

Philippians

Philippians opens with “Paul and Timothy” as also 2 Corinthians and Colossians, and the Thessalonian letters, “Paul, Silas and Timothy.” Timothy was a frequent companion and coworker with Paul. He directly participated in writing these apostolic letters and helped to organize and propagate the New Testament.

Paul, with Silas, Timothy and Luke had taken the gospel to Philippi in Macedonia as recorded in Acts 16:6-40. Hostility against Paul and Silas compelled them to leave Philippi abruptly (Acts 16:40-17:1), leaving behind Luke and Timothy for a time, to help the fledgling congregation that included, among others, Lydia’s household and the jailor’s household. Timothy later was with Paul and Silas in Berea, and perhaps served somewhat as a messenger between the churches in Macedonia and the preachers, Paul, Silas, and Luke. Both Paul and Timothy were well known to the Philippian church.

The saints (holy people) at Philippi had overseers (bishops, the same as elders or pastors/shepherds, as in 1 Timothy 3:1ff, Acts 20:17/28, 1 Peter 5:1ff), and deacons (servants, as in 1 Timothy 3:8ff, Acts 6:2ff) leading and helping the church. On the other hand they had no hired man as their primary teacher/preacher (nor did any other congregation in the New Testament).

The Philippian letter has a different personal tone than Paul’s other letters, with very little of correction and an overall focus on the positive.

The Philippians were joyfully commended by Paul for their “partnership” in the gospel, supporting Paul in prayer, assisting him with men sent to preach, and supplying his financial needs again and again (1:3-6, 2:25ff, 4:14ff).

Paul wrote of his own imprisonment as a means of advancing the gospel (1:12ff), particularly among the soldiers who guarded the palace (1:13) and by emboldening others to preach Christ (1:14).

The spirit Paul displayed in 1:15-18 is challenging to imitate, being glad for any means of Christ being preached, even if some are wrongly

motivated.

Paul knew that his imprisonment might end in a death sentence (1:20-26), which he was not only prepared for, but was glad to consider leaving the flesh to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Christian perspective on death, to die and be with the Lord (1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:6, Acts 7:59), while anticipating the future glory of the resurrection body.

Paul also perceived that his race was not yet completed, and so he expected to live awhile longer for the sake of the churches, 1:24-26.

Expect problems in this world from the opponents of Jesus Christ, 1:29-30.

Jesus is our great example, the demeanor he showed when he humbled himself to enter into flesh, and then humbled himself as a servant, and then humbled himself to die for our sins (2:1-11). Citing a prophecy from Isaiah 45:23 (2:10-11), Paul equates Jesus with the LORD (YaHWeH, JeHoVaH), to whom everyone who has ever lived will bow and confess his authority and justice.

Notice the multifaceted encouragement to good behavior and a cooperative spirit in Christ all through 1:27-2:18. Notice that our working in 2:12 is enabled by God's work in us in 2:13.

Shining like stars in 2:15 alludes to Daniel 12:3.

The day of Christ is often in the mix of expectations Paul mentions (1:10, 2:16, 3:20, 4:5 for example).

The allusion to a drink offering (2:17, and again in 2 Timothy 4:6) is from Numbers 28-29 which prescribed drink offerings to accompany the majority of animal sacrifices. If Jesus is our sin offering, then Paul saw himself as poured out in accompaniment to the sacrifice Jesus provided.

2:19-30 reviewed the situation with a worker sent from Philippi to help Paul, both delivering a financial gift and staying to help in the gospel. The man, Epaphroditus, was highly commended, as was Timothy, as a faithful worker, but had been very sick, and for the sake of compassion needed to go home. Note that his recovery is attributed to prayer and God's mercy

(2:27) but not necessarily to a miraculous healing sign. Sometimes the Spirit led Paul and others to heal, but such healings were not the norm for Christian experience then or now.

Paul's admonition to rejoice in the Lord (3:1, 4:4) brackets some sobering thoughts about opposition, self-sacrifice, and even conflict in the church. Paul's description of what he gave up for the sake of knowing Christ (3:2-11) is not bragging or grumbling, it's exemplary profession of what really matters. Paul didn't take his own part in running the race for granted, 3:12ff, but worked hard to finish what he had started in Christ.

Apparently the 2 women named in 4:2, and the individual referenced in 4:3, were all part of the church in Philippi and interconnected, although some issue had come between the women. Paul suggests their names were in the book of life, 4:3, but that they need to get over whatever had come between and agree on the common ground of being in the Lord.

Joyful living in the peace of God in 4:4-9 is not a distant dream, but a reality that comes from prayer and thankfulness and fixing our attention on the good things we ought to think about. Jesus' promise in John 14:27, 16:33 is ours for life.

After more than 25 years following Jesus and approximately 4 years as a prisoner with limited freedom Paul could say, "I have learned to be content" in 4:11, doing all that he needed to do in dependence on Christ, 4:13. Even so, he was grateful for the help provided several times by the church in Philippi (4:14ff). From the very beginning in Acts 16-17 that church had supported Paul's work wherever he went, including right way in Thessalonica, and later in Corinth (2 Corinthians 11:9). As Paul described his own life as a drink offering being poured out, he described their gifts for the gospel as a fragrant offering (4:18), which is a typical description of sacrifices burnt on the altar, and alludes to doing the ongoing work of Christ who is himself a fragrant sacrifice, Ephesians 5:2. Their sacrifices for Paul and for the gospel were an accompaniment to the redemptive work of Christ, done in his name.

Notice that Paul's influence in 1:13 extended to the palace guard, and in 4:22 included believers in Caesar's household. These opportunities were directly related to Paul's hardships in being a prisoner, and reflect on the contentment he affirmed.