

PAUL'S JOYFUL SERVITUDE

*A Study of
Paul's Letter to
the Philippians*

John L. Hoh. Jr.

INTRODUCTION

Paul's letter to the Philippians is Paul's most joyful letter. Written in prison, Paul shows a pride and joyfulness in serving the Lord--even if it meant suffering for the cause!

The letter was written to the group of Christians in and around the city of Philippi. The city was originally named *Krenides*. It was captured in 359 BC by Philip II, who was the father of Alexander the Great. Philip enlarged and fortified the city during his reign. Nearby were gold mines that were then used to bankroll the armies of Philip and Alexander. These gold mines were already depleted when the Romans captured the city 200 years later.

In 42 BC Philippi was the site of the historic battle between the forces supporting Brutus-Cassius and the forces supporting Antony-Octavian. Brutus, having played a major role in the death of Julius Caesar, was anti-imperial, pro-Senate. Octavian's forces would win the skirmish and Octavian himself would become Caesar Augustus--and the rest, they say, is history (*Luke 2:1*). Philippi was then made a Roman colony settled by veterans of the Roman Army. Proud of their citizenship, Paul's readers would also be familiar with Paul's use of the terms "Praetorian Guard," "Caesar's household" and "heavenly citizenship." The founding of this congregation is recorded for us in *Acts 16*.

Paul's Epistle (Letter) to the Philippians was one of four attributed to having been written during Paul's imprisonment. Along with this letter Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians are believed to have been written in prison (**1:13**--"*I am in chains for Christ*"). There is strong evidence to point to Paul's first Roman imprisonment:

- 1) Paul refers to the *palace* guard,
- 2) he was confident of acquittal (**1:25; 2:24**) and
- 3) Paul was still awaiting his appeal to Caesar (*Acts 21-27* tells us why Paul was awaiting an appeal to Caesar).

Philippians can be divided into eight sections for an eight session study:

Paul as servant of Christ Jesus

(1:1-11)

Paul in chains for the Gospel

(1:12-30)

Paul demonstrates humility

(2:1-11)

Shine as Stars

(2:12-18)

Paul sends faithful workers

(2:19-30)

Confidence in Christ

(3:1-11)

Paul presses on toward the goal

(3:12-4:1)

Paul bids fond farewell

(4:2-23)

LESSON ONE

PAUL AS SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS

Philippians 1:1-11

1:1,2: As with any letter, Paul's letter to the Philippians starts with a greeting. This greeting is the standard format for letters in Paul's day. The author is listed first, followed by the recipient of the letter, then a greeting.

Why does Paul include Timothy as co-writer?

cf. 2:19-24:

cf. 1 Timothy 1:2:

Why does Paul call himself a “servant?”

Why does Paul use the term “saints?”

Paul also addresses the overseers and the deacons. Though we are unsure of the structure of the New Testament church, an orderly organization already seems in place.

Discussion: Did every congregation that Paul establish have the same organizational structure? Explain.
(*cf.: Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1, 8-21; 16:13; 17:1-2, 10, 17, 34; 18:4, 7, 19; Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1*)

1:3-11: This section gives us a hint of Paul's relationship with the Philippians. As you progress through the letter, notice that Paul does not address any grave error or heresy. The tone is very irenic. Writing to the Philippians undoubtedly lifts Paul's spirits while in prison, even though it was most likely a “house arrest” arrangement. Joy is evident in the letter!

v5: Partnership: What is the relationship between Paul and the congregation at Philippi?

What does this say about the Pastor-Congregation relationship for today's church?

cf. Ephesians 4:11-13: What additional insight can we gain from this portion of another letter of Paul?

v6: Confidence--in whom or what?

What applications does **verse 7** have in our everyday faith-life? (*cf. 1 Cor. 10:13*)

v8: Affection of Jesus Christ--what is it?

vv9-10: to grow in knowledge--will we ever stop in this area? (*cf. Eph. 4:11-13*)

LESSON TWO

PAUL IN CHAINS FOR THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:12-30

I. Imprisonment propels the Gospel (12-14)

How did Paul's imprisonment serve the Lord inside the prison?

How did his imprisonment serve the Gospel cause outside the prison?

II. Even motives do not stand as a roadblock (15-18a)

The first two verses are set up in what is called a *chiastic* pattern. When we draw lines between the corresponding lines of the verses we see an “X” (*Chi* in Greek) take form, as so:

Some preach out of envy	Others out of good will
	X
Latter out of love	Former out of selfish ambition

Whom is Paul referring to when he speaks of those with false motives?

What, according to Paul, is the important thing despite the motives?

III. Paul continues to rejoice--he will be delivered! (18b-26)

How will Paul be delivered?

Why can Paul expect not to be ashamed?

What is Paul's dilemma in (21-23)?

What advantages for Paul in death?

What benefit from earthly life?

What does Paul conclude and why?

IV. Encouragement for the Philippians (27-30)

In what two ways does Paul encourage the Philippians to conduct themselves in a worthy manner?

1)(27b)

2)(28a)

How can we put these words into practice in our daily lives today?

Paul also encourages the Philippians with the knowledge that their opponents will be destroyed and the church members (believers) will be saved. Who are the opponents and why do they oppose the believers?(*Eph. 6:12*)

What is part of the privilege of being a believer?

Why is it a privilege?

What does Paul hold up for them as an example to follow in their suffering?

Is this vain boasting? Why?

Paul reassures the Philippians that he is fine. But foremost in his thoughts is the Gospel. He wants to point the Philippians to have that same focus on the Gospel. His suffering is a tool of God to advance the Gospel. It makes outsiders view Paul's unusual attitude with greater scrutiny as well as give other Christians confidence to proclaim the Good News. Paul even stresses that impending death would be a blessing! With his example Paul urges the Philippians to continue their life of faith in a worthy manner.

LESSON THREE

PAUL DEMONSTRATES HUMILITY

Philippians 2:1-11

I. True Christian humility

Paul urges the Philippians to imitate Christ's humility.

vv1-2: ACTION--What has God done for the Philippians?
For us?

REACTION--What does Paul write about our reaction to what God has done for us?

vv3-4: Paul reminds us that actions (REACTIONS) are not to be driven by selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility.

List some DO's and DON'Ts that you see in these two verses in regards to our relationships with other people:

DO	DON'T

How can we apply these verses to our relationship with other Christians?

Our relationship with non-Christians? (*cf. 1 Cor. 9:22*)

II. Example of Christ

Christ's example makes a full circle, as illustrated in the diagram below.

<i>Who He Is</i>		<i>What He Became</i>
6: Being in very nature God----- π	-----υ	Did not consider equality with God something to be grasped.
π		θ
to the glory of God the Father.		7: but made himself nothing,
π		θ
11: and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,		taking the very nature of a servant,
π		θ
in heaven and on earth and under the earth, π		being made in human likeness.
π		θ
10: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,		8: And being found in appearance as a man, θ
π		θ
and gave him the name that is above every name,		He humbled himself and became obedient to death--
π		θ
9: Therefore God exalted him to the highest place	τ-----	even death on a cross!
Christ's Exaltation		Christ's Humiliation

Compare these verses Paul penned with the second article of the Apostle's Creed:

Why did Christ humiliate himself?

Who exalted whom?

How does Paul relate Christ's attitude to us today?

LESSON FOUR

SHINE AS STARS

Philippians 2:12-18

I. Don't "relax" in your Christianity

A. To live as if Paul were with them.

Do we tend to watch our actions when a pastor is around? Why?

Do we watch what we say or do more around believers or around unbelievers? Why?

B. Continue to work out salvation with fear and trembling

Does this say that we assist in our salvation? (*cf. Eph. 4:27, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8*)

What comfort does v 13 give us in our daily lives? (*cf. John 3:16, Rom. 8:28*)

II. Do everything without complaint or argument (*cf. Job, Jesus at his trial*)

A. To be blameless and pure

--children of God without fault

--in a crooked, depraved generation (*Matt. 5:13*)

--that you may shine as stars (*Gen 15:5, Matt 5:14-16, Dan. 12:3*)

--as you hold out the Word of Life (*Psalms 119:105*)

If we are sinners, how can we be considered "blameless" and "pure"?

B. That Paul may boast on the day of Christ.

Can we judge a pastor's effectiveness or diligence by the sanctified life of the members of the congregation?

Can we judge him by the standards of church growth?

C. Paul again mentions the possibility of martyrdom

What is Paul's attitude?

What encouragement does he give to the Philippians?

Paul encourages the Philippians not to relax even though their salvation has been won for them by Christ. Sinful man can do nothing for his salvation from sin for it is sin that traps him. Yet Paul warns the Philippians that by being complacent in faith they will gradually forfeit it. He then urges them to *Evangelize by Action*. By following Christ's example, out of love, those around the Christian notice this and are more receptive when he (or she) hears the Gospel.

LESSON FIVE

PAUL SENDS TIMOTHY AND EPAPHRODITUS

Philippians 2:19-30

I. Timothy

A. Who was he? (*cf Acts 16-20*)

1) *Acts 16:1*--_____

2) *Acts 16:3*--_____

3) *1Tim. 4:12*--_____

other qualities (*1 Timothy 5:23, 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-15*)

B. Why was he being sent?

C. What was Paul's sacrifice in sending Timothy?

REALIZE--Do not become confused thinking Timothy alone of all of Paul's associates was a faithful brother. If, as is commonly accepted, this is the final letter written from prison, others may have been sent previous to the writing of this letter. These other associates of Paul could very likely have carried other letters for Paul (as they had no postal system) or ran errands! (Eph. 6:21, Col. 4:7)

Timothy (***Timwqeos***) means "honor of God"

II. Epaphroditus

A. Who is he?

1) **v. 25**--_____

2) **4:18**--_____

3) **vv. 27,30**--_____

B. Why was he sent back to Philippi?

1) **v 25**--_____

2) **vv 26, 28**--_____

3) not as a punishment--he risked his life for the Gospel! (**vv 29-30**)

C. What was Paul's sacrifice in sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi?

Why, do you suppose, is Epaphroditus' story told in Scripture? (*2 Tim. 3:16,17*)

In the case of Timothy we see someone willing to do what others had opted out of doing. We see Timothy as a selfless servant of the Gospel. In Epaphroditus we see a man willingly go in the place of his fellow brothers in Christ. Paul looks at the positive--those who do the task rather than the lagards. There is a difference with each man: Timothy was the only full-timer to do his duty. Epaphroditus went in the place of Christians eager to do something for the Gospel but were constrained by their calls from God (family, job, etc.). These constraints did not excuse them from sharing the Gospel--no doubt God showered the Philippians with many opportunities to witness where they were! If there is any doubt that Epaphroditus' trip was futile because of the illness, remember that Paul is joyful in having Epaphroditus with him! This fellow servant likely helped to cheer Paul and give Paul encouragement!

Epaphroditus (***Epafroditos***) means "charming."

LESSON SIX

CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

Philippians 3:1-11

I. What the flesh gains for us:

Paul uses a triad (a set of three phrases or words to explain something. Each phrase or word builds on the previous phrase or word to heighten intensity).

What are the three phrases which Paul uses in **verse 2**?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

Paul also uses a play on words, a play that borders on a pun. The twist that Paul uses is not picked up as fully in English. By changing the prefix Paul shows the unnecessary act of circumcision to be what it is to the Christian faith--a mutilation (literally=emasculatation).

mutilation=katatome (***katatome***)

circumcision=peritome (***peritome***)

EITHER/OR

EITHER we are saved by Christ through faith OR we rely upon ourselves. There can be no mixing the two! (*cf Eph. 2:1-10*)

WHY PAUL THOUGHT HE COULD BOAST

1. **Circumcised on the eighth day** (*Gen. 17:9-14, Ex. 4:24-26, Lev. 12:3, Josh. 5:1-9*)
2. **Of the nation of Israel**, God's chosen race to bear the Messiah (*Gen. 12:2-3, 15:4, 25:23, 49:8-12*)
3. **Of the tribe of Benjamin**, one of two tribes to return from Babylonian Captivity (*Nehemiah 11*) *In boasting, Paul seems to neglect the negative history of his tribe [cf. Judges 20]*
What other famous Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin? (*1 Samuel 9:1*)
4. **Hebrew of Hebrews**--Paul was fluent in the Hebrew language, rare when the spoken languages of the day were Greek, Aramaic and Latin. (*cf. John 19:19-22*).
5. **In regards to the Law: a Pharisee**, the strictest sect of the Jews (compare this with Luther's Augustinian order, which was the strictest Catholic order of his day).
6. **Zeal**--persecuted the church (*Acts 8:1; 9*) (notice also how Paul now views this "zeal" in *1 Tim. 1:13*)
7. "Faultless" before the Law: no one could blame him for any scandal.

Paul had these "brownie points" that he had earned. No one could out-boast him. Yet why does Paul consider the loss of these boastings a gain because of the Gospel?

II. What we have by grace from God

Paul in his spiritual blindness thought that he was advancing on heaven's ladder a rung at a time, and that much faster than anyone else. But in Christ he realizes his imperfection. So now what he has "gained" he throws overboard so that by clinging to his Savior he would have everlasting life.

cf. Romans 7:7-13--how does Paul now see that Law code he strove so hard to keep?

Cf. Romans 3:27-31--In what does Paul now boast?

cf. Romans 1:16-17--The Reformation's Declaration

Before his conversion, Paul myopically saw his own life, his own situation and his own shortcomings as he strived to keep the Law to earn salvation. Now Paul can expand his vision. He has seen how far short he had fallen. He sees that he is no better (nor any worse) than any fellow man he encounters. Knowing that he has been freed from sins domination, he can now joyfully and enthusiastically share this message of free grace.

Thought questions:

Does the Law still have a place in the Christian's life? If so, what is it?

In what ways can we today be tempted to boast as Paul boasted?

In what ways does the devil slyly sneak the Law around us?

LESSON SEVEN

PAUL PRESSES ON TOWARD THE GOAL

Philippians 3:12-4:1

In the last lesson, Paul's "good works" were for what he thought was his way to heaven—work righteousness. Since the Gospel has been revealed to Paul, his works are now the fruits of faith. Before, he considered himself the "model Jew" and a shoo-in for heaven. But now he realizes his imperfections and how great God's grace is.

What has Paul not obtained that he strives to obtain in **verse 12**?

3:13: Because of Jesus' atonement, all of our sins are forgiven and forgotten by God. Paul does not dwell on past glories nor, because he has received the Gospel, does he "breeze" through life with the attitude that he has it made. He continues to strive—there is still a struggle going on, both within (*Romans 7:14-25*) and outside (*Ephesians 6:10-20*).

Paul Uses Sports Terms

Forgetting What is behind, straining toward what is ahead:

In Paul's day the laurel wreath soon withered away and dried up. Today the pennants and memorabilia from last year's champions give way to the paraphernalia of a new champion if the crown is not successfully defended. Salaries and bonuses are soon spent. In the same way the Christian ought not to rest or take it easy, but to keep on running and striving in the Lord.

Press on toward the goal:

Any athlete or team without a goal will not go far. Goals spur individuals and teams to achieve championship play.

Is our goal to keep the Gospel to ourselves, or have we set goals for outreach?

Do we set goals for our faith-life?

3:15-16--Are all Christians the same? Explain:

How does Paul say we should regard each other?

3:17-4:1: Is Paul saying we should judge people? Explain:

How does Paul describe the Enemies of the Cross of Christ?

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

cf. Romans 1:18-32

The enemies' minds are on earthly things; the Christian's citizenship is in heaven! (*Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:33, 1 Timothy 6:19*)

Why would Paul use the term *citizenship*? (cf. Introduction of this study series).

LESSON EIGHT

PAUL BIDS A FOND FAREWELL

Philippians 4:2-23

I. Addresses attitude of the spirit

- A. Peace among Christians: What do verses **2-3** tell us about the church in Philippi? How is the church at Philippi much like your congregation?
- B. Rejoice in the Lord! What may cause the Philippians to lose their joy?

Why can they still be joyful even if the circumstances are less than favorable?

What message can we personally take home with us from these verses?

- C. What does Paul encourage the Philippians to think about and why?

What encouragement does Paul give us in today's world?

II. Addresses attitude of giving

- A. Gives thanks: for what and why?
- B. For what does Paul also commend the Philippians?
- C. How is this ironic? (**cf. Acts 16:16-40**)

Is our stewardship such that Paul would write the same about us? What may we learn from the church at Philippi?

What does Paul say God promises to the cheerful giver?

To God be the Glory!

III. Addresses congregation of people

- A. Leaves no one out, regardless of degree of faith, weakness, quarrels anyone has. Are our arms as open?
- B. Sends greetings from fellow Christians in Rome--universal body of believers! (compare how Paul concludes all of his letters!)

*God's people united
for God's service!*

Paul ends the letter as he began it:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.