

Notes & Outlines

PHILIPPIANS

J. Vernon McGee

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“The Earthly Walk of a Heavenly People”

WRITER: Paul (Philippians 1:1)

DATE: A.D. 62

Written at the same time as Ephesians, it is one of the prison epistles.

CITY OF PHILIPPI:

Philippi was a Roman colony. Although it was a miniature of Rome and imitated and aped Rome in every way, it was nonetheless a city which had a higher cultural level than other cities visited by Paul.

CHURCH OF PHILIPPI:

1. It was less Jewish and more Gentile than were all others (the names of individuals mentioned are Greek and Roman). This was the first church established in Europe (Acts 16:6-40), which gives special meaning to Gentiles.
2. Women occupied a prominent place in this church. Paul attended, first of all, not the synagogue, but a prayer meeting of women (Acts 16:12-15). A woman named Lydia was the first convert in Europe. Two women were prominent in the church (Philippians 4:2), and there were others who labored in the church (Philippians 4:3).
3. It was generous in its gifts to the Lord's work (Philippians 4:10-16). Paul cited them as examples to others in giving (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

OCCASION FOR EPISTLE:

There were two specific circumstances that occasioned the writing of this epistle:

1. The church at Philippi had been generous in support of Paul, and he wrote this letter to thank them. When he was in prison in Rome, they sent help by the hands of Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus became ill in Rome, and when he recovered, Paul wrote this letter and sent it by the messenger who had brought him help.
2. A deeper reason was evidently the division that was arising because of the misunderstanding between two of the women (Philippians 4:2). One of the phrases that Paul used again and again is “you all,” speaking to and of all the believers in the church.

KEY:

The epistle is practical; its key thought is *joy*. It has been labeled “The Secret of Joy.” Some form of the word occurs 19 times. It answers the question, “How may I have joy in my heart?” The man who wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4), was in the Mamertine prison in Rome. Joy does not depend upon circumstances.

REMARKS:

After Paul and Barnabas had completed their first missionary journey, they determined to visit again the Galatian churches to see their progress. A sharp division arose over the feasibility of taking John Mark along again.

The result was that Paul took Silas and departed for the Galatian country. After visiting the churches, Paul was evidently planning to extend the circumference of his missionary activity by taking the gospel to Asia (the province of Asia, of which Ephesus was the leading city). This was a very prominent, populous, and prosperous region at that time. The Spirit of God put up a roadblock, however, and they “were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). Then Paul attempted to go north into Bithynia, along the coast of the Black Sea, where there was a very large population. Again the Spirit put up a roadblock — “but the Spirit allowed them not” (Acts 16:7). They had come from the east, they could go neither south nor north, so there was only one way to go — west. It was not Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune* who first said, “Go west, young man, go west,” it was the Spirit of God speaking to Paul.

Paul proceeded then to Troas where he waited for orders. He was given the vision of a man of Macedonia beseeching him to come over to Europe. The party of Paul crossed over to Samothracia, went on to Neapolis, and to Philippi. Luke joined the party at this juncture (Acts 16:10). Silas and Timothy were already with Paul.

When Paul arrived in Philippi, he discovered that the man of Macedonia was actually a woman by the name of Lydia, holding a prayer meeting by the riverside (Acts 16:13-15). Paul got rough treatment in the city because he cast the demon out of a girl who, by the spirit of divination, was making money for her owners. Paul and Silas were imprisoned. When they sang praises to God at midnight, the prison was shaken, and this led to the conversion of the jailer (read Acts 16). He and his family were some of the converts in this church who were especially drawn to the apostle Paul in the bonds of Christian love.

Paul visited Philippi at least one other time, possibly more. The church in Philippi kept in close touch with the apostle (Philippians 4:15) but apparently lost track of him when he was arrested in Jerusalem, and for two years there was no communication. They finally heard he was in prison in Rome and immediately dispatched their pastor, Epaphroditus, to Rome with words of sympathy, a gift, and many expressions of love.

The Epistle to the Philippians is the answer of Paul to their communication and the coming of Epaphroditus. It is his thank-you letter.

OUTLINE:

I. PHILOSOPHY for Christian living, Chapter 1

- A. Introduction, vv. 1, 2
- B. Paul's tender feeling for the Philippians, vv. 3-11
- C. Bonds and afflictions further the gospel, vv. 12-20
- D. In life or death — Christ, vv. 21-30

II. PATTERN for Christian living, Chapter 2

(Key verses: 5-11)

- A. Others, vv. 1-4
- B. Mind of Christ — humble, vv. 5-8
- C. Mind of God — exaltation of Christ, vv. 9-11
- D. Mind of Paul — things of Christ, vv. 12-18
- E. Mind of Timothy — like-minded with Paul, vv. 19-24
- F. Mind of Epaphroditus — the work of Christ, vv. 25-30

III. PRIZE for Christian living, Chapter 3

(Key verses: 10-14)

- A. Paul changed his bookkeeping system of the past, vv. 1-9
- B. Paul changed his purpose for the present, vv. 10-19
- C. Paul changed his hope for the future, vv. 20, 21

IV. POWER for Christian living, Chapter 4

(Key verse: 13)

- A. Joy — the source of power, vv. 1-4
- B. Prayer — the secret of power, vv. 5-7
- C. Contemplation of Christ — the sanctuary of power, vv. 8, 9
- D. In Christ — the satisfaction of power, vv. 10-23

COMMENT:

I. PHILOSOPHY for Christian living, Chapter 1

A. Introduction, vv. 1, 2

v. 1 — In ascribing this epistle to himself, Paul links his name with that of Timothy. Since there is no doctrine to correct or conduct to condemn, Paul does not assert his apostleship, but identifies himself with Timothy as “servants [bond slaves] of Jesus Christ.”

“All the saints” — apparently there is one ripple on the surface of the church: two women, Syntyche and Euodia, are not of the same mind (Philippians 4:2). Paul is careful not to address either one or the leader of a group.

The saints are “*in*” Christ, but they are “*at*” Philippi.

He is addressing a local church with officers:

bishops	—	the office	}	the same
elders	—	the individuals		
deacons	—	spiritual men performing a secular service (Acts 6)		

v. 2 — “Grace” (*charis*) is the Greek form of greeting; “peace” (*shalom*) is the Hebrew greeting. We must know the grace of God before we can experience the peace of God. Grace is love in action.

B. Paul’s tender feeling for the Philippians, vv. 3-11

v. 3 — It is a lovely and delightful relationship.

v. 4 — Paul prays for the Philippians in every prayer. “You all” is not only a good Southern idiom, but it includes all the saints in Philippi — none are left out.

“Joy” — this is the first of 19 occurrences of this word or its cognates. Joy is the fruit of the Spirit, and it was not turned off when Paul went to prison.

v. 5 — “Fellowship” is *koinonia*. Anything that believers can share together is *koinonia* — fellowship. Prayer, Bible reading, celebrating the Lord’s Supper, and giving are all areas of fellowship that can be shared.

v. 6 — “Being confident” is causative, meaning “since I am confident,” implying certainty.

“Perform” (perfect) is translated “will finish it up” (Lanski) or “carry through” (Vincent).

“Day of Jesus Christ” is the Rapture.

If God has brought you up to the present hour, He will consummate His work in you. He will not let you down. You can count on Him. (This has been my personal life verse from the day I graduated from college.)

v. 7 — “Meet” (KJV) is *right*. “You all” — here it is again.

“In my heart” is a good place to carry friends.

“Partakers” (*sugkoinonous*) is fellowship compounded. This speaks of the close relationship between the Philippians and Paul. There is no credibility gap.

v. 8 — “You all” includes all believers in the church, not just one segment.

“Bowels” (KJV) means tender feelings. This has definite reference to the emotions and drives. Here is where many decisions are made — not in the mind.

v. 9 — Love of the believer is to be exercised in knowledge. He is not to express his love and help to any and every person in sight. He should know the individual and then exercise judgment. He does not love indiscriminately.

v. 10 — “That ye may approve things that are excellent” may rather be expressed, “That ye may try the things that differ.”

“Without offense” is blameless.

C. Bonds and afflictions further the gospel, vv. 12-20

v. 12 — Obviously, the Philippians had sent their sympathy to Paul, expressing their distress that his imprisonment had ended the preaching of the gospel. Paul makes it clear that, rather, the gospel is being extended by his imprisonment. He mentions two areas, and we see another, also:

v. 13 — (1) Paul is now able to witness to the Praetorian guard of Caesar’s palace. These soldiers, representing the elite of Roman patricians, were guarding the apostle (Acts 28:16).

v. 14 — (2) Many believers who felt inadequate as long as Paul was out witnessing now feel free to go. I suppose literally hundreds

of believers took to the Roman roads with the gospel.

(3) Paul does not mention it, but with the perspective of history we see that the Spirit of God was giving Paul the time to write these prison epistles.

vv. 15-18 — Some brethren who preached Christ were of goodwill, but others, motivated by envy and jealousy, were giving Paul a rough time. In either case, he rejoiced that Christ was being preached.

v. 19 — “Salvation” evidently refers here to Paul’s physical deliverance.

v. 20 — Paul’s motivation is that Christ shall be magnified in his body either in life or death.

D. In life or death — Christ, vv. 21-30

v. 21 — This is Paul’s philosophy of life:

To live — Christ;

To die — gain (more of the same thing).

vv. 22-26 — Paul recognizes that to be with Christ is far better, but for the Philippians’ sake it is better to continue on with them.

v. 27 — Regardless of his presence, Paul urges them to continue living in a manner that is honoring to Christ.

v. 28 — He also urges them not to be terrified by their enemies.

v. 29 — Suffering is the badge of the child of God. (With the use of a concordance, look up the Scripture references to the suffering of the saints, beginning with John 16:33).

II. PATTERN for Christian living, Chapter 2

(Key verses: 5-11)

A. Others, vv. 1-4

v. 1 — “If” is not conditional, but argumentative. It could be translated, “Since there is consolation in Christ....”

Again, “bowels” is tender mercies.

v. 3 — “Strife” and “vainglory” are the causes of most church divisions.

“Lowliness of mind” and consideration of others will produce harmonious relationships.

v. 4 — “Others” is the key to the entire passage as the motivation

of Christian conduct.

B. Mind of Christ — humble, vv. 5-8

v. 5 — This is not the imitation of Christ, but it is the impartation of the mind of Christ which only the Holy Spirit can accomplish.

This gives the humiliation of Christ. There are 7 steps down:

v. 6 — (1) He was not in danger of losing His place in the God-head because of any lack on His part or because of the ability and ambition of a contender. He was God without effort.

v. 7 — (2) This is the *kenosis*. He emptied Himself. He did *not* empty Himself of His deity — He was very God of very God and very man of very man. He *did* empty Himself of His glory (John 17:5).

(3) He was a root out of Jesse. Jesse, David's father, was a peasant in Bethlehem. Although Jesus was of the royal seed of David, the line had long since become merely a vassal of Rome.

(4) To become a man was a humiliation for Him, as God. To comprehend something of this, we might imagine the humiliation it would be for you or me to become an ant.

v. 8 — (5) He was not humbled by others, but He willingly and gladly humbled Himself. Real humility is not a Mr. Milquetoast, nor is it a false front like Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield*. Pride is the opposite of humility (1 Peter 5:6).

(6) Death is the result of sin. It is a judgment upon man. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20). He bore the penalty of our sin.

(7) The cross was the method of execution used by Rome for criminals. It was a badge of ignominy and shame.

C. Mind of God — exaltation of Christ, vv. 9-11

There are 7 steps upward:

v. 9 — (1) God has highly exalted Him and
(2) given Him a name above every name.

v. 10 — (3) The name of Jesus.
(4) Every knee in heaven shall bow.
(5) Every knee in earth shall bow.
(6) Every knee under the earth shall bow.

v. 11 — (7) Every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

D. Mind of Paul — things of Christ, vv. 12-18

v. 12 — To “work out your own salvation” is to work out what God has worked in.

v. 13 — God works out what He works in.

v. 15 — The believer shines like a light in the darkness as God looks upon the world.

v. 16 — “Holding forth the word of life” is an appropriate motto for a Bible-teaching church.

“Day of Christ” is the Rapture of the church.

v. 17 — Paul thought of himself as a drink offering offered upon the sacrifice of Christ. The drink offering (Genesis 35:14; Exodus 29:40; Leviticus 23:13; etc.) was poured upon the other offerings, and it ascended in steam. (See Colossians 1:24.)

“Joy, and rejoice” — note the repeated resurgence of joy.

v. 18 — Paul calls upon the Philippians to “joy, and rejoice” with him.

E. Mind of Timothy — like-minded with Paul, vv. 19-24

v. 19 — Paul plans to send Timothy to Philippi.

v. 20 — Timothy is of the same mind as Paul. “Naturally” is truly.

vv. 21-23 — Timothy is contrasted to others. He seeks the things of Christ. Others seek their own interests.

v. 24 — Paul was planning to return to Philippi if released.

F. Mind of Epaphroditus — the work of Christ, vv. 25-30

v. 25 — Epaphroditus was the pastor of the church in Philippi. Notice that Paul has a way of saying something complimentary of the local pastor. He identifies himself with Epaphroditus — “brother... companion...fellow soldier.”

vv. 26, 27 — Epaphroditus had been sick, very sick.

v. 28 — Paul is sending him back to Philippi.

v. 30 — Epaphroditus has the mind of Christ — “for the work of Christ, he was near unto death.”

III. PRIZE for Christian living, Chapter 3

(Key verses: 10-14)

A. Paul changed his bookkeeping system of the past, vv. 1-9

v. 1 — “Finally” indicates that Paul intended to bring this epistle to an end at this point. However, the Spirit of God prompted him to continue. He calls upon the Philippians to rejoice. Paul’s letter to the Philippians is not a burden to him as the Galatian and Corinthian epistles had been.

v. 2 — “Beware of dogs” — dogs in the Old Testament were false shepherds and prophets who did not warn the people nor feed the flock.

“Concision” is a slur on the word “circumcision.”

v. 3 — Paul declares that the true circumcisions are those who are new creations in Christ (Galatians 6:15), rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and having no confidence in the flesh.

v. 4 — There are those who might say that Paul had nothing according to the flesh in which he could place confidence. However, Paul is going to present a very impressive list of assets in which he once had confidence:

v. 5 — (1) “Circumcised the eighth day” means that he had godly parents who reared him according to the Mosaic Law.

(2) He was a full-blooded Israelite, not a half-breed.

(3) Benjamin was a son of Jacob by Rachel, who died after she had given him birth. Jacob called him the son of his right hand. He was something special, and so was the tribe that came from Benjamin. The first king of the nation, Saul, came from Benjamin. (Paul may have been named for King Saul.)

(4) “Hebrew of the Hebrews” means that Paul was in the highest strata of the religious circle.

(5) As a Pharisee, he represented the best in Israel. The Pharisees were a religio-politico party. As a religious party, they were fundamental. As a political party, they were extremely nationalistic.

v. 6 — (6) Paul led in persecuting the Christians.

(7) Paul does not mean that he kept the Ten Commandments; he means that he offered the proper sacrifice when he broke the Law.

...I had not known sin but by the law; for I had not

known coveting, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. (Romans 7:7)

v. 7 — Paul changed his bookkeeping system when he came to Christ. This was the great revolution that took place in his own life. It was as radical as if the entire economy of the nation changed to the extent that credits became debits and debits, credits. This would upset the economy of the nation and the world. Paul was turned upside down and right-side up on the Damascus road when he met Christ. All that he had as “confidence in the flesh” (v. 4) became garbage.

v. 8 — This describes the marvelous transformation that took place in the life of Paul.

v. 9 — This is the theological explanation of the conversion of Paul.

“Mine own righteousness” was legal righteousness — it was filthy rags in God’s sight. He had given up all claim to his righteousness in order to receive the grace righteousness of Christ (which he had received by faith). Faith was the only *modus operandi* of receiving grace righteousness.

B. Paul changed his purpose for the present, vv. 10-19

v. 10 — Being saved by faith may give the impression that there is no motivation for conduct and works. Paul dissipates that notion in this section. He exhibits an effort and energy derived from the Holy Spirit which is far greater than any legal effort. Under the Law, he would go to Damascus to stamp out the followers of Christ. Under the grace-faith system, he will go to the end of the earth to make followers of Christ and to witness for Him (v. 14).

At the end of his life, his ambition is still to know Christ — His person, the power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings. To know Christ and His work of redemption will engage our attention for eternity.

v. 11 — Paul is not expressing a doubt about his participation in the Rapture. Rather, he is affirming that he will have part in it with great joy. Paul does not expect to attain perfection in this life.

v. 12 — The knowledge that he will not attain perfection here does not deter him from moving in that direction.

v. 13 — This expresses the *modus operandi* of the life of Paul.

The past — he is leaving it behind, with all its mistakes, not letting it be a handicap for the present.

The future — he lives in the present in anticipation of the future when he will grow and develop. This is his practical sanctification.

v. 14 — This is the prize for Christian living. Paul’s future is so absorbed by Christ that it motivates everything he says and does in the present. He likens himself to a track star running for a prize. His prize is not some earthly award, but Christ Himself.

vv. 15, 16 — Paul calls upon the Philippians to make this their goal also.

v. 17 — Paul’s life is an example to other believers, not for imitation, but to share the power of Christ in the body of Christ — the church.

vv. 18, 19 — There are some who profess Christ yet contradict all of this by their lives. Their god is their belly.

*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.
Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works;
show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee
my faith by my works.* (James 2:17, 18)

John Calvin put it this way, “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.”

C. Paul changed his hope for the future, vv. 20, 21

v. 20 — “Conversation” (KJV) is citizenship, meaning the total way of living. Mrs. Montgomery translated it, “Our city home is in heaven.”

Paul’s hope is the imminent coming of Christ from heaven to receive the church.

v. 21 — “Lowly body” is perhaps better translated “body of humiliation”; “body of corruption” is an acceptable translation.

“Like his glorious body” is the goal toward which Paul is moving.

Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality....Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)

IV. POWER for Christian living, Chapter 4 (*Key verse: 13*)

This is the program for power. Paul gives us the formula for power in Christian living, which must be met before we can quote verse 13.

A. Joy — the source of power, vv. 1-4

v. 1 — The Philippian believers were a joy to Paul in this life and his crown for the next. Paul calls upon them to “stand fast in the Lord” (see Ephesians 6:10-14).

v. 2 — Evidently, two women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, had a misunderstanding that ruptured the close fellowship of the believers in Philippi. These women needed the mind of Christ (Philippians 2).

v. 3 — This reveals the prominence of women in the leadership of the apostolic church.

v. 4 — Joy is not an option for the believer, it is a command of Christ. Without joy, a believer is powerless (Nehemiah 8:10).

B. Prayer — the secret of power, vv. 5-7

v. 5 — “Moderation” is called by Matthew Arnold “sweet reasonableness”

v. 6 — Worry about nothing; pray about everything. Paul places two indefinite pronouns in opposition. A believer is to worry about nothing because he is to pray about everything. There is nothing in a believer’s life that should not be made an object of prayer. The answer of a famous preacher to a woman who asked if we were to pray about the small things in our lives is noteworthy: “Madam,” he said, “can you mention anything in your life that is big to God?”

“With thanksgiving” means that the believer is to thank God for answering his prayer even while he prays. God always hears and answers the prayers of His children — but His answer is often *no*.

v. 7 — This is an indescribable peace of God, for it passes understanding. It guards the heart and mind. It is a peace that must encompass all others.

Peace *with* God — sins forgiven
Peace *of* God — tranquility

You enter this passage in worry — you come out in peace. The storm is still blowing, the waves are still rolling high, the night is still dark. *Things* have not changed, but the believer who prays has.

C. Contemplation of Christ — the sanctuary of power,
vv. 8, 9

v. 8 — “Lovely” is *gracious*.

This has been called the briefest biography of Christ. The believer must contemplate Christ as well as communicate with Him for power. Purity is essential to power. In fact, purity is synonymous with power. We live in a dirty world. We need to retire to the sanctuary of the soul — the throne of God where Christ sits on the right hand of God. He will cleanse us by the washing of His Word.

v. 9 — “Do” is *practice*. Paul is an example here also.

D. In Christ — the satisfaction of power, vv. 10-23

v. 10 — The Philippian believers had sent Paul a gift, and this is his thank-you note.

vv. 11, 12 — Paul knew how to be content, regardless of his circumstances. (As I write these notes, I am about 35 miles northwest of Boston, Massachusetts, in a place called Ayer. A snowstorm has paralyzed this area. It is impossible to get into Boston. I have not even been able to make telephone contact to see if I have reservations out of here. I am stranded and find it difficult to be content.)

v. 13 — “Through Christ” is *in Christ*. This is the high point of the epistle. It is well to note that “all things” is modified by “in Christ.” For example, a train can do “all things” between departure and destination when it is “in” the tracks made for it. When it leaves the track, it is a wreck and can do nothing.

vv. 14-19 — Paul speaks of the past generosity of the Philippian believers and assures them that God will meet their every need (not luxury items).

vv. 20-23 — Paul concludes this epistle as he began it — on a personal, warm and friendly basis of Christian love and fellowship.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

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