

Valley Bible Church - Bible Survey

Bible Survey Lesson 75: The Book of Philippians

Introduction:

Ask a person, "What makes you happy?" and you will get a myriad of picturesque responses: Birthday or Christmas parties with laughter, gifts, and noise. Walking on a quiet beach with family or with the one you love most. Vacationing on a cruise boat or in your favorite exotic place. Sitting among an appreciative crowd at a really great movie or a live performance. *Some strange person could even say reading a good book.*

Or, some really weird person might say being surrounded by books, notes, outlines, and a computer studying to teach the Word.

Different things make people happy, but ***everybody wants to be happy.***

Just look around and you will see that being happy is a life long pursuit: People spend money, collect things, try new experiences, use people, take artificial stimuli, anything to get a little slice of happiness. But, when toys rust, money is lost, friends forsake, health deteriorates, loved ones die, and the party's over, what then? Sadness, depression?

The contrast to happiness which, by definition, depends on happenings; people, things, or circumstances, is JOY. *Joy is a quiet, confident assurance that God's love and work is active in our lives.* Joy depends on Jesus rather than people, eternal rather than temporal things, and purpose rather than circumstances.

Happiness depends on happenings, but joy depends on Christ.

Happiness depends on circumstances, but joy depends on relationship.

In Philippians 4:4 Paul says, "*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!*" or as one really fine translation puts it, "*Always be full of joy in the Lord, I say it again, rejoice!*" **Philippians is a book of joy!**

The Author:

Because of both internal and external evidence it is almost universally accepted by New Testament scholars that Paul is the author of this book along with the other three prison epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon.

The arguments for its writing in Rome during Paul's house arrest under the care of Caesar's Praetorian Guard (Acts 28), are the same as those we discussed in our study of Ephesians.

The time of its writing is an interesting question. Paul's belief that his case would soon be decided, bringing death or release (2:23-24), points to the letter to the Philippians being written toward the end of his two-year imprisonment and places its writing at late AD. 61 or 62.

There are also references to two trips by Epaphroditus between Philippi and Rome, a distance of 800 miles taking 4 to 6 weeks, making the late dating necessary.

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The fact that Luke is not mentioned and had probably left Paul by this time is another indication of its late writing. He was not likely to leave unless he thought Paul was about to be released.

The City: Refer to map of Paul's journeys in the back of your Bible.

Philippi was founded by Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, in 358 BC. He named it after himself so we need not wonder where Alexander got his gigantic ego.

Philip coveted the city because it was surrounded by natural fresh water springs and had several nearby gold mines. He developed a modern water system and used the gold to enhance the temples and public buildings in the city.

Philippi was a part of the Roman province of Macedonia by the second century BC. It became an official Roman colony in 42 BC. In 30 BC, Octavian made it a retirement colony for Roman army officers assuring its position as a prominent, independent city with much tax money flowing into it for expansion and development.

Its non-Roman citizens became very "Roman" and took pride in the fact that they were granted all the rights and privileges of Roman citizens. They adopted Latin as their official language, accepted Roman customs, and modeled the city plan and government on that of Rome.

The Church

The church at Philippi was the first one founded in Europe by Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke, on Paul's second missionary journey in AD. 51 (Acts 16). They went to Macedonia in response to a cry for help (Acts 16:9)

It looks like the Jewish population was so small they couldn't even have a synagogue, but some religious women met outside the city to pray. Paul preached to those women and Lydia a wealthy merchant of expensive dyed cloth became a believer. It is probable that the first church meetings were held in her home. (Acts 16)

Another convert was a once demon-possessed, fortune-telling, slave girl whom God set free through Paul and Silas. Later, after being jailed and released by an earthquake, they led the local jailer and his entire household to Jesus. (Acts 16)

Tertullian, the church leader and historian reported that the Roman leaders were greatly disturbed when they found Christians in positions of authority in the government, and even in the homes and families of the Emperor himself.

As you can see many, probably most, of the members of the Philippian church were Gentiles. What an interesting church it must have been in the midst of an evil, perverse, and idolatrous city where religious intolerance and opposition were the norm.

Nearly five years later Paul visited Philippi on his third trip, both as he went out and on his way back home. The church had gladly contributed financially to Paul at least twice so that he would be free from having to work or depend on other churches. They also took part in his collection for the needy church at Jerusalem.

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He obviously had frequent and loving contact with them, so, when they heard he was a prisoner in Rome, they sent Epaphroditus with a delegation to encourage and bring him a personal gift to meet his needs.

The Purpose:

Paul's relationship with the Philippian church was a love relationship of spiritual father to his children. He called them, "*my joy and my crown*"(4:1).

- It is a very positive letter. Paul wanted to:
- Thank them for their generous gift.
- Explain why he was sending Epaphroditus back to them.
- Inform them of his circumstances in Rome (God was blessing).
- Prepare them for a visit from Timothy and perhaps from himself.

But, just as any father must, Paul had to deal with a couple of problems:

- They needed work in the area of rivalries and ambitions, unity.
- He needed to warn them about false teachers.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Paul is not writing from Caesar's palace nor from a "five-star" hotel, not even from a friend's fine home. Paul is under house arrest, chained to a guard day and night, waiting for a trial that could easily cost him his life.

Paul is depressed. *NOT!* He tells them in Philippians 4:11-- "*Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstance I am.*"

This is a prime example of joy instead of happiness, relationship rather than circumstances. Remembering this as we survey the letter will add power to its message.

I. EXPERIENCES (Chapter 1)

Paul's first expressions of joy are tied to his personal relationship with the members of the church at Philippi as partners in the spreading of the kingdom of God and his relationship with Christ in the ministry of preaching the gospel to everyone he meets.

A. Partnership (1-11)

Paul is greeting all the saints, those set apart unto God, and the overseers and deacons, the leaders, many of whom he personally trained. But, he is doing more:

He is joyfully and prayerfully remembering their shared ministry, "*in view of your participation in the gospel from the first until now.*" and fellowship in the gospel (v 5).

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Because they share God's grace with Paul, he is confident that God is continuing to work in their lives to help them to abound in richer and deeper spiritual understanding, love and righteousness so they will be blameless when Christ comes. (vv. 6-10)

B. Preaching (12-30)

Satan and circumstances may be able to keep Paul from traveling but they cannot keep him from teaching.

When Paul talks about his confident joy in the midst of trying situations there is at least one man at Philippi who knows that he speaks the truth. That man was the jailer who had learned that neither intimidation, beating, nor chains could quell the excitement of Paul's triumph and joy in Christ. He dated his conversion to the night Paul and Silas sang hymns of joy in the Philippian city jail.

How does Paul do that? He realizes that because of his relationship with Jesus his "*circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel,*" (v 12):

1. The Word is spread among the royal guard. (v. 13)
2. New converts have courage to witness also. (vv. 14-18)
3. Paul has a healthy view of death and ministry. (vv. 19-26)
4. The church can stand firm under persecution. (vv. 27-30)

Or, as he puts it in verse 21, "*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*"

II. EXAMPLES (Chapter 2)

This chapter starts with "If therefore" indicating a link between the last paragraph of chapter 1 and the beginning of chapter 2. It is a bridge between the two.

In the former he instructs them, "*conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*" and explains that means being united and courageous in the face of opposition. In the latter he goes on to explain that the way to walk in unity is through humility and this would indeed make Paul's joy complete (v. 2) True unity will reveal itself in an authentic, selfless, servant spirit as demonstrated to perfection by Jesus Himself.

A. Christ (1-18)

Jesus' emptying of Himself, the kenosis or incarnation, is the basis for Paul's entire argument as to how a member of the body ought to function in relation to all other members.

1. Pattern (1-11)

Jesus existed in the very nature of God and yet made Himself nothing, not giving up His deity but His heavenly glory, rights, and privileges. He lived a life of an obedient bond-servant and humbled Himself even to the point of dying a criminal's death on a cross as a substitute sacrifice for sinners.

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He was, however, glorified in his resurrection and ascension and *"God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him, the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (vv. 9-11)

The implication is clear. Those who follow in His steps of humility will experience a transformation of conduct and character as well as a future in the presence of God.

2. Practice (12-18)

Paul's call to unity involves them in, *"working out their own salvation with fear and trembling"* (v 12) following Christ's example of service and unity as a witnesses to a perverse and crooked generation.

B. Co-workers (19-30)

Jesus, of course was the prime example of a servant spirit. Paul has already discussed his own ministry which certainly displayed the mind of Christ. Now he commends two of his coworkers, whom they already knew, as further examples of that attitude.

1. Timothy (19-24)

First he reminded the Philippians that Timothy's service was an example of true, total, and tested commitment to Christ. He was always ready to be uprooted and moved to carry out the spread of the gospel and training of the church. In fact, it is interesting to compare these verses with the former verses to see how he patterns his life on that of Jesus.

2. Epaphroditus (25-30)

Next, he told of how Epaphroditus remained steadfast and faithful even when he was *"sick to the point of death"* (v 27). He, Paul said, *"For the work of Christ, risked his life to complete what was deficient in their service to him"* (v. 30).

In Paul's usual style, he uses the last two chapters to make a practical application of the theology he had taught in the first two.

What was that theology?

1. Believers need to take their joy from a relationship with Jesus rather than depending on persons, things, or circumstances.
2. Believers should be unified in mission and ministry.
3. Believers should have a servant spirit patterned after the work of Jesus.

III. EXHORTATIONS (Chapter 3)

Meanwhile, back at some familiar topical territory, Paul writes the *"same thing again"* (v 1), a basic lesson he has gone over again and again. There is great danger in turning aside to depend on legalistic standards rather than on the grace of God in Christ.

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A. Legalism (1-16)

Paul labels the Judaizers (who taught circumcision was necessary for salvation) *dogs* (the term they used for the Gentiles), *evil workers*, and *false circumcision*, (meaning mutilators) (v. 2).

How dare he be so crude and confrontive? He shows, by reviewing his life in the Jewish religion, that he had the right to expose false Judaism. He was, after all, the model pious Jew.

Paul explained, again, that true circumcision involves faith in Jesus, not in the flesh. He offered himself as a perfect example of one who, in his past, trusted in human achievement instead of the justifying grace of God and all-sufficiency of Christ.

Now, Paul's object of joy, subject of concentration, **focus**, is to "*know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to his death.*" (v. 10)

In contrast, like an athlete who does not waste time or lose stride by looking back, Paul exerted all his energy to reach the finish line of Christian maturity.

B. Lawlessness (17-21)

At the same time, Paul strongly denounces the false teaching of careless living. He reminds them that they are, in fact, citizens of heaven. Since Philippians were so proud of their Roman citizenship they would understand that he is saying live in a way to bring glory rather than shame to their true country.

IV. ENABLEMENT (Chapter 4)

In chapter 4 Paul expands on the results of practicing a Christ-like servant attitude as well as God's provision for a life of peace brought about by practicing the presence of Christ.

A. Peace with Others (4:1-3)

1. "Therefore" refers us to chapter 3. So, in relation to the legalists and lawless, "*Stand firm in the Lord, my beloved*" (V1).
2. Euodia and Syntyche need to practice the harmony, unity, and service as presented in chapter 2. More than that, Clement, and the rest of the body, the fellow workers, need to be involved in helping them to live in harmony. Perhaps they need church discipline.

B. Peace with Self (4:4-9)

Inner peace comes from a right attitude, a right mindset, and right actions:

1. Right Attitude (4-7)

Rejoicing (v 4)--"*In the Lord*" indicates again the sphere in which a believer's joy exists, not related to people, things or circumstances but based on an unchanging relationship to a powerful and sovereign Lord.

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Gentleness (v 5)--Since *"God is near"* we don't have to let worry about problems keep us from being gentle since he has the power to act, bringing peace to our hearts and minds. When we think we have to do it all ourselves, we get tough.

Freedom from anxiety (vv. 6-7)--We can be *"anxious for nothing"* through prayer to God (He is a loving Heavenly Father) and through supernatural peace, *"which surpasses all comprehension"* and gives us peace of heart and mind.

2. Right Mindset (8)

This is a Biblical view of positive thinking, dwell on good things.

3. Right Actions (9)

Right thinking breeds right actions. By learning from Paul's teaching and receiving Paul's example then practicing those truths, *"the peace of God shall be with you."*

C. Peace with Circumstances (4:10-23)

Paul ends his letter rejoicing and giving thanks for the Philippians' generous care of him both in his times of affliction (v. 14) and in his present imprisonment. He is at peace with his circumstances whether in prison, beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, or hounded by enemies.

READ PHILIPPIANS 4:12 AND 13

Paul sees their generosity toward him as a sign of their spiritual health. From first to last they have shared their resources with him, even at great cost to themselves.

Paul shared his attitude toward material things urging them to realize that, *"my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*(v. 19)

Even Paul's benediction and greetings are special and apropos to his teaching. In the midst of trying circumstances, under house arrest and chained to a member of Caesar's Praetorian Guard, God's work is evident. He sends a greeting from all the saints, *"especially those of Caesar's household."* (v. 22) The beat goes on. The Word spreads. Men are saved.

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Lessons:

1. Joy is a quiet, confident assurance that God's love and work is active in our lives. Joy depends on our relationship with Christ.
2. Humility, as demonstrated by Jesus, is the key to developing a servant spirit and fostering unity in the body.
3. Peace comes from a right attitude, a right mindset, and right actions.

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