

Philippians

Philippians is the epistle of joy and encouragement in the midst of adverse circumstances. In it, Paul freely expresses his affection for the Philippians because of their consistent testimony and support. He lovingly urges them to center their actions and thoughts on the person, pursuit, and power of Jesus Christ. Paul also seeks to correct a problem with disunity and rivalry, urging his readers to imitate Christ in His humility and servanthood. In this way the work of the gospel will go forward as believers seek to stand fast, be of the same mind, rejoice always, and pray about everything.

INTRODUCTION

Paul writes a “thank you note” to the believers at Philippi for their help in his hour of need, and he uses the occasion to send along some instruction on Christian unity. His central thought is simple: Only in Christ are real unity and joy possible. Paul contends that with Christ as your model of humility and service, you can enjoy a oneness of purpose, attitude, goal, and labor. This truth is illustrated by Paul’s own life and one the Philippians desperately need to hear.

The followers of Jesus at Philippi are at odds with each other, hindering the work of proclaiming new life in Christ. Paul exhorts the church to “stand fast... be of the same mind... rejoice in the Lord always... but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your request be made known... and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:1, 2, 4, 6, 7).

AUTHOR

The external and internal evidence for the Pauline authorship of Philippians is very strong, and there is no doubt that Paul wrote it.

This epistle is called *Pros Philippesious*, “To the Philippians.” The church at Philippi was the first church Paul founded in Macedonia.

DATE & SETTING

In 356 B.C, King Phillip of Macedonia (the father of Alexander the Great) took this town and expanded it, renaming it Philippi. The Romans captured it in 168 B.C. In 42 B.C. Octavian turned Philippi into a Roman colony (Acts 16:12) and a military outpost. The citizens of this colony were regarded as citizens of Rome and given a number of special privileges. Because Philippi was a military city and not a commercial city, there were not enough Jews for a synagogue when Paul came (Acts 16:13).

Paul’s “Macedonian Call” in Troas during his second missionary journey led to his ministry in Philippi with the conversion of Lydia and others. Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned, but this resulted in the conversion of the Philippian jailer. When the Philippian church heard of Paul’s Roman imprisonment, they sent Epaphroditus with financial help (Philippians 4:18). Paul sent this letter back with Epaphroditus to Philippi (Philippians 2:25-30).

Silas, Timothy, Luke, and Paul first came to Philippi in A.D. 51, 11 years before Paul wrote this letter. Certain references (Philippians 1:13; 4:22) suggest that it was written from Rome.