

2. Philippians 1:1-30

One can only imagine the love that Paul felt for the church at Philippi, established from the beginning of the Gospel in Macedonia from the households of Lydia and the Jailor. Some say that Philippians is the most positive letter written by Paul. Evidently the church there had remained free from the blatant immorality and false teaching that beleaguered other congregations in Asia Minor and Greece.

Salutation and Prayer: Phil 1:1-11

Phil 1:1-3

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The salutation identifies the writers—Paul and Timothy—as servants of Christ Jesus. The word used for *servant* literally means slave. The same word is used for bond servants and slaves. For all Christians it reflects the complete submission to the will of the Lord.

Paul addresses the letter to three groups: saints, overseers, and deacons. The word *saints* comes from the root word from which we get holy and refers to all believers not just those who achieve a higher or special level of holiness, nor those who are designated saints by an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Phil 4:21 refers to the church as *all the saints*: “21 Greet **all the saints** in Christ Jesus. The brothers who are with me send greetings.” In 2 Thess 1:10, the word is translated holy people: “10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his **holy people** and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.” Of modern denominational practices completely pervert the meaning of the word *saint*.

The word *overseers* find wide spread abuse in denominational groups. The word used means overseer in Greek, and the word bishop in many translations means exactly the same thing—overseer. However, modern religions use the term Bishop as a proper noun to designate a special office in the hierarchy of offices in denominational administration. In the New Testament, three words refer to exactly the same office: elders, bishops, and pastors. In many passages they are used interchangeably. Acts 20:17 speaks of Paul sending for the elders: “17 From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the **elders** of the church.” However, he address them as overseers and pastors in Acts 20:27-29:

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**. Be **shepherds** of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

While instructing Titus, Paul uses elder and overseer interchangeably in Titus 1:5-9:

5 The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint **elders** in every town, . . . 7 Since **an overseer** is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.

Peter, likewise, used the word interchangeably in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

5 To the **elders** among you, I appeal as a fellow elder . . . 2 Be **shepherds** of God's flock that is under your care, serving as **overseers** – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.

Thus the earthly offices of the church begin and end in the local congregation. There is no church hierarchy beyond the congregation, which is the all-sufficient and singular unit of organization of God's church on earth. Any organization larger than the local congregation is unscriptural (synod presbyteries, dioceses, convention, conclaves, etc.); and any organization smaller than the local church is unscriptural (Sunday schools, women's auxiliaries, men's fellowships). All church activities and missions are under the auspices of the elders.

Finally, Paul addresses deacons, those who serve as their special duty within the congregation. The deacons have no oversight responsibilities; however many denominations have unscriptural boards of deacons running their affairs.

Grace (unmerited favor) and peace are from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's usual prayer includes these spiritual blessing that only come from above. Eph 1:3 teaches: "3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." James 1:17 adds: "17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Only from the Father and the son can one achieve this four-fold harmony of peace with God, with Christ, with one another, and with ourselves.

Phil 1:3-5

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Continuing the prayer for them, Paul focuses on their *partnership in the gospel*, which begins a recurring theme throughout the letter. Earlier version, such as the KJV and ASV, use the word *fellowship*. Today, fellowship has come to mean company and association, usually in a social sense such as in a church yak and snack or covered dish dinner. The literal meaning of the original word is mutual participation, a partnership. In Phil 4:14-17, Paul lays out an illustrative definition of their partnership with emphasis on sharing:

14 Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. 15 Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.

Paul's expression—"will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"—seems a hint toward encouraging them to continue their support.

Phil 1:7-8

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Verse 7 returns to the theme of participation by emphasizing their sharing in his chains and in his defending and confirming the gospel. Overarching the discussion of their participation is his heart felt love and affection for them.

Phil 1:7-11

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.

Paul's prayer uses a cause and resulting effects to call for knowledge and insight with the effect being an ability to discern what is best. The effect of this discernment is that they be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. The fruit of righteousness that comes from Jesus is another effect, and finally, the ultimate effect of all our service is the *glory and praise of God*.

Christ Is Preached: Phil 1:12-19

Phil 1:12-14

12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

Paul made even his imprisonment in Rome an opportunity for the gospel of Christ. In Phil 4:22, Paul noted that converts were made even in Caesar's household: "22 All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar's household." The gospel spread throughout the palace guard. For too years, he was able to preach without hindrance, according to Acts 28:30-31:

30 For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. 31 Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.

His imprisonment encouraged the brethren to speak courageously and fearlessly

Phil 1:15-19

15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

However, those, who were envious of Paul, preached Christ out of selfish ambition. Paul conclude that most important was the fact that Christ was preached. His imprisonment and those working against him would turn out to his deliverance.

To Live Is Christ

Phil 1:20-26

20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the

faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

What ever happened to Paul, even life or death, he was sure that it would exalt Christ. How many of us can say as Paul, "To die is gain." Paul harbored no lust to hold on to this life, being willing to live for Christ was an accommodation to his faith. For us, this passage shows the balance between the hope of heaven and our ability to press on for Christ in this present life, finding our joy in our faith and in the faith of our brethren.

A Manner Worthy of the Gospel of Christ: Phil 1:27-30

Phil 1:27-30

27 Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel 28 without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved – and that by God. 29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, 30 since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

The overriding command to the Philippians in this first chapter is to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel." We, as they, must stand as one man contending for the faith of the gospel. Jude 3 concurs with Paul: "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

We, as they, will have those who oppose us, and we are not to be frightened. They will be destroyed, and we will be saved. Paul gave similarly encouraging words to the church at Thessalonica in 2 Thess 1:5-10:

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

We must all struggle and suffer, even as Paul did, for our struggles and sufferings are blessings granted by Christ. Peter admonished those to whom he wrote 1 Peter 1:5-8:

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

A manner of life worthy of the gospel is a life without hiding and compromise, but one that is open and brave in the face of enemies. Those who are cowards have a special place reserved, according to Rev 21:8:

*8 But the **cowardly**, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*