

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Introduction

Philippians is the epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances. Paul freely expresses his fond affection for the Philippian Christians, appreciates their consistent testimony and support, and lovingly urges them to center their actions and thoughts on the pursuit of the Person and power of Christ.

Author

This letter is clearly identified as written by Paul (1:1), and Pauline authorship has never seriously been questioned.

Date

The traditional view has been that Paul wrote Philippians between A.D. 61 and 63 from imprisonment in Rome. The references to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar's household (4:22) fit with Paul's Roman imprisonment. In addition, Paul's statements in 1:12–20 and 4:22 strongly suggest that the imprisonment was fairly long. Thus, this letter appears to have been written sometime after the beginning of Paul's imprisonment recorded in Acts 28.

Themes and Literary Structure

Philippians is one of Paul's most personal letters. In it he shares his own experience with Christ, and his struggle over whether to prefer dying to be with Christ or living to serve the Philippians (1:21–26). The Philippians were in his heart and they supported him in his imprisonment (1:7), a fact which explains the note of gratitude that Paul frequently sounds (1:3–11; 2:19–30; 4:10–20).

Philippians focuses on: Paul's account of his present circumstances (ch. 1), Paul's appeal to have the mind of Christ (ch. 2), his appeal to have the knowledge of Christ (ch. 3), and his appeal to have the peace of Christ (ch. 4).

Prominent in Philippians is the theme of joy. The word "joy" (Greek: *chara*) is found five times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1) and the verb "to rejoice" occurs eleven times (twice in 1:18; 2:17, 18; 4:4; and once in 2:28; 3:1; and 4:10). Despite his unpleasant circumstances in prison, Paul manifests a joyous confidence in God's provision for him personally and for the Philippian Christians.

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 "self-emptying" of Christ does not mean that He relinquished His essential deity, but that He withheld His preincarnate glory and voluntarily restricted His use of certain attributes (such as omnipresence).¹

¹Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

Outline of Philippians

- I. 1:1-11 Introduction
1:1-2 Greeting
1:3-7 Thanksgiving & Confidence
1:8-11 Paul's prayer for them
- II. 1:12-26 Paul's Circumstances
1:12-14 The result of his imprisonment
1:15-18 The differing motives for preaching Christ
1:19-26 The alternatives of life or death
- III. 1:27-2:18 Exhortation on Christian living and fellowship
1:27-30 Appeal to live worthy of the gospel
2:1-4 Appeal to unity through humility
2:5-11 The example Christ
2:12-18 The practical outworking of salvation
- IV. 2:19-30 Future plans
2:19-24 Commendation of Timothy
2:25-30 Explanations concerning Epaphroditus
- V. 3:1-21 Spiritual Ambitions
3:1-3 Beware of confidence in the flesh
3:4-7 Paul's "life in the flesh"
3:8-14 Paul rejects old ambitions and strives towards new
3:15-17 Exhortation to like-mindedness
3:18-21 Warning of worldly and call to heavenly
- VI. 4:1-23 Exhortations, thanks and greetings
4:1-3 Personal appeals
4:4-7 A call to joy and prayerfulness
4:8-9 Meditate on good things
4:10-20 The Philippians gifts to Paul
4:21-23 Final greetings

Lesson 1 - Philippians 1:1-30

Open It

What's your usual way of saying hello to your friends?

Explore It

1. How did Paul identify himself and his coworker? (1:1)
2. How did Paul greet the Philippians? (1:2)
3. When Paul thought about the Philippians, what did he do? (1:3)
4. How were the Philippians in partnership with Paul? (1:4-5)
5. What was Paul confident about? (1:6)
6. How did Paul feel about the Philippian church? (1:7-8)
7. What did Paul report that he prayed for? (1:9)
8. What two results did Paul seek? (1:10-11)
9. How was the gospel affected by Paul's bondage? (1:12-14)
10. Why did some people preach Christ out of envy and rivalry? (1:15-16)
11. Why did some people preach Christ in love? (1:15,17)
12. What made Paul rejoice? (1:18)
13. How did Paul expect to be delivered? (1:19-20)
14. What was Paul's main purpose in living? (1:21)
15. Why was Paul torn between living and dying? (1:22-24)
16. Why did Paul think he would remain alive? (1:24-26)
17. What did Paul want the believers to do? (1:27-30)

Apply It

Which brother or sister would be heartened to receive a letter from you this week?

Lesson 2 - Philippians 2:1-30

Open It

Have you ever given a character reference for a friend? How did you feel about it?

Explore It

1. What four qualities mark unity with Christ? (2:1)
2. What did Paul say about selfishness? (2:3-4)
3. What did Paul exhort believers to have? (2:5)
4. How did Jesus limit Himself? (2:6-8)
5. How did God exalt Jesus? (2:9)
6. What confession will every person make? (2:11)
7. What were the Philippian believers to work out? (2:12-13)
8. Why were the Philippians shining "as lights" in the world? (2:14-16)
9. Why did Paul plan to send Timothy to the Philippians? (2:19)
10. What was Paul's opinion of Timothy? (2:20)
11. In Paul's view, why did Timothy stand out? (2:21-22)
12. When would Paul send Timothy to the Philippians? (2:23)
13. Why did the Philippians send Epaphroditus to Paul? (2:25)
14. How did Epaphroditus feel about his friends in Philippi? (2:26)
15. How did God spare Paul tremendous sorrow? (2:27)
16. How did Paul demonstrate his selflessness? (2:28)
17. How were the Philippians told to welcome home Epaphroditus? (2:29-30)

Apply It

How can you be a model of humility and service to other Christians this week?

Lesson 3 - Philippians 3:1-21

Open It

When was the last thing you achieved that you worked hard for?

Explore It

1. What did Paul call on believers to do? (3:1)
2. Whom did Paul identify as "the circumcision"? (3:3)
3. What autobiographical facts did Paul give? (3:4-6)
4. Why did Paul view his former accomplishments as "rubbish"? (3:8)
5. What hope did Paul express? (3:9-11)
6. In what ways did Paul's spiritual life resemble the discipline of a runner? (3:12-14)
7. What was Paul's view of the past? (3:13)
8. What was Paul's goal? (3:14)
9. How did Paul call the Philippians to share his view? (3:15)
10. What did Paul hope for the believers who disagreed with him? (3:15)
11. What was Paul's plea to the Philippians? (3:16)
12. How did Paul want believers to imitate him? (3:17)
13. How did Paul describe God's enemies? (3:18-19)
14. Where did the Philippian Christians have their citizenship? (3:20)
15. Whom did the Philippian believers eagerly await? (3:20)
16. What characterizes citizens of heaven? (3:21)

Apply It

What do you need to start counting as rubbish for the sake of Christ?

Lesson 4 - Philippians 4:1-23

Open It

When was a time you felt contentment in the middle of problems or uncertainty?

Explore It

1. How did Paul feel about the Philippians? (4:1)
2. Why did Paul plead with Euodia and Syntyche? (4:2)
3. How had Euodia and Syntyche helped Paul in the past? (4:3)
4. What did Paul encourage his readers to do? (4:4)
5. How did Paul tell the Philippian Christians to treat others? (4:5)
6. What were the Philippians to do instead of worrying? (4:6-7)
7. What are the qualities of wholesome thoughts? (4:8)
8. How can believers enjoy the presence of the God of peace? (4:9)
9. What lesson had Paul learned about contentment? (4:10-13)
10. Why could Paul handle any kind of circumstance? (4:13)
11. What did the Philippians do about Paul's troubles? (4:14)
12. How had the Philippians supported Paul in the past? (4:15-16)
13. What did Paul want for the Philippians? (4:17)
14. How would God reciprocate the believers' generosity? (4:19)
15. To whom did Paul give thanks and praise? (4:20)
16. Who sent final greetings to the Philippians? (4:21-22)
17. To what did Paul give prominence in closing his letter? (4:23)

Apply It

What can you do today to reduce your level of anxiety?