

"Paul's Letter to the Philippians — The Opening Verses"

Introduction:

- *The letter's chronology - during first Roman imprisonment, around 62 or 63 AD*
- *The letter's place in the Pauline epistolary: 3 and 3; doctrine correction for practical failure; correction for doctrinal failure*
- *The letter's central theme*
- *A high level outline of the letter*

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 & 1st Example, 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 in Paul's imprisonment. The key word is "mind" and four examples of such exalted "thinking" are given in the letter beginning with Christ's own and ending with the apostle Paul's.

But 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. That is a very practical concern and it is thematic for this letter focused on practice more than on doctrine, as was the Ephesians letter.

All is in the prison context here. But the apostle's outlook is SO POSITIVE NEVERTHELESS and this is a cause for our continual amazement as we read this letter over and over again. How could the apostle be so encouraged himself that he could write this letter, one of the greatest letters of personal encouragement ever written!

Our Text:

Phil. 1:1-8

[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.

[READ] 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;

[READ] 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.

I. The Authors:

1a Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ . . .

- **Paul & Timothy: Paul is clearly the author while Timothy is so close to him in his ministry (and will be Paul's heir when he finishes his course). In the opening to 2 Corinthians there is a similar wording.**
- **In Phil. 2:19 we see that Timothy was with Paul when he wrote this letter. In Acts 16 and 20 Timothy takes a central role both times Philippi is in view, both at its founding and later, as Paul and the others travel back to Jerusalem. So Timothy was no doubt especially beloved by the Philippians.**
- **"servants" here == "bondslaves". While both Paul and Timothy are called bondslaves here, only Paul, as far as we know, was actually in physical bondage. But for the apostle, they were both enslaved to Jesus Christ and not to the Romans or any other power on this earth. This is part of a central theme of the letter. Not only here, but also in 2 Corinthians, Galatians and Titus he introduced himself in this manner. Of course in many places in his letters he exhorts the believers to live as bondslaves, whether to the Lord or to one another.**

II. The Recipients:

. . . to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

- ***This use of the word “saints” is very common in Paul’s letters. It simply means those who are “sanctified” or “set apart” for the Lord’s use and blessing.***
- ***“bishops” or “overseers” does not have here the much later meaning as it came to be used in the organized churches. There is no such hierarchy promoted in the scriptures. In fact it seems pretty clear that overseers and elders are the same persons in Paul’s letters.***
- ***That Paul adds these words “with the bishops and deacons” might mean that they are not to consider themselves above the rest and not therefore to be exhorted in the same way as the rest. We really do not know.***
- ***“in Christ Jesus”: These words are so commonplace in Paul’s letters that they deserve special mention. In fact, other than the salutation in verse 2 here, and the words contained in it, there are no more “Pauline” words in his letters than these. Paul uses this expression 40 times (in KJV, slightly different in the Greek texts). The shorter expression, “in Christ” is used 75 times by Paul and only twice by Peter. That shows the significance of these “Paulinisms”.***

The significance of these three simple words, “in Christ Jesus”, summarize the entire Pauline doctrine, the highlights of which would include the following at a minimum:

- ***Our heavenly position:***
 - ***Eph. 2:6*** And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus
 - ***1 Cor. 1:30*** But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

- **Rom. 8:39** . . . nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **2 Tim. 1:9** Who hath saved us, and called [us] with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began
- **2 Tim. 2:1** Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
- ***Our entire life as believers, our “newness of life”:***
 - **Rom. 8:1-2** “[There is] therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”
 - **Gal. 6:15** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

III. The Salutation:

2 Grace [be] unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and [from] the Lord Jesus Christ.

- ***As we mentioned last time, here in this salutation the apostle is not offering or providing grace as if he is its administrator. He is not. But he is by these words reminding his readers that it is in the realm of God’s abundant grace that they all stand before God and our Lord Jesus Christ. His grace has made all the difference.***

IV. Paul’s Often Thanksgiving:

***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;***

- ***It is fitting that Paul here at the very beginning expresses his thanksgiving to God for these Philippian believers. This starts out the letter on the proper footing since Paul was the founder of this***

assembly and he is in constant thanksgiving and prayer for them. They needed to know this.

V. The Confirming Truth:

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:

- *Paul spoke of a beginning in verse 5. That referred to their salvation when Paul visited in Philippi and many were saved through his prison experience there and afterwards. For each of those who were saved, a continuing salvation experience was maintained by Almighty God. This was personal, individual, and ongoing. Here he writes that that work will NEVER END and promises that this will always be “a good work”. Indeed, such words must have made a great difference to these saints as they do to us as well to whom they equally pertain.*
- *“the day of Jesus Christ”: As we have already seen, this is the end point of this life. For when the day of Jesus Christ has come, we shall be caught up into heaven’s glory, whether by resurrection or by transformation. Then will be completed the “good work” that God is doing in each of us as referred to by verse 6.*
- *This is a firm promise of our Lord. Have you received it? Does it change our daily lives to know and to be assured of the end point of this phase of our lives?*

VI. The Letter’s Justification:

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.

- *Why was Paul so sure of this? Many today are not and one might well wonder why Paul was so convinced. He gives the answer here:*
 - *“because I have you in my heart”:*
 - *“in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace”:*
- *So the foundational truth is expressed here: “ye all are partakers of my grace”. So again we see that ultimately grace is the key. It always is. That is the way God is working under this dispensation.*

Will we respond by receiving the fullness of that grace or will we hold back or even turn aside after other things of this world that look so attractive? God knows. Indeed he does.

VII. The Apostle's Unique and Heartfelt Concern:

8 For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

- ***It seems that this touches directly on a major theme in Paul's letters. Therefore I will reserve the heart of our teaching on this until our next study. However, this verse here is one of the central ones stating something so critical for our understanding of how God is working today under grace. Paul sets up himself as our "example" and asks multiple times for us to "follow him as he follows Christ Jesus". Therefore we must carefully consider what he has written here as this is our example for living today.***
- ***The apostle has written that his concerns for the Philippians are heart felt and that they are in a way not explained "in" Christ's own innermost being. Therefore Paul is identifying his own innermost interests and concerns as the very same as Christ's own. I am convinced that this is not arrogance on Paul's part. Rather, it is a fact that Christ had appointed him to be such an example for us of Christ's love and sacrifice for us all [see Acts 9:15-16]. But the question now must be asked: to what extent then is Paul our example and what extent is he not our example?***
- ***We will save this for next time, Lord willing. But it would not be right to finish today without at least reading three more verses, all of which are a great benefit for us to dwell in until our next meeting:***

Phil. 2:1 If [there be] therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies . . .

Col. 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering . . .

Rom. 5:5 And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Conclusions:

- *This letter, taken in its context, must have had a dramatic effect in the early assemblies. When we realize that for this church in Philippi this letter was probably their only scripture. They may have had some of the Old Testament but more than likely they had nothing except this letter. So they were in that assembly dwelling on these very verses every week in their meetings together. What a difference they must have made for these saints. If they might have the same effect in us, most of whom have such little contact with these words of life and truth.*
- *Praise God for our opportunities to gather together each Sunday to open God's word together. The blessings of that are inestimable.*