

Reading Through the New Testament

Paul's Letter to the Philippians



Background to the Letter

- Philippi was a small military outpost city in Greece, whose residents enjoyed privileges afforded to those living in a Roman colony
- Paul first visited on his second missionary in Acts 16:12 and established a church
- He had a close relationship with the church, they faithfully supported his ministry (4:16)
- The congregation sent Epaphroditus, one of their members, to deliver a gift to Paul in his imprisonment. While in Rome, Paul's faithful friend became seriously ill (2:25-27)
- One of Paul's reasons for writing the letter was to express gratitude for their generosity
- It seems to have been a fairly healthy church, though there were some conflicts and rivalries
- In the letter, he updates his supporters on his circumstances as a prisoner awaiting trial. Rather than hindering the progress of the gospel, the name of Christ spread to people who might not have heard otherwise.
- Key themes include joy, humility, contentment

Outline

I. Introduction (1:1-11)

II. Paul's Chains Advance the Gospel (1:12-26)

III. Unity and Humility (1:27-2:18)

IV. Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30)

V. Enemies of the Cross and Citizens of Heaven (3:1-4:3)

VI. Greeting and Thanksgiving (4:4-23)

I. Living Above Our Circumstance: (1:3-14)

1. In the opening verses, we find one of the apostle's favorite words used throughout the letter: joy. Does joy depend on our circumstances? Can we rejoice even when things are going wrong in our lives? How? How could Paul have joy while a prisoner of Rome?

2. Was he dwelling on all the problems and difficulties that he was facing? Where was his focus?

3. Paul's opponents could lock him up, but they couldn't shut him up, or keep him from sharing the good news of Jesus. Who are some of the people who came to know Christ as a result of the time he spent as a prisoner in Rome? (1:13; 4:22)

4. What affect did Paul's imprisonment have on other believers, as far as their willingness to share Christ with others? (1:14)

5. When we hear reports of Christians suffering persecution, whether its believers who are beheaded for their faith in the Middle East or a football coach being fired for praying after the game, what effect should that have on our testimony? Satan wants to intimidate us to remain silent about our faith, but how do the examples of people like the apostle Paul encourage us to be bold?

6. Paul knew that, in a sense, his life was hanging in the balance. If the trial did not go his way, he would likely be put to death. How did Paul feel about that? What was his highest ambition, in life or in death? (see verses 19-26)

II. A Picture of Humility: (2:1-11)

7. Paul's desire for the church in Philippi, and all churches, is that they be unified. What happens to the ministry of a church when members allow themselves to engage in selfish bickering, pettiness, and trivial arguments? Will the world be drawn to Christ? Will believers grow closer to the Lord? Will young people learn how to love God and love others?

8. In verse 2 the apostle says, "make my joy complete by..."

- Being of the same m_____
- Maintaining the same l_____
- United in s_____
- Intent on one p_____
- Instead of insisting on our own way, whose will should we seek in all things? Fellow believers will not always see things the same way, but what is the right way to handle disagreements?

9. In your own words, how would you define humility? Is this a character trait that is instinctive for us?

10. Who is the perfect example of humility, believers should strive to follow? How did He demonstrate a humble heart? Did He ever insist on having his own way? Did He put Himself and His well-being above others? Was He too good to associate with the lowly?

11. Christ humbled Himself to the point of death, dying like a criminal, despised and rejected by men. What was the result of His obedience? How effective will we be as servants of God if we are not humble?