

# INTRODUCTION AND PHIL. 1:1-30

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## Introduction

### I. The City and the Church

A. Philippians is a letter from Paul to the church in the Roman colony of Philippi. The church was founded there during Paul's second missionary journey, probably in the latter part of A.D. 49 or early A.D. 50. You'll recall that the missionaries, including Silas, Timothy, and Luke, went there in response to Paul's vision of a Macedonian man begging him to come and help them.

B. Philippi was a leading city in the province of Macedonia and was the first major center where Paul preached the gospel in Europe. The actual founding of the church is reported in Acts 16:12-40. During their stay in Philippi, Lydia converted, Paul and Silas were illegally flogged and thrown in prison, the jailor converted, and then the magistrates, after being told that Paul was a Roman citizen, apologized and asked them to leave the city. In 1 Thess. 2:2 Paul refers to the suffering and insults they received in Philippi on this occasion.

C. After leaving Philippi, Paul received material assistance from the Philippians both when he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15-16) and in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9 – "brothers who came from Macedonia"). Paul visited the Macedonian churches, those at Thessalonica and Philippi, on at least two occasions during the mid 50's (Acts 20:1-3) and maintained a warm relationship with the Philippians throughout his life.

### II. The Date and Occasion

A. At the time of this writing, Paul is in prison, probably in Rome. If Rome is indeed the site of his imprisonment, the year is around A.D. 61-62. This is near the end of his first imprisonment in that city.

B. During Paul's third missionary journey, when he was raising money from his Gentile churches for the poor Jewish churches in Judea, the Macedonian churches insisted on participating. And though they were in dire financial straits at the time, they gave with extreme generosity (2 Cor. 8:1-5). That generous gift, along with their uncertainty about Paul's status, probably is why the Philippians were unable to provide Paul any material assistance during his two-year imprisonment in Caesarea. When they learned that Paul had been sent to Rome, they were determined to help him.

C. The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift (4:18) and with instructions to care for Paul's needs (2:25). Either while he was on the way or after he arrived, Epaphroditus became so ill that he almost died. News of Epaphroditus's illness

reached Philippi, which caused anxiety for both the Philippians and Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus recovered from his illness, and Paul decided to send him back to the Philippians. He takes that opportunity to send them this letter.

### **Phil. 1:1-30**

#### I. Opening (1:1-11)

##### A. Salutation (1:1-2)

1. Paul refers to himself and Timothy as "slaves" of Christ Jesus. They were totally at the disposal of their Master. There was absolutely no question about who was in control of their lives. That is to be the attitude of every Christian because we have all been purchased by the blood of the Lamb (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Acts 20:28).

2. The recipients are described as "saints in Christ Jesus." "Saints" simply means holy or sanctified ones, those set apart for God and his service. All Christians are saints because in Christ they have entered into a new relationship with God; they are the special or elect community of mankind. The popular notion of saint as a status bestowed by the church on select deceased Christians is unbiblical.

3. The saints in Philippi include the "overseers and deacons."

a. Local congregations in the early church were each led by a plurality of men variously called elders/presbyters (*presbuteros*), overseers/bishops (*episkopos*), or shepherds/pastors (*poimēn*). The interchangeability of these terms is clear from Acts 20:17, 28; Tit. 1:5,7; and 1 Pet. 5:1, 2. The term "pastor" is today commonly thought to be a synonym for "preacher" or "minister," but technically that is incorrect.

(1) In brief, elders are responsible for the spiritual welfare of the congregation. This necessarily involves them in teaching and modeling the word of God. The qualifications for the office of elder are contained in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

(2) The only leadership structure specified in the New Testament is a plurality of elders that govern each local congregation. Churches of Christ and many other groups follow that biblical pattern. In other words, we don't have some governing church structure above the elders in the congregation.

b. The role of deacons in the N.T. is less clear. The qualifications for this position are set forth in 1 Tim. 3:8-13. Given that the word translated "deacon" generally means servant or minister and given that it was a distinct position in the congregation, they probably aided the elders in carrying out their responsibilities to the church. Acts 6:1-7 is probably a good illustration of the concept, though those men are not specifically called deacons.

4. Paul desires for them that the Father and the Son will pour out on them unmerited favor in unspecified ways and the blessing of general well being.

B. Thanksgiving for them (1:3-8)

1. Paul expresses his appreciation and affection for the Philippians, telling them that every time he mentions them in prayer he does so with thanksgiving and joy. Paul knew how to encourage people in the faith and was not hesitant to do so. The bases of his thanksgiving and joy are:

a. Their "sharing in the gospel from the first day until now." This means more than simply their coming to faith; it means their active participation in furthering the gospel, particularly their generous support of Paul's missionary effort. They were a "missionary church" from the beginning (see, Phil. 4:15-16; 2 Cor. 11:9). The sincerity of their love for the Lord and his work was demonstrated by their sacrificial giving (see, 2 Cor. 8:1-8).

b. His confidence "that the one who began a good work in [them] will carry it through until the day of Christ Jesus." Paul had seen so much of God's working in their lives that he had no doubt that God was going to complete the work of their salvation, that they were going to share in the consummated kingdom at the Lord's return. Their track record made him confident that they would not resist God's grace in their lives, which meant that God's will for them would be realized. Paul's assurance assumes the Philippians' cooperation and partnership in God's gracious work.

c. This conviction was a source of great joy and gratitude for Paul, and was a tremendous encouragement and compliment for the Philippians. I think of John's statement in 3 Jn. 4: I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (ESV).

2. He tells them it is right for him to have such a grateful and joyful attitude about them because he has them in his heart (i.e., holds them in affection).

a. There is a question whether the clause "in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" goes with the preceding clause, as I have translated it, or with the following clause. The vast majority of scholars link it with the following clause, in which case the meaning is that Paul has them in his heart because they are sharers with him in God's grace in both his chains and in his defending and confirming the gospel. In other words, he has them in his heart because they have supported him through thick and thin.

b. If "in both my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel" goes with the preceding clause, which I favor, the meaning is that Paul's affection for them is so great that it transcends his circumstances. He has them in his heart both when he is stuck in prison and when he otherwise is defending and confirming the gospel.

The following clause then explains the reason for that great affection: they are "sharers with [him] in God's grace." This is Christian fellowship. Paul loved those who shared in God's grace in Christ, and he loved the Philippians so deeply because the reality of their sharing in that grace was so evident in their lives. God's grace to them was not without effect, and as such, they were "soul mates" with the apostle.

3. He loves them so much that he calls God as his witness that he "long[s] for all of them with the affection of Christ Jesus." Nothing can be said beyond this.

### C. Prayer for them (1:9-11)

1. Paul's prayer is that their "love may grow even more and more in knowledge and all insight." He wants their love to be increasingly informed by an intimate knowledge of God and by spiritual discernment. Their love is to be directed toward that which God loves and into ways in which God would have them love. As explained in v. 10, the growing of their love in knowledge and insight will allow them to "ascertain the superior things," meaning the superior objects and ways of love.

2. Paul wants them to ascertain God's ways so they can pattern their lives after them, in order that "[they] may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, having been filled with the fruit of righteousness produced through Jesus Christ." In other words, he wants them to come to know God's ways so they can live righteously and thus be found pleasing to God on the day of Christ's return.

3. Paul is not content for these Christians to stop with a basic knowledge of the Gospel. He wants them to grow in holiness and purity. He wants this because righteous living is "to the glory and praise of God."

## II. Paul's Current Circumstance

### A. Setting the record straight (1:12-14)

1. "Now I want you to know, brothers, that my circumstances have actually come about for the advancement of the gospel."

a. Paul is correcting some misunderstanding they have gotten about his situation. Contrary to what they had been led to believe, his situation was actually a benefit to the cause of Christ, not a detriment.

b. Precisely what "circumstances" he is referring to is unclear. It may simply be the fact of his imprisonment, but some think he is referring to a more recent change. It's possible his prison situation had changed because in A.D. 62 the infamous Tigellinus became the head of the Praetorian Guard in place of the honest Burrus. Until A.D. 63, Nero delegated the handling of appeals to the head of the Praetorian Guard.

c. Paul wants them to know that God is in control, that his circumstances in no way represent a defeat for God. He also wants them to know that the gospel is advancing because they share Paul's desire in that regard.

d. God is amazing in how he accomplishes his purposes in ways we would not expect, the ultimate example of which is human redemption by divine crucifixion. When in Acts 23:11 the Lord told Paul, "As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you must also testify in Rome," I doubt Paul envisioned that he'd be doing so as a prisoner. This ought to encourage us when we find ourselves in difficult situations. We need to look for how we can serve and glorify God wherever we are and not go into a spiritual funk about our situation. God is looking for us to be faithful where we are.

## 2. The manner in which his circumstances advanced the gospel

a. The whole palace guard and everyone else involved with Paul's incarceration came to understand that he was in chains because of Christ. It became clear, undoubtedly through his preaching, that he was in prison for his belief in the risen Lord. The fact he was willing to suffer, solely for his allegiance to Christ, was a powerful witness. Faith that deep, that genuine, gets people's attention. Justin Martyr, a second century Christian, wrote that as a pagan he was greatly impressed with the courage of Christians in the face of death.

b. Most of the brothers were emboldened by Paul's chains to preach the word even more fearlessly. The fortitude of a leader in the face of unjust treatment often spurs those within the movement to greater zeal and courage.

(1) Consider the great witnesses in Heb. 11:32 - 12:1.

(2) I think we saw that with Nelson Mandela's imprisonment in South Africa. Paul inspired the brothers by putting Christ above all else, even liberty and life.

c. This should tell us something about the potential influence of a sacrificially committed life. If we want to influence the world toward Christ and to encourage those around us to pursue him more zealously, we cannot cave in on our obedience when it cost us something. If as soon as Christianity becomes painful we "sell," the world will conclude that our God is not worth much.

## B. The reality of competitive preachers (1:15-18a)

1. Some who were stimulated by Paul's imprisonment to preach more fervently were doing so from mixed motives.

a. He says they preached Christ out of envy, rivalry, and selfish ambition. They were competing with Paul in the presentation of the gospel, seeking to

gain status at his expense. The phrase translated "not sincerely" in v. 17 (NIV) means "not with a pure motive." They sincerely believed the gospel message they were preaching but part of their motive for preaching it was to elevate themselves above Paul.

b. By implication from v. 16, these competitive preachers did not appreciate that Paul's imprisonment was a divine appointment in which he was faithfully discharging his ministry to the Gentiles. Instead, they perceived it as a failure, as some kind of hindrance to the spread of the gospel. Judging from 1:12, this negative "spin" on Paul's imprisonment had apparently reached Philippi.

c. They supposed that they could stir up trouble for Paul "by [his] chains." Most translations interpret this phrase as "*while* I am in chains," but it makes more sense to see Paul's imprisonment as the basis on which they were causing trouble. As Gerald Hawthorne (Word Biblical Commentary) translates it: "They think they will stir up trouble *because* I am in prison."

d. Carson writes (*Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, 23):

One can easily imagine the reasoning of Paul's critics. Depending on how this case turns out, Paul's appeal to the Emperor could bring Christianity into ill repute. Paul is constantly rushing headlong into things where a wiser, cooler head would have been cautious. Why did he have to go up to Jerusalem and get himself arrested anyway? He knew how much he was held in contempt there? Surely there was a better way.

e. Whoever these competitive preachers were, it is worth noting that they were not Judaizers. Paul says that despite their impure motives, they "preach Christ." Judging by Galatians 1, Paul does not consider the Judaizers to be preaching the gospel at all.

f. We must be very careful that our good works are not motivated by a desire to outshine someone else, a sort of spiritual one-upmanship. This problem, of course, is most acute among those who lead. We get into this competitive thing with other preachers.

2. Others who were encouraged by Paul's imprisonment to preach more boldly were doing so out of good will and love, realizing that Paul was where he was for the cause of the gospel.

3. Paul rejoiced in the preaching of the gospel, even if it was done at his expense. He could swallow the small mindedness of preachers who were intent on overshadowing him, as long as they were driven by that competition to preach Christ to a dying world.

a. Carson comments (*Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians, 25-26*):

Paul's example is impressive and clear: Put the advance of the gospel at the center of your aspirations. Our own comfort, our bruised feelings, our reputations, our misunderstood motives – all of these are insignificant in comparison with the advance and splendor of the gospel. As Christians, we are called upon to put the advance of the gospel at the very center of our aspirations.

What are your aspirations? To make money? To get married? To travel? To see your grandchildren grow up? To find a new job? To retire early? None of these are inadmissible; none is to be despised. The question is whether these aspirations become so devouring that the Christian's *central* aspiration is squeezed to the periphery or choked out of existence entirely.

b. Note that they were still preaching Christ. This does not mean that we should overlook heresies and rejoice whenever anyone mentions Christ.

c. Of course, in rejoicing over the result, Paul is in no way condoning the motives of such men. In Phil. 2:3 he makes clear that they are to "do nothing out of selfish ambition or empty conceit." The "how" of the preaching is not the object of Paul's joy; the "fact" of the preaching is.

C. Rejoicing in confidence of salvation through his upcoming trial (1:18b-21)

1. Paul will continue rejoicing in the future, regardless of the outcome of his impending trial, because he knows that the situation will turn out for his "salvation." He is confident that nothing in his upcoming circumstances will jeopardize his salvation, that the road he is about to travel will not divert him from that goal.

a. NIV and a number of other translations use "deliverance" instead of "salvation," presumably to suggest that Paul is referring to release from prison, but this word is usually translated "salvation." It's translated that way in the KJV and ASV, and the NIV notes that "salvation" is an alternative translation.

b. In Paul the word normally refers to the final deliverance of the believer at the last judgment (see, Rom. 1:16, 10:10; 2 Cor. 7:10; Phil. 1:28). This end-time salvation (see Phil. 2:12; 1 Thess. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 2:13) has to do with deliverance from the coming wrath of God (Rom. 5:9; 1 Cor. 3:15, 5:5; 1 Thess. 1:10, 5:9) and endowment with divine glory (Rom. 8:18-30; 2 Thess. 2:13-14).

c. This salvation will be in keeping with Paul's "intense expectation and hope." Paul fully expected and confidently looked forward to the consummation (note 2 Tim. 4:8; Rom. 8:22-25). We need to do the same; it is a source of joy that cannot be taken from us.

d. It's interesting that the phrase translated "this will turn out for my salvation" is verbatim from Job 13:16 (LXX). Paul probably is applying the words of Job to his situation ("turn out" is found nowhere else in Paul) because, like Job, he is confident of his vindication before God despite being held in contempt by others because of his hardships.

2. Paul's confidence of remaining saved through his upcoming trial is explained in terms of his confidence that he will in no way repudiate Christ.

a. He knows that the situation will turn out for his salvation because he knows that he "will in no way be ashamed but with all boldness, now as always, Christ will be exalted in [his] body, whether through life or through death."

b. Jesus taught that those who abandon him in persecution will be abandoned by him on that day. See Mat. 10:21-22, 32-33, 24:9-13; Mk. 8:34-38; Lk. 14:26-27, 21:16-19. See also, Rev. 12:10-11, 14:9-13.

c. Paul, of course, had suffered greatly for his faith. By the time of 2 Cor. 11:21b-27, he had been repeatedly flogged, beaten with rods, and imprisoned and was once subjected to stoning. He was again imprisoned in Jerusalem, Caesarea, and now in Rome. Through all those times, despite being in constant danger, he maintained his confession that Jesus is Lord.

d. The attitude or perspective that helps create the will to suffer for Christ's sake is summarized in the statement, "For to me, to live [is] Christ and to die [is] gain" (v. 21). Paul could not be bullied by the threat of death because he knew to the core of his being that to die in Christ would be a blessing. See Acts 21:13.

e. You might think this is arrogance; after all, Peter thought he would remain firm but denied the Lord. But Peter repented and proved his repentance by his deeds (see, Acts 4:3, 5:17-40, 12:1-5). According to church history, he was crucified upside down by Nero. Paul was rightly confident, not arrogant.

3. Paul's confidence that he would not repudiate Christ, that he would maintain the proper perspective regardless of what happened to him, was in turn based on his confidence in the power of their prayers on his behalf and the help given by the Holy Spirit.

a. Paul did not boast that he would stand firm in his own power; he trusted that God would grant him the strength.

b. We cannot underestimate the power of prayer, and we cannot become prideful about spiritual strength.

D. Confidence that he will go on living to benefit the Philippians (1:22-26)



1. Though dying would be a gain for Paul, he understands that if he is to go on living it will mean fruitful labor, so he cannot say which he would choose (if it were up to him). He is torn between the two. He desires to be with Christ, "for this is far better," but he realizes that his remaining alive is more necessary for the progress of the Philippians in the faith.

2. Being convinced of the Philippians' spiritual need and knowing God as he does, Paul is confident that he will in fact live on for their advancement and joy in the faith. If it were up to him, he cannot say which he would choose, but it is not up to him. He is convinced that God will preserve him for the sake of the brethren and that he will again visit with them.

### III. Exhortation to Right Living (1:27 – 2:18)

#### A. Live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (1:27-30)

1. Regardless of Paul's situation, they are to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. In general, to live in a manner worthy of something means to act in accordance with the value and importance of that thing, to act with a proper appreciation of its worth. If someone gives you a gift that cost them dearly and you then treat it as a small thing, giving it away or selling it, you have not acted worthily of the gift.

2. Living worthily of the gospel can encompass many things, but the specific aspect with which Paul is concerned is that they make a united stand against those opposing them.

a. They were being persecuted by their pagan neighbors. 1:28 refers to those "who oppose you," and 1:30 says "you are having the same struggle you saw me have and now here that I am having." Recall that Paul was flogged and jailed when he founded the church in Philippi and is currently in jail.

b. To succumb to such pressure, to treat the gospel as unworthy of enduring this hardship, is to live unworthily of it. How much more so if we succumb to some lesser pressure today? E.g., peer pressure, financial pressure, social pressure.

3. The united stand they are to make is explained in terms of both a positive and a negative aspect:

a. They are to contend as one person for the faith based on the gospel. With unity of heart and purpose they are to struggle together for the cause of the faith, for its spread and growth.

(1) We are to fight against whatever is opposed to the gospel - today that includes heresies and such things as humanism, relativism, materialism, scientism, etc. As J. Gresham Machen wrote many years ago:

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.

(2) We are to be united in our opposition. There is strength in unity ("Workers of the world unite!"). If the church fragments, it will be less effective in its struggle against the things opposed to the gospel.

b. They are not to be intimidated in any way by those who oppose them. In other words, they are not to be frightened into compromise, into doing less than they think Christ would have them do. We cannot allow a teacher or a boss, any person with power to hurt us, to intimidate us so that we shrink from our Christian responsibilities. With Paul (1:20), we must glorify Christ whether through life or through death. As Martin Luther wrote in his hymn *A Mighty Fortress*, "the body they may kill, God's truth abideth still, his kingdom is forever."

4. Paul encourages them by telling them that their standing firm in the face of persecution is an omen or clear indicator regarding the future.

a. The steadfastness of the Philippians in the face of that hostility, the boldness and courage they show as a result of sharing Paul's outlook that to die in Christ is gain, is an omen that those persecuting them are doomed. It stands as a clear indicator that they chose the wrong side, whether they recognize it or not.

b. By the same token, the Philippians' resolve and unity in the face of that hostility reveals them to be God's faithful and is thus a clear sign of their coming salvation. We need to appreciate that in the pressures we face today.

5. This sign of their salvation is from God, for it is he who has graciously granted them not only the blessing of faith but also the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake (see Acts 5:40-41; 1 Pet. 4:12-14; Mat. 5:11-12). It is an honor to suffer as he did, to suffer because of evil's opposition to God, and this Christ-like pattern of life reflects a union with him that will culminate in eternal glory.