



PHILIPPIANS

FOR ME TO LIVE IS CHRIST

PART ONE

 **GraceCity**
Church Nagoya

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How To Use

In GraceCity Church we use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text. We believe it is appropriate to replace “discussion questions” (that focus on the theoretical) with “response questions” (which require participants to personally interact with the central theme of the text).

Context →

1. Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.
2. Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

Observation and Meaning →

3. Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. “for”, “if”, “therefore”),

repetition, dialogue, narrative, and Old Testament quotations.

4. To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author’s purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?
5. Helpful questions to ask include:
 - Who is writing and to whom?
 - What is the situation of the author and of the readers?
 - Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?
 - Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

Application →

6. Apply God’s word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviours by asking good “heart” questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?
7. Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?
8. Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.



Introduction

Introduction

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Placing It in the Bigger Story

The church at Philippi had a special significance for Paul, since it was the first church he founded in Europe (see Acts 16:6–40). The first convert was Lydia, a seller of purple goods, and women continued to have a prominent role in the Philippian church (see Philippians 4:2). Paul and Silas were imprisoned there for exorcising a demon from a fortune-telling slave girl, but God miraculously delivered them, and they proclaimed the gospel to the Philippian jailer. Paul likely visited the Philippians a few times after his initial departure, and they maintained active support for his ministry (Philippians 4:15–16).

Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison, prompted in part by his reception of their latest gift, sent with Epaphroditus (himself a member of the Philippian congregation). But the letter is far more than a *'thank-you'* note. Paul wanted to pass along the important news that Epaphroditus had recovered from an illness (Philippians 2:25–30), and that he was sending Epaphroditus to them with the hope that soon he might also send Timothy (Philippians 2:19). Timothy and Epaphroditus were also mentioned because they exemplified the Christ-centred, gospel-focused life Paul wanted the Philippians to live.

Paul wanted to encourage the Philippians in their faith, and his imprisonment meant he could do that only through a letter. With the possibility of his execution looming, Paul wanted to assure the church that he was still in good spirits (Philippians 1:12–18). He was also eager to thank them for their continued support. Imprisonment carried with it a social stigma, and it would have been easy for the Philippians to turn their back on Paul at this point. But they had remained faithful to him.

Paul's number one priority is that the Philippians continue to make progress in their faith (Philippians 1:25). While there were no doubt conflicts within the congregation, notably between Euodia and Syntyche (see Philippians 4:2), the Philippians appear to be a healthy congregation. This church stood in contrast to the troubled groups in Corinth and Galatia. Despite their health, Paul sees no reason for them to relax. The world is perilous and the gospel glorious, therefore the Philippians should not be content with their past achievements (Philippians 3:12-16). They must follow Paul's example and '*press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*' (Philippians 3:14).

Paul explains what spiritual progress looks like. Christian maturity does not come through special mystical insights available to only a few, but rather through the patient practice of the virtues of love and service to others. Paul presents himself as a model for such a life (see Philippians 1:12-18; 3:17; 4:9), and commends Timothy and Epaphroditus for the way they also model a similar lifestyle (Philippians 2:19-30). Knowing all believers fall short of the glory of God, Paul points beyond his own modelling to the supreme model; Jesus Christ.

The centrepiece of his letter to the Philippians is the '*hymn of Christ*' (see Philippians 2:5-11). Jesus willingly let go of the privileges of divine glory to take up the form of a servant. Jesus embraced the ultimate humiliation of the cross, in order to liberate the world from sin. Therefore, Jesus is accorded the highest glory, receiving universal worship as God's Messiah. Those who follow Christ's example have the hope that God will also vindicate them, and therefore they can rejoice (Philippians 1:18; 3:1; 4:4). They can be confident that God will not leave them alone to make their way through the world as best they can. Spiritual progress involves effort: they are encouraged to 'work out [their] own salvation with fear and trembling' (Philippians 2:12). But they can do so knowing that 'it is God who works in [them], both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (Philippians 2:13).

**Jesus willingly let go of
the privileges of divine glory
to take up the form of a servant**



GRACE AND GRATITUDE

Philippians 1:1-11

Philippians 1:1-11

Grace and Gratitude

Scripture Text

Philippians 1:1-11

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Overview

Philippians follows many of the same conventions as the other Pauline epistles. The thanksgiving, prayer, moral exhortations, greeting, and benediction are all identifiable as Paul's writings. He is writing to people who help provide the prayer support and financial assistance necessary for his ministry to the Gentiles. Paul, wanting to fulfil his end of the partnership,

- assures the Philippians of his prayers,
- updates them on his personal circumstances,
- reports on the effectiveness of the gospel in his area,
- offers spiritual encouragement,
- and expresses gratitude for the way the Philippians support his ministry.

This letter is known for its joyful mood (the words for 'joy' and 'rejoice' occur more than a dozen times), for its strong personal relationship between its author and its recipients (a relationship that is constantly in view, from the beginning of the letter to the end), and for its repeated connections between the saving work of Jesus Christ and the servant ministry of his followers.

Observation and Meaning

1. Who was the author of the letter to the Philippians (1:1)? How did Paul identify himself and his coworker (1:1)? To whom did Paul address this letter (1:1)?

Paul's greeting to the Philippians immediately announces the theme of grace. The fact that Paul could speak of himself as a servant of Jesus Christ testifies to God's grace in his life. Here is a man who had been an arrogant and self-righteous persecutor of the church (see Acts 9:1-2; Philippians 3:6). Paul uses the word '*saints*,' which literally means '*holy ones*,' to remind us that in the gospel our identity has been changed. Having been cleansed by the work of Jesus once and for all, we are called to holy lives that reflect who we now are. As always, the imperatives of the gospel are based on the indicatives of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

2. How did Paul greet the Philippians (1:2)?

Grace and peace are more than mere greetings; they are two of God's greatest gifts. Grace is all about God's unmerited favour and underserved blessing. Peace is all

about a restored and non-hostile relationship with God. These two gifts come through Jesus' self-sacrificing work on the cross and his subsequent resurrection (Philippians 2:1-11).

3. When Paul thought about the Philippians, what did he do (1:3)? How were the Philippians in partnership with Paul (1:4-5)? What was Paul confident about (1:6)?

The prayer of Paul for the Philippines contains thankfulness that only the gospel can produce. The gospel brought tremendous joy to Paul (Philippians 1:3) not only because of the Philippians' partnership in the gospel (Philippians 1:5), but also because Paul is confident of God's continued work in their lives (Philippians 1:6). The word Paul uses for '*partnership*' is the Greek word '*koinonia*' — which is often translated as '*fellowship*'. Paul uses this word six times in his letter to the Philippians (see Philippians 1:5, 7; 2:1; 3:10; 4:14-15). As well as financial support for the mission, it includes the idea of working together for the gospel. The same word is translated as '*partakers*' a few verses later (v.7), and carries the idea of participating together in the grace of salvation.

4. How did Paul feel about the Philippian church (1:7-8)? What did Paul report that he prayed for (1:9)? What two results did Paul seek? (1:10-11)

Paul is thankful that the gospel produces not only *justification* (God's righteous declaration of our right standing before him), but also *sanctification* (progressive holiness) that inevitably leads to our *glorification* (complete holiness) when Jesus returns. Christians are called to live as a community marked by ongoing thankfulness and confidence in God's continued work among them. Relationships of partnership in the gospel with others ought to be celebrated, not only as an opportunity for the gospel to continue to grow but also as a challenge to grow in love, knowledge, and discernment.

Application

- Describe in your own words what God's grace and peace mean to you?
- In what way are you '*partnering*' with others for the sake of the gospel?
- Describe how your justification (right standing before God) is affecting your sanctification (progressive holiness)? How do you imagine you will feel when you eventually experience glorification (complete holiness)?

**Grace and peace are more than mere greetings;
they are two of God's greatest gifts.**



THE ADVANCE OF THE GOSPEL

Philippians 1:12-18

Philippians 1:12-18

The Advance of the Gospel

Scripture Text

Philippians 1:12-18

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

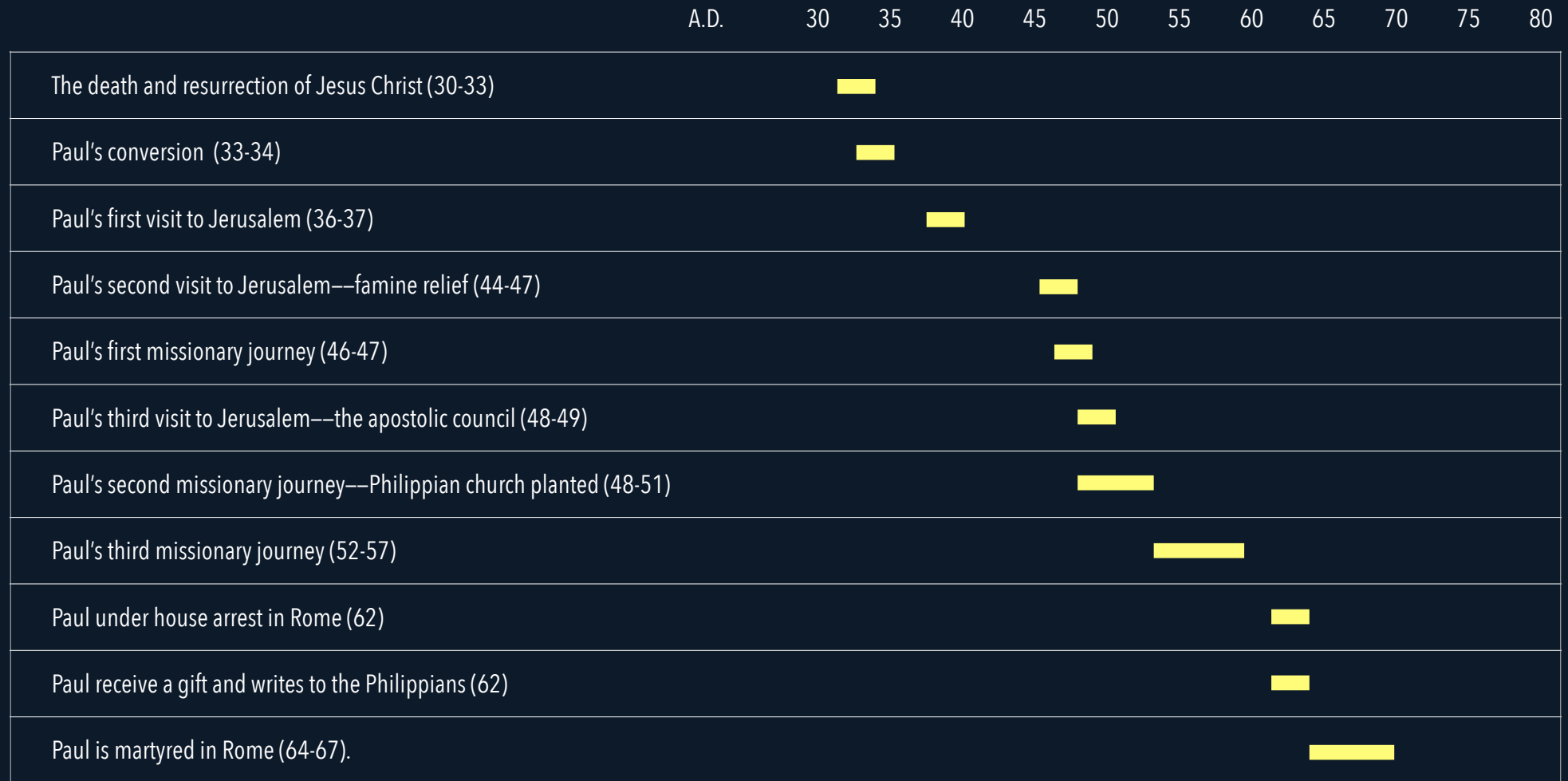
Overview

Paul continues his reflection on the gospel by explaining that God's work is not hindered by the persecution that has come to him. Quite the opposite. Rather than Paul's imprisonment being a barrier to the growth of the gospel, God is using it to advance the gospel. Paul can say he is imprisoned *'for'* Christ (Philippians 1:13). His imprisonment inspires boldness to proclaim Christ to others (Philippians 1:14). Paul even finds a reason to rejoice in those who preach Christ out of rivalry (Philippians 1:15-16).

With Paul, our confidence and joy in the gospel must never be marginalised by trials. Hostility to Christians, when rightly viewed through the gospel, can embolden us to speak good news without fear (as it did for Paul and his colleagues). Just as Paul finds he can rejoice in persecution, and even in those who preach out of rivalry, we too are freed from fearing the suffering that comes because of our allegiance to Jesus. Such suffering ushers us into deeper communion with our suffering Saviour (see Philippians 3:10).

Timeline

Before going any further, take a moment to remind yourself of the timeline surrounding this letter.



Setting

After their victory at the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C., Antony and Augustus re-founded this Macedonian city. Its special status as an Augustan colony exempted the city from taxation and gave it additional privileges of land ownership. The city encompassed good agricultural land, and it was on the Egnatian Way (an important Roman road built during the middle of the second century B.C.). Archaeological remains from Paul's day testify to the presence of a theatre, shops, and two city gates. One small stone crypt (built over a cistern) near the speakers platform was designated in later church tradition as the prison site of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:23–34).

Observation and Meaning

1. How was Paul's ministry affected by his bondage (1:12-14)? Why was Paul being talked about (1:13)?

The word Paul uses for the 'advance' of the gospel is the same word he uses later to refer to the Philippians 'progress' in faith (see Philippians 1:25).

Christians should seek to advance God's kingdom rather than dwelling on past or present problems.

2. How did Paul's incarceration affect the testimony of others (1:14)?
3. Why did some people preach Christ out of envy and rivalry (1:15-17)? Why did some people preach Christ in love (1:15-16)?

Those who preached Christ from envy and rivalry were likely Christians who preached the gospel but were at odds with Paul for some reason.

4. What made Paul rejoice? (1:18)

Application

- In what way does Paul's imprisonment for the sake of the gospel inspire you?
- In what type of situation do you fear sharing the gospel or confessing allegiance to Jesus Christ?
- What is your typical response when hearing someone else proclaim the gospel? Do you cringe or rejoice?



TO LIVE IS CHRIST

Philippians 1:18-26

Philippians 1:18-26

To Live is Christ

Scripture Text

Philippians 1:18-26

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Overview

Paul repeats the main theme of the letter: rejoicing in the gospel no matter what the circumstances.

This is not a blind or naive rejoicing. Neither is it stoicism. Instead, it is confidence that God's purposes will triumph in the end (Philippians 1:19).

As Paul writes he faces a personal dilemma (Philippians 1:23). He contemplates the possibility of death by Roman execution, and wonders which is better (remaining in the flesh or dying). Either way, Paul wants Jesus to be honoured. In one of the most powerful statements in this letter, Paul acknowledges that death is '*gain*' and that continued living is '*Christ*' (Philippians 1:20). This affirmation of the union of a believer with the once-suffering and now-risen Jesus, gives us insight into our own relationship with our Saviour. Ongoing ministry will further confirm Paul to Christ, who already is his identity (see Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:4). Through personal trial, Paul learns more about Jesus' life of sacrificial servanthood. The life that we now live in union with Jesus furthers our understanding of the One who gives us his identity and resources (despite our sin and weaknesses). As a result we can be confident of God's care and purpose for each of us, as his precious children, united to all the others who are in Christ.

Observation and Meaning

1. Why did Paul expect to be delivered from his predicament (1:19)? How did Paul expect to be delivered (1:19-20)?

Either deliverance from prison or the deliverance of eternal salvation. Paul may intend both meanings, since he mentioned his imprisonment (Philippians 1:12-14) and also focuses on the eternal (Philippians 1:23). The crucial thing for Paul is not life or death, but maintaining his faithful witness as a believer.

2. What was Paul's main purpose in living (1:21)?

Paul's life is all about the advancement of Jesus' kingdom. Therefore, to live means serving Jesus. To die is gain because then Paul would be in the presence of Jesus.

3. What were Paul's convictions about living and dying (1:22-24)?

Paul knows that the way of Jesus is the way of service (see Philippians 2:5-11). Paul is convinced that he will

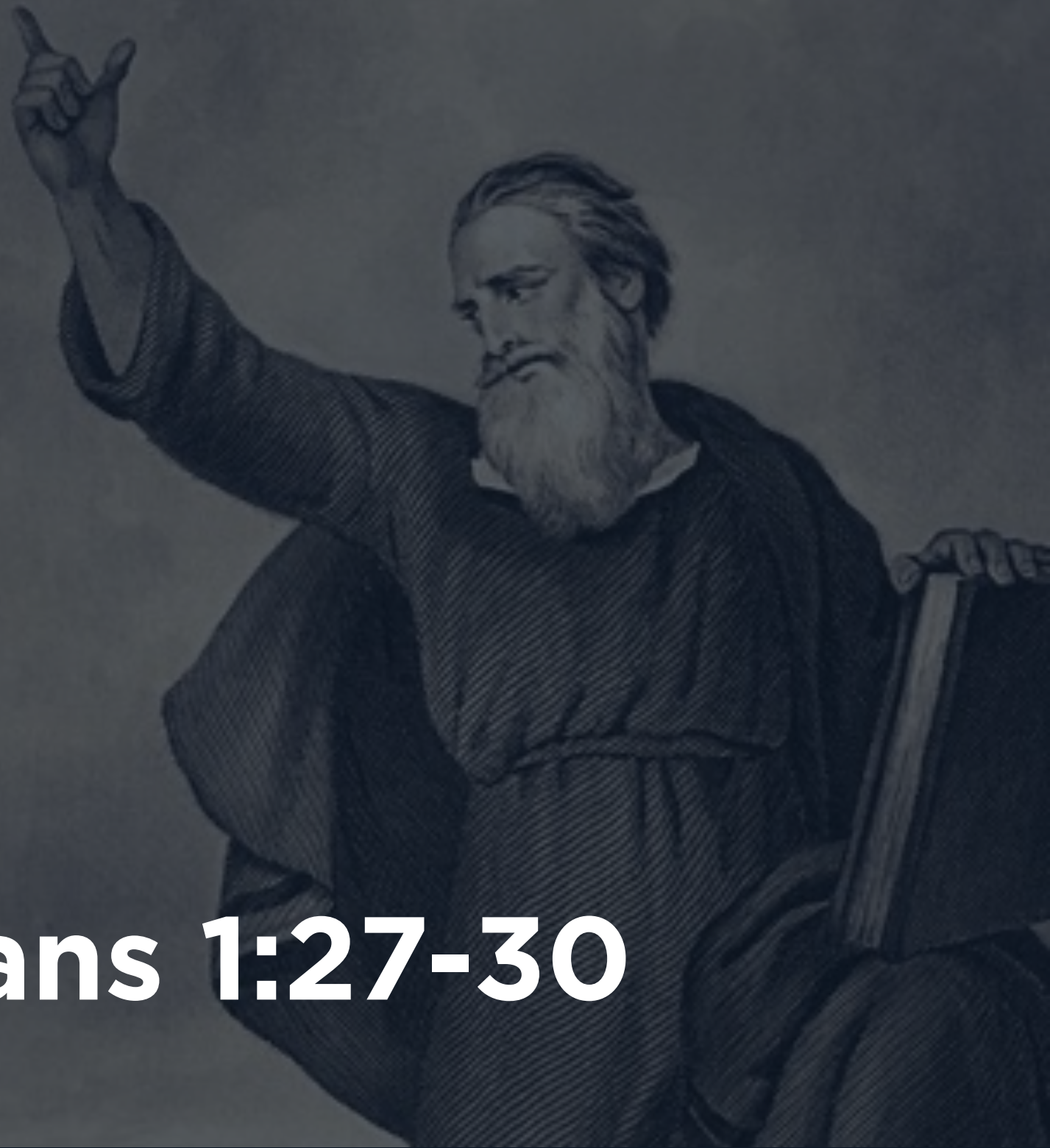
remain with the Philippians for their progress and joy in the faith. Paul is not thinking about his own crisis. He is giving the Philippians a model of a *'service-driven'* life.

When Paul writes that his desire is to depart and be with Christ, he recognises that when a believer dies they are immediately with Christ—long before their bodies are raised from the dead (see 1 Corinthians 15:23). At Jesus' coming, all his people from all time will receive resurrection bodies. Until that time, those who have died exist in heaven as spirits (see 2 Corinthians 5:8; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 6:9).

4. Why did Paul think he would remain alive (1:24-26)?

Application

- What aspects of your life are more about the advancement of your own kingdom, than they are about the advancement of God's kingdom ?
- Explain how, through personal trials, you have come to learn more about Jesus' life of sacrificial servanthood?
- What is your main purpose for living? Try to answer this question as honestly as you can.



GOSPEL CITIZENSHIP

Philippians 1:27-30

Philippians 1:27-30

Gospel Citizenship

Scripture Text

Philippians 1:27-30

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Overview

Like Paul, the Philippians are called to live in a way that is worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27-30). This involves standing firm through suffering (Philippians 1:29). Paul literally tells the Philippians to live as '*citizens*' worthy of the gospel (Philippians 1:27). They are citizens of heaven, even as they suffer in this world. Paul reminds them that as they stand firm, united in the gospel, unafraid of their opponents, their lives become a sign of the gospel itself (Philippians 1:28).

Like Paul and the Philippians, we are called to live lives worthy of the grace and servanthood of Jesus. Since we are united with Jesus and our citizenship is in heaven, we are to face persecution with steadfastness. In doing so, we uphold the truthfulness of the good news of Christ who suffered for us. Amazingly, we can face even the most difficult situations with joy. We are called to a joy that defies any explanation by the world's categories.

Observation and Meaning

1. What did Paul want the believers to do (1:27-30)?

Paul's sacrifice and service will be useless, if the Philippians do not continue to live in a way that is '*worthy of the gospel of Christ*'. This phrase can also be translated '*behave as citizens worthy [of the gospel]*'. Philippi prided itself on being a Roman colony, offering the honour and privilege of Roman citizenship. Paul reminds the congregation that they should look to Christ, not Caesar, for their model of behaviour. They need to stand with one another and with Paul in striving for the gospel. Paul's emphasis on unity may suggest some division within the Philippians congregation (see Philippians 4:2-3).

2. How did Paul tell the Philippians to face opposition (1:27-30)? How did Paul encourage the Christians at Philippi (1:29)?

The opponents Paul is referring to are different from those mentioned earlier (see Philippians 1:15-18). Here Paul speaks about what is happening in Philippi, whilst his opponents in his earlier reference were probably in Rome. Paul follows Jesus' teaching (Matthew 5:10-12), reminding the Philippians that persecution shows they belong to Christ. Both suffering and faith have been granted to us as gifts of God. Suffering for the sake of Jesus is a great privilege (see Acts 5:41). Once again, Paul presents himself as an example of one who has maintained his joy while experiencing opposition from hostile unbelievers.

Application

- In advance of his hoped-for visit, Paul encourages the Philippians believers to live a life '*worthy of the gospel of Christ*' (see Philippians 1:27). What do you think it means to live a life worthy of the gospel of Christ?
- How does living a life '*worthy of the gospel of Christ*' impact the way you live today?
- Why might it be a blessing to suffer for Christ (see Philippians 1:29)?



HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Philippians 2:1-5

Philippians 2:1-5

Healthy Community

Scripture Text

Philippians 2:1-5

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Overview

Paul makes the gospel application clear:

- unity (v.2)
- humility (v.3)
- service (v.4)

Since we are one with Christ (Philippians 2:1), Christians are to have Christ's mind-set toward each other;

- having the same love
- being of one mind
- pursuing no rivalry
- doing nothing from empty conceit
- always prioritising the interests of others

For Paul, this lifestyle of humility is linked to '*koinonia*' (see Philippians 1:5, 7). However, here the encouragement is '*in Christ*' and the empowerment is our '*participation in the Spirit*' (Philippians 2:1). Since we are one with Christ by the Spirit, we are to act as one (Philippians 2:2) and imitate Christ (Philippians 2:5). This, Paul says, brings him joy (Philippians 2:2).

Observation and Meaning

1. What four qualities mark unity with Christ (2:1)? How can Christians show their unity in Christ in practical ways (2:2)?

Paul knows that encouragement, participation in the Spirit, affection, and sympathy are realities in Christ and are present in the congregation at Philippi. He uses a conditional sentence (if) to lead the Philippians to reflect on whether these qualities are evident in their own lives. They are to use their different gifts (see 1 Corinthians 12) in a cooperative way, focusing on God's glory.

2. What did Paul say about self-centredness (2:3-4)?

Paul realises that everyone naturally looks out for their own interests. The key is to take that same level of concern for ourselves and apply it to the interests of others. Such radical love is rare, so Paul shows its supreme example in Jesus' life (Philippians 2:5-11).

It is crucial we recognise how Paul motivates people to model a similar lifestyle to his own. He draws our attention to what Jesus has done, rather than beating us with the law or comparing our failings with one another.

3. What did Paul exhort believers to have (2:5)?

Application

- Paul talks about *encouragement*, *comfort* from love, *affection* and *sympathy* as if they are present in the congregation at Philippi (vv.1-2). Are these things present in your own congregation? If so, give examples of how they have been implemented?
- Paul calls us to live out the gospel by exhibiting *unity*, *humility*, and *service* (vv.2-4), Which of these do you struggle with the most, and why?
- Give positive and negative examples of how Christians sometimes try to motivate one another to obey Christ.



HEALTHY HUMILITY

Philippians 2:5-11

Philippians 2:5-11

Healthy Humility

Scripture Text

Philippians 2:5-11

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Overview

The hymn contained in these verses describes the gospel as it was lived out by Jesus (Philippians 2:6-11). Despite equality with God (v.6), Jesus emptied himself of heavenly privileges, taking on the form of a servant and humbling himself to the point of death (v.8). The lowest point of Jesus' humiliation was the crucifixion—a violent means of punishing and degrading the lowliest of criminals. Yet God raised Jesus to universal praise (vv.9-11). Jesus' humble death, burial, and resurrection for our sins is the essence of the gospel (see 1 Corinthians 15:1-5).

Observation and Meaning

1. What did Paul exhort believers to have (2:5)? What did Christ set aside when He became a man (2:6-8)?
2. How did Jesus limit Himself (2:6-8)? How was Christ fully God and fully man at the same time (2:6-8)? How is Christ the best example of humility and unselfishness for us (2:6-8)?

Prior to his incarnation as a human being, Jesus was in the *'form of God'*. This phrase refers to the *'preexistence'* of Jesus. The eternal Son was with the Father (John 1:1; 17:5, 24) before he was born in Bethlehem. When Paul uses the word *'form'* he is referring to the exact nature of something—possessing all the characteristics and qualities of that thing. Therefore having the *'form of God'* is essentially the same as having *'equality with God'*. It is in direct contrast with having the *'form of a servant'* (Philippians 2:7). The Son of God is and always has been God. Remarkably, Jesus did not imagine that having *'equality with God'* (which he already possessed) should lead him to hold onto his privileges at all costs. It was not something to be grasped, or to be used for his own advantage. Instead, he set his mind on service.

3. Why did Christ take on the limitations of being human even though He was of the same nature as God (2:7)?

The Greek for *'emptied himself'* can also mean 'give up states and privilege'. Paul is not saying Jesus became less than God or gave up any of his divine attributes. Neither is Paul discussing whether Jesus was all-powerful or all-knowing during his life on earth (Philippians 2.6). Rather, Paul is saying that even though Christ has the privileges of being King of the universe, he gave this privilege up to become a baby bound for the cross. Jesus *'emptied himself'* by taking on the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. He had every right to stay in a position of power, but his love for sinful mankind compelled him to accept a lowly position. The emptying consisted of his becoming human, not giving up any part of his true deity.

**When Jesus became human
he did not lose his divinity.
Through his divine nature,
he added a human nature.**

4. How did God exalt Jesus (2:9)? How did Christ win sovereignty over all people and over everything (2:10)? What confession will every person make (2:11)?

It is remarkable that the Son of God would take on human form for us. But Jesus went further by becoming obedient to the point of death on a cross. Crucifixion was the ultimate humiliation, and the physical pain was terrible. It was the opposite of the divine majesty of the preexistent Christ. This is what made the cross the ultimate expression of Jesus' obedience to the Father. By humbling himself on the cross out of love, Jesus demonstrated that he truly shared in God's divine nature (which is love). For this very reason, God raised him to life and exalted him, entrusting him with the name that is above every name.

**Jesus willingly let go of
the privileges of divine glory
to take up the form of a servant**

Following his death and resurrection, Jesus received a status and authority that had not been his before the incarnation (see Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:33). Paul goes on to quote the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 45:23). In Isaiah these words apply to *Yahweh*, the personal name for God. When Paul claims Jesus is Lord, he is saying that Jesus is God. But Jesus' exaltation also results in the glory of the Father (see 1 Corinthians 15:23-28). Even though Jesus is equal with God, he remains a model of loving service to God.

Application

- Humility is often considered to be a good thing. What comes to mind when you hear the word 'humility'?
- What differences do you see between the way humility is exhibited within your culture and the way humility is exhibited in the life of Jesus?
- How might you need to turn away from worldly humility and turn towards imitating Jesus' humility? Pray together and seek the Holy Spirit's help in these matters.



LIGHTS IN THE WORLD

Philippians 2:12-18

Philippians 2:12-18

Lights in the World

Scripture Text

Philippians 2:12-18

Big Idea

The main theme of Philippians is encouragement: Paul wants to encourage the Philippians to live out their lives as citizens of a heavenly colony. This should be evidenced by a growing commitment to serve God and one another. The way of life that Paul encourages was not only evident in the life of Jesus Christ, but also in the lives of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Overview

Paul does not pretend that working out the implications of the gospel into a lifestyle of practical humility is easy (vv.12-12). But it is necessary.

When we apply the gospel to ourselves with the humility of Christ, we stand out in the world as lights for Christ (vv.14-16). The application of the gospel is tremendously difficult work. It requires working out our salvation '*with fear and trembling*' (v.12), all the while trusting God to do the work of the gospel in us (v.13). Meanwhile, we live with a luminous joy, free from grumbling or complaining (v.14).

Paul's own life follows the pattern of Christ's humble sacrifice as he faces the prospect of being '*poured out as a drink offering*' (v.17). Rather than dread this possibility, Paul rejoices and wants the Philippians to rejoice also (vv.17-18). As followers of Jesus, we cannot expect our path to be one of ease. Salvation by grace is totally free, but that does not mean there is no personal cost (see Luke 14:28). God is at work, but there is strenuous work for us to do as well. However, the strain of living for Christ cannot eclipse our joy. Jesus' sacrifice was done in joy, and we likewise are welcomed into the glad service of Christ and others. The gospel that calls us to sacrifice also calls us to rejoice. The redemption into which we have been swept up is too great for us to remain tepid. As we reflect on God's grace towards us, our hearts are softened.

Observation and Meaning

1. What did the Philippian Christians need to obey (2:12)? What were the Philippian believers to work out (2:12-13)? How would God help the Philippians obey Him (2:12-13)?

The Philippians have obeyed in the past and should continue to do so as they work out their salvation with fear and trembling. But while God's justice is a cause for sober living (fear and trembling), Paul does not want the Philippians to think that they can never merit God's favour. Rather, it is God's love and enabling grace that will see them through. They can rejoice in God's empowering presence even as they work hard at living responsible Christian lives. Whilst this might seem to suggest salvation by works (v.12), Paul clearly rejects any such teaching (see Philippians 3:20-11). Even the desire to do what is good comes from God.

2. What instructions did Paul give in relation to everyday Christian living (2:14-16)? Why were the Philippians not shining "*like stars*" (2:14-16)? Why did the assembly need to show a united front to unbelievers (2:14-16)? What would enable Paul to

boast about the Philippians (2:14-16)? Whose honour was Paul concerned about (2:16)?

The Philippians should shine as lights amid a crooked and twisted generation. Paul's choice of words is linked to the wilderness generation of Israel (see Deuteronomy 32:5). Instead of being crooked and twisted, they are to hold fast —believing God's Word and following it.

3. How did Paul view his own life (2:17)? How did Paul view the faith of the Philippian believers (2:17)?

A '*drink offering*' involved pouring out wine, either onto the ground or on an altar (see Numbers 28:7). It illustrates a life '*poured out*' for God's service (see 2 Timothy 4:6). The Philippians are to be a sacrificial offering.

4. What did Paul want his friends at Philippi to experience (2:18)?

Application

Joy is an important themes in this letter. Look through the list provided and answer the following questions.

- Where is your rejoicing similar to Paul's rejoicing?
- Where does your rejoicing differ from Paul's rejoicing?
- What part of the gospel, as lived out by Jesus (see Philippians 2:6-11), causes you to rejoice and motivates you to greater obedience?

Reference	Paul...
Philippians 1:4	prays with joy
Philippians 1:18	rejoices that Christ is proclaimed
Philippians 1:25	will remain living on earth, for the Philippians joy in the faith
Philippians 2:2	asks the Philippians to complete his joy
Philippians 2:17-18	is glad and rejoices with the Philippians
Philippians 2:28	sends Epaphroditus, that the Philippians might rejoice
Philippians 2:29	tells the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus with joy
Philippians 3:1	tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord
Philippians 4:1	tells the Philippians they are his joy
Philippians 4:4	tells the Philippians twice to rejoice in the Lord
Philippians 4:10	rejoiced in the Lord at the Philippians concern for him

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