

1 Philippians Overview

Written by whom?

Paul the Apostle (the author of twelve other books of the New Testament). All earliest church leaders believed Paul wrote Philippians – no one has seriously argued with this.

Written when and where?

From prison (house arrest) during his first imprisonment in Rome 61 A.D.

Paul was under arrest for two years in Rome with a 24 hour guard (Acts 28:16,30) and was then probably released due to his accusers having a weak case against him

Written to whom?

To the Christians at the church in Philippi (church there was established in 50 A.D. – probably the best organized of all of the early churches – they already had elders and deacons by the time Paul wrote this letter)

What form?

Letter of thanks, news and encouragement

What's it about?

How Christians ought to live

Written for what purpose?

To thank the Philippians for their gifts

To give a report on his circumstances in prison

To encourage them to live lives of Joy and Faith in adversity

To encourage them to practice unity and humility

To warn against those that would force Jewish customs on Gentile Christians (Judaizers)

To warn against those that say you can live however you like (Libertines or Antinomians)

2 Paul's Missionary Journeys and Where Philippians Was Written



3 Philippians Chapter 1 – Scripture Questions

1. To whom did Paul write this letter? (vs. 1)
2. Of what was Paul confident? (vs. 6)
3. Where is Paul when he writes this letter? (vs. 7)
4. For what does Paul pray? (vs. 9)
5. “What has happen to me has really served to _____ the _____.” (vs. 12)
6. What two groups of people are preaching?
 - Those who preach out of _____ (vs. 16)
 - Those who preach out of _____ (vs. 17)
7. What is the most important thing for Paul? (vs. 18)
8. For Paul, “To live is _____, but to _____ is gain.” (vs. 21)
9. What is Paul torn between? (vs. 23-24)
10. How does Paul expect the Philippians to act when he is not there? (vs. 27)

4 Philippians Chapter 1 – What did it mean to them?

In this letter, we will see two main themes: joy and warning against self-centeredness. Paul rejoices in the good traits and blessings, and uses the examples of Timothy, Epaphroditus and Christ to encourage self-denial and self-sacrifice.

A phrase that is repeated through this letter is “in Christ”. By this Paul means not only to be bound to Christ individually by faith (making us servants, or slaves), but also bound together with Christ’s people. Paul was by this time concerned with unity among believers (the Corinthians, especially, had struggled with this issue) and he very gently reminds the Philippians that they were not yet perfected in their faith, and that growth in love and righteousness were needed. Righteousness, as Paul understood it, was two things: right standing with God, and the creative work of God as he makes people righteous.

Paul’s unique circumstances (he wrote from prison) gave courage to the Christians in Philippi. Paul doesn’t say that his imprisonment is good, or that God did it to him. Paul was confident that being in jail would end in victory. Not necessarily in release from prison: he was confident, instead, that God would bring good. This good even included the fact that there were people preaching from faulty motives.

Another striking feature is Paul’s willingness to either die or live, as God chose. It wasn’t that he wanted to die, but that he would be satisfied with either result. This was because everything he did was centered around Christ. Therefore, going to be with Christ was good, or staying to preach Christ was good.

The last few verses have the phrase “let your manner of life”, which literally reads “Let your citizenship be”. Paul is encouraging the Philippians to be committed to Christ and his kingdom first. He doesn’t mean that Christians don’t have obligations to this world, but our ultimate citizenship is heavenly.

5 Philippians Chapter 1 – Application Questions

1. Paul is glad that the Gospel is preached, even if it is out of less than pure motives. How do you feel about Christians who are obviously mistaken / uninformed / fanatical but sincere? What should we do about them? Should we spend time trying to correct them?
2. What should we do if we're working in a ministry with people we don't like (or they don't like us) or we don't agree with – when is it appropriate to leave?
3. Paul almost sounds like he's anxious to die – is there ever a time when we should just “throw in the towel” on our lives? How would it help us to focus more on our coming resurrection with Christ?
4. Paul is writing from prison – does this make you think differently about people who are in prison now? Could one of them be a modern day Paul?

6 Philippians Chapter 2 – Scripture Questions

1. Paul asks that the Christians at Philippi make his joy complete by doing four things (vs. 2):
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
 - d) _____
2. What did Christ think of equality with God (vs. 6) ?
3. His appearance was that of a _____ - he humbled himself and became obedient to _____ on a _____ (vs. 8).
4. At the name of Jesus – who will bow and confess that Christ is Lord (vs. 10-11) ?
5. Who worked in the Philippians, for His own good purpose? (vs. 13)
6. How did Paul describe the current generation? How did he describe the Philippians? (vs. 15)
7. Paul was willing to be poured out like a _____ . (vs. 17)
8. How did Timothy feel about the Philippian believers? (vs. 20)
9. When was Paul planning to send Timothy? (vs. 23)
10. Why was Epaphroditus upset? (vs. 26)

7 Philippians Chapter 2 – What did it mean to them?

This chapter is very dense. Paul covers several topics that are very important to our lives as Christians. He begins by calling on the believers to take Christ as their example and live in unity, and to refuse to let personal interest or advantage be the thing that they put first. Their encouragement is in Christ, their incentive comes out of love and their participation in the Holy Spirit. The word 'encouragement' literally means 'calling alongside'. The way Paul uses it, his intention is probably to remind them of not only the strength available to them in Christ, but also the relationship that they have with him.

The affection and sympathy which Paul calls for come from the heart. Any problems they were having at Philippi required not so much instruction—they knew the right thing to do—but the right spirit. He wanted them to remember the love that they had received, and the agape love that they had for one another.

Most scholars agree that verses 6-11 are an early Christian hymn. Paul's main emphasis is that the mind which governed Christ also govern his people. The essence of this mind was obedience—even when that obedience led to death. While it talks about humility, the main subject is self-sacrifice. Christ 'emptied himself', which means that he gave up his privileged position in heaven for a position of service on earth.

The phrase "work out your own salvation" does not mean that believers save themselves. Rather, Paul calls them to put into practice among themselves the mind of Christ (obedience, self-denial). Salvation is God's work, but he works within our willingness to be obedient. In Paul's mind, also, it is not enough to simply DO things. They must be done in the right spirit, which is NOT with grumbling or arguing. The church should not be a gossip club or a debating society.

Timothy, who was to be sent to the Philippians, was one of Paul's most devoted friends. He was also well known to the Philippians, since he had been with Paul on the first visit there. They knew his character. More importantly, Paul felt that Timothy had the exact mind, or spirit, which he wanted the Philippians to imitate. Timothy would be the example to help the church come closer to their goal of obedience and self-sacrifice.

Epaphroditus was evidently a person sent from Philippi to Paul to be of assistance to him. It seems that he did something for Paul which risked his very life, in order to fulfill a promise of service from the Philippian church. Paul may have been pointing this out so that they could honor him by imitating his own generous, sacrificial spirit.

8 Philippians Chapter 2 – Application Questions

1. If we are to have 'unity', which beliefs are not negotiable? (See the next page for examples of core beliefs.)
2. What about churches that split up because they disagree about fundamental things – are they wrong to split? Should they patch things up and re-unite?
3. Eventually, (Paul writes), every knee will bow and everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord. What is this referring to? Does this mean that everyone (eventually) will be a Christian?
4. If my salvation is a gift from God, and if he is the one who is making me more like Jesus, what am I accomplishing by working hard as a Christian?

9 Philippians Chapter 2 – Examples of Basic Christian Beliefs

1. **The Bible is the only infallible, inspired, authoritative Word of God. It is our final authority for all matters of faith and Christian practice.**
2. There is one God eternally existing in three persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is the Creator of all things.
3. **Jesus Christ is God in human flesh. He came to this world to die for our sins. He was bodily raised from the dead.**
4. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Living God, who draws people to Christ and lives in every person who has received Christ.
5. **Man, created by God, willfully sinned and as a result is lost and without hope apart from receiving Jesus Christ.**
6. Salvation (forgiveness of sins) is available only by the grace of God through the blood of Jesus Christ. This free gift of forgiveness is offered to all who receive Christ as Lord and Savior.
7. **The Bible teaches the pattern to receive Christ is to believe in Jesus as God's Son and Savior of the world, repent of personal sin, confess Christ publicly, and be baptized.**
8. Full immersion under water is the prescribed mode of baptism as indicated by Jesus' own example and command, and best depicts our union in His death, burial, and resurrection.
9. **The Church is the body and bride of Christ on earth, founded on the day of Pentecost, consisting of all Christians everywhere.**
10. Death seals the eternity of each person. Those who are forgiven will spend eternity with God in heaven, those not forgiven will be eternally separated from God in hell.

10 Philippians Chapter 3 – Scripture Questions

1. For it is we who are the _____, we who worship by the _____, who glory in _____, and who put no confidence in the _____. (vs. 3, 4)
2. What were some of the reasons Paul gave for his success as Jewish man? (vs. 5, 6)
3. Paul had many reasons to think well of himself. What did he consider those things to be, now that he knew Christ? (vs. 7-8)
6. What did Paul want to know and share with Christ? (vs. 10-11)
7. Paul was determined to do one thing: _____ what was behind and _____ toward what was ahead. (vs. 13)
8. What are we supposed to live up to? (vs. 16)
9. Many lived as enemies of the cross. Match up their sins. (vs. 19)

a. Their destiny	a. Is on earthly things
b. Their god	b. Is in their shame
c. Their glory	c. Is their stomach
d. Their mind	d. Is destruction
7. Where is our citizenship? (vs. 20)
8. How will Christ transform our bodies? (vs. 21)

11 Philippians Chapter 3 – What did it mean to them?

There is a strong contrast between the first two verses of this chapter. Paul begins by reassuring them that he doesn't mind repeating things, and that he wants them to rejoice in the Lord. Immediately, he jumps to a strong warning against the threat of some form of Judaism, either Christian or non-Christian. The term "dogs" is very harsh, and may be a clue about the growing tension between the church and local synagogue. This tension was the highest in the years leading up to the Jewish-Roman War in AD 66-73. From that point on, Christianity moved deeper into the Gentile world and farther from Judaism. Paul calls those who are trying to convince Christians to go back to Judaism dogs and evil-workers, those who mutilate the flesh. This was most likely a reference to Jews that insisted Gentile men be circumcised before they could be acceptable to God. Paul insisted, here and in other places, that a true commitment to God was found in the heart.

When Paul talks about the things he gave up for Christ, he was not giving up things that were evil or worthless. The items he lists were his former treasures, and things prized most highly by his family and friends. But in the presence of Christ, all was reversed. In Christ, Paul came to have a new understanding of what righteousness was and the way to get that righteousness. Before, his goal was to achieve his own righteousness. In Christ, he received righteousness from God and through faith.

The goal which Paul strives toward is to fulfill the call of God in Christ. He is not afraid to call it perfection, but denies that he has reached that perfection. It is also possible that Paul is including the idea of maturity in his call for perfection. Believers are mature when they hold true to what they have attained. 'Hold true' means 'to march in line', so what Paul is calling for is for them to stay faithful and keep on going in their current path.

In the last section, verses 17 to the end of the chapter, Paul seems to be warning of the danger of giving up the effort toward perfection, as some there seemed to be doing. Evidently some of the believers were saying that since they were saved, there was no need to strive to become perfect. This idea alarms Paul. He encourages them to pay attention to those trying to live up to the goal of Christ-like lives.

The idea that our true home is heaven even while on earth was a widely held belief among early Christians. It probably had special appeal and meaning in a city like Philippi, a Roman colony. Paul believed in a physical, bodily resurrection. Here and in other letters, he does not think of believers as 'going to heaven' but of Christ coming to us from heaven. There is no evidence, here or otherwise that indicates Paul expected any experience between death and being with Christ. After death, the believer was with Christ.

12 Philippians Chapter 3 – Application Questions

1. The people trying to enforce Old Testament laws had lost their sense of balance, spiritually. They were trying to use rules and laws to feel secure. Which Old Testament Laws are optional for Christians? How do we try to make ourselves feel secure?
2. Paul was once very active in the Pharisee party. He left behind that life, and presumably friends who were still in that group. Is it really possible that God would call us to abandon our friends? When would he do that?
3. Some people say they are Christians (or at least believe in God), but their lives are real jaw-droppers. They make the rest of us look bad! AND they almost always get a lot of publicity. What do we do about this? Should we try to make it clear that they are not really Christians? Why or why not?
4. Paul says that when Jesus comes back for us, we'll be changed physically. What transformations have occurred in your life? What is actually different because you believe in Christ?

13 Philippians Chapter 4 – Scripture Questions

1. Paul loved and longed for the Philippians. What did he call them? (vs. 1)
2. Paul begged two women to agree with each other “in the Lord”. Why did he want to help them agree? (vs. 2, 3)
3. When were the Philippians to rejoice? (vs. 4)
4. What are we to be anxious about? (vs. 5)
5. How do we present our requests to God? (vs. 6)
6. What will guard our hearts? (vs. 7)
7. What are we supposed to focus on? (vs. 8)
8. Who will be with us? (vs. 9)
9. What secret had Paul learned? (vs. 12)
10. What can we do through Christ’s strength? (vs. 13)
11. Who helped Paul in the early days of his ministry? (vs. 15)
12. What did Paul consider the Philippians' gift to him to be? (vs. 18)
13. “The _____ be with your spirit.” (vs. 23)

14 Philippians Chapter 4 – What did it mean to them?

In this last chapter, Paul speaks openly of a problem that has been indirectly referred to throughout the letter. After encouraging unity, speaking against grumbling and questioning and telling them that they needed to have the mind of Christ and to be in full accord with one another, he tells Euodia and Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Whatever happened between these two former co-workers, the feud has become public. Paul does not take either side, but appeals to them to agree in the Lord. Not that they need to be one in thought, but they do need to be one in spirit.

Alongside the call for unity is the sense of joy. Paul tells them to rejoice in God, to be sure of Christ's presence in their lives and ready for his second coming. They are warned against anxiety, which is a destructive force that stunts creativity. The antidote to anxiety is the attitude of thanksgiving, out of which we live in openness to God, grateful for life and all its provisions, open to what more God has to give.

Prayer is the general term for speaking to God. It is not that God needs to be informed or to be begged. It is that we need to ask, to be aware of and acknowledge our needs. Through this we will receive the peace of God. This peace is not the absence of conflict but the sense of acceptance, the assurance, the serenity which one may know within themselves, no matter what situation we may be in.

The virtues Paul mentions (true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellence, worthy of praise) were familiar and accepted in pagan society, but Paul puts a Christian spin on them. When he says to "Think about these things" he really means "to take into account". They are not simply to reflect on the virtues, but to let them affect the choices of life and actions.

In the last section, Paul thanks the Philippians for their gracious gift to him. It seems at least possible that they had been cut off from him, either not knowing where he was or unable to reach him. The word "content" is a Stoic term, but Paul gives it a Christian meaning. The Stoics solved the problems of life by giving up all desires or wants. Their strength was within themselves. Paul's contentment (or sufficiency) was not in himself but flowed into him from Christ.

15 Philippians Chapter 4 – Application Questions

1. Paul publicly asked two quarreling Christians to make things right with each other. He even asked another believer to help them make up. Whose job is it to reconcile people who are mad at each other? Shouldn't we let people fix their own problems? When should we step in, and when should we leave the situation alone?
2. Sometimes life is just miserable. How can we possibly “rejoice in the Lord always?”
3. Our country seems, at times, to be at war with itself. People in this city are abused and hurt. People we love in this very church are dying. This is our reality. Given these truths, what does it mean to “not be anxious about anything”? How is this possible?
4. Paul said he had learned how to be content in every situation. Does this mean we just accept things as they are? Is there a problem with the ambition to make things better? Our church periodically tries to figure out what to do next as a church family. Why shouldn't we just wait for things to fall into our lap?