

Paul's Letter to the Philippians Lesson 1

[Philip. 1:1-4:23](#) Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: [2](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.



Like the letter to the Colossians, Timothy is with Paul in Rome. Paul is still in chains, tethered to house arrest within his own rented home. He is writing to the Philippians who are in the city of Philippi, in the province of Macedonia. Today it would be part of Greece. Four hundred years before the town was known as "Crenidas," but it was changed to Philippi when Philip of Macedonia made it his capital. This was the father of Alexander the Great. The city had a rich heritage long before the little church was begun there on one of the missionary journeys.

It is interesting that he is writing to the overseers and deacons. In today's thinking, one might think that if he were writing to the leadership, he would be writing also to the "elders," but this is not the case. He is writing to the overseers or pastors in today's language and the deacons. The deacons were selected to make sure the needs of the widows and orphans were being met as well as being helpers to the pastors. They held no other authority in that day. The overseer was the shepherd of the flock and in charge of the church. Paul is writing to this great church with much joy and happiness. This is the church that had helped him more than once both spiritual and monetarily.



Gangitis River Philippi apparently had only a small number of Jewish inhabitants and no synagogue. Consequently Shabbat worship was held outside the city on the Gangitis River. Here Paul met a group of women to whom he preached the gospel. Lydia, a merchant trading purple cloth, believed Paul's message and was baptized with members.

Acropolis - Founded in the 4th c. B.C. and renamed after King Philip of Macedon, Philippi was an important outpost on the Egnation Way. Two important battles were fought here in 42 B.C. resulting in the defeat of Cassius and Brutus, conspirators in the assassination of Julius Caesar. After these battles, Philippi became a Roman colony encompassing 700 square miles.





Excavations - Archaeological work has revealed a large and well-preserved forum, a theater, the alleged jail of Paul and several Byzantine churches, including one of the earliest churches known in Greece. The number of churches in the city in the Byzantine period indicate Philippi's importance to Christians at this time. A series of earthquakes apparently destroyed many of the buildings and probably contributed to the city's decline.

Egnatian Way - The Via Egnatia was built beginning in 145 B.C. and at its greatest extent connected Byzantium with the Adriatic ports. This route was Rome's primary artery to the east and Philippi was an important outpost along the road. The Egnatian Way made it easier for Rome to move troops throughout the empire and it was the route that Paul traveled on from Neapolis to Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia and Thessalonica.



Philippian Jail - This traditional place of Paul and Silas's imprisonment is of dubious authenticity, but it remembers the attack on these men and their subsequent flogging and imprisonment. In the course of the night, a violent earthquake shook the prison and the jailer feared that all might have escaped. After learning that none had fled, the Philippian jailer put his faith in Christ and was baptized with his family.

Latrines - Public bathrooms were not uncommon in ancient Roman cities, but this one is a good illustration for Paul's reference to *scubalon*, or human waste. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (3:8 NIV).



Philip. 1:³I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, ⁵in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. ⁸For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

When Paul was at Philippi, his treatment by the people of the town was nothing short of evil. While there, Paul saw very little fruit, yet his labors would not fail, for after he left, the fruit began to find root and grow into the church Paul was now writing to with great excitement. The church in Philippi was overflowing with grace, comforts, gifts, and benefits for Paul. They had done much for him and their work would not go unnoticed by the Lord. Paul wanted them to know that their work of grace will one day be perfected when Jesus Christ appeared to them. So too, we must always be confident that God will perform a good work in us, not in our outward appearance, but in the new creation that we have become when we put our trust in His saving grace. The people of Philippi were very dear to Paul and they had suffered for their loyalty many times. When you think of it, those who have suffered should be dear to one another. Christ suffered and so have we! Christ is dear to us, and we are dear to him. If you abound in the grace of Christ, then it is only right that you abound even more in that same grace. Paul wants the Philippians to approve the things which are excellent! What is excellent? It is the word of God and the truths of the laws of Christ. These things are excellent! The things which honor God the most are also the things that benefit us the most. Just a smidgen of knowledge and love should never be enough for those who belong to Christ. We should only be satisfied with an abundance of love and knowledge in our lives.

Philip. 1:¹²Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, ¹³so that my imprisonment in *the cause* of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, ¹⁴and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. ¹⁵Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will; ¹⁶the latter *do it* out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; ¹⁷the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. ¹⁸What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, and I will rejoice. ¹⁹For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame

in anything, but *that* with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

Everything happens in this life for a purpose and Paul's imprisonment was no different. Paul's imprisonment made him known to all the high powered leaders and all the paupers on the street throughout the world. He was there because of the gospel that he preached and he would suffer for that stance. So-called friends would betray him. Some preached out of envy, causing Paul great grief and strife. These afflictions would oppress even the mightiest of men. We should not desire to honor men. Neither should we desire to escape the cross. All we should desire to do is to hold fast to Christ, avoiding all the temptation, all the contempt, and all the affliction that comes our way. Put it all in Christ's hands and He will mold us into servants for His ultimate glory. However we must labor, and it is an honor to serve Him.

Philip. 1:²¹For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; ²⁴yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵And convinced of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

If you are a man of the world without Christ, death is a great loss! In death you will lose all the comforts and pleasures of this world and gain only torment and misery. But Paul was not without Christ and his future was not filled with eternal torment and misery. His was filled with joy and eternal life with his Lord. Paul's difficulty was not found in his living here or living in heaven. There is absolutely no comparison between the two and Paul absolutely knew the difference. For Paul, living on earth and in heaven were both wonderful things. Here, he is living for Christ. There, he will be living with Christ. Whether here or there does not matter, it is all in Christ! Paul's faith was so strong and mighty that the Divine grace which he had experienced allowed him to be willing to die. In dying he would shed once and for all, all the sin, temptation, and death for evermore. But because of this, like Paul, we should have all the more reason to stay and share the reason for the hope that lies ahead. We should be willing to work for the Lord here, sharing the riches of His mercies with those who need to hear. We live for Christ here until He decides it's time to depart this world.

Philip. 1:²⁷Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ²⁸in no way alarmed by *your* opponents-- which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God. ²⁹For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, ³⁰experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

Because we belong to Christ, we must live our lives every day subject to the gospel and depending upon it and its promises. For the Philippians, they could not get away from the fact that Paul would know of their worthiness whether he remained on earth or traveled on to heaven. What are they to do about their opponents then? Faith in Christ is the bond that

binds Christians together. There must be oneness of heart among Christians even though there may be differences about many things. If suffering comes for our stand in Christ, then it is a gift. But our salvation should never be tied to physical afflictions as is the case with many who seek to punish the body with whips and starvations. Salvation is only from God. Salvation presents to us both patience and faith to endure wrong when wrong is done.

Philip. 2:¹If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, ²make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ⁴do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Oneness must be paramount among the Christians. Oneness means being of the same mind! But Paul does not tell them just to be like-minded, they must also be lowly-minded. To be lowly-minded means that we put others first, before ourselves, looking out for the interest of others, then our own interest last. To live in the kindness of God, share kindness with others. To live in the compassion of God, have compassion for others. Put away the pride, stop the busy body tactics, and find the inward peace that comes from like-mindedness and lowly-mindedness.

Philip. 2:⁵Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE SHOULD BOW, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Do you see the example of our Lord? We must imitate Him so we can truly experience the benefit of His death on the cross. Christ had two natures! He was both Divine and human. He was both God and man.

John 1:1-5 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. ⁴In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. ⁵And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

It was not robbery for Christ to be equal with God and accept the worship of men because He was God. Yet, He took on human nature to be like us in all things except sin. Can you imagine

how it was that He left glory to be in this world? It is to the absolute glory of God for everyone to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

John 5:22-23 "For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, ²³in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Philip. 2:¹²So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure. ¹⁴Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, ¹⁶holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may have cause to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. ¹⁷But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. ¹⁸And you too, *I urge you*, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.

Don't get tripped up on the phrase "work out your own salvation" for you can not save yourself, nor can you do anything to earn your salvation. It is a free gift of God just because you gave yourself to Him. In today's terms this phrase simply means to "carry on with the work of your salvation." There are instructions as to how "saved" people are to live from the moment of their conversion. As babes they are to begin to grow in the knowledge of the Lord, putting away all immorality, impurity, greed, covetousness, etc. Their language is to change from worldly speech to Godly speech and they are to set their minds on things above, living just as if they were already in glory with Christ. Because of this, they must carry out the work of their salvation here on earth with "fear and trembling." It is a scary thing to do, for we must always be on our guard to make sure we are living for Christ, in His will, and in His purpose.

¹⁹But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ²⁰For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ²²But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serving* his father. ²³Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things *go* with me; ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly.

Paul is not going to reveal much about his circumstances in this letter. He still does not know what will come of him in the coming days. The language of the text implies that something is possibly scheduled to happen soon and when it does, he will send his beloved son in the faith, Timothy to tell them of Paul's welfare and return to tell Paul of the welfare of the Philippian church members.

²⁵But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; ²⁶because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ²⁷For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*. ²⁹Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; ³⁰because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Who was this Epaphroditus? He is only mentioned in this letter by this name. However, because of the use of the phrase "he was longing for you all" it is quite possible that this is the Epaphras spoken of in Paul's letter to the Philemon and the Colossians, both written around the time of this imprisonment. In Colossians, Paul lists those who are in his service and with him in Rome. Epaphras is there but here is no Epaphroditus. The same goes for Philemon. Epaphras was well known to the church in Colossae because he had probably started the church in Philemon's home. Epaphras had longed for the Colossians just as Epaphroditus was longing for the Philippians. Being well known, it is possible that a shorter "nick" name was used when writing to his home church. But to Philippi he was not as well known, or should we say, "known of." Therefore when he was sent by Paul to Philippi, his "formal" legal name was used. It is my opinion that this is one and the same person because of this evidence and much more within the letters.

Notice that Epaphroditus was willing to go to Philippi so he could bring comfort to those who were worried about him and his sickness. He wanted to show that the mercies of God had brought him health. Paul wanted them to have great respect for him because of what he had gone through. But notice also that that which brought him illness, sickness, or some sort of trauma, was because of his service in the "work of Christ." Look at it this way: Epaphroditus was somehow hurt on the job in the ministry, and that injury almost killed him. Paul could have said it this way, "Hold him in high regard because he was injured in the line of duty." Whether it be on the streets of a far away country or in downtown USA, when a person is hurt in the line of duty sharing the gospel, they are to be esteemed with a high regard. If they are injured helping the poor and needed, stricken and distressed, sharing the gospel with their actions rather than their words, they are to be esteemed with a high regard. When they are disabled building a structure in which many lives will be changed for Christ, they are to be esteemed in high regard. Their lives have been changed forever and the Christian church should care for them because of what they did, what they experienced, what they gave up, what they suffered, all for the cause of Christ.

Paul's Time Line

5 AD	Paul is born as an Israelite in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 22:3; Phil 3:5)
5 AD	Paul is a Roman citizen by birthright (Acts 22:28)
15 AD	Paul is at the School of Gamaliel in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3)
30 AD	Paul is a well established Pharisee (Phil 3:5)
32 AD	Paul is present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1)
33 AD	Paul is the lead Pharisee in persecuting the church (Acts 8:1-3; Phil 3:6)

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34 AD	Paul is converted on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9) Goes to Damascus (Acts 9:10-19), then travels to Arabia and remains there for three years (Gal 1:17)
37 AD	Paul returns to Damascus then has to leave the city for safety reasons (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:20-25; 2 Cor 11:32-33) He travels to Jerusalem (Acts 9:26-29; Gal 1:18) then returns to Tarsus, his home (Acts 9:30)
46 AD	Barnabas travels to Tarsus in order to seek out Paul (Acts 11:25)
47 AD	Paul goes to Antioch with Barnabas and begins his teaching ministry (Acts 11:26) Agabus prophesies a famine (Acts 11:27-28) An offering is sent to Jerusalem in the hands of Barnabas and Paul (Acts 11:29-30) Barnabas and Paul return to Antioch with John Mark (Acts 12:25) Barnabas and Paul separated and they go out on missionary travels (Acts 13:2-3) Paul travels from Antioch to Seleucia and then to Cyprus (Acts 13:4)
48 AD	While at Cyprus Paul goes to Paphos and Salamis (Acts 13:5-12) From Paphos he goes to Perga of Pamphylia where John Mark departs and returns home (Acts 13:13) Paul ministers in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-50) and then at Iconium (Acts 13:15-14:6) He will flee to Lystra and Derbe (Acts 14:6-7) and in Lystra he and Barnabas are thought to be gods (Acts 14:8-18) He is stoned at Lystra, thought to be dead, but he reenters the city (Acts 14:19-20) He then departs with Barnabas to Derbe (Acts 14:20-21). They return to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to encourage the disciples and appoint elders. (Acts 14:21-24) From Pisidia they return to Antioch of Syria and reported their journey to the church (Acts 14:24-28)
49 AD	Galatians is written. Paul goes to the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29; Galatians 2:1) returns to Antioch of Syria (Acts 15:30-35; Galatians 2:11-14) Contention over John Mark takes place and Barnabas and John Mark sail to Cyprus (Acts 15:36-39) Claudius expels the Jews from Rome and blames it on Chrestus – a reference to Christ. Paul and Silas depart and go through Syria and Cilicia encouraging the churches (Acts 15:40-41)
50 AD	Paul goes to Derbe and Kystra and picks up Timothy (Acts 16:1-5) They go to Troas (Acts 16:6-10)
51 AD	Paul sails from Troas to Neapolis (Acts 16:11) Then to Philippi where he meets Lydia (Acts 16:12-15) Paul and Silas are imprisoned (Acts 16:16-25) the Prison doors are opened (Acts 16:25-34) departs for Philippi (Acts 16:35-40) Passes through Amphipolis and Apollonia (Acts 17:1) then to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10) At Berea he leaves Sias and Timothy (Acts 17:10-14) and then at Corinth they rejoin (Acts 18:1-17)
52 AD	2 Thessalonians written
53 AD	After stopping at Ephesus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, He returns to Antioch. He then travels through Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23) then passes through the upper region on the way to Ephesus. (Acts 19:1-41)
54 AD	1 Corinthians written
56 AD	2 Corinthians written. Goes to Macedonia (Acts 20:1) Greece (Acts 20:2) back to Macedonia (Acts 20:3) to Troas (Acts 20:4-12) to Assos, Mitylene, Chios, Samos, Toggylum (Acts 20:13-15) exhorts the Ephesian elder at Miletus (Acts 20:15-38) then to Cos, Rhodes, Patara, Phoenicia (Acts 21:3-6) to Tyre (Acts 21:3-6) Ptolemais (Acts 21:7) Caesarea (Acts 21:8-14)
57 AD	At Jerusalem (Acts 21:15-25) Paul arrested (Acts 21:26-36) citizenship saves him from scourging (Acts 22:22-29) then before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:30-23:10) Jesus assures Paul he will witness in Rome (Acts 23:11) plot against Paul's life (Acts 23:12-22) Sent to Felix (Acts 23:23 – 24:27)
59 AD	Before Festus (Acts 25:1-12) before Agrippa (Acts 25:13 – 26:32) departs for Rome (Acts 27:1-5) then to Myra and to Fair Havens on Crete (Acts 27:6-8) sets sail again and shipwrecked in Malta (Acts 27:13-28:1) sails to Syracuse (Acts:11-12) then to Rheguim and Puteoli (Acts 28:13)
60 AD	Philemon written. Arrives in Rome (Acts 28:14-16) meets with the Jews and lives in rented house for two years (Acts 28:30-31)
61 AD	Colossians and Ephesians Written
62 AD	Philippians, 1Timothy and Titus written. Released from home imprisonment
64 AD	2 Timothy written
66 AD	Second imprisonment and martyrdom under Nero.