

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Philippians - Session 1

April 15, 2001

I. Background of the epistle.

Philippians derives its name from the Greek city where the church to which it was addressed was located. Philippi was the first town in Macedonia where Paul established a church. The unanimous testimony of the early church was that the Apostle Paul wrote Philippians.

The traditional view is that Philippians, along with the other Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon), was written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome (ca. a.d. 60–62). The most natural understanding of the references to the "palace guard" (1:13) and the "saints ... of Caesar's household" (4:22) is that Paul wrote from Rome, where the emperor lived.

As a colony, Philippi had autonomy from the provincial government and the same rights granted to cities in Italy, including the use of Roman law, exemption from some taxes, and Roman citizenship for its residents. Being a colony was also the source of much civic pride for the Philippians, who used Latin as their official language, adopted Roman customs, and modeled their city government after that of Italian cities.

Paul's description of Christians as citizens of heaven was appropriate, since the Philippians prided themselves on being citizens of Rome.

The church at Philippi, the first one founded by Paul in Europe, dates from the apostle's second missionary journey (Acts 16:12–40). Philippi evidently had a very small Jewish population. Because there were not enough men to form a synagogue (the requirement was for 10 Jewish men who were heads of a household), some devout women met outside the city at a place of prayer alongside the Gangites River. Paul preached the gospel to them and Lydia, a wealthy merchant dealing in expensive purple dyed goods, became a believer. It is likely that the Philippian church initially met in her spacious home.

Satanic opposition to the new church immediately arose in the person of a demon-possessed, fortune-telling slave girl. Not wanting even agreeable testimony from such an evil source, Paul cast the demon out of her. The apostle's act enraged the girl's masters, who could no longer sell her services as a fortune-teller. They hauled Paul and Silas before the city's magistrates and inflamed the civic pride of the Philippians by claiming the two preachers were a threat to Roman customs. As a result, Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned.

The two preachers were miraculously released from prison that night by an earthquake, which unnerved the jailer and opened his heart and that of his household to the gospel. The next day the magistrates, panicking when they learned they had illegally beaten and imprisoned two Roman citizens, begged Paul and Silas to leave Philippi.

Paul apparently visited Philippi twice during his third missionary journey, once at the beginning, and again near the end. About 4 or 5 years after his last visit to Philippi, while a prisoner at Rome, Paul received a delegation from the Philippian church. The Philippians had generously supported Paul in the past, and had also contributed abundantly for the needy at Jerusalem. Now, hearing of Paul's imprisonment, they sent

another contribution to him, and along with it Epaphroditus to minister to Paul's needs. Unfortunately Epaphroditus suffered a near-fatal illness, either while en route to Rome, or after he arrived. Accordingly, Paul decided to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi and wrote the letter to the Philippians to send back with him.

Paul had several purposes in composing this epistle. First, he wanted to express in writing his thanks for the Philippians' gift. Second, he wanted the Philippians to know why he decided to return Epaphroditus to them, so they would not think his service to Paul had been unsatisfactory. Third, he wanted to inform them about his circumstances at Rome. Fourth, he wrote to exhort them to unity. Finally, he wrote to warn them against false teachers.

II. Outline of the book

- I. Paul's Greeting (1:1–11)
 - II. Paul's Circumstances (1:12–26)
 - III. Paul's Exhortations (1:27–2:18)
 - A. To Stand Firm Amid Persecution (1:27–30)
 - B. To Be United by Humility (2:1–4)
 - C. To Remember the Example of Christ (2:5–11)
 - D. To Be Light in a Dark World (2:12–18)
 - IV. Paul's Companions (2:19–30)
 - A. Timothy (2:19–24)
 - B. Epaphroditus (2:25–30)
 - V. Paul's Warnings (3:1–4:1)
 - A. Against Legalism (3:1–16)
 - B. Against Lawlessness (3:17–4:1)
 - VI. Paul's Admonition (4:2–9)
 - VII. Paul's Thankfulness (4:10–20)
 - VIII. Paul's Farewell (4:21–23)
- III. READ Chapter 1:1-11

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints 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. It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for 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 until the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

OBSERVATION - What does it say?

1. Restate and summarize what Paul is saying in this section in your own words.

After greeting his fellow believers and identifying himself as a bondservant of Jesus, he lets them know that when he is thinking of them and praying for them with great joy and thanksgiving to God. He is joyful when he thinks of them because he loves them very deeply, because they have been working together with him from the very start for the promotion of the gospel. He is sure that God will complete the work of grace that He started in these fellow believers. He misses them greatly, and knows that in their hearts they are with him as he is suffering for and defending the gospel. His prayer for them is that their love would mature and increase, that in addition to deep affection their love would include discernment, insight, and knowledge, knowing that this discernment will keep them pure and righteous and ready for the coming of Christ Jesus - all for God's glory and praise.

INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION

READ Vs 1-2

2. How did Paul view himself according to verse 1? He viewed himself as a servant of Christ Jesus. The word servant means:

doulos (dou`lo" , from *δεομ*, to bind, a slave, originally the lowest term in the scale of servitude, came also to mean one who gives himself up to the will of another, e.g., 1 Cor. 7:23; Rom. 6:17, 20, and became the most common and general word for "servant," as in Matt. 8:9, without any idea of bondage. In calling himself, however, a 'bondslave of Jesus Christ,' e.g., Rom. 1:1, the Apostle Paul intimates (1) that he had been formerly a bondslave of Satan, and (2) that, having been bought by Christ, he was now a willing slave, bound to his new Master.

- We do not belong to ourselves - we have been bought

1 Cor 7:21-24²¹ Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. ²² For he who was a slave when he was called by the Lord is the Lord's freedman; similarly, he who was a free man when he was called is Christ's slave. ²³ You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. ²⁴ Brothers, each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to.

The price that has been paid to purchase back our lives (redeem us) is the very life and blood of Jesus Christ. He is the one who purchases us and becomes our master, but He Himself was also the payment - the debt of sin had to be paid to free us from the guilt and penalty of that sin.

- We used to be bound to sin; now we are bound to Christ

Romans 6: ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death,

or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

Everybody serves someone or something. True Christians serve Christ, which is the same as saying we serve righteousness. To be a saint, is to be set apart, or separated. Our separation is from sin (set free from sin) and bound to God - and God is righteous and holy - we are bound to righteousness and holiness because we belong to Him.

3. How should understanding this truth that we are bond-servants of Christ affect our attitudes and actions?

Our life is not our own to live to please ourselves. Paul was literally in chains for the gospel, and was rejoicing - not because of the chains, but because he was chained to Christ. He was suffering because of his close association with Jesus and the gospel. This was Paul's passion in life, to please his master. Christ has purchased us for a reason - not for us to live for ourselves, but to serve Him. What does this mean in practical terms? It means that I view my job as a platform to share Christ - first in my actions and attitudes, and then as God opens the door, in my words. It means that if I suffer because of sharing Christ, I am blessed. This truth means that as I suffer ill treatment from others, because I serve Christ, I am to actively respond in love. It means that I do the right thing, even though there may be difficult outcomes from such choices - I am a slave to righteousness - righteousness dictates my actions. As Romans 6 stated, in the same way that sin used to dictate and control my actions, now Christ controls me. And how do we understand what Christ wants us to do? By knowing Him through His word.

4. What is a saint? Literally, it is one who has been set apart, and in the context of the NT, set apart to God, e.g. consecrated for God's use. Sainthood is a state that is bestowed upon justification. When God calls us to Himself, He sets us apart, and thus we are saints.

5. What are overseers and deacons?

Overseer = episkopos (επισκοπος" , (1985)), lit., an overseer (*epi*, over, *skopeo*μ, to look or watch), This term speaks of the function of an elder. Other terms that refer to the same person are shepherd, pastor, bishop, and elder. Acts 20:28 states is an exhortation from Paul to the elders at Ephesus ²⁸*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*

Deacons are those who serve and meet the practical needs of the church - they are assigned duties to assist the elders.

So in this passage, deacons and elders refer to the leadership of the church. Paul is writing to all of the saints and leadership at this church.

READ Verses 3 - 8

6. When Paul remembers the Philippians, he is thankful and joyful. When he prays for them, his heart is full of thanksgiving to God and he prays with joy. Why is this so? The key words are partnership in verse 5 and share in verse 7. What is this partnership and sharing that Paul refers to that brings him such great joy?

II Cor 8: And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. ² Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. ³ For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, ⁴ they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. ⁵ And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

The word partnership is translated participation in the NASB, and it is the greek word for fellowship - koinania - It is a sharing, and giving, and partnership, a cooperation for a common goal. The sending of the gospel is divinely designed to be a joint effort. We saw earlier that God has called us out of sin into His service - and His service is to make the gospel known. Some, like Paul, are called to take the gospel, but all saints are called to participate and share in the joy and responsibility. This mutual goal is the basis of true fellowship, intimacy, and affection in the body of Christ. In verse 7, Paul refers to the grace that he has experienced from God - the grace he needs to endure the hardship of defending the gospel and suffering for it. He says that the Philippians have given to help Paul take the gospel, and that they also share in the grace given to Paul for this work. APPLICATION: If we are lacking joy and fulfillment in our lives, we should ask the Lord to show us where we can become participants in making the gospel known. We should seek to see how we can become partners in proclaiming the Word of God in Wheelersburg, Scioto County, and around the world. This is what brings grace and peace and joy into our lives, for this is the primary purpose for our redemption. It is also the evidence of the good work God has started in our hearts when He saved us.

7. What is the good work mentioned in vs 6? Why was Paul confident that the work started would be completed? Who does he say is responsible for completing the work?

Rom 8: 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

God has started a work that He is going to complete in every elect believer. Paul was confident that this work was taking place in these believers, because that work was evidenced by their generosity and partnership in the gospel. Rom 8 says those that God foreknows and calls will come to completion (glorification), and that nothing can separate them from the love of God. When we are involved in making Christ known, it is an evidence of our calling being true, because that is the purpose that God calls and saves us, unto good works - unto proclamation of His greatness and grace, which is proclamation of the gospel. We are called according to His purpose - and His ultimate purpose is His glory as Christ is manifested in our lives and our words.

8. What is happening to Paul because of his association with the gospel? He is in chains. Association with the gospel means that we will suffer tribulation.

9. Discuss the content of Paul's prayers for the Philippians. As Paul is praying for the Philippians with joy, and in his heart he is longing to see them, he prays the following:

Love may abound more and more - more than enough

Knowledge - epignosko - intimate, full knowledge

Insight - cognition, moral discernment, understanding

Discernment - to perceive and hold fast to what is best

Purity will result - once we test and discard the impure.

Blameless - without something to stumble over, without hindrance

Filled with righteousness - which is a fruit, or evidence, of the presence of Christ.

For God's glory and praise.

Paul is praying that the Philippians have an abundance of what is best - most pure, without stumbling, abundant evidence of Jesus Christ in their lives. This speaks of maturity of love, which has moral substance. It's not that God would grant these things - it is that they will grow and abound and be in overwhelming abundance. For this to occur, full knowledge and depth of insight is needed. Paul is praying that God will bring this about - for it is He who is doing the work in these believers. We need knowledge so that we can discern what is best so that we will abound in righteousness to God's glory. We need to test and reject and/or approve things in our lives.

10. In light of Paul's prayer, how can we better pray for one another?