

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE Philippians

Notes: Philippi was a Roman colony in the province of Macedonia. According to Acts (16.11-40) Paul and friends had visited the city some years before around the year 50 CE. Paul wrote this letter from prison but we do not know what prison. Some think Rome but we are not sure. Many other sites are possible. The date of writing is mid to late 50's. Some scholars believe that parts of three letters were assembled into the letter we read today. Other scholars do not subscribe to this view. I join with the later and believe this is one and not three letters combined. For being in prison Paul is surprisingly upbeat even though there is an underlying concern for the teaching of "wrong theology" in his absence. Paul continues to preach grace rather than works.

Salutation

1 Paul and Timothy, servants/slaves in the Greek of Christ Jesus, We know who is writing the letter

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: To the folks in Philippi – note that we have bishops and deacons at this point – different than what we have today, how so we are not sure. We can only know that they were the leaders of the church in Philippi.

2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Standard greeting

Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

3 Verses three through eleven express Paul's gratitude to all the Philippians I thank my God every time I remember you, ⁴constantly praying with joy Joy is mentioned at least 12 times in this letter in every one of my prayers for all of you, ⁵because of your sharing in the gospel Paul is acknowledging gifts he has received from the Philippians from the first day until now. ⁶I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. Paul's expectation of the return of Jesus saving everybody from the wrath that is to come – see Romans 2.5, 15-16, 1st Cor. 1.8, 2nd Cor. 1.14, 1st Thes. 1.10 ⁷It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Paul is very proud of these people ⁸For God

is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. **He misses them greatly** ⁹And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight ¹⁰to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, ¹¹having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ **For Paul righteousness cannot come any other way** for the glory and praise of God.

Paul's Present Circumstances

¹² I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, **Paul writes from imprisonment, perhaps house arrest**¹³so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; **some think that this letter was written from Rome because of the reference to the imperial guard. However, he could also be at any provincial governor's home – see Acts 23.35** ¹⁴and most of the brothers and sisters, **again there is no sisters** having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. **Early believers were incredibly brave and resolute**

¹⁵ **Verses 15-18 can be obtuse. I take them to mean that Jesus is a huge subject whether or not he is spoken about in a believing way or not. It doesn't seem to matter to Paul – there is no bad publicity** Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. ¹⁶These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, **Paul has an upcoming trial and now he begins to write about it** ¹⁹for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ *this will result in my deliverance*. **A quote from Job 13.16 which refers to his expected exoneration** ²⁰It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame **be forced to deny Christ** in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, **Paul has suffered often for his belief** whether by life or by death. **These are the potential outcomes of the trial –**

life or death ²¹For to me, living is Christ Paul means he has no life apart from Christ and dying is gain. So he can be closer to Christ and stop the suffering he endures regularly too ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer Greek is choose no prefer – there is an underlying suicidal tone here which we find abhorrent but was not seen in the vein at that time. ²³I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, see 2 Cor. 5.1-9 for that is far better; ²⁴but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. The appeal to what is necessary is often found in classic Greek Stoic discussions of suicide ²⁵Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain I will continue to choose to live and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, ²⁶so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again. Paul has stated he has thought that he might die at the jailer's hands or his own but has chosen a hope that he won't, not for his good but for the good of others

27 Now Paul exhorts them to be good whichever happens Only, live your life this is a political term meaning live as citizens since the people he writes to are Roman citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. The opponents would be unbelievers and those with a different gospel to preach. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. God provides the strength ²⁹For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well— Remember Paul see suffering as part of the package and to be embraced ³⁰since you are having the same struggle this term comes from the athletic arena and occurs frequently in this letter – also see 1st Cor. 9.24-27 and Galatians 2.2 and 5.7 that you saw See Acts 16.19-24 I had and now hear that I still have. The struggle continues for Paul

Imitating Christ's Humility

2 I confess that within the next few verses are some passages that blow me away. You will know it I think when we encounter it. The first five verses are an encouragement to act as Jesus did and gives us another window into what Jesus was actually like If then there is any encouragement in Christ,

any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy **another reference to joy** complete: **Here we go** be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but **"also" seems to have been left out of the translation** to the interests of others. **Better translation one another – not necessarily to everybody but at least to those in the church. Ok – here we go – I quote from the HarperCollins Study Bible: "These verses, as their format shows, are widely regarded as a Pre-Pauline Christ Hymn; Paul's letters frequently contain material from earlier Christian tradition." This is material even closer to Jesus than the letter and gives us a window into early worship services. My personal opinion is that this goes back to within a decade of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Other examples are Romans 1.3-4, 3.24-25, 1st Cor. 15.3-5' 1st Thessalonians 1.9-10 Let's spend some time teasing out what is being said in this statement of belief.**

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus
⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, **The pre-existence of Christ**
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself, **The life of Jesus**
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him **His resurrection and position**
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend, **The congregation probably knelt here**
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shining as Lights in the World

12 The obedience shown by Christ is now expected of the Philippians

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Paul continues to extoll the virtues of a life in partnership with the Holy Spirit

14 Do all things without murmuring and arguing, Hard lesson for a lot of people – so many must make themselves the center of attention or complain when times get a little hard ¹⁵so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation Paul quotes Deuteronomy and perhaps Jesus – See Deut. 32.5, in which you shine like stars in the world. See Matthew 5.14 – same meaning ¹⁶It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain another athletic image or labor in vain. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, This references sacrifices in the Temple – the libation, wine, is poured over the fire and God's portion is has been offered and it erupts as a result – pretty impressive imagery in which Paul sees himself I am glad and rejoice with all of you— ¹⁸and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me. It's a party!

Timothy and Epaphroditus

19 The next few verses are a sort of digression I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I may be cheered by news of you. Timothy would visit and report back to Paul. He was well known to the Philippians – see Acts 16.3, 16.12, 19.22 – Paul was very close to Timothy – see 1st Cor. 4.17 and 1st Thess. 3.1-6 ²⁰I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me; as soon as Paul knows the result of his trial ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that I will also come soon. Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus He will be carrying the letter – we know this because of the verb used later "to send" carries a right now meaning –my brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier,

your messenger and minister to my need; **five descriptive terms – 3 for Paul and 2 for the Philippians and a reference to the gifts sent to Paul from the Philippians** ²⁶for he has been longing for all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. **Some historical information** But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. **The sorrow of the loss of E** ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, **We know now this is not his first visit** and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, ³⁰because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me. **Wouldn't it be great to know E's story?**

3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

Breaking with the Past

Now Paul begins to warn them about persons and ideas that could endanger them – for something similar see 2nd Cor. 11.21-27 To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard. **I take this to mean that writing about things is not irksome to Paul and is good for he hearers.**

2 Beware of the dogs, **Dogs in that day often referred to non-Jews and was a term of reproach. In Paul's case we can be fairly sure he was just using it as a term of reproach – see Mark 7.27-28 and Revelations (can you believe it?) 22.15** beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! **He is talking about circumcision** ³For it is we who are the circumcision, **The Jews** who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus **who have turned to Christ** and have no confidence in the flesh— **no confidence in works** ⁴even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh. **In other words Paul was a very observant Jew as a Pharisee as he goes on to say**

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:

⁵circumcised on the eighth day, **this was the custom see Gen. 17.12 and 21.4; Lev. 12.3** a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, **See Romans 11.1** a Hebrew born of Hebrews **This attests to Paul's knowledge of Hebrew scripture see Acts 21.40, 22.2-3, Galatians 1.14;** as to

the law, a Pharisee; See Acts 23.6, 26.5 ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church See Acts 8.3, 9.1, 9.21, 22.4, among many more; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. Oh Paul, no wonder people see you as a bit stuck up – but he has told us all this to say that if he has given up works for grace so should any other thinking person

7 Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. He trades everything for a relationship with Christ ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, literally garbage in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, Works and being a member of the chosen people but one that comes through faith in Christ, Grace the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Paul is willing to pay any price to be like Jesus in his death and resurrection - Paul is consistently concerned with rival missionaries and seeks to differentiate himself as part of his writing

Pressing towards the Goal

12 Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. When we think of what Paul has just written we are both vexed and comforted ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: please note the continued athletic imagery forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, works in the past and grace in the future? ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Paul refers to his own salvation ¹⁵Let those of us then who are mature big word be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. There is room for slight disagreement ¹⁶Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. Let us hold on to Christ Jesus I think is what he is saying as they endure what they must endure

17 Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, Let's revisit 1st Cor. 4.16 and 11.1 along with 1st Thess. 1.6 and observe those who live according to the

example you have in us. **Look at those who are like Timothy and I** ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; **those that persecute them** I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. **This is how strongly he feels** ¹⁹Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. **The opposition cannot win in the long run and Paul sees their self-indulgence and narcissism** ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, **this is a political term** and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Paul speaks to the expectation of the return of Jesus Christ** ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. **This was a very cool promise to those that believe.**

4¹Therefore, my brothers **and sisters**, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. **Hang in there!**

Exhortations

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche **these are two leaders who are women that Paul is speaking directly to – there were many women in leadership as attested by Paul’s letters – see Romans 10.1-15, 1st Cor. 1.11, 16.19, Philemon verse 2 to be of the same mind in the Lord. He is asking that these women specifically agree with him**³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, **we do not know who Paul is referring to here – Epaphroditus?** help these women, for they have struggled beside me **this is big and lets us know how important women were in the early church** in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. **See Ex. 32.32, Psalm 69.28, Dan. 12.1**

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. **Paul reiterates the theme of Joy that runs through the letter** ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. **A sign of the spirit** The Lord is near. **Hang on he’s coming or this is a figurative term** ⁶Do not worry about anything, **sounds like Jesus** but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. **Stay in touch with God** ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Sound familiar?**

8 The following is pretty famous and gets quoted often Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. Paul is cheering them on and letting them know how well they have been doing and his expectations for them in the future

Acknowledgment of the Philippians' Gift

10 Now Paul formally thanks the Philippians for what they have given him I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. But now you do! ¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. Paul has learned to exist within whatever circumstance befalls him – he sounds like a classic Stoic philosopher ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. This tells us a little more about his life In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret this reflects the language of some the mystery cults abounding at the time of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. We also need to give Paul some credit for his relationship with Christ and therefore his ability to endure whatever is going on around him ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

15 You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. They are the only ones to support him in his ministry ¹⁶For even when I was in Thessalonica, remember the letter to the Thessalonians – see Acts 17.1-9 you sent me help for my needs more than once. ¹⁷Not that I seek the gift, Paul continues to want to be as independent as possible through his trade of tent making – see Acts 18.3, 1st Cor. 4.12, 2nd Cor. 11.7-11, 12.14-15 but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account. Some sort of goodwill for having done what they did ¹⁸I have been paid in full a commercial expression having to do with receipts and have more than enough; you filled up my tank I am fully satisfied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. You people really did good – this

almost sounds like a priest like statement at the Temple ¹⁹And my God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. **God will take care of you for what you have done for me** ²⁰To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Final Greetings and Benediction

²¹ Greet every saint in Christ Jesus. The friends who are with me greet you. ²²All the saints greet you, especially those of the emperor's household. **Same conversation about where Paul is during the writing of this letter**

²³ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. **Final goodbye**