

NT Survey – Philippians
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
www.valleybible.net

Title, Date of Writing, and Author

Philippians is addressed to the church in the city of Philippi, the first town in Macedonia (Europe) where Paul established a church.

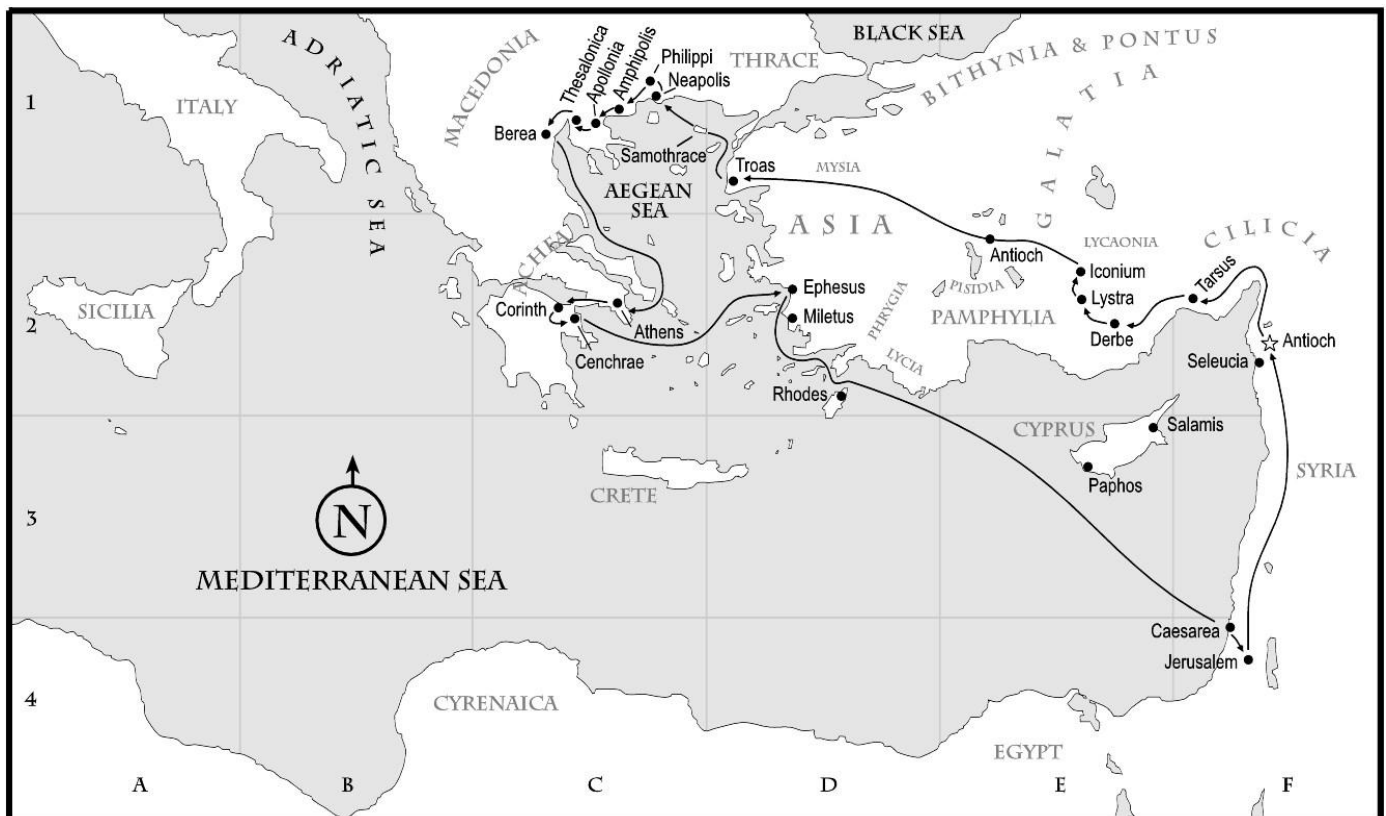
Philippians is the second of four letters labeled "The Prison Epistles" since they were written during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome AD 60-62. The other three were Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. All four make reference to his plight (Eph 3:1; Phil 1:7; Col 4:10; Philemon 1:9). Paul most likely wrote Philippians toward the end of his Roman imprisonment since he believed that his case would soon be decided (2:23-24).

The Philippian church had sent a contribution to Paul along with Epaphroditus who was to minister to Paul's needs. After arriving in Rome, Epaphroditus became ill to the point of near death (2:25-30). The Philippian church was so concerned about Epaphroditus that Paul sent him back to Philippi and wrote this letter to send with him.

The letter claims to be written by the Apostle Paul and the testimony of the early church confirms this.

Introduction

Philippi was founded by Philip II of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, in 358 BC. 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 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. Philippi's citizens took pride in the fact that they were Roman citizens.



Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)

Paul first visited Philippi during his second missionary journey during which he received his Macedonian call (Acts 16:6-10) and crossed into Europe where he first began to minister in Philippi. The first convert in Europe was a woman named Lydia who had come to listen to Paul and the “Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.” She then shared the gospel with her household and all were baptized. The missionaries (Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke) stayed with her.

Paul and Silas were arrested in Philippi after healing a demon possessed slave girl. After being beaten and in stocks, at about midnight the two were praying and singing hymns of praise to God with the prisoners listening to them when they were freed by an earthquake. The jailer turned to Christ after seeing Paul and Silas’ changed lives and hearing the gospel. The jailer demonstrated true repentance by caring for Paul and Silas and immediately being baptized. After the leaders of the city discovered that they had illegally beaten and imprisoned Roman citizens, they begged the missionaries to leave. The missionaries encouraged the Philippian believers and then traveled on to Thessalonica.

Paul apparently visited Philippi twice again during his third missionary journey, once on the way to Greece and once on the return.

This is a loving, (mostly) positive letter from a spiritual father to his children. Positively, 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; and prepare them for a visit from Timothy and perhaps from himself. Negatively, he wrote to address unity in the body and to warn them about false teachers.

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-11)
 - A. Greetings (1:1-2)
 - B. Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Philippians (1:3-11)
- II. Paul’s Circumstances (1:12-26)
- III. Exhortations (1:27-2:18)
 - A. To Stand Firm Amid Persecution (1:27-30)
 - B. To Be United by Humility (2:1-4)
 - C. To Remember the Example of Christ (2:5-11)
 - D. To Be Light in a Dark World (2:12-18)
- IV. Paul’s Companions (2:19-30)
 - A. Timothy (2:19-24)
 - B. Epaphroditus (2:25-30)
- V. Warnings (3:1-4:1)
 - A. Against Legalism (3:1-16)
 - B. Against Lawlessness (3:17-4:1)
- VI. Admonition (4:2-9)
- VII. Thankfulness (4:10-20)
- VIII. Farewell (4:21-23)

Summary

Introduction (1:1-11)

1:1-2 – Greeting – Paul begins by identifying himself and Timothy as “bond-servants” of Christ Jesus. With the Philippians, he does not have to identify himself as an apostle. They know full well who he is and what God has called him to do. Right away we can see that this is a personal letter from Paul to a beloved church.

Timothy is mentioned because he was a part of Paul's team that founded the church at Philippi (Acts 16). He was well known to the church and Paul's desire was to send him to them shortly (2:19:23).

Bond-servant [doulos] means slave; the most servile person in the culture of Paul's day.

Paul was in complete, but willing, bondage to God. He had no life that he called his one, no will of his own, purpose of his own, or plan of his own. All was subject to his Lord. In every thought, every breath, and every effort he was under the mastery of God. MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Titus

❖ **What do I call my “own”, or is everything given over in submission to Christ?**

Paul addresses the letter to the all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi. Those that had been set apart from sin unto God and declared holy through their faith in His Son, Jesus. They are “in Christ Jesus”. They have been united to Christ. Christ lives in them. From this union comes the power to live in a manner worthy of their calling.

This is the only time Paul addresses the elders and deacons specifically in the salutation. Perhaps they received special mention because the church had sent monetary support to Paul (2:25) or because there was an issue with unity within this church (4:2-3) and he wanted to acknowledge the church leadership.

1:3-11 – Thanksgiving and Prayer – Every instance of remembering the Philippian church results in Paul thanking God because of the confirmation of true saving faith.

The Holy Spirit through Paul tells the Philippians and us that once you have been made a new creature in Christ, God will continue that initial work throughout our life until we go home.

A true believer cannot lose their salvation for the Scriptures declare that nothing can separate the believer from Christ (Rom 8:28-39). All true believers once saved are kept by God's power and are always saved (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor 1:4-8; Eph 4:30; Heb 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet 1:5; Jude 24). The result of unrepentant sin in the believer's life is loss of fellowship (1 John 1:6); church discipline (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:4-5); the Lord's discipline (Heb 12:6); and sometimes physical death (1 Cor 11:30).

Paul's prayer for the church is for them to ultimately glorify God: “that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

❖ **What is my prayer for those in my life?**

Paul's Circumstances (1:12-26)

1:12-18 – “Circumstances” = Sovereignty – God does not make mistakes and nothing happens outside of his directive or permissive will. The purpose of “circumstances” is God's glory (Psa 19:1; Eph 1:4-6, 11-12; Rom 9:23; Rev 4:11) and my benefit (Rom 8:28).

²⁸And we know that **God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. Rom 8:28

❖ **Am I stable or does my life ebb and flow with circumstances?**

These truths are independent of the type of circumstances. Even in the midst of imprisonment, Paul understood these truths and relates them to them Philippians. Paul rejoiced that his imprisonment turned out in the greater progress of the gospel as the Word is spread among the royal guard (v13) and others have courage to witness also (v14-18).

1:19-26 – Christ Exalted – Paul’s desire was to exalt Christ in whatever circumstances he found himself. He wanted the life of Christ to flow through him and the Triune God to be glorified. Paul provides the mindset of the citizen of heaven:

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. Phil 1:21-24

❖ **Is my primary goal to glorify Christ?**

❖ **Do I view my present life as being “fruitful labor”?**

Exhortations (1:27-2:18)

1:27-30 – Worthy Conduct – Paul’s personal desire to exalt Christ drove him to exhort the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Amidst persecution, worthy conduct looks like unity amongst believers in ministry.

❖ **Am I striving to conduct myself in a manner worthy of the gospel?**

2:1-4 – United by Humility – Paul introduces four motives for unity by using a Greek first-class conditional clause (meaning “if and it is true”). We could therefore replace “if” with “since” or “because” and provide a better understanding.

- since there is encouragement in Christ
- since there is consolation of love
- since there is fellowship of the Spirit
- since there is affection and compassion

These are the driving motives behind unity. Because of these things, “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” True unity will reveal itself in an authentic, selfless, servant spirit as perfectly demonstrated by Jesus.

❖ **Do I exhibit humility, selflessness, service, and unity?**

2:5-11 – Remember Christ’s Example – Jesus’ emptying of Himself, the kenosis, 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. The kenosis (literally “emptying”) is the doctrine from Phil 2:5-8 where Christ surrendered only the prerogatives of deity (the independent exercise of His divine attributes) but nothing of the divine essence during the incarnation. He was always God during the incarnation.

- 1) Jesus did not surrender any attributes of deity of any time.
- 2) The self-emptying of Jesus was voluntary (Phil 2:7).
- 3) Jesus maintained His divine self-consciousness (He knew who He was) (John 8:14; 19:7).
- 4) In His incarnation, Jesus became totally subservient to the will of the Father; He became a perfect Servant, living to do the Father’s will (John 8:28-29; 12:49). In submitting Himself to the Father, Jesus acquiesced entirely to the guidance, control, and empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2; Luke 3:21-22; Acts 10:38; John 3:34). He did not surrender the divine attributes themselves; He surrendered the independent exercise of those attributes.

Jesus 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. He was, however, glorified in his resurrection and ascension.

❖ **Do I live as a servant?**

2:12-18 – Light in a Dark World – Following the bond-servant heart of Jesus, knowing that our destiny is glory, we are to work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. This is exemplified by doing all things without grumbling or disputing which shows us different than the world; a witness to a perverse and crooked generation.

❖ **Do I “cooperate” with God in my maturing?**

❖ **Am I a complainer?**

Paul’s Companions (2:19-30)

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

2:19-24 – Timothy – Timothy's service was an example of true, total, and tested commitment to Christ. He was a “kindred spirit” of Paul and genuinely concerned about the Philippians. He was of “proven worth”. He was always ready to be uprooted and moved to carry out the spread of the gospel and training of the church.

❖ **Am I of “proven worth”?**

2:25-30 – Epaphroditus – Epaphroditus was Paul’s “brother”, “fellow worker”, and “fellow soldier”. He remained steadfast and faithful even when he was "sick to the point of death". The Philippians were exhorted to “hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.”

❖ **Have I given up everything to in my service of Christ?**

Warnings (3:1-21)

3:1-16 – Against Legalism – In this section, Paul gives a warning against putting confidence in the flesh; against legalism. This is 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.

3:1-3 – Paul begins with a call to rejoice. A spirit-filled believer will have joy in the midst of any trying circumstance; even when confronted with false teachers. Paul contrasts true believers with fake believers and in this case false teachers; those that look righteous on the outside with those that, by God’s grace, look righteous on the inside because of Christ.

False: Dogs, evil workers, false circumcision

True: True circumcision; worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus; put no confidence in the flesh

Paul labels the Judaizers (who taught circumcision was necessary for salvation) as dogs (the term they used for Gentiles), evil workers, and false circumcision, (meaning mutilators) (v2).

❖ **Am I concerned more about the inside or the outside?**

3:4-6 – Paul had the right to denounce Judaizers, because he was once the perfect Jew. He offered himself as a perfect example of one who, in his past, trusted in human achievement instead if the grace of God and all-sufficiency of Christ.

3:7-11 – All works to attempt to gain God’s approval are rubbish. Being found “in” Christ is the only thing that matters. From the relationship with Christ comes the power to live in a manner worthy of the Gospel.

❖ **Have I done the “all things are loss” exchange?**

3:12-16 – Paul never thought of himself as arriving at a place where he could coast. He pressed all his life to honor Christ; to bring glory to God. Paul exerted all his energy to reach the finish line of Christian maturity.

¹²Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Phil 3:12-14

❖ **Do I forget about my former manner of life when I was without Christ?**

❖ **Am I pressing?**

3:17-21 – Against Lawlessness – Paul now strongly denounces the false teaching of licentiousness. These kind of people are: “enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.”

He reminds them that they are citizens of heaven. Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12) and being Roman citizens was a source of pride for the residents (Acts 16:21). They would understand that he is saying live in a way to bring glory rather than shame to their true country and true King.

❖ **Do I ever sin thinking that it is ok because God will forgive me?**

Admonitions (4:1-9)

4:1 – Stand Firm – “Therefore” refers back to the warnings in chapter 3. We are to stand firm against both extremes: legalism and licentiousness.

❖ **Where is my pendulum?**

4:2-3 – Live in Harmony – There were those at Philippi (Euodia and Syntyche) that apparently did not exhibit the unity and Christ-like humility and service that Paul spent so much time elaborating on in Chap 2. Paul asks that his “true companion” help these women. “Companion” is the Greek word *suzuge* which means “yoke fellow”. Most bibles translate/interpret *suzuge* as a description rather than as a proper name. If a description, then this could have been an elder at Philippi. A man named Clement, and the rest of the body, the fellow workers, need to be involved in helping them to live in harmony. Perhaps they needed church discipline.

❖ **Do my interpersonal relationships exhibit Christ’s character?**

4:4-9 – Be Known as a Believer – Paul not exhorts believers to live in a way that all know they are believers. Live in a way that the life of Christ is exhibited. Rejoice! Joy is a central theme in Philippians and one of the fruits of the Spirit. How can we who are saved from an infinite weight of sin not rejoice? Paul goes on to exhort believers to let their Spirit empowered character be evident to all. Let their light shine!

❖ **Is my character different because of belong to Christ?**

Another way we are different than the world is that we need not be anxious. The cure of anxiousness is appropriating the truth of God’s sovereignty (e.g. Rom 8:28) coupled with prayer. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

❖ **Am I anxious about things in my life?**

❖ **What is the put off/renew/put on dynamic related to anxiousness?**

The believer's mind is to dwell on things that honor God: true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good repute, excellence, worthy of praise.

❖ **What do I dwell on?**

Thankfulness (4:10-20)

Paul ends his letter rejoicing and giving thanks for the Philippians' generous care of him both in his times of affliction (v14) and in his present imprisonment. 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 has learned to be content in any and all circumstances: I can do all things through Him who strengthens me!

❖ **Am I content?**

Farewell (4:21-23)

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." The gospel is being spread through faithful people.

❖ **Am I "all in" on the great commission?**

Homework

Read Colossians.