

"Paul's Letter to the Philippians — An Introduction"

Introduction:

- ***The letter's chronology - during first Roman imprisonment, around 61 or 62 AD***
- ***The letter's place in the Pauline epistolary: The Threes: (1) doctrine, (2) correction for practical failure; (3) correction for doctrinal failure. Here is seems the order is significant: Romans/Corinthians/Galatians — Ephesians/Philippians/Colossians, as in the 3 and 3 arrangement as stated here.***
- ***The letter's central theme: The Lord God is sovereign and glory awaits just around the corner. The Lord God himself will ensure that we each reach the destination he has chosen for us. BUT CONSIDERING THAT GREAT TRUTH OF GRACE AND GOD'S WORKING ACCORDING TO THAT GRACE, WHAT SHOULD OUR LIVES BE? IT IS A GREAT QUESTION AND THE ANSWER TO IT IS THE THEME OF THIS LETTER. FOUR EXAMPLES ARE GIVEN AS PATTERNS OR EXAMPLES FOR US: CHRIST'S, PAUL'S, TIMOTHY'S AND THEN THAT OF EPAPHRODITUS. TWO NEGATIVE EXAMPLES ARE ALSO PROVIDED, THE TWO WOMEN MENTIONED BY NAME.***
- ***Both Christ's and Paul's examples in suffering enable us to endure the many trials in this life:***
 - ***In chapter 4 Paul mentions two women, the only names of members of the Philippian church mentioned in the letter other than Epaphroditus (the godly and god-sent one making this letter possible, as it were): "I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." So a major focus of this letter will be on the "mind", on Christ, on the one hand, and, on sinners, on the other:***

Many times this word "mind" is found in this letter. The Greek word has several different translations in our translations. But the same Greek work is found in so many verses that it is clearly intended a major focus or theme of the letter. Here are some of those verses:

Phil. 1:7, Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

Phil. 2:2, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Phil. 2:5, Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Phil. 3:15, Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Phil. 3:16, Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

Phil. 3:19, Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

Phil. 4:2, I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

Phil. 4:10, But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.

- ***It is the “mind” of Christ that will be highlighted in this letter and it is in the center of everything. His mind or thinking that led him out of pure love to sacrifice him for sinners is at the very center. Then, and this is critically important, Paul’s example is set for for all to see. He is the believer’s model of what Christ would have for those living under the abundance of grace.***
- ***Their examples for us are powerful... will we be encouraged through our trials which are far less? Will we?***
- ***The highest view of the structure of the letter:***

A Opening words & salutation — 1:1-2

B Paul’s heartfelt concern for the Philippians — 1:3-26

C Exhortation & example of Christ — 1:27-2:18

D 2nd Example, Timothy — 2:19-24

D 3rd Example, Epaphroditus — 2:25-30

C 4th Example, Exhortation and example of Paul — 3:1-4:9

B The Philippians concern for Paul — 4:10-20

A Final words & salutation — 4:21-23

The overall theme is joy though the circumstances of the writing of the letter is Paul’s imprisonment. The radical contrast of these two is central to the theme of

the letter. All is in the prison context but his outlook is SO POSITIVE NEVERTHELESS. The immediate cause of his letter writing in this case is what has happened to him and his concern for the Philippians in that context - this is very interesting but is very consistent with his emphasis on examples, both Christ's and his own.

Following our high level outline then, let's consider what is written in this letter (I have chosen some verses from each prominent section of the letter to illustrate the overall teaching of that section). Later we will look at this in more detail, of course:

Opening words & salutation — 1:1-2

**[Read] 1 Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
2 Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and [from] the Lord Jesus Christ.**

- *Paul and Timothy are the source of the letter although the author, of course, is Paul alone.*
- *The letter begins as the others: grace and peace from God and our Lord Jesus Christ to you all. The sphere of grace is where we live as believers today. And we all dwell in the realm of peace as well as a consequence. This is the starting place of the letter and it is most blessed. The letter ends on the same note as well. Amen.*

Paul's heartfelt concern for the Philippians — 1:3-8

Phil. 1:3-11

**3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,
4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,
5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;
6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ:
7 Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.
8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.
9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and [in] all judgment;
10 That ye may approve things that are excellent [that “differ”]; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;**

11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

- *“thanking God”*
- *“every remembrance”*
- *“making request with joy”*
- *“for their fellowship”*
- *The foundation of his confidence:*
 - *God will take them all to his appointed destination*
 - *Because of the grace bestowed on them THROUGH PAUL*
- *His confidence: verse 6: “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform [it] until the day of Jesus Christ”*
- *But now to the heart of the letter, the several fold purpose of his writing begins to be made clear:*

Exhortation & 1st Example, Christ — 1:27-2:18

Phil. 2:1-13

1 If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

2 Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, [being] of one accord, of one mind.

3 [Let] nothing [be done] through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

4 Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

[READ] 5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

9 Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

10 That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of [things] in heaven, and [things] in earth, and [things] under the earth;

11 And [that] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ [is] Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

12 Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of [his] good pleasure.

- *This section of this letter has without question the greatest detail on the teaching that has been called by theologians the “kenosis” of Jesus Christ. “kenosis” is the Greek word translated “made himself of no reputation” here in the KJV. Exactly to what degree this was done is at the center of those theological discussions. The Son of God gave up much when he entered the human race — but did he give up all, even his deity? Surely not. But we will not enter into that discussion further today.*
- *So Christ’s example for us, “his mind” and what was the necessary consequence of that in his sacrifice for our sakes, lies at the very center of this letter and is at the heart of our walk as believers under his grace. The apostle illustrates that mind or “thinking process” in the rest of this letter. The four examples given each provide a foundation for our understanding. Amen.*

2nd Example, Timothy — 2:19-24

Phil. 2:19-24

[READ] 19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state.

20 For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

21 For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.

22 But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.

23 Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.

24 But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

3rd Example, Epaphroditus — 2:25-30

Phil. 2:25-30

[READ] 25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.

26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.

27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

28 I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.

29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:

30 Because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.

- *These examples are powerful indeed. But they do not match the final one set forth before us here for all to see — the example of the apostle Paul. Most of the letter is focused squarely on his example for us believers today.*

4th Example, Exhortation and example of Paul — 3:1-4:9

Phil. 3:1-11

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed [is] not grievous, but for you [it is] safe.

2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

- *Verse 3 has one of the most concise yet powerful statements of the Christian Life under grace found in the scriptures:*

3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

- *Verses 3 through 6 list his qualifications, most important, since the theme of this entire letter is Christ's AND Paul's example for all, and so their qualifications are right in the center of this: Paul's are here while Christ's were listed in chapter 2 beginning in verse 5. In each case there are SEVEN, the number of completion!*

[READ] 4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, [of] the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things [but] loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them [but] dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

- *Christ and Paul - similarities and differences indeed!*
 - *Circumcised the eighth day*

- *Hebrew of the Hebrews . . . [and there are many, many more, but they will be saved for our verse by verse study later.*
- *But the following verses are surely the most important of all:*

[READ] Phil. 3:17-21

17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, [that they are] the enemies of the cross of Christ:

19 Whose end [is] destruction, whose God [is their] belly, and [whose] glory [is] in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

21 Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

- *This is a strong statement indeed and contrasts greatly with is criticism of some in chapter 1. There they are at least preaching Christ and he rejoiced in that though they were not entirely “on his team”, as it were, “seeking to add affliction to his wounds”, as it were. But these referred to here are of a different sort indeed.*
- *The are enemies, of Paul and of Christ and of his cross. They are the embodiment of evil and of God’s work today under grace. Paul calls them out without anything at all positive to say about them. “Their end is destruction”.*
- *Again, though, consistent with the theme and key word of this letter, these “mind” earthly things opposed to the heavenly things set before us and so central in the Pauline teaching and preaching.*
- *The key question would then be: what about us? What are we minding? Paul’s testimony closes out this letter and again sets himself forth as our example:*

The Philippians concern for Paul — 4:10-20 [as highlighted through Paul response to their concern:

Phil. 4:11-13

[READ] 11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, [therewith] to be content.

12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

[READ] Phil. 4:19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

- *Paul's example is powerful and is intended to be received as just that by these believers in Philippi to whom this letter is addressed. What has been proven in Paul's life may be proven in their's as well.*

Final words & salutation — 4:21-23

Phil. 4:21-23

21 Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you.

22 All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household.

23 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you all. Amen.

Conclusions & Exhortation:

- *With this introduction, we launch ahead to our verse-by-verse study here. Until then, let's often consider what "mind" we are to have. The circumstances of life that we shall face may not be like Paul's imprisonment, but may indeed be as Paul's beloved church in Philippi had endured. False teachers and the blind following them with a mindset far different from what the riches of grace would provided may very well be our challenge.*
- *How will we respond?*