

Exploring Philippians

Jacob Jasin

PREFACE

In his letter to the Philippian Christians, Paul explains what it means to be a Christian. Having been united with Christ, our identity is no longer in ourselves or any other things but is in our union with Christ. The secret to live a joyful life as a Christian is by always rejoicing in Christ and having our minds centered on him. Life in this broken world is marked with struggles and anxieties. However, Christians have “the peace of God which surpasses all understanding” that guards our hearts and minds in Christ. The grace of Christ is sufficient for our lives. Paul is confident of the well-being of all believers in our union with Christ, “And I am sure of this, that he [God] who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

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Jacob Jasin
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Introduction

The book of Philippians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in the city of Philippi. Philippi was a Roman colony and is in present day Greece. The city was named after Philip II, the father of Alexander the Great. Paul wrote this letter during his imprisonment in Rome about 60 A.D. The Philippian church consisted of mostly Gentiles (non-Jewish people). Paul encouraged the Philippian Christians to live joyfully in Christ and to imitate the example of Christ's humility in their lives.

Lesson 1 – Our Identity in Christ

Read Philippians 1:1-2

How did Paul identify Timothy and himself to the Philippians? What is the significance of it (v.1)?

Timothy was a disciple and a member of Paul's mission team. Paul took Timothy in his missionary journeys to share the gospel and to plant churches. Paul identified Timothy and himself as servants of Christ Jesus. Paul used the Greek word *doulos* which means bond-servant or slave. A bond-servant is permanently owned by his master. Therefore, Paul identified that he belonged to Christ alone and no one else. His allegiance was for Christ alone.

Why did Paul call the Philippian Christians as "saints" (v.1)?

All true followers of Jesus Christ are saints. A saint is someone who is set apart by God and for him alone. 1 Peter 2:9 describes who true Christians (saints) are, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Why are grace and peace important subjects in the life of Christians (v.2)?

Who are the sources of spiritual grace and peace (v.2)?

What is the significance of identifying both God the Father and Jesus Christ as the sources of spiritual grace and peace (v.2)?

What is the significance of calling God as our Father and calling Jesus Christ as our Lord (v.2)?

Read Philippians 1:3-11

Why was Paul joyful in his prayer for the Philippian Christians (v.3-5)?

If we would like to be joyful in our prayers, we need to learn from Paul. Paul's prayer is not self-centered but gospel-centered. He thanks God for the Philippian Christians. Like Paul, we need to regularly mentioning other people in our prayers. We need to: (1) think about what good works they do for God's kingdom, (2) thank God for their works, and (3) pray for their well-being and for them to impact more people for God's kingdom.

The Philippian Christians had "partnership in the gospel" with Paul. The Greek word for partnership is *koinonia* which means fellowship. There are two other places where Paul uses the word *koinonia* in this letter to the Philippians: "participation in the Spirit" (2:1) and "share his (Christ's) sufferings" (3:10). The same word *koinonia* is translated partnership, participation, and sharing.

The Philippian Christians' partnership in the gospel includes their financial contributions to support Paul's mission to bring the gospel and to plant churches in many places (v.5).

Have you developed a plan to regularly give financial support for the work of global missions?

What assurance does Paul have for the Philippian Christians? What is the basis of his assurance (v.6)?

God has brought us to Christ by his saving grace. By his preserving grace, God preserves us and will bring our salvation in Christ to completion when we are glorified at "the day of Jesus Christ"—the day of Christ's return. God cannot fail. He has begun a good work in us and will finish it. God has justified us in Christ. He sanctifies us in the present time. He will glorify us in the future.

What was one reason that Paul held the Philippian Christians dear in his heart (v.7-8)?

What was Paul's prayer for them (v.9)?

Paul not only told the Philippian Christians that he prayed for them, but also told them the content of his prayer for them so that they may be encouraged.

How do we grow in "knowledge and all discernment"?

Why did Paul want the Philippian Christians' *agape* love (unconditional love) "to abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment" (v.10-11)?

To love God and to love other people unconditionally is God's commandment for us. As God's people, we need to be loving, knowledgeable, discerning, pure, blameless, and fruitful. The ultimate purpose of our lives is "to the glory and praise of God" (v.11).

Lesson 2 – The Fruit of Suffering for Christ

Read Philippians 1:1-11 for review.

Read Philippians 1:12-18

What did Paul say about his suffering and imprisonment (v.12-13)?

How does Paul's imprisonment affect the other Christians (v.14)?

Our confidence is "in the Lord" and not in ourselves or any others. "In the Lord" means in our union with Christ. Those who are united with Christ have divine resources from Christ for their lives. Our union with Christ is permanent and inseparable. It is a covenant union. Paul emphasizes our covenant union with Christ throughout this book. The phrase "in the Lord" appears nine times.

What does being united with Christ mean to you personally?

Why do some people preach Christ out of envy and rivalry (v.15-17)?

There was apparently a group of people who preach Christ out of envy and rivalry to Paul. They were most likely Christians who still held to Judaism, believing that circumcision was necessary. They seemed to desire recognition and praise. They did not preach out of sincere motive but seek to increase Paul's suffering.

How did Paul respond to this (v.18)?

If some intended to increase Paul's suffering by preaching Christ with a wrong motive, he left this to Christ. Paul's ultimate desire was to see the name of Jesus Christ proclaimed throughout the world. He rejoiced in the salvation of many people, even though it caused him to suffer.

What can we learn from Paul's heart for Jesus?

Read Philippians 1:19-30

What is the Holy Spirit also called (v.19)?

Paul hoped that through the Philippians' prayers and the help of the Holy Spirit, he could be delivered from the imprisonment. He trusted God's will for his life for whatever might happen to him.

What was Paul's "eager expectation and hope" (v.20)?

What was Paul's philosophy of life (v.21)?

What does "to die is gain" mean?

For some people, death is a tragedy. For us, death is gain because we are in union with Christ. For us, death means being delivered from this corrupted body and this corrupted world—free from sin and suffering. Death means meeting with Jesus. When we die, our souls go to heaven to be with Christ and are made in perfect holiness. Death will bring us into a deeper experience of our union with Christ.

What was Paul's purpose of life (v.22)?

What was Paul's desire (v.23)?

Why did he think "to remain in the flesh is more necessary" (v.24-25)?

Paul's life was very focus, meaningful, and joyful. His purpose of life was to serve Christ's people and to build them up. He was not a self-centered and self-oriented person, but a Christ-centered and people-oriented person. This is the secret of Paul's joy. He lived his life for the work of the gospel and God's kingdom. To live means "fruitful labor" for him. To die is gain for him—seeing and enjoying the result of his labor.

What was Paul's admonition for the Philippian Christians (v.27-28)?

Christians' manner of life that is worthy of the gospel of Christ is demonstrated by (1) standing firm together, (2) striving side by side for the gospel, and (3) not being afraid of persecution.

How should we encourage one another to apply these in our lives?

When we stand and suffer together for the gospel, it is a clear sign of our salvation from God, as well as a clear sign of the destruction of our enemies. God's power will be manifested in and through us (v.28).

What has been granted to us as Christ's people (v.29-30)?

Suffering for Christ is a blessing that Christ gives to his people. Suffering for Christ deepens our personal relationship with him. We have greater intimacy with him. When we suffer for him, we share in his suffering. Jesus says, "If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20). Like Paul, Peter also suffered for Christ. He encourages the believers, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Peter 4:13).

Lesson 3 – Having the Mind of Christ

Read Philippians 1:12-30 for review.

Read Philippians 2:1-11

Paul states four major qualities that every born-again Christians has: (1) encouragement in Christ, (2) comfort from love, (3) participation in the Spirit, and (4) affection and sympathy. “So if there is any” means “because there is.” Because born-again Christians are in union with Christ, they possess these qualities (v.1).

What does “encouragement in Christ” means?

What does “comfort from love” means?

What does “participation in the Spirit” means?

What do “affection and sympathy” mean?

What did Paul ask of the Philippians Christians because they had these qualities (v.2)?

What else did Paul ask of them (v.3-4)?

Paul wants Christians to be loving and humble like Christ. This mind or attitude “is yours in Christ Jesus.” This means that we have this mind because we are in union with Christ, but we need to exercise and develop it in our lives (v.5).

Is Jesus God? Is he equal with God the Father (v.6)?

How did he demonstrate his humility (v.6-7)?

Jesus “emptied himself” did not mean emptying his divine nature but giving up his heavenly glory for a time and humbling himself by “taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.” Jesus added human nature to his divine nature. Jesus is both truly God and truly man. He did not lose any of his divine attributes while being a man. His deity did not become less and his humanity did not become more than a man. His deity and humanity were two distinct natures inseparably joined together in one person. Each of Jesus’ nature retains all its unique properties.

How did Jesus demonstrate his humility and submission to the Father’s will (v.8)?

Jesus came from heaven and was born as a man with a purpose to be our mediator. As a man, he sacrificed himself to die bearing the punishment of our sins on the cross as our substitute. This is the Father's will, so that by repenting from our sins and putting our faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, we can receive the Father's forgiveness and have a new life in Jesus.

How has God exalted Jesus' humility (v.9-11)?

God the Father has restored Jesus' heavenly glory and has made him Lord of all, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Every creature—angels and men, the living and the dead—will acknowledge that Jesus is Lord and will worship him. It is the Father's will and is for his glory that his Son is acknowledged and worship as Lord of all creature.

Read Philippians 2:12-18

What does to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" mean (v.12)?

We do not work for our salvation because we receive it by God's grace. We need to work out our salvation with fear and trembling—with awe and reverence to God—by being obedient to his guidance.

What does "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" mean (v.13)?

The motive of our obedience to God—working out our salvation—is because God is working in us. He wants us to be productive and fruitful Christians. He sanctifies us from the inside out, making us more and more righteous in the image of Christ. This is his will and good pleasure. As his children, he wants us to be holy and righteous just as himself. As he works in us, sanctifying us, he gives us the power to work out our sanctification.

What did Paul admonish the Philippian Christians to do (v.14)? Why (v.15)?

Some of the Philippian Christians grumbled against their church leaders, just as the Israelites against their leader, Moses. Paul wanted them to be blameless and innocent children of God and to shine as the lights of Christ in this twisted and corrupted world.

What else did Paul admonish them to do (v.16, 18)?

"The word of life" refers to the gospel and the ethical teachings founded upon it. We need to hold the gospel firmly as the guide for our lives. All our thoughts, words, and actions need to be gospel-centered and gospel-saturated. Paul hoped that when Christ returns—"the day of Christ"—he would be joyful to see his sacrificial labor for the Philippian church is not in vain. Paul "emptied himself" and became a servant for others. Just as Paul imitated Christ, we too can imitate Christ. The secret to have a joyful life is to live our lives sacrificially for the gospel and for the good of others in Christ (v.16-18).

Lesson 4 – Found in Christ

Read Philippians 2:1-18 for review.

Read Philippians 2:19-24

Whom did Paul hope to send to the Philippian church? What was the purpose for (v.19)?

Timothy was Paul's disciple and a member of his mission team. Just as Paul, Timothy was a man of humility and served God's people sacrificially.

Did Timothy care about the Philippian church (v.20)?

While many people cared only about their own interest, Timothy cared about God's people. Paul admonished the Philippian Christians to care for other people's interest and not just their own (v.4, 21).

What did the Philippian Christians know about Timothy (v.22)?

Paul hoped to be able to send Timothy to them as soon as possible, although Paul himself needed his assistance. Paul himself would like to visit the Philippian Christians and to encourage them (v.23-24).

Read Philippians 2:25-30

Paul also had in mind to send Epaphroditus to the Philippian church.

What can we know about Epaphroditus (v.25)?

Like Timothy, Epaphroditus was a godly man and sacrificed himself to serve others. He was sent by the Philippian church to bring a love gift to minister to Paul's need. He got sick near to death but God healed him. Paul wanted to send him back to the Philippian Christians, so that they "may rejoice at seeing him again" (v.26-28).

What did Paul ask of the Philippian Christians? Why (v.29-30)?

Read Philippians 3:1-11

What does to "rejoice in the Lord" mean (v.1)?

Paul would say it again, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (4:4). The secret to live a joyful life is by always rejoicing in the Lord, having our minds centered on Christ—being Christ-centered. We have worries or anxieties about things in life because we have our minds centered on ourselves—being self-centered.

What did Paul warn the Philippian Christians about (v.2)?

The people that Paul described as “dogs, evildoers, and those who mutilate the flesh” are Judaizers who taught the necessity of circumcision. They wanted to corrupt new believers of their faith, joy, and freedom in Christ. They taught new believers that in addition to their faith in Christ, they must also be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul emphasizes that born-again Christians are the true circumcision, who worship by the Holy Spirit and “put no confidence in the flesh”—salvation by works—but only in the sufficiency of the redeeming work of Christ on the cross alone (v.3).

“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ” (Colossians 2:11).

What could Paul boast about if he wanted to have “confidence in the flesh” (v.4-6)?

If people can be justified and saved by God through their self-achievements or works, Paul could claim that he was blameless in obeying the law of God.

What did Paul say about his outstanding record of self-achievements (v.7)?

Why (v.8-9)?

What does knowing Jesus Christ as our Lord mean?

The worth of knowing Christ as our Lord—having a personal relationship and being united with him—surpasses all things on earth. We are justified by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. When we repent from our sins and put our faith in Jesus, trusting and surrendering our lives to him, God forgives our sins and justifies us in Christ by imputing the righteousness of Jesus to us.

Paul conveys that his identity is in his being united with Christ by the grace of God, “I may gain Christ and be found in him.” Outside of Christ, Paul and all his self-achievements are nothing. In his union with Christ, he is found by God to be righteous and worthy before him. Christ’s righteousness and worthiness cover Paul like a beautiful garment. This is how God sees us if we are *found in Christ*.

Are you *found in Christ* or in something else, such as your own self-achievements?

How did Paul articulate even further of his faith in Christ and not in his self-achievements (v.10-11)?

One of the manifestations of being united with Christ is that we share his sufferings. When we suffer for Christ, his resurrected power is manifested in our lives. He is with us in the midst of suffering and strengthens us. When he returns, he will glorify us by giving us a resurrected and glorified body.

Lesson 5 – Having Our Hearts and Minds in Christ

Read Philippians 2:19—3:11 for review.

Read Philippians 3:12—4:1

Paul knew that he had not received all the benefits of his salvation and union with Christ. He knew that God would make his salvation complete and glorified him at the day of Christ's return. Paul understood that he was not a perfect Christian, thus he did his best to be one. Paul did this out of his gratitude to Jesus who has saved him and has made him his own. Paul kept "straining forward to what lies ahead, press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (v.12-14).

How can we live our Christian lives very focus toward heavenly goal just as Paul?

Paul encouraged believers to continue pressing toward heavenly goal. Let us hold on to whatever we have learned about Christ and his gospel and not be shaken. Let us keep growing in God's word and in our intimate relationship with God. God will continue to sanctify us until we receive our complete salvation (v.15-16).

Paul also encouraged believers to imitate him and those who were faithful (v.17).

Are there any faithful Christians whom you try to imitate in your life?

Paul spoke of those who opposed Christ and the gospel. They concerned only about food—"their god is their belly"—and sensual pleasure—"they glory in their shame." Their destruction is certain. Christ will destroy them (v.18-19).

What does "our citizenship is in heaven" mean (v.20)?

What will Christ give to all his people at his second coming (v.21)?

"There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another" (1 Corinthians 15:40).

"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

How does Paul's address to the Philippian Christians show his affection towards them (v.1)?

What does to "stand firm in the Lord" mean (v.1)?

Read Philippians 4:2-9

Euodia and Syntyche were important women in the Philippian church. They worked with Paul and his missions team to plant the Philippian church. Apparently, they had disagreement and it affected the whole church. Paul asked them “to agree in the Lord”—to have Christ-centered unity and peace. Praying for church staff members and volunteer leaders is very important for every church member to do.

Have you had a regular schedule to pray for your church leaders?

What does to “rejoice in the Lord always” mean (v.4)?

As Christians, our thoughts, words, and actions should reflect our joy in Christ. Our behaviors should be good testimonies and “reasonable” to the people around us, so that they can be drawn to Christ, especially with the urgency that Christ is coming soon—“the Lord is at hand” (v.5).

What is Paul’s admonition to all believers (v.6)?

What kind of anxieties do we usually have?

Being anxious is a form of self-centeredness. The antidote for this is to pray much with thanksgiving and to think much of Christ—being Christ-centered in our thinking.

What will the “peace of God which surpasses all understanding” do in us (v.7)?

The results of thinking much about Christ is a joyful heart that takes away the anxieties. “The peace of God” is a divine and powerful peace that surpasses all understanding and protects our focus on Christ, guarding our hearts and minds in him.

What else should we be thinking about (v.8)? Give some examples.

Thinking about Christ is reflected in thinking about how to be good witnesses of him to the people around us. Paul wanted the Philippian Christians to follow his examples and to imitate him as he imitated Christ. To “think about these things” and to “practice these things” are the secrets of a joyful life in Christ (v.8-9).

Lesson 6 – Content in Christ

Read Philippians 3:12—4:9 for review.

Read Philippians 4:10-23

Why did Paul “rejoice in the Lord greatly” (v.10)?

Paul’s source of joy was in the Lord. He knew that all good gifts were from the Lord. The Philippian Christians were certainly care about Paul’s living need. They most likely had a challenging situation to send financial support to Paul. Now that Paul had received their gift, he rejoiced in the Lord and not in the quantity of the gift. Paul lived a simple life as an apostle and a missionary. He often did not have adequate food and proper housing.

How did Paul express about his life in the Lord (v.11)?

What does to be content in every situation mean?

How do you think that Paul learned “the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” (v.12)?

What is Paul’s secret of contentment (v.13)?

It is Christ who gives us spiritual strength. Christ is always with us because we are in union with him. He says to all his people, “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus also says to all his people, “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me ... for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

How do we receive spiritual strength from Christ?

The Philippian church *shared* Paul’s trouble (v.14). The Greek word translated *share* is *koinonia*, which means fellowship or having participation. It is an active act. The Philippian church knew that Paul was in trouble financially, and they brought themselves to share and participate in his trouble, carrying his burden together with him. This is Christian fellowship where believers care for one another.

How many churches helped Paul after he left Macedonia during his gospel mission trips (v.15)?

Who sent help to Paul when he was in Thessalonica (v.16)?

What did Paul mean when he said, “Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit” (v.17)?

Paul received the gift from the Philippian church through Epaphroditus, who was a member of the Philippian church and Paul’s fellow worker for the gospel ministry. Paul considered their gift as “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (v.18).

What is a sacrificial financial gift and what is not?

Giving to missions to support the work of the gospel should be a sacrificial giving. It should be a priority in our financial budget plan. We should not give only when we have “leftover” money.

What will God do when we prioritize giving to missions to support the work of the gospel (v.19)?

“Every need” includes material and spiritual needs in our lives. God will make sure that our needs are met. He is our heavenly Father. He is please with us if we live our lives as a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to him.

Who is worthy to receive glory forever and ever? Why (v.20)?

Paul reminded the Philippian Christians of the unity that all believers have in Christ. He gave them greeting from believers who worked at Caesar’s palace in Rome. He reminded them of the sufficient grace of Christ. Knowing that the grace of Christ is with us in times of struggle, it brings peace and joy to us. We can be content in Christ because of his sufficient grace for us.

Resources

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