

Philippians 1:1-11

Paul's Prayer for His Partners and Friends

Who wrote Philippians? The Apostle Paul. The story of the founding of the church in Philippi—the first church established on the continent of Europe—appears in Acts 16, during Paul's second missionary journey. Located in northern Greece, Philippi (then Macedonia) was a thriving commercial center at the crossroads of Asia and Europe.

To whom was Philippians written? The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his close friends, the Gentile Christians. Since his audience was mostly Gentile believers, there are no Old Testament quotations.

What were Paul's circumstances when he wrote it? Paul was in prison in Rome — for two years without trial and facing possible execution for his faith.

How many other prison letters did Paul write? Three—Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Though 2 Timothy was also written from prison, it is not considered to be one the “prison epistles.” The Mamertine prison where Paul wrote that second letter to Timothy was a cold dungeon—unlike this “house arrest” imprisonment in Rome.

What is the prominent theme of Philippians? Joy. No other book in the Bible speaks more about joy than Philippians where some form of the word “joy” is used sixteen times. Paul's bottom line is about living life joyfully regardless of circumstances.

Though he wrote this letter from prison under the threat of execution, it's remarkable to see that Paul's first reference to his own feelings is that of joy (v. 4). Of all Paul's epistles, Philippians is the most consistently positive and personal. *What does that say about him?*

How would you define joy? Quiet self-assurance of God's love and work in our life—He is with us no matter what. Runs deeper and stronger than happiness. Irrespective of circumstances.

What is the source of joy? The fruit of (Holy) Spirit: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23, NASB).*

How would you describe Paul's tone in this letter? Encouraging, tender, affectionate. The Philippians had a special place in his heart.

Who was Timothy? An associate of Paul's who may have assisted Paul in the dictation of this letter. The Philippians knew Timothy — he had been with Paul during their church's founding (Acts 16:1-12) and on subsequent occasions (Acts 19:22; 20:3-6). Even with Paul imprisoned in Rome, Timothy is with him again.

Paul often refers to himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. But how does he refer to himself here? A slave of Jesus Christ. The Greek word *doulos* denotes a bond slave.

What are some of the characteristics of a bond slave? Devotion to your master with complete disregard for your own will, emotions and desires. For a Jew, this concept did not connote drudgery, but rather honor and privilege.

Think of yourself as a slave of Christ? Do you feel privileged? Or is it unexciting drudgery? Everything in Paul's life was framed by his relationship with his Master, as indicated by his use of “Christ” or “Jesus Christ” fifty-one times in Philippians—seventeen times in the first chapter alone. Paul felt privileged to be Christ's bond slave.

Paul's lack of reference to his apostleship is harmonious with this epistle's overall emphasis — a personal letter, not one of correction. The latter would need apostolic authority behind it so the recipients would accept and act on it.

The phrase “in Christ Jesus” appears in the book of Philippians ten times. What does (“in Christ Jesus”) mean? Union, oneness; in a right relationship; surrendered to and depending on Christ.

Who are “all the saints in Christ Jesus” (v. 2)? All the Christians in Philippi. *Hagios*, a New Testament Greek word for “saint” refers to Christians in their status of standing justified before God—right now and for all eternity. Paul was fond of addressing his fellow believers as saints.

What does *hagios* mean? Holy ones; His people—set apart for His pleasure and purposes.

Application: How often do you remember other Christians and thank God for them (v. 3)?

Why was Paul thankful for the Philippians (vs. 4-5)? They partnered with him in spreading of the gospel. From the first day, clear through Paul’s present imprisonment, they immediately got behind him and supported his ministry—not waiting to see if Paul was a “winner” before committing to him in partnership.

How were they partners with Paul? They prayed for him, sent Epaphroditus to help him, and provided financial support (Philippians 1:19; 2:25; 4:15-17), helping him as friends to reach the lost with the gospel.

How does this partnership thing work for us now? Partnership includes our working together with God and other believers—the Church, the Body of Christ—to reach the unsaved world with the gospel.

What is the good work that God has begun in us (v. 6)? Being completely conformed by Him in to the image of Christ, displaying His character: *And we... are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18).*

Paul was confident that just as surely as God had justified the Philippians, He would also continue to sanctify them. While we do have a hand in the process of sanctification—and we can affect it by our obedience or disobedience—God alone justifies us.

This verse is one of the Bible’s most comforting verses for the Christian believer. Salvation is God’s work—not ours (Jonah 2:9). The Lord will help us safely reach heaven in spite of our shortcomings and failures. As surely as God has already delivered us from the penalty of sin (Romans 5:1), He is now in the process of delivering us from the power of sin, and ultimately one day will deliver us from the presence of sin (Romans 8:31-39).

How would you describe Paul’s emotional perspective toward the Philippians (v. 7-8)? Pure affection, tender concern. Longing to be with them.

In praying for the Christians at Philippi, Paul asks God that (v. 9-11):

- Their love may increasingly abound in knowledge and depth of insight. The Greek word here for knowledge is *epignosis*. That New Testament word is applied only to spiritual things—the knowledge of God and religious, spiritual, and doctrinal knowledge—a knowledge coming through a study of God’s Word.
- They may be discerning—right from wrong, good from best, counterfeit from truth. **What does “pure and blameless” mean?** Open to scrutiny by God and others as people of character and integrity, living lives free from hypocrisy. It does not mean sinless.
- They would be filled with “the fruit of righteousness”.

What does “the fruit of righteousness” mean? It refers to what is seen externally—the “fruit” produced by the innumerable righteous acts of kindness and service to which every believer in Jesus Christ is called. It does not refer to internal righteousness—love, joy, peace, etc.—which are all the *fruit* of the Spirit.

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