

THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

“Church Joy and Unity”

Philippians 1:1, 2

Introduction

1. The Holy Spirit issued a call to “come over into Macedonia” (Acts 16:9). This resulted in the church at Philippi.
2. There’s a lot of joy in the letter. About 18 times words like “joy” and “rejoicing” are used in the letter (cf. 1:4, 18, 25, 26; 2:2, 16, 17, 18, 28, etc.).
3. Apparently women were predominant in the congregation (cf. Acts 16:13). Regretfully, friction developed among some women (Phil. 4:2) and this failure, in part, elicited this letter.
4. Some love gifts from the believers (Phil. 4:14-19) provoked Paul to send this tender epistle. Their generosity overwhelmed the Apostle.
5. The opening verses of the text provide three statements of salutation:

1. DESIGNATION OF WRITERS v. 1

a. Their Names

1) Paul

This name first occurs in Acts 13:9. It was a common name in Tarsus, his home city. Only here, 1 and 2 Thess., and Philemon, Paul does not mention his apostleship.

2) Timothy

While he is mentioned, he is not a co-author (cf. 2:19). No reason is given why he did not experience jail with Paul and Silas. Timothy is mentioned 24 times in the N.T. (cf. Acts 16:1; 1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10, 11, etc.).

b. Their Calling

What a terrific word -- “servants of Jesus Christ.” The Roman Empire was filled with slaves, so this designation has enormous meaning. The term has both physical and spiritual significance (1 Cor. 7:22). Taken from slavery of the sin nature, a believer has a new slavery (cf. Ro. 6:1-23). The whole issue has its roots in the O.T. (Ex. 21:1-6). It is this wonderful truth to which Paul makes allusion here. By the manumission price of the precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18, 19), Paul was set free, but committed himself to a bondage more binding than ever. Bless God, the same is true of us, for like Paul, we are slaves “of Jesus Christ.” Such a bondage is at once honorable and sweet. Bound to Him, He is responsible for our needs (Phil. 4:19) and for our supplies (1 Cor. 9:7; Ex. 18:23). Hallelujah!

2. DESCRIPTION OF READERS v. 1

a. Their Position

The term “saint” is in reference to all the believers at Philippi. It speaks of a group which is separated unto the Lord. The irregularities and profligacies of the church at Corinth did not forfeit this incredible title (cf. 1 Cor. 1 - 7 with 1:1). Being “in Christ” gave the right to be a “saint” (cf. 2 Cor. 5, 17). It is helpful that the translators of the KJV (King James Version) added “to be” in italics (Ro. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2) to teach that while a believer is called a “saint,” he is called “to be a saint.” It is wrong for a prince to live like a pauper, similarly, a saint must live like a saint (cf. 2 Pet. 1:14-17). We must live out our profession. A believer is “Christ’s one” (Christian), hence must be “Christly.” So be it!

b. Their Situation

In brief, the readers were “at Philippi.” Geographically this was on the main road between Europe and Asia, a population center. Historically the city went back to the times of the Phoenicians and it became a Roman “Colony” under Octavian. Biblically Philippi was where a Jewish proselytess, a Greek slave, and a Roman jailer came to Christ.

c. Their Direction

“Bishops and deacons” are neatly noted. The former word refers to the overseers (episkopos) who are one and the same with the elder (presbuteros) and pastor (poemenos). Scripture clearly identifies these as being three functions of the single person (cf. Acts 20:17, 28). The idea of plurality of eldership is difficult to support (cf. Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23). Deacons referred to other leadership which apparently cared for temporalities, but they also attended to spiritual work (Acts 6:1; 1 Cor. 3:5).

DESTINATION OF BLESSINGS v. 2

a. Provision of Grace

Grace linguistically has the thought of brightness, then beauty, then kindly pleasure given by the sight of beauty. Didactically it means unbought favor from God. It refers to God for us in our acceptance and God in us for our new life.

b. Provision of Peace

This is essentially a harmony, an adjustment. It speaks of enjoyment of harmony with God. Peace with God leads to the peace of God.

c. Provision of Deity

The use of one preposition (apo) for both Father and Lord indicate equality. Therefore our Lord’s deity is taught. Consider how this one verse mentions: 1) Fatherhood of God. 2) Lordship (Lord) of Christ. 3) Servanthood of Christ (Jesus). 4) Messiahship (Christ) of Christ and 5) Unity within the Godhead (apo).

Conclusion

So there you have it. The opening verses tell who wrote the letter, to whom it was addressed, who the leaders were, and what sort of blessing was inferred in prayer. May it please the God of Glory to impact our lives with these truths and all that is to come in the letter. Amen.