

## Philippians

- Background
  - Acts 16:6 – 17:40
    - 16:6 – 10 Paul and company had planned to go from a re-visit to the congregations of central Turkey to Ephesus in southwestern Turkey. But, the Spirit specifically directed them to Macedonia, Philippi being a major commercial center.
    - 16:12 Philippi was a Roman colony; Italians, mostly veterans, were moved there and made citizens for the purpose of establishing a loyal fortification adjacent to neighboring gold mines.
    - 16:13 Since Paul went to the riverside on the Sabbath, no synagogue existed, meaning that less than 12 Jewish men were in the city.
    - 16:14 – 15 Lydia, a wealthy trader, believed Paul’s message and became the focal point of the original congregation.
    - 16:16 – 24 A demon-possessed slave girl announced to many that Paul carried the Word of God. Not wanting to get his advertising from the other side, he cast out the demon, costing her owners the profits of her fortune-telling. The owners sought to prosecute Paul and Silas, but charged them with teaching illegal religion rather than property damage. Paul and Silas were summarily beaten with rods and cast into the dungeon.
    - 16:25 – 28 Paul and Silas demonstrated a positive attitude and devotion to God, which impressed the other prisoners to the extent that they did not try to escape when given the opportunity.
    - 16:29 -34 The jailer in particular was impressed, who learned more and was baptized with his household that night.
    - 16:35 – 38 The magistrates tried to release Paul and Silas. But, Paul and Silas first required that the magistrates escort them out to demonstrate to the population that they had done nothing wrong. Paul used their citizenship as leverage.
    - 16:38 – 40 Paul and Silas agreed to leave to avoid further embarrassing the magistrates. Luke was left behind (“we” in 16:10 – 17, “they” in 17:1).
  - Acts 20:1 – 6 Paul passed this way twice more while collecting up funds for famine relief in Judea.
  - Philippians 4:15 – 17 The Christians at Philippi sent money to Paul and company while they were in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1 – 9).
  - Philippians 4:18 The Christians at Philippi sent money to Paul by Epaphroditus while he was in prison in Rome.
- Expressing Fellowship (chapter 1): How do we express ourselves to those to whom we are connected through the Spirit.
  - (1:2) General theme:
    - May God’s gracious character become your character
    - May you have peace with God, with others, and with yourself.
    - These are gifts from God.
    - Application:
      - Paul is not addressing the Christians in Philippi as an authority figure, but as one who is connected to them.

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- Paul views them as fellow Christians. No hint of separation between Jew and Gentile appears.
- So, the relationship between them can be a model for Christians of all times, places, and cultures.
- (1:3 – 11) I think of you often, and here is what I think:
  - I have joy when I pray for you
  - We have a long history of working together
  - I have confidence that God will continue to develop you
    - Your love may abound still more
    - Greater knowledge
    - Greater understanding
    - Greater wisdom
    - Sincerity
    - Fruits of righteousness from Jesus
    - God’s character will be on parade through you
  - Applications
    - Pray for the development of Christians in other places.
    - Tell them that you are doing it.
    - Express your confidence in them.
    - Reveal what they have done that most impressed you.
    - Outline what you see as goals for them.
    - Remind them that their development creates a parade of God’s character traits.
- (1:12 – 26) This is what is happening in my life:
  - Despite what you may see as negative events, those same events furthered the gospel. Focus on the positive (Christ is preached).
  - Because of your prayers and the Spirit, this will work out not just adequately, but well.
  - What’s the “worst” that could happen? Death is an “early out.”
  - But, because of your prayers and you need for further instruction, I will remain.
  - The outcome will cause you to rejoice still more.
  - Applications:
    - Don’t minimize difficult circumstance (Paul would rather be free and would rather that all those who spoke the gospel were sincere), but show the positive outcome of “even this.”
    - Address the worst-case scenario. “Worst-case” is not really so bad. (Our potential disasters may not be death, but financial ruin or poor health.)
    - This prepares both us and those to whom we are connected.
- (1:27 – 30) My expectations of you:
  - Think about being “worthy” (Ephesians 4:1 – 3, Colossians 1:9 – 12, 1 Thessalonians 2:10 – 12, 2 Thessalonians 1:3 – 12) through the work of the Spirit.
  - I want to hear more good things about you.
  - Unity (fellowship) is achieved by faith.

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- Have peace (1:2); your lack of fear proves that you are connected to God. The fact that the adversaries rely on fear to control you proves that they are lost.
- To be conflicted over suffering is normal; think of suffering as a blessing.
- Applications:
  - Let others know that worthiness is through the work of the Spirit.
  - Remind others that their response to adversity proves their acceptance.
  - Learn to see adversity for its end results.
- Developing Fellowship (chapter 2).
  - (2:1 – 2) Theme: Fellowship develops indirectly
    - The encouragement we derive from being in Christ (*cf.* armor in Ephesians 5:10 – 20) drives away the self-centeredness that prevents fellowship.
    - The comfort derived from doing what is best for others enables fellowship.
    - Recognizing that the Spirit that dwells in each of us is the platform for fellowship.
    - Christian family relationships are based on affection and compassion develop fellowship.
    - Giving joy to those far away (in this case, through unity on a local level) is an incentive to fellowship.
    - Applications:
      - Positive emotions drive fellowship; focusing on shortcomings isolates.
      - The Spirit is the central figure in all our hopes and relationships.
      - Giving joy begets joy.
  - (2:3 – 11) Attitudes that develop fellowship
    - Self-focused Christianity is at the root of division
    - Have the attitude that God had which prompted Him to come to earth
      - My power, ability, or positive character traits do not make me important, just a better servant.
      - Humility (which may result in physical difficulty) is the key to success.
    - Applications:
      - If we believe that we have the truth (which we should), we should not be afraid that the truth will be lost if I do not take charge.
      - Humility sends the right message; lamenting loss of position does not.
  - (2:12 – 18) Applying the attitudes of fellowship
    - Practice giving joy to friends far away who may never know what you are doing.
    - Think about an appropriate response to the gift of salvation (Ephesians 2:8). “Gift” should not bring up the image of a birthday present, but of a “thing given” which is to be a tool. This tool clarifies our thinking (the helmet of salvation, Ephesians 6:17), which results in our fear for unbelievers, not in patting ourselves on the back.
    - God develops in us not only the ability but also the desire to accomplish His purposes.
    - Applications:
      - How will those far away know about what we do to give them joy? Through the connection of our spirits.

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- Paul was certain of his destination (2 Timothy 4:8) but was willing to give it up if others could be saved (Romans 9:3).
- Our desire to take on what appears difficult (to the point of being impossible) is not a matter of superior mental toughness but the work of the Spirit.
- (2:19 – 30) Examples of the attitudes of fellowship
  - Timothy
    - Paul wanted confirmation of his hope in them. Supposition was not sufficient. Evidence squashes doubt.
    - Paul’s high praise: no one more likeminded, sincerely cares.
  - Epaphroditus
    - Distressed because his illness made them worry
    - Hold such men in high esteem (whose faith follow, Hebrews 13:7)
  - Applications:
    - Confirmation of hope:
      - Reports from trusted people (Timothy and Epaphroditus)
      - The work of the Spirit
      - The empty tomb
      - Not “belief in that for which there is no proof”
    - Do we express our confidence in those we hold in high regard?
    - Do our difficulties turn us inward or outward?
    - Do we take the initiative to relieve the worry of others, or do we expect them to come to us?
    - Do we seek those of faith and follow?
- Maintaining fellowship (chapter 3)
  - (3:1) Repetition of good things is not tedious but for safety. The comparisons given in the following verses illustrate that bad doctrine easily diverts us. Applications:
    - Even good news can become repetitious. How do we prevent stagnation in a positive environment?
    - We can produce shallow joy. How can we make it deeper?
  - (3:2 – 11) Acceptability
    - People desire acceptance.
      - Meeting physical benchmarks is easy to understand
      - However, the benchmarks have no connection to the purposes of God, unless God’s objective is good behavior.
      - (2) Paul has harsh descriptions for teachers of physical acceptance.
    - Paul contrasts acceptance based on human achievement versus benefits from being accepted because of God’s gracious character.
      - (3) We worship in the Spirit, not at a certain location (John 4:2 – 24).
      - (4 – 7) Jewish Christian teachers were teaching Gentile Christians that they needed to add Jewish practices to their faith. Paul used himself as an illustration that such benchmarks were unimportant.
      - (8 – 11) Paul’s list of benefits
        - Knowing Jesus (knowing His gracious character) and/or the knowledge of Jesus (thinking as Jesus thinks).

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- To be found “in” Him (the perspective of a spirit; the perspective of fellowship)
- To be accepted because of Jesus rather than because of me.
- Know (experience) the power of the resurrection.
- Fellowship (spiritual connectedness) of His suffering; I understand why He did it.
- Conformed (transformed) to His death (sacrificial lifestyle).
- Resurrection
- Applications:
  - How can we deal with those who trust in physical benchmarks of acceptance?
  - Some of the spiritual benchmarks in Paul’s list look uncomfortable. How do we explain them to those with a physical mindset?
- (3:12 – 21) Managing the growth process
  - Law requires flawless execution, so we rationalize a lower but attainable standard. Paul describes how to function in a system in which we neither reach flawlessness nor lower the bar.
  - (12 – 14) Reaching forward, not arriving.
    - If Paul had not arrived, chances are that I have not, either.
    - Could the audience have applied “that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me” to themselves? Was this specific to Paul being an apostle?
    - To what things “ahead” does Paul refer?
  - (15) A promise that God will fix differences.
  - (16) Liberty: to the degree that we have already attained. Walk at the level where you are now, always seeking the next level.
  - (17) Hebrews 13:7, “Whose faith follow.” Examples are helpful.
  - (18 – 19) The physically minded:
    - Cause sadness, not anger.
    - A physical mindset makes one an enemy of Jesus, not just weak.
    - “Whose god is their belly” – physical comfort as an objective
    - “Glory in their shame” – Boasting of achieving physical goals.
  - (20 – 21) The spiritually minded:
    - Citizenship implies a country.
    - Eagerly waiting for Jesus to return.
    - At which time we “arrive.”
  - Applications:
    - Do we have the faith to accept acceptance? Are we afraid of self-deception such as displayed by those with physical mindsets?
    - Can we be comfortable not arriving until Jesus returns?
    - For what has Jesus laid hold of you?
    - If I am acceptable now, why seek more?
    - Do I follow someone? Do I follow faith or practice?
    - How do we respond to the physically minded?
    - Do we “feel” like citizens of a heavenly country?
    - Do we eagerly await His return?

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- Attitudes of fellowship (chapter 4)
  - (4:1 – 3) Involvement
    - In keeping with the other-centered mentality, continue “in” the Lord for the purpose of the joy of others.
    - Get involved in overcoming the differences of others.
    - Applications:
      - Is our motivation to faithfulness for ourselves or for others?
      - Do we risk getting involved?
      - Do we view others as those whose descriptions are in the Book of Life?
  - (4:4 – 7) Joy
    - If joy is not the fundamental outlook, something went wrong.
    - Have a reputation for a mild, appropriate character.
    - Spiritual connectedness results in those far away to seem near, including Jesus.
    - Anxiety is normal as is anger (Ephesians 4:26); overcome anxiety with prayer. Other passages that use the same word:
      - 1 Corinthians 7:32 – 34 Marriage rightly creates anxiety for the fortunes of another. Enter advisedly.
      - Luke 10:41 Desiring to serve adequately can create anxiety that interferes with edification. Keep perspective.
      - Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14 The anxiety of life can interfere with growth. Compare time spent with the Word against time spent solving the nuisances of life.
      - Luke 21:34 The anxiety of life can interfere with preparedness for Jesus return. Life creates diversions.
      - Matthew 7:25 – 34, Luke 12:22 – 59 Be realistic about the anxiety and expectations of life. God provides. Anxiety is the result of expecting more than God knows you need.
      - Matthew 10:19, Luke 12:11 (Promise to the Twelve) Don’t be anxious about what to say; God will provide.
    - Understanding is good (recall the many promises of understanding), but peace is better because it moderates both emotions and intellect.
    - Applications:
      - Other observed outlooks: fear, insecurity, paranoia (the bunker mentality), isolation, conceit...
      - Do others characterize you as being “appropriate”? Not emotionless; not out of touch with reality; not frantic.
      - Do we “feel” close to those not physically nearby?
      - How would a prayer about anxiety sound?
  - (4:8 – 23) How to have joy and peace
    - Think about good stuff.
    - “Whose faith follow” (Hebrews 13:7)
    - Specific examples:
      - Causing joy in others brings joy.
      - Discontentment with one’s physical situation blocks joy and peace. Paul *learned* to be content through the strength supplied by Jesus.

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- One can rightly feel good about doing a good thing.
- Faith: God will supply what I *need*.
- Greetings from those physically separated contribute to joy and peace.
- Application:
  - One must learn of potentially bad things so as to avoid them. What is a reasonable balance between learning of dangers and focusing on good things?
  - Do we actively seek to imitate faith that works?
  - In what ways could we bring joy to those far away?
  - How so we avail ourselves of the opportunity to learn contentment?
  - Do we take time to savor the joy we bring to others?
  - How do we balance that God will supply food and clothing (Matthew 6:31 – 34) and our responsibility to work (1 Thessalonians 4:11 – 12)?
  - Do we take the time to greet those far away?