

# CONCERNING THE WAY

January 15, 2013

## LESSON 149: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS



Paul writes this letter to the church at Philippi, which he planted along with Timothy and Silas during his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey (Acts 16). This was the first church in Europe. Paul's call by God to go to Greece was the main reason why the gospel spread in Europe and not Asia. Philippi at this time was a Roman colony, but it had been Alexander the Great's capital during the time of his Greek empire, naming the city for his father Phillip of Macedon.

Philippi was located in the Roman province of Macedonia about 9 miles from the Aegean Sea. The city was unusual in that there was no Jewish synagogue there, leading many scholars to believe that the citizens generally were anti-Semitic. There were large numbers of Jews in other Greek cities.

Today all that is left of Philippi is some ruins. Archeologists have uncovered a marketplace and an amphitheater dating back to Roman times.

We can tell a few things about the church in Philippi just from the text.

1. It was mostly Gentile. There were very few Jews living in Philippi.
2. Women had a significant role in the church (Acts 16:11-15; Philippians 4:1-2).
3. The church was generous.
4. They were very loyal to Paul.

The traditional date for the writing of Philippians is during Paul's first Roman imprisonment (a.d. 60-62). The theme of this book is traditionally been known as the epistle of joy. The words joy or rejoice are found 18 times in the book, and there are many verses in this epistle that are favorites with Christians everywhere.

**Philippians 1:1-2 From: Paul and Timothy, servants of the Messiah Jesus. To: All the holy ones in Philippi, along with their overseers and ministers, who are in union with the Messiah Jesus. (2) May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be yours!**

- Calling the Philippian believers "holy ones" or "saints", Paul was not saying his readers were sinless, or only speaking to the more spiritual in the church. The Greek word he used means "those set apart." The saints at Philippi were set apart for God. They were in union with Christ Jesus as far as their relationship to God was concerned. It was that fact that made them holy. All believers are "saints".
- Even though Paul wrote the letter, he included Timothy because he had been with him when he planted the church at Philippi and probably had been visiting with him in prison in Rome. So the Philippians were very familiar with Timothy as well.
- "Ministers" is also translated "deacons". The "overseers" or bishops, were also called "elders" (Titus 1:5, 7); and they were responsible for shepherding or pastoring the flock (see Acts 20:17, 28). The "deacons" were those church leaders who had special service responsibilities in the assembly (see Acts 6).
- Unlike many of Paul's letters, he doesn't mention that he is an apostle in his greeting, but just says that he and Timothy were "servants of the Messiah Jesus". The assumption is because he was so close to the people in this church, he didn't feel the need to assert his authority, but felt he could talk to them as friends.

**Philippians 1:3-6** I thank my God every time I remember you, (4) always praying joyfully in every one of my prayers for all of you (5) because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (6) I am convinced of this, that the one who began a good action among you will bring it to completion by the Day of the Messiah Jesus.

- Verses 3-11 are Paul's prayer for the Philippians and a good example for us in our prayers for people. Paul included many prayers in his letters, and the Philippians were familiar with that, as the church started with prayers and praise in the midst of persecution (read Acts 16:25-34). Prayers and praises should be a dominant theme in our lives!
- The "good action" (or good work in some versions) Paul speaks of is salvation. You can see clearly from this verse that maintaining and finishing our salvation is not up to us, but it is entirely the work of God. We can be sure that God will finish what He has started in us so that we will stand before Christ complete in Him. This is a wonderful promise for us!
- God sees believers as already complete, already glorified, because they are in Christ (Romans 8:30). We as human beings are only looking at what is currently going on with our lives, but God looks at His people as what they will be when He has finished His work in them.

**Philippians 1:7-8** For it is only right for me to think this way about all of you, because you're constantly on my mind. Both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, all of you are partners with me in this privilege. (8) For God is my witness how much I long for all of you with the compassion that the Messiah Jesus provides.

- Paul considered the Philippians to be partners with him in his work, which was spreading the gospel. They supported him with their constant prayers for him and monetary gifts. This idea is expressed today when we support missionaries from our churches with both our prayers and offerings.

**Philippians 1:9-11** And this is my prayer, that your love will keep on growing more and more with full knowledge and insight, (10) so that you may be able to choose what is best and be pure and blameless until the day when the Messiah returns, (11) having been filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus the Messiah so that God will be glorified and praised.

- Notice that Paul prays that their love will grow with full knowledge and insight. Love for other Christians isn't just sentimental, but is tied to our knowledge of God and insight into His ways. The more we know about God from His word, the more we are able to truly love God and others.
- This knowledge also gives us the ability to "choose what is best and pure and blameless". The Greek word translated "choose" also means "testing". The idea is that we are to examine and test everything in our lives and choose the higher, more important things instead of the lower, meaningless things. The sense of the word is that we should be constantly reassessing our opinions and our lifestyle. This includes moral purity, but the meaning here is not distinguishing between good and evil, but what is temporary and what is eternal.
- "Until the day when the Messiah returns". As believers we don't have to worry about our salvation but we will stand before Christ in that day, and we want to fill our lives with things that glorify God, not things that we will be ashamed of when we look into His face. Our works in this life will be judged, and we don't want them all to be burned up and cause us to lose rewards. Things we do that bring glory to God will last forever.

**Philippians 1:12-13** Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has actually caused the gospel to advance. (13) As a result, it has become clear to the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that I am in prison for preaching about the Messiah.

- The “imperial guard” was the Praetorian Guard, which was an elite group of soldiers, from 9 to 10 thousand that served Caesar personally. They received double pay and special privileges. They became so powerful that those who desired to be Caesar knew they needed to get their support first.
- One of the reasons Paul was writing was to reassure this church that his being in prison was in God’s plan. Even though Paul was allowed to stay in a rented house (Acts 28:30), he was guarded by these soldiers all the time, and chained to one of them constantly. The shift changed every 6 hours, so in the two years that Paul was in prison he could have witnessed to several thousand guards. They watched how he spoke to his friends, how he wrote, and how he prayed. Everyone who came in contact with Paul heard about Jesus Christ.

**Philippians 1:14-15** Moreover, because of my imprisonment the Lord has caused most of the brothers to become confident to speak God's word more boldly and courageously than ever before. (15) Some are preaching the Messiah because of jealousy and dissension, while others do so because of their good will.

- God had another purpose for Paul being in prison. It got other believers fired up! They were more bold and courageous in their witnessing.
- Apparently there were two kinds of believers that were preaching the gospel. There were some that knew that Paul was in chains because of the gospel, but others were jealous of Paul for some reason, even though still boldly teaching about Christ.

**Philippians 1:16-18** The latter are motivated by love, because they know that I have been appointed to defend the gospel. (17) The former proclaim the Messiah because they are selfishly ambitious and insincere, thinking that they will stir up trouble for me during my imprisonment. (18) But so what? Just this—that in every way, whether by false or true motives, the Messiah is being proclaimed. Because of this, I rejoice and will continue to rejoice.

- Paul was just happy that the gospel was being preached, even though some had false motives. We see here that there were factions in the body of believers, just like there are today, and that some believers were insincere and selfishly ambitious. Again, we see this same situation today. There are popular preachers that seem to be more interested in promoting themselves than promoting Christ, but people are still coming to Christ through their message if they are preaching the gospel.

**Philippians 1:19-20** I know that this will result in my deliverance through your prayers and the help that comes from the Spirit of Jesus the Messiah. (20) I rejoice because I eagerly expect and hope that I will have nothing to be ashamed of, because through my boldness the Messiah will be exalted through me, now as always, whether I live or die.

- Paul’s trial in Rome may have already begun. He didn’t know whether he would be released or sentenced to death, but you can see that his main concern, whether he lived or died, was that Christ would be exalted through him. What an example for us! This should be our daily prayer.

**Philippians 1:21-24** For to me, to go on living is the Messiah, and to die is gain. (22) Now if I continue living, fruitful labor is the result, so I do not know which I would prefer. (23) Indeed, I cannot decide between the two. I have the desire to leave this life and be with the Messiah, for that is far better. (24) But for your sake it is better that I remain alive.

- Again, what an example for us! Paul's life found all its meaning in Christ. His thoughts, feelings, and actions were fixed on Christ. Jesus was the center of his daily existence.
- When he said "to die is gain", I doubt if he meant gain for himself, but gain for the cause of Christ. Paul recognized that his death could advance the gospel further, just as his imprisonment had already caused many believers to be bolder in living for Christ.
- This passage was a huge inspiration for me when I was diagnosed with cancer. We as believers always live with this tension. We recognize that we don't belong here – this world is not our home. We want to be with Christ and for all the pain of this world to be over. But our purpose here in this life is to do good works for the Lord (fruitful labor), and to love and be a blessing to others, especially our families and friends.
- Verse 23 tells us that death brings us immediately into the presence of Christ to live forever—there is no soul sleep and no purgatory in between. Being in heaven with Christ is "far better" - in every way possible infinitely better than life on earth.

**Philippians 1:25-26** Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will continue to live and be with all of you, so you will mature in the faith and know joy in it. (26) Then your rejoicing in the Messiah Jesus will increase along with mine when I visit with you again.

- Paul seems to have been pretty sure that he would be released. His trial may have been going well at this point.

**Philippians 1:27-28** The only thing that matters is that you continue to live as good citizens in a manner worthy of the gospel of the Messiah. Then, whether I come to see you or whether I stay away, I may hear all about you—that you are standing firm in one spirit, struggling with one mind for the faith of the gospel, (28) and that you are not intimidated by your opponents in any way. This is evidence that they will be destroyed and that you will be saved—and all because of God.

- Verse 27 is very important. This is the responsibility of all believers; that we live as the citizens of heaven that we are, in a way worthy of the gospel of the Messiah. We are part of the Kingdom of God but we live now in kingdoms ruled by Satan (Luke 4:5-6). Jesus told us not to fear men (Luke 12:4). He told us that we would have trouble in this world, but he also said He had overcome the world (John 16:33), which is even more reason to focus on living a Christ – centered life.
- The way our culture is going, true Christianity is being more and more marginalized and rejected in this country. We can expect that, if we live for Christ, we will have opponents. But we should not be intimidated or disheartened by this; it has always been that way. Paul is saying that being persecuted for Christ is evidence that we will be saved, not because of our own efforts, but "all because of God".

**Philippians 1:29-30** For you have been given the privilege for the Messiah's sake not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. (30) You have the same struggle that you saw in me and now hear that I am still having.

- This is not a popular sermon topic today, but there it is. It is a privilege to suffer for the sake of Christ. Notice it is part of the package, to suffer for Him.
- Suffering for Christ should not be considered accidental or a divine punishment. Paul says this kind of suffering is really a sign of God's favor. The Greek word translated "privilege," comes from a word which means "grace" or "favor." Believing on Christ and suffering for Him are both associated with God's grace. Read Romans 8:17, 2 Timothy 2:12, and 1 Peter 4:13.

## Chapter 2

**Philippians 2:1-2** *Therefore, if there is any encouragement in the Messiah, if there is any comfort of love, if there is any fellowship in the Spirit, if there is any compassion and sympathy, (2) then fill me with joy by having the same attitude, sharing the same love, being united in spirit, and keeping one purpose in mind.*

- These "if" statements in the original Greek are certainties. These four qualities are absolutely found in Jesus Christ, and Paul is saying we should have the same qualities and be in unity with each other. Unity is possible only because of those four qualities.
- Then Paul encourages us to show that unity in Christ by the four things he lists in verse 2

**Philippians 2:3-4** *Do not act out of selfish ambition or conceit, but with humility think of others as being better than yourselves. (4) Do not be concerned about your own interests, but also be concerned about the interests of others.*

- Humility is something all believers should work at (also 1 Peter 5:5-6). We can express humility by being concerned about the interests of others, instead of being focused on ourselves.
- The next seven verses, about the humility of Christ is the high point of the letter. Different than the informal, conversational style of the rest of the letter, verses 5-11 are very formal and polished, even poetic. In a few beautiful verses Paul describes the uniqueness of the person and work of Christ:

**Philippians 2:5-11** *Have the same attitude among yourselves that was also in the Messiah Jesus:*

*In God's own form existed he, and shared with God equality, deemed nothing needed grasping.*

*Instead, poured out in emptiness, a servant's form did he possess, a mortal man becoming.*

*In human form he chose to be, and lived in all humility, death on a cross obeying.*

*Now lifted up by God to heaven, a name above all others given, this matchless name possessing.*

*And so, when Jesus' name is called, the knees of everyone should fall wherever they're residing.*

*Then every tongue in one accord, will say that Jesus the Messiah is Lord, while God the Father praising.*

- As followers of Christ, we should try to think as He would think, walk as He walked (1 John 2:6) and love as He loved (John 13:34). With renewed minds (Romans 12:2), we can and should have "the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- Here are the things about Christ that we learn from these statements:
  - Jesus Christ was God from eternity (John 1:1-3), the Creator of all things.

- He emptied Himself and chose to become a servant, a mortal man, but without a sin nature like the rest of us. This does not mean he ceased to be God. He is both a true human being and completely God, God in the flesh.
- As God He had all the rights of deity, but during His time on earth incarnated as a man He surrendered His right to manifest Himself visibly as the God of glory. He didn't walk around with a glow or with a halo above His head (like you see in some paintings), but looked, walked, and talked like an ordinary person. He chose not to use His divine power except under the control of the Holy Spirit and under the will of the Father.
- He chose to allow Himself to be treated like the lowest guilty criminal, and to die in the most excruciatingly painful death imaginable, all in obedience to the Father.
- He rose from the dead, ascended to heaven and assumed "all power in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18).
- What every tongue will say is that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is the earliest Christian creed, and it means that Jesus Christ is Yahweh-God (from the Old Testament). People who confess the name of Jesus as Lord now will be saved (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 16:31), but all created beings, men and angels, must confess it and bow their knee to Him eventually, because He is Lord of all! See also Ephesians 1:20-21; 1 Peter 3:22.

**Philippians 2:12-13** **And so, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, not only when I was with you but even more now that I am absent, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. (13) For it is God who is producing in you both the desire and the ability to do what pleases him.**

- It's important to understand what Paul is saying here. We don't work FOR our salvation, but, having been given salvation freely, we work it out in practice in our daily lives. Works do not earn us salvation, but works are the visible evidence that we have salvation. We have been "created" to do good works (Ephesians 2:10).
- In verse 13 we see that God is working in us through His Holy Spirit. We would never have the desire or ability to please God on our own, but it is "produced" in us by God. Both divine enablement and human responsibility are involved in getting God's work done. Believers are partners with God, working together with Him. He can give us the desire and the ability, but it is our responsibility to choose to do the work.

**Philippians 2:14-16** **Do everything without complaining or arguing (15) so that you may be blameless and innocent, God's children without any faults among a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world (16) as you hold firmly to the word of life. Then I will be proud when the Messiah returns that I did not run in vain or work hard in vain.**

- Here's something you can do to work out your salvation – do everything without complaining or arguing. We are to accept the difficulties in life willingly, confident that the Lord is allowing them for good reason, as He is preparing him or her for the age to come. OK, well already that's a tough one, isn't it? Also, remember the context here, Paul is speaking to the entire church in Philippi. There must have been a problem with that there. We need to be able to get along with our brothers and sisters in Christ without complaining or arguing.

- Blameless in the original Greek means “above reproach.” This does not mean sinless perfection. The testimony of the church in the world is what this is about. Historically the church has fallen well short of this ideal; we have rarely been seen by the world as above reproach and no one thinks we’re innocent or without fault any more. Yet God’s desire, expressed by Paul here, is that we “shine like stars in the world”. How do you think we can get there?
- A child of God is in God’s family, but the unsaved are alienated from Him. They are His enemies. God’s sovereign plan is to use His Word, “held firmly” or offered by God’s people, to transform His enemies into His friends by the regenerating work of God’s Spirit.

**Philippians 2:17-18** Yet even if I am being poured out like an offering as part of the sacrifice and service I offer for your faith, I rejoice, and I share my joy with all of you. (18) In the same way, you also should rejoice and share your joy with me.

- Paul knew that death as a martyr was a real possibility for him. But he chose to rejoice in his sufferings, and he wanted his friends to rejoice with him.

**Philippians 2:19-23** Now I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I can be encouraged when I learn of your condition. (20) I do not have anyone else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. (21) For all the others look after their own interests, not after those of Jesus the Messiah. (22) But you know his proven worth—how like a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. (23) Therefore, I hope to send him as soon as I see how things are going to turn out for me.

- Timothy was one of Paul’s companions, and apparently was allowed to visit him in his incarceration. You can see his love for Timothy in these verses, and since he could not visit the church in Philippi he wanted to send the next best person, one who genuinely cared about them.
- The Philippians knew Timothy, so they knew that what the apostle said about him was true. From the start, when he worked with Paul in Philippi, Timothy was faithful (see Acts 16). He had been closely associated with Paul since Paul’s second missionary journey. He had been tested and proved. Paul was Timothy’s spiritual father, and Timothy worked with him as his son. Together they both served the Lord as slaves in the work of the gospel. Timothy’s life is an example for all of us.

**Philippians 2:24-30** Indeed, I am confident in the Lord that I will come to visit you soon. (25) Meanwhile, I thought it best to send Epaphroditus—my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and minister to my need—back to you. (26) For he has been longing for all of you and is troubled because you heard that he was sick. (27) Indeed, he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow on top of another. (28) Therefore, I am especially eager to send him so that you may have the joy of seeing him again, and so that I may feel relieved. (29) So joyfully welcome him in the Lord and make sure you honor such people highly, (30) because he came close to death for the work of the Messiah by risking his life to complete what remained unfinished in your service to me.

- So Paul sent another trusted brother, Epaphroditus, to Philippi first with his letter. Since the church had sent Epaphroditus to bring Paul “the gifts” (of money, 4:18) and to see how things were going with him, they probably wanted him to stay and help Paul indefinitely. But the apostle chose to send him back to them. Here he tells the Philippians what he thought of Epaphroditus. He called him my brother, fellow

