

Philippians

Introduction

The epistle to the church at Philippi, the first church Paul established in Macedonia, is titled in the Greek text, *Pros Philippesious*, "To the Philippians."

The Letter to the Saints at Philippi differs in some respects from any of the preceding letters of the Apostle Paul. It contains less logic and more of the heart. It is distinguished by the absence of didactical reasoning, and by the presence of a tender friendship and fatherly affection which is more apparent than in other Pauline letters to the churches. The letter to the Romans is in the profoundest logic; those to the Corinthians were designed to rebuke certain prevalent sins and necessarily contain more or less censure; that to the Galatians rebukes a dangerous heresy which threatened the welfare of the Galatian churches; that to the Ephesians is a sublime unfolding of the mystery of God in reference to the Gentiles, but this letter is the outpouring of the love of the founder of the Philippian Church towards one of the most affectionate, faithful and self-forgetful of all congregations which he had planted. It has been remarked that there is no breath of censure for the Philippian saints, except in so far as it is implied in the tender exhortation to Euodias and Syntyche found in chap. 4:2. The history of the origin of the church and the memory of the loving remembrances of the Philippians help to explain the affectionate tenderness of the letter.

It was not only the scene of gospel triumphs but of suffering for the cross of Christ. Here it was that Paul and Silas were beaten, cast into the stocks in the inner prison, by the grace of God converted and baptized their jailer and his household before the dawn, and were honorably released by the magistrates in the morning, as Roman citizens, unjustly beaten and imprisoned. When Paul continued his journey westward, the recently founded Philippian church followed him with support, contributing more than once to his necessities (Philippians 4:15 Philippians 4:16), and when the tidings came that he was a prisoner in Rome their old affection showed itself still again by sending one of their members, Epaphroditus, with the offerings of the church as a provision for his wants (Philippians 2:25 Philippians 4:10-18). It seems to have been the return of Epaphroditus from this ministration of their love, to which we are indebted for this letter.

Author and Title

Both the internal and external evidence again points to Paul as the author. "The early church was unanimous in its testimony that Philippians was written by the apostle Paul (see 1:1). Internally the letter reveals the stamp of genuineness. The many personal references of the author fit what we know of Paul from other NT books."

Date: A.D. 60-61

As with Ephesians, this epistle was written while Paul was imprisoned. His reference to the Praetorian guard (Phil. 1:13) along with the possibility of death (vv. 20-26) suggest he was writing from Rome. Though death was possible, Paul also seemed confident of his release. This suggests Philippians was written after Ephesians later in A.D. 60 or 61.

Theme and Purpose

Whereas Ephesians sets forth the glorious mystery, “the church which is Christ’s body,” Christ as the head of the Church (1:22-23), and believers as co-members of one another who are equally blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ (1:3; 2:11-22), Philippians guards the practice of Ephesians. Philippians guards against the failure to practice Christ-provided unity and against the failure of believers to rejoice in their blessings and position in Christ (Phil. 1:27; 2:2; 4:1f.). The theme of Philippians might well be “**joy and unity in Christ.**”

Paul had several obvious purposes in writing this letter to the Philippians: (1) He sought to express his love and gratitude for the gift they had sent him (1:5; 4:10-19); (2) to give a report about his own circumstances (1:12-26; 4:10-19); (3) to encourage the Philippians to stand firm in the face of persecution and rejoice regardless of circumstances (1:27-30; 4:4); (4) to exhort them to live in humility and unity (2:1-11; 4:2-5); (5) to commend Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church (2:19-30); and (6) to warn the Philippians against the legalistic Judaizers and the libertarian antinomians who had slipped in among them (Chapter 3).

Summary

Chapter 1, Paul writes about his sufferings and that through his imprisonment the Kingdom was increased. “*Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel*” (1:12). Christians are to surrender their lives in service to Christ Jesus. And what should Christians expect in this life for doing this? Suffering. Paul explains that there are two things granted by God for a believer. The first is to believe in Him and the other is to suffer, “*For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me*” (1:29-30). Jesus said, “*Count the cost*”... (Luke 14:25-33).

Chapter 2, Paul explains the benefits of believers in unity with the “*mind of Christ*”. He teaches a theological lesson about the humanity of Jesus Christ as He laid down His glory and became a perfect human man in order to rescue and restore mankind back to a relationship with God.

Chapter 3, Paul expounds on the joys of a Christian and encourages the church to press forward with the Gospel. He displays his testimony when he said, “*I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ*” (3:8).

Chapter 4, Paul again mentions joy in Christ as he encourages believers to rejoice in the Lord. It is important for the believer to be well grounded in prayer and thanksgiving. To offer praise and to give God thanks for the many provisions they are blessed with, “*my God shall supply all your needs*” (4:19).

Key Word(s)

The key word, occurring in one form or the other some 16 times, is “joy” or “rejoice.” “Unity” or “oneness” is another key idea of the book. This is expressed in a number of ways like, “being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (2:2); “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together” (1:27), and “be in harmony” (4:2).

Key Verses

1:21. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

3:8-11. More than that, I now regard all things as liabilities compared to the far greater value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things—indeed, I regard them as dung!—that I might gain Christ, 3:9 and be found in him, not because of having my own righteousness derived from the law, but because of having the righteousness that comes by way of Christ’s faithfulness—a righteousness from God that is based on Christ’s faithfulness. 3:10 My aim is to know him, to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings, and to be like him in his death, 3:11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

4:11-13. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content in any circumstance. 4:12 I have experienced times of need and times of abundance. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment, whether I go satisfied or hungry, have plenty or nothing. 4:13 I am able to do all things through the one who strengthens me

Key Chapters

Chapter 2 is certainly a key chapter in the way it sets forth Christ as our example in putting others before ourselves by having the mind of Christ. In the process of this, Paul then launches into a grand revelation regarding the humility and exaltation of Christ in 2:5-11.

Commentary

The joy of the Christian experience is the dominant theme running through the book of Philippians. The words “joy” and “rejoice” are used 16 times in the epistle. The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to express his gratitude and affection for the Philippian church, his strongest supporters in ministry.

The church had sent gifts to Paul while he was in chains. The gifts were delivered by Epaphroditus, a leader in the Philippian church who ended up assisting Paul with ministry in Rome. At some point while serving with Paul, Epaphroditus became dangerously sick and nearly died. After his recovery, Paul sent Epaphroditus back to Philippi carrying with him the letter to the Philippian church.

Besides expressing thanks to the believers in Philippi for their gifts and support, Paul took the opportunity to encourage the church concerning practical matters such as humility and unity. He warned them about "Judiazers" or Jewish legalists and gave instructions on how to live a joyous Christian life.

In the pages of Philippians, Paul conveys a powerful message about the secret of contentment. Although he had faced severe hardships, poverty, beatings, illness, and even his current imprisonment, in every circumstance Paul had learned to be content. The source of his joyous contentment was rooted in knowing Jesus Christ:

Paul encouraged the Philippians to pray whenever they became anxious, so prayer is said to be a powerful enabler to live the Christian life. With petitions to God in thanksgiving and in trust in God's ability to answer our prayers, a believer can have peace and assurance. The peace that God gives Christians goes well beyond human understanding. This peace actually guards and protects a believer's heart and mind. Dwelling on wholesome attributes is to be coupled with serving others. This is an effect when Christians serve others; they learn to be content in all circumstance. Paul wanted the Philippians to understand that their strength was in Jesus Christ and was not going to be found in themselves.

Paul mentions some of the problems that the church had like personal ambitions and rivalries that were flaring up in Philippi. As in most churches in Paul's day, and to some extent today, legalists were trying to insert the requirements of the law or works into the gospel. Even the tendencies of antinomianism were enough to persuade Paul to include this concern in this letter. Antinomianism referred to the idea that Christians were free from civil, moral, and even scriptural laws. Nothing could be further from the truth (see Romans 13). Paul actually cried at the knowledge that some of the members would think that they were so free as to not feel that God would expect them to live as if there were no moral laws even though God is the Moral Lawgiver. This tendency was alive and well even until the time that Jude was written in the middle-to-late 60's. Paul also had concerns about unity in the church.

Paul also concerned over the Philippians persecution (1:27-30), over their being exposed to false teachings (3:2-21), and internal conflicts which would threaten their witnessing to those outside of the church (1:27-2:18, 4:2, 3).

Paul's prayer for the Philippians was about their love shown in the gift of financial support to him. He assured them that he was praying for them regularly. He prayed that their love would be overflowing like a cup runs over when it is overfilled. He prayed that they would have spiritual discernment and that they would be living holy, sanctified lives until the day that they were received unto Christ. This prayer was for them to have right relationships with God and with one another and that this righteousness would bear fruit from the Holy Spirit. This would lead to God's being glorified and praise for God's work in them and through them.