

Love Letters

Lesson 11: Philippians 1

Introduction

Paul was imprisoned in Rome while the recipients of this letter were a great distance away at Philippi; but the “oneness” he shared with them in the Spirit was very apparent to him. He understood that for the Philippian church to survive and prosper, the Christians would have to come together and strengthen their fellowship in the gospel. Realizing that the best defense for the enemy’s attacks was their strength as a united body, Paul exhorts the believers to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. In other words, to *live as citizens* according to their calling. The Christians of Philippi were enjoying the privileges of the Roman citizenship to the extent that Paul needed to remind them they were first citizens of heaven, with the accompanying responsibilities of their high position.

Fast Facts ~

- Paul’s letter was written from a Roman prison to the Christians in Philippi, located in the northern part of Greece near the Aegean Sea. The city was a Roman colony whose citizens enjoyed the privileges of Roman citizenship; but along with that came the influences of pagan religions.
- The church itself had special significance to Paul, being the first he founded in Europe (Acts 16). The Philippian jailor and his family along with Lydia (a seller of purple goods) and her family were among the first to make this church their home.
- Epaphroditus is thought to possibly have been the pastor of the church. He visited Paul in prison to present him a financial gift and to encourage him.
- The overriding theme of this letter is encouragement to one another in service to God. It is a letter of thanks to the believers in this congregation for their generous financial support of Paul, along with a practical exhortation addressed to their specific issues.

Read Philippians 1:1–30.

Day One: Paul’s Thanksgiving and Prayer

Perspective is everything in the Christian life! The vantage point from which we view our circumstances helps in determining whether we experience joy or despair, success or failure, and whether or not we have clear focus of what is going on around us in any given moment. Wouldn’t it help if you could see your circumstances from God’s perspective? It certainly helped Paul; he was able to view his situation from “God’s big picture” and rejoice even in troubled times.

Your goal this week is to gain God’s perspective right where you are. Take a moment now and ask Him to help you see what He sees as He actively works to bring about His perfect will for you.

1. Paul is the author of this letter but whose name does he add in verse 1 to the salutation? Why do you think he did so? See Philippians 2:20 and 22.

Paul writes to “all” the saints in Philippi, along with the bishops—literally, the spiritual overseers (or elders) of the flock—and to the deacons, who saw to the physical needs of people much like those of the early church in Acts 6:1–6.

2. What blessing does Paul wish for the people reading his letter (verse 2)?

Paul first preached among the Philippians approximately a decade earlier, and throughout the subsequent years, the people had supported him with their prayers and financial gifts.

3. For what is Paul particularly thankful and joyful (verse 3–5)?
4. Why is he confident about the believers in Philippi (verses 6–7)?

The ongoing process of good work that the Holy Spirit is doing in every believer’s life is called *sanctification*. Paul assures that God began this good work and that He will bring it to completion. The literal translation means He will continue it until the “day of Jesus Christ,” that is until He returns to earth for His people as prophesied in Scripture.

5. Having expressed his love, Paul begins to pray about the believer’s love in verses 8–9. What does he say about his feelings for them; their feelings for one another?
 - a. What is his hope for them as they await the Lord’s return (verses 10–11)?
 - b. “Fruits of righteousness” are the character qualities that bring glory to God. Review these once again in Galatians 5:22–23, making note of which one(s) God is presently working into your own life.

Memory verse: Philippians 2:21 NKJV

Write the verse out below; repeat it each day to commit it to memory.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Day Two: Bringing Good Out of Bad Times

Reread Philippians 1:12–18.

Paul takes a sudden mental turn, writing that his own adversity has resulted in the advancement of the gospel. In other words, Paul's restrictions had not restricted the gospel going forth and God being glorified!

1. Paul was in prison for preaching the gospel; but what was the result (verses 13–14)?

Paul was not imprisoned for breaking the law or committing a crime—he was in chains for speaking about Christ. Conventional wisdom would cause people to become fearful about sharing their faith, yet the opposite was true. And God took advantage of Paul's chains to call new converts to the faith.

2. What were the two kinds of people seizing the opportunity to preach about Christ (verses 15–17)?
 - a. Contrast the motive of those preaching from selfish ambition with those preaching out of love (verses 16–17).

Obviously those who preach with wrong motives are seeking their own end, their own exaltation; they are not promoting the gospel in sincerity. These particular individuals wanted to incite trouble for Paul and discourage him from his mission. Were they successful? No, because Paul had his sights and heart set on doing the Lord's will. Instead of conflict and contention, Paul was at peace.

- b. What did Paul realize about his own calling that made him rejoice (verses 17b–18)?
- c. Personal: What have you realized through your study about your calling?

Selah ~

Think about it . . . if the believer's love abounds in knowledge (verse 9) and discernment—or depth of insight—how might it make all the difference between a fearful disciple and a faith-filled disciple ready to do whatever it takes to share about Christ?

- Personal: What difficult or challenging circumstances are *you* facing today? Look around and try to determine how God might want to use your situation to get out the gospel message. Are you willing? Please share your thoughts and conclude by lifting them to the Lord in prayer.

Day Three:

To Live Is Christ

Reread Philippians 1:19–30.

Do you ever find yourself holding tightly to this life—not wanting to let go? When the believer is motivated by the hope of one day being with Christ, then we too can maintain the perspective Paul had: the reality of Christ being here and now!

1. How did Paul know his chains were not permanent (verse 19)?
 - a. Whether released from prison or left on earth, what was Paul's greatest desire?
 - b. What perspective ruled Paul's heart-attitude?

The words “to live is Christ” are present tense, emphasizing that Jesus Christ was the true essence of Paul's life now—presently. How wonderful to have that same assurance.

2. Paul longed to depart and be with Christ; but if he remained, of what would he be certain (verses 22–23)?

Paul would be better off in death, as it was far better to be with the Lord than in prison. However, Paul's love for the believers allowed him to place the welfare of others ahead of his own.

- a. What did he believe would be the outcome (verses 25–26)?

Determined to remain committed to the Lord no matter what the sacrifice, Paul's desire was that the believers remain committed as well.

3. In what practical ways would these Christians prove out their commitment (verses 27–28)?
 - a. As they remained unified, what effect would they be able to have on the world?
4. What important privilege did Paul think it important to remind those who follow Christ (verses 29–30)?

Selah ~

Have you experienced the privilege of suffering for Christ's sake? In what way? How has it or will it affect your testimony (witness) for Him?

Day Four:

Conduct Befitting the Call

There is no higher calling than that of *Christian*. To live worthy of the gospel means that we are to live differently because of the grace we have received. The privileges of “son-ship” came at a high price—the shed blood of Christ—motivating believers to live in a manner that exemplifies Him. Paul puts it this way: “Whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents” (verses 27–28 NRSV). Walking worthy means with integrity—consistent with what the Bible says. Let’s look closer at what Paul highlighted here.

1. ***Standing firm in one spirit***—the idea of teamwork is emphasized here; inward solidarity being equal and able to withstand outward persecution. Picture in your mind the illustration of believers linking their shields together and standing fast in one faith. Explain how the Holy Spirit uniting us would also enable us to triumph together?

2. ***Striving side by side with one mind for the faith***—all believers are united in mind and heart through the Holy Spirit. This oneness serves to help us protect and promote the gospel. What do you glean in the following (keep it simple in one sentence):
 - a. Unity of faith (Ephesians 4:4–6)
 - b. Unity of mind (Philippians 2:2–4)

 - c. Unity of heart (Acts 4:32–33)

3. ***In no way intimidated by your opponents***—the opponents in Paul’s day were not so different from what we face today: authorities in high places, false teachers, nonbelievers, adversaries who think they are doing good by attempting to snuff out Christianity.
 - a. According to John 15:18–21, what did Jesus promise every believer?

 - b. Why do you think He left these particular words for His followers?

 - c. Personal: Give an example(s) of Christ’s opponents you face regularly. What have you learned this week that will help you not to become intimidated by those opposing your efforts to share the gospel?

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.
(Philippians 1:27 NIV)

Day Five:

In Touch with Jesus ~

This section of the lesson is intended to be a review of what you have learned and what God has spoken to you this week. Go back over your lesson with a marking pen or highlighter and mark those places and points that stand out to you. Use the margins to make personal notations. Be sure to indicate which points or questions you'd like to share with your discussion group.

1. *LISTEN*: In what way did the Lord Jesus meet *you* in His Word this week? Be specific.

2. *LEARN*: How can you apply this understanding to your daily Christian walk?

3. *LIVE*: What step of obedience will you purpose to take in your walk of faith?

Prayer Requests ~
