

Monday March 4th
Introduction to Philippians

“Philippi was already a very old and historic city when Paul arrived and later wrote his letter to the Christians there.” Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great, “had built it in 358-57 B.C. on the site of an ancient Thracian city located eight miles from the sea in a spring-filled, fertile region.” Once part of the Roman Empire, Philippi became one of the main way stations along the overland route connecting Rome with the East. Emperor Octavian established Philippi as a military outpost and populated it with veterans of his wars, making it a Roman colony. This “gave it the *ius italicum*--the highest privilege obtainable by a provincial municipality. Consequently, as the citizens of Rome, so the citizens of Philippi could buy and sell property, were exempt from land tax and the poll tax and were entitled to protection by Roman law.”

Though the majority of the population of Philippi was Roman, there was also a high population of Macedonian Greeks as well as Jews. “Its people were proud of their city, proud of their ties with Rome, proud to observe Roman customs and obey Roman laws, proud to be Roman citizens.” When Paul was writing his letter to the Philippians he often used terminology that would resonate with the pride of citizenship familiar to the Philippians.

Philippians is also one of Paul’s more personal letters. He was not writing with a strong sense of imparting doctrine or being critical as with other of his prison epistles. “The frank hearty tone, the artless form, the cheerful mood even under oppressive circumstances, the practical purport--these all bear a very personal stamp, and make it--to a measure surpassing any other letter of the apostle--a letter, the effusion of the heart to a Church he loved.”

As we read through Philippians note the theme of joy and gratitude found throughout the letter. “The word ‘rejoice’ or other words of similar meaning, appears sixteen times in this short letter. Even the imprisonment or malicious action of opponents could not extinguish his joy in the Lord. [] Although the letter is throughout practical and parnetical in its tone and character, it is nevertheless important even from the dogmatic point of view.”

Hawthorne, G.F. “Letter to the Philippians.” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne & Ralph P. Martin, InterVarsity Press, 1993

Muller, Jac. J., *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. William B. Erdmans Publishing, 1988.

Tuesday March 5th

Philippians 1:1-6

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

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

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

As with all but one of his letters, Paul begins Philippians with a benediction. Words of thanksgiving. Through this Paul is demonstrating that no matter the circumstances (remember he was in prison when writing Philippians and a number of his other letters) there is always something to be thankful for. Not only does Paul praise God but these words of thanksgiving also guide the reader toward the tone and subject of the letter to follow. In this case he is beginning his letter with Joy and with a theme of becoming more complete in Christ.

This idea of completeness was actually begun in verse 1 when Paul addresses his letter to "all God's holy people in Christ Jesus" sometimes translated as saints. "Saintliness or holiness must not be taken here subjectively as an innate ethical quality attached to the believers, an inward purity, or devotion to God, which is in them, but must be understood in an objective sense, in inseparable connection with "in Christ Jesus." as a being sanctified in him. In themselves the believers are not yet holy; only in Christ, considered in the light of his righteousness, as set apart for him, and liberated by him and in his blood and through his spirit, they are holy."

It is only when we are in Christ that we are holy. It is not something that happens overnight but is a process. Which is why Paul says he is thankful that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ." The process of becoming holy is not going to be finished today or tomorrow or even next year but will only be completed when Christ returns.

Muller, Jac. J., *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. William B. Erdmans Publishing, 1988.

O'Brien, P.T.. "Benediction, Blessing, Doxology, Thanksgiving." *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne & Ralph P. Martin, InterVarsity Press, 1993

Wednesday March 6th

Philippians 1:7-11

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,* ¹⁰ *so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,* ¹¹ *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.*

All of you share in God's grace with me. "This not only expresses a common experience of those redeemed by the saving grace of God in Christ, but also means that the church has a share in the affliction and suffering for the cause of the gospel as well as in its defence and confirmation, by their sympathy with and support of Paul--by identifying themselves with him and his cause at Rome. It is God-given grace to labour for Christ, and it is grace also to be allowed to suffer for Christ. By their sharing with Paul in his suffering and labour, they gave evidence that they were also partakers with him of the grace of God." Here Paul is continuing to be thankful for the Philippians but is showing concrete ways in which his thankfulness is manifest.

We should be able to identify with Paul's sentiments here as modern believers in Christ's grace. As parts of the body of Christ we should help our brothers and sisters carry the burdens associated with our faith but also share in the joys that come from faith as well. Life is not always easy or hard but it is encouraging regardless to know that someone is walking beside you no matter what is thrown at you.

So to, it is encouraging to know that someone is rooting for you to grow in your faith. Paul finishes off this section by praying that his readers would continue to grow in love and righteousness. "Love is already experienced-- love towards God and Christ, as well as love towards the apostle and mutual love towards each other as partakers of grace. But this love is yet imperfect and must abound more and more, especially in depth and quality, in advanced knowledge (knowledge of God) and in all discernment, spiritual judgement and moral discrimination."

Muller, Jac. J., *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. William B. Erdmans Publishing, 1988.

Thursday March 7th **Philippians 1:12-18**

¹² *Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel.* ¹³ *As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ.* ¹⁴ *And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.*

¹⁵ *It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill.* ¹⁶ *The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.* ¹⁷ *The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.* ¹⁸ *But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.*

This passage is an amazing example of what it means to look beyond the self. Paul is in prison and yet foremost in his thoughts is the spreading of the gospel. He looks at his situation and sees only the people he is surrounded by who might not otherwise have heard about Jesus and good news of Christ's death and resurrection. He counts his lack of physical freedom as a gain for the kingdom, a gain which far outweighs any discomfort he is feeling.

Interestingly he sees the same optimism when hearing of how the gospel is being preached outside of his prison. He refuses to rise to the taunting of jealousy that could easily arise from others who preach the gospel motivated by ambition or a desire to hurt Paul. "Not the way he is personally affected by it, but how it affects the cause of Christ is his only care. For Christ, his lord, and the preaching of His gospel, was the one great passion of his life."

Muller, Jac. J., *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. William B. Erdmans Publishing, 1988.

Friday March 8th **Philippians 1:19-26**

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

This passage shows an internal conflict not dissimilar to Jesus' prayer in Luke 22 where Jesus prayed 'Not my will but yours be done'. Paul can see all the work still to be done for the furtherance of the church if he is released from prison. He knows that to continue to live is to spread the gospel more and to be an encouragement to the body of Christ with whom he is in communication. However, he doesn't want to discount the possibility that he might not be released from prison and might actually be put to death. For Paul he sees that "in death all is done away with that still resisted the full development of the life of Christ in him, and all infirmity and sin which still stood in the way of magnifying Christ. After death there would be a fuller and greater glorification of the lord." Paul would be with Christ if he died and for him personally life might seem better. Yet, "Christ is the one and all to give meaning and significance to Paul's existence, the only one who really matters."

Muller, Jac. J., *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*. William B. Erdmans Publishing, 1988.