

EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. The writer of Philippians was the apostle Paul.
1. Biblical note, Philippians 1:1, *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:*
 2. Personal references in Philippians
 - a) Philippians 1:12-13, *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.*
 - b) Philippians 2:19, *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.*
 - c) Philippians 3:4-6, *...If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*
 - d) Philippians 4:15, *And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only.*
2. Support from church fathers
 - a. Polycarp (ca. 69-155 AD) was bishop of Smyrna.
 - b. Irenaeus, (ca. 2nd C. AD) was a theologian and bishop of Lyons in Gaul.
- B. Place and date of writing
1. Paul wrote the epistle while a prisoner.
 - a. Philippians 1:7, *It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.*
 - b. Philippians 1:13, *so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.*
 2. Paul's location when he wrote Philippians was probably Rome.
 - a. *imperial guard* refers to the Praetorian Guard which was headquartered in Rome.
 - b. Caesar's household was in Rome, 4:22, *All the saints greet you, especially those of Caesar's household.*
 - c. Gordon Fee, *Evidently he did so* wrote (Philippians) *during his first Roman imprisonment (60–62 A.D.) during which time he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, the other Prison Epistles.*
 - d. The Marcionite Prologue (170 A.D.) attached to this Epistle states that it was sent from Rome.
- C. Historical background of Philippi
1. The city
 - a. It was founded in 356 BC by Philip of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great.
 - b. Importance
 - 1) A major city of Macedonia on the road from Rome to Asia, the Egnatian Way.
 - 2) It was on the land route to the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, about 10 miles inland from the Aegean Sea.
 - 3) It became a Roman colony in 31 BC with full privileges of Roman citizenship, autonomous government, immunity from taxes, and treatment as if they lived in Italy.
 2. The church
 - a. The first town in which Paul preached after he crossed the Aegean Sea from Troas and entered Europe.
 - b. The first church in Europe, founded 49 AD on Paul's second missionary journey.
 - c. Predominantly Gentile church based on names of members mentioned in the epistle, Epaphroditus, Euodia, Syntyche and Clement.
 - d. Paul's activities in Philippi are recorded in Acts 16.
 - 1) Macedonian Call (1-11).
 - 2) A glimpse of Christianity (12-34)
 - a) Lydia, first convert in Europe, the work of God (12-15)

- b) A slave girl, the supremacy of Christ (16-21)
- c) The jailer and his family converted, the power of the Gospel (27-34)

3. Paul's contact with Philippi

- a. Paul's companions on his first visit to Philippi included Silas, Timothy, and Luke.
- b. Luke may have stayed in Philippi to establish the new converts when the other members of Paul's missionary team moved on to Thessalonica.
- c. Philippian Christians sent financial support to Paul in Thessalonica more than once, 4:15-16, *And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.*
- d. Probably, Paul visited Philippi again during his third missionary journey in 57 A.D.
 - 1) He traveled from Ephesus to Corinth by land and then from Corinth back to Miletus mostly by land. From there he took a ship to Jerusalem.
 - 2) The land route he took on both occasions would have led him through Philippi.

D. Purposes for writing Philippians

- 1. To thank the Philippians for gift sent to Paul while he was in prison, 4:15-16
- 2. To announce Timothy's approaching visit, 2:19, *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.*
- 3. To share Paul's desire to visit them again, 2:24, *and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*
- 4. To give warnings
 - a. On rivalry and ambition, 2:3-4, *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*
 - b. On the threat from Judaizers, 3:2-3, *Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.*
 - c. On need for reconciliation, 4:2, *I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*
 - d. On antinomian (lawless) tendencies, 3:18-19, *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*
- 5. To convey the central theme - live what you believe.

E. Importance of the Epistle of Philippians

1. Christology

- a. Hypostatic union - the relationship of Jesus' human and divine natures.
 - 1) Two natures constitute one person.
 - a) He is equal with the Father in His deity and equal with man in His humanity, except for sin.
 - b) Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Jer. 23:5, 6; Ps 16:10; Philippians 2:6-11; John 1:14
 - 2) Insures the constant presence of both humanity and deity.
 - 3) Unique to Jesus alone - the God-Man.
 - a) Co-eternal, John 8:58
 - b) Co-equal in nature, John 10:30
 - c) Co-equal in power, Mat. 26:64
- b. Kenosis - the subordination of Jesus' divine attributes.
 - 1) The word *kenosis* means *empty*.
 - 2) Philippians 2 deals with this concept of the interrelationship of Jesus' two natures, deity and humanity.
 - 3) Jesus gave up the independent use of His divine attributes, assigning responsibility to the Father.

2. The Christian life
 - a. Allowing oneself to die to self and live to Christ, 3:10, *that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*
 - b. Christian joy is not dependent on circumstances but relationship to the Son, 4:4, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*

3. Comments regarding Philippians
 - a. Robert Lightner, *One's manner of life is truly a reflection of what occupies his mind.*
 - b. Max Anders, *Philippians...will challenge you to rejoice in the midst of adversity by seeing God's perspective. Then like Paul you can rejoice in troubling circumstances.*

 - d. Thomas Constable, *Paul ended up in prison when he first evangelized Philippi. Yet in prison Paul and Silas sang praises to God. When Paul wrote Philippians he was in prison, this time in Rome. However the dominant emotion that he projected in this book was rejoicing. The paradox of a man in prison rejoicing lies at the root of what this book is all about. Such an attitude demonstrates an unusual view of life. It is a uniquely Christian view of life. It demonstrates the mind of Christ, which is the key to this epistle.*
 - e. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The only way to survive in prison is to abandon all expectations in this world and live for the next.*
 - f. M. Chandler, *God wants us to grow from being infants in Christ to being mature in Christ. That's what this book is about. How are we to mature, and how can we spot any "developmental delays"? My prayer is that as you read this book, prayerfully applying its challenges to your heart, God would use Paul's letter to the Philippians to show you what maturity looks like and to call you to pursue it all the more with all your might under His grace.*

F. Outline of the Epistle to the Philippians

1. Introduction (1:1-26)
 - a. Greeting (1-2)
 - b. Paul's prayer for Philippian believers (3-11)
 - c. Personal notes (12 - 26)

2. On Christian living (1:27-4:9)
 - a. Pastoral counsel (1:27-2:18)
 - b. Pastoral plans (2:19-30)
 - c. Pastoral instructions on trusting Christ (3:1-21)
 - d. Pastoral instructions on serving Christ (4:1-9)

3. On Christian contentment (4:10-23)
 - a. The recent gift from the church at Philippi (10-14)
 - b. Prior gifts from the church at Philippi (15-20)

4. Conclusion (4:21-23)