

Through the Bible Book by Book

New Testament

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PHILIPPIANS

Theme: The Epistle to the Philippians has been called “the sweetest of all of Paul’s writings,” and “the most beautiful of all of Paul’s letters, in which he bares his very heart and every sentence glows with a love more tender than woman’s.”

Throughout the Epistle there breathes forth a spirit of love on the part of Paul for the Philippians; and their attitude toward him shows that his love was mutual. There are no controversial matters discussed. no severe rebukes, no aching heart on the part of Paul because of any serious disorders. There were some divisions, it is true, but they did not seem to be of any serious nature.

In dealing with them the apostle uses rare tact and judgment. Instead of hurling severe denunciations against the parties involved, he creates an atmosphere of unity and love by the frequent use of words suggesting fellowship and co-operation-such words as “**yoke fellow**,” “**fellow soldier**,” and like words suggesting the thought of unity and fellowship.

He creates an atmosphere of faith and worship by the repeated use of the name of the Lord, and makes them forget their petty differences as he paints for them a wonderful pen-picture of the One, who, though He was in the form of God, emptied Himself and humbled Himself for the salvation of others. In seeking for the theme we shall be guided by the frequent use of certain words.

A great scholar said the sum of Philippians is “I rejoice, rejoice ye.” The letter is full of joy. In every chapter, like the tinkle of silvery bells sound forth the words “**joy**,” “**rejoice**,” “**rejoicing**.” In spite of imprisonment and in spite of the fact that he is resting in the shadow of the executioner’s block, the apostle can rejoice.

We shall sum up the theme as follows: the joy of Christian life and service, manifested under all circumstances.

Occasion for Writing: Epaphroditus, the messenger of the Philippian church, and the one entrusted with a gift to the apostle, fell sick on his arrival at Rome. On his recovery he returned to Philippi and Paul took advantage of this circumstance to send a letter of thanks and exhortation to the church about whose condition Epaphroditus had notified Paul.

When Written: About 64 A. D. during Paul’s first imprisonment at Rome.

Contents:

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II. Three Examples of Self-Denial. Ch. 2.

III. Warnings Against Error. Ch. 3.

IV. Concluding Exhortations. Ch. 4.

I. Paul's Situation and Labor at Rome. Ch. 1.

1. Paul's salutation (1:1-11).
2. His joyfulness in prison (vv. 12-30).

(a) *His joyfulness in spite of bonds* (vv. 12-14).

His imprisonment has turned out to be the furtherance of the Gospel. The news of his imprisonment and preaching has been spread all over the military quarters and from thence to other parts of the city. The Christians at Rome have been inspired to evangelistic effort by his boldness.

(b) *His joyfulness in spite of those who, in the spirit of party are preaching the gospel from insincere motives* (probably the Judaizers) (15-18). But since Christ is being proclaimed, the apostle will rejoice.

(c) *His joyfulness in spite of the prospect of death* (vv. 19-30).

It matters little to the apostle whether he lives or dies, for in either case his desire is to glorify Christ. It would be better for him to die and be with Christ; yet he would rather live and finish his work, and further the faith of the Philippians. He has hopes that he will be released and so be able to visit them. But whether he sees them or not, he desires that they walk worthy of the Gospel, proclaiming its message in spite of persecution.

II. Three Examples of Self-denial. Ch. 2.

Paul begins with an exhortation to unity, which was in danger of being marred by some minor differences among the believers (vv. 1-2). This unity was to be effected on their part by the spirit of humility and self-denial (vv. 3,4). **“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”**

The apostle then mentions three examples of those whose principle of life was sacrifice for others.

1. *The example of Christ* (2:5-16), who, though He was on equality with God, emptied Himself of His glory, stripped Himself of His power and humbled Himself even to the death of the cross for others.

The apostle then adds a threefold exhortation:

(a) An exhortation to perseverance in the faith (vv. 12, 13).

- (b) An exhortation to obedience (vv. 14-16).
- (c) An exhortation to missionary activity (v. 16).

2. *The example of Timothy* (2:17-24). He was a minister who fully exemplified Paul's exhortation in verse 4. Compare vv. 20, 21.

3. *The example of Epaphroditus* (2:25-30).

In this Christian, we have an example of one who freely poured out his life for others. Having been brought nigh unto death through overwork, he was troubled, not because of his own affliction but because the news of his sickness had caused sorrow to others.

III. Warnings Against Error. Ch. 3.

1. *A warning against legalism* (3:1-14).

To one not acquainted with these teachers it would seem unduly severe to refer to them as “**dogs**” and “**evil-workers,**” but Paul saw in their teaching of salvation by the externals of the law something that would undermine Christian life and faith.

Accordingly he denounces the Judaizers as enemies of the gospel. Paul had as much to boast of in the way of social and religious privileges as these Judaizing teachers (vv. 4-6), but he has rejected all those things and counts them as refuse (vv. 7, 8) that he may win Christ and be found in Him having the righteousness, not of the law, but of faith (vv. 9, 10). His justification and sanctification by faith in Christ has not lulled him into a careless security, for he still presses toward the goal of that perfection which will be consummated at the first resurrection (vv. 11-14).

2. *An exhortation to unity in doctrine* (vv. 15, 16).

Those who are spiritually mature are to take this same attitude toward Christian perfection mentioned by Paul, and to agree on it. If there are minor differences, in non-essentials, God will make even these clear. These verses reveal the subject that was causing divisions among the Philippians; namely, the subject of Christian perfection.

3. *A warning against Antinomianism* (lawlessness) (vv. 17-19).

From the Jewish side the church was exposed to the danger of legalism.

From the Gentile side, to the danger of antinomianism, a doctrine which taught that the believer was under no law whatsoever. Adherence to this teaching often resulted in shipwreck of faith and purity.

4. *An exhortation to holiness* (vv. 20,21). They are to maintain a heavenly walk, for they have a heavenly hope - a hope of glorification at the coming of the Lord.

IV. Concluding Exhortations. Ch. 4.

1. Exhortations to:

- (a) Steadfastness. v. 1.
- (b) Like-mindedness. v. 2.
- (c) Co-operation with Christian workers. v. 3.
- (d) Rejoicing. v. 4.
- (e) Forbearance and gentleness. v. 5.
- (f) Freedom from anxiety vv. 6, 7.
- (g) Holy-mindedness. v. 8.
- (h) Practical Christianity. v. 9.

2. Thanks to the believers for their gifts. vv. 10-20.

3. Salutations and benedictions. vv. 21-23.

~ end of Philippians ~

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