

Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Session Two April 1, 2020

Philippians 1:1-18

Philippians was a personal letter to the church at a Philippi, not a circular letter intended to be passed around to other Christian churches (for example, the letter to Ephesus).

Epaphroditus was believed to have delivered this letter to the Philippians and was intended to answer any initial questions that the church might have from the letter that Paul wrote.

Opening: Thanks and Praise

Opening Thought – Who in your life are you thankful for right now and why?

Vs. 1 – Paul includes Timothy in the opening greeting in his letter. Why?

Did Timothy help write this letter? Maybe.

What other reason would Paul include Timothy?

It is very likely that Paul was going to send Timothy to Philippi shortly to assist the church as it grew – a very common practice that Paul undertook with the church's Paul founded. This introduction helped "break the ice" for Timothy, and also give Timothy legitimacy when he arrived.

Notice Paul and Timothy's designation as "bond-servants" or "slaves" of Jesus Christ.

Status was an important designation back in biblical times, even for Paul – a citizen of Rome! Even now, though, he took on this label as more important – a "slave" of Christ – role reversal, the most important title of all!

Early Church Structure? "Overseers" and "Deacons"?

It is very interesting that even in the first century church we are starting to see the emergence of church hierarchy. While we can't say what the specific duties were at the church at Philippi, there must have been some designation between the two for Paul to distinguish between them.

Vs. 2 – 6 – Grace and Peace – A Summary of the Gospel?

Paul repeatedly begins his letters with this two word designation, Grace and Peace. What is the significance? Is it like saying, "Dear _____"?

For Paul, "grace" sums up the whole movement of the gospel, a gift of the one true God through Christ, with the result being the peace of God for all those who believe – so "Grace and Peace".

Gives Thanks for their Partnership – Paul and Philippi

From the beginning, Paul had a fellowship – a “koinonia” with this group of believers – this fellowship is active, an energy, it is transforming – resulting in the church sending Paul money while in prison, praying for him; resulted in Paul praying for them, sending them Epaphroditus, later Timothy.

Why is this idea of “koinonia” so important for the church today?

“The Day of Christ Jesus/Lord” (vs. 6) – Old Testament imagery

OT idea of when everything would be made right – when the Messiah would come initially (Paul saying Jesus Christ has come), then when he would come again to make all things new. Paul talks about this again at the end of Chapter 3. Paul is telling Philippi that God will keep working in them until this day comes. (Interestingly, Paul hardly mentions the Holy Spirit in the letters to the Philippians at all. He alludes to it, but hardly mentions it.)

Vs. 7 – 8 – Why is Philippi so Special to Paul? “In My Heart”

“In my heart” – In our Hallmark age, this may be a common thing to hear. However back in Paul’s time, this would be very uncommon. This speaks to the depth of love Paul has for this church. Remember, Paul hasn’t spent that much time with the church at Philippi.

Word for “deep love”, literally can be translated as “guts”. Paul “longs to be with them”. The “love” he has for them is “agape” – deepest love.

Vs. 9 – 11 – Paul’s Prayer for the Church at Philippi

“Overflowing Love” – Love grows not just for Paul, but for one another (remembering the diversity that lies within their congregation and their community).

Love must be accompanied by knowledge and discernment (wisdom) – not just give into it! Balance! New way of thinking in this larger Greco-Roman world (Messianic thinking). Christians are challenged to reflect this divine love in the world today until the Day of Christ comes – fruits of righteousness (fruits of the spirit) – vs. 11.

How do we as Christians reflect this divine love in the world today?

How do we as Christians reflect this divine love in this “new” world today?

Philippians 1:1-11

A Small working model of how of prayerful sharing in God’s work should look like.

Partnership – Paul/Philippians – Thankfulness – Praying – Love – Discernment

How does Paul’s concept of love challenge how we normally think of love?

What would happen if we thought of partnership like Paul did?

Who were the key people in your life who informed you of Jesus?

Paul transitions in Chapter 1 to address some of the rumors that the Church at Philippi may have been hearing regarding Paul's imprisonment and others preaching the Gospel.

The Emphasis is POSITIVE – Paul is displaying how to think with a Messianic Mindset!

Philippians 1:12 – 18

Vs. 12 – 14 – All for the Best! – Everything is Helping the Gospel

Circumstances/Imprisonment – Either in Rome or Ephesus, most likely; Who is the Imperial Guard? Every major city that Rome is ruling, there was an Imperial/Praetorian Guard. Paul's goal was for everywhere to hear the message of Christ – not just the minor cities, but even the Roman soldiers, the hallways of the Roman empire. So even the Roman prisons are talking about it.

Paul's imprisonment has also encouraged other Christians to speak out! If Paul was free, maybe the other believers would sit back and say, "Oh, let's let Paul do it." But now that he is in prison, they are emboldened to get out and spread the gospel message without fear (vs. 14). This brings Paul JOY while he is in prison.

Vs. 15 - 17 – Proclaiming out of "Envy and Strife" – Who? Why? The Debate?

Who are these individuals that Paul are referring to that are proclaiming the gospel out of envy and strife, out of selfish ambition, rather than pure motives?

1. Rival Christian Missionaries – opposing Paul's ministry, like those that came in to the church at Galatia.
2. Roman Citizens – believed in Roman culture, many gods – in reality they were speaking out against Paul's belief and Paul's God, at the same time they were spreading Paul's message

In reality, we just don't know who Paul is referring to, but what we do know is that the word was getting out and Paul was REJOCING about it. Paul was telling the church at Philippi to be happy about it as well.

Another way Christ has been proclaimed from a "negative point of view" and it turned against them – Pontius Pilate at the cross – "King of the Jews" over Jesus' head. Pilate was mocking Jesus with the title, but in reality, he was proclaiming the truth.

Vs. 15b – 16 – “goodwill” and “love” – Not all that were spreading the message of Christ were using negative connotations; many were defending the faith as positive for society – not subversive for the Roman Empire.

1. Christianity builds up community (koinonia) – fellowship.
2. Makes people better citizens.
3. Christians do not break the law – do not murder, do not steal, etc.
- The only thing they do not do is worship Caesar! (Instead God!)

In Christian history, we really start seeing this in Christian literature 100 years later where Christianity plays an important role in the Roman Empire, eventually Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 337 CE.

Vs. 17 – “Proclaim” – Greek word used here is the word for “announce”, not the same as preach the good news, which is often used throughout Paul’s letters. Paul seems to intentionally use both to make sure that the Philippians understood the clear distinction between the two.

Vs. 18 – The End Result: The King is Announced! – REJOICE!

When Christ is proclaimed, things happen! Even when I am in prison! I am rejoicing because God is working, and you should rejoice with me!

Philippians 1:12-18

The Gospel is the Main Event – When It is Proclaimed, Things Happen – Paradoxically, Because I am in Prison, Christ is Being Proclaimed to All

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS...

Paul faced some difficult circumstances and God still advance the gospel. How might God be using the difficult circumstances we are facing to advance the gospel?

How would reframing the current circumstances the way Paul did help you see who God might be trying to reach through you?

In what ways do we tend to leave ministry to “the professionals” rather than seeing our lives and circumstances as occasions for ministry?