

# PHILIPPIANS

Cultivating Christian Unity and Fellowship

# Introduction

- Philippi was the first city in ancient Macedonia to be visited by Paul and Silas when they cross over into Europe from Asia (Acts 16:11-40)
- The first converts were Lydia and her household (Acts 16:14-15), the jailer and his household (Acts 16:33-34), and others (Acts 16:40)
- The letter also mentions other prominent members like Epaphroditus (2:25), and Euodia and Syntyche (4:2)
- Paul wrote the letter from prison, but it's hard to ascertain the place (Ephesus AD 55, Caesarea AD 57-59, Rome AD 60-22)
- Most scholars believe it was Rome (Acts 28:16-31), when Nero was emperor, and so the church was about ten years old when the letter was composed

# Purpose for Writing

- One of the main reason for Paul's writing is to acknowledge the gifts from the congregation (4:10-19)
- <sup>10</sup>I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do all this through him who gives me strength.
- <sup>14</sup>Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. <sup>15</sup>Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only: <sup>16</sup>for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need. <sup>17</sup>Not that I desire your gifts: what I desire is that more be credited to your account. <sup>18</sup>I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

# Purpose for Writing

- In passing, he also urged two individuals to be reconciled to one another and he remain faithful to the Lord (4:1-3):
- Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! <sup>2</sup>I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.
- He wanted to reassure the church of his circumstances and his plans to send Timothy in the future (chs 1-2)
- He also warns of false teachers (ch 3)
- Paul wrote the letter because he is sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi (2:25)

# Key Theme—The Hymn of Christ (2:5-11)

- <sup>5</sup>In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: <sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; <sup>7</sup>rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. <sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!
- <sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

# Key Theme—The Hymn of Christ (2:5-11)

- Many scholars think the passage was derived from an ancient hymn in the early church, which Paul lifted and placed in his letter
- Phil 2:5-7: “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God (υἰοθεΐα = “essential substance or essence”), did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature (υπορφή) of a servant, and being made in the likeness (σχημα) of men”
- This passage was the foundation to the formulation of the Chalcedonian Creed of 451:
- In Christology, the “classic” formulation of doctrine is that **Christ is one person (*hypostasis*) who possesses two natures (*physes*): divine and human**

# Key Theme—The Hymn of Christ (2:5-11)

- Together with Jn 1:1-18, Paul sets out Christ's divinity and pre-existence
- John 1:2-3 spells out the detail that Christ is co-creator with the Father, while Phil 2:10-11 points out that Christ is to be worshiped:
- <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father
- Thus, Phil 2:5-11 is a brief but important account of the gospel
- The term "gospel" appears 10 times (1:5, 7, 12, 14, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15; and "word of life" (2:16)
- But the letter is not primarily doctrinal but it also focuses on

# Fostering Unity and Fellowship (1:27-2:4)

- <sup>27</sup> Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel <sup>28</sup> without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him, but also to suffer for him. <sup>30</sup> Since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.
- **2** Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, **2** then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

# Fostering Unity and Fellowship (1:27-2:4)

- Given our partnership in the gospel (1:3-5), Paul commands believers to “*[monon= only]* conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (1:27a)
- That means we live out our identity in Christ and in community
- Until Paul visits them, he exhorts them to “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel” (1:27b)
- 2:2-3 spells out what a life worthy of the gospel looks like:
- <sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves,

# Fostering Unity and Fellowship (1:27-2:4)

- The gospel is best manifested in real life in terms of spiritual unity: “then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (v. 2)
- The gospel is the good news that God has created a new humanity or community reconciled to himself and whose members are reconciled to one another through the Holy Spirit
- Paul uses the term *phronesis* (like-minded), which refers to practical wisdom, combining cognitive and affective thinking
- This unity allows for diversity on tertiary or secondary matters

# Fostering Unity and Fellowship (1:27-2:4)

- 2:3 tells us the necessary conditions for spiritual unity
- **Negatively**, we must not “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit” (2:3a)
- Why? This attitude gives rise to envy, competitiveness, and division
- We also don’t do things out of “vain conceit” or vain-glory (2:3a)
- **Positively**, “but in humility consider others better than yourselves” (2:3b)
- Paul continues in v. 4. “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”

# Follow the Example of Jesus (2:5-7)

- Paul then describes Christ's example for us to follow:
- Phil 2:5-7: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God ( $\mu\omicron\theta\omega\acute{\eta}$  = "essential substance or essence"), did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature ( $\mu\omicron\theta\omega\acute{\eta}$ ) of a servant, and being made in the likeness ( $\sigma\chi\eta\mu\alpha$ ) of men"
- To be like Christ is to make oneself "nothing" and to "serve" others
- In other words, Jesus "emptied himself" (*kenoo* = nullified himself) and became a "servant" or a "slave"

# Knowing Jesus

- Paul talks about his desire to know:
- “I want to know Christ and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (3:10)
- He is obviously not referring to knowledge about somebody but to a personal experience in which he shares the actual experiences of Jesus
- The idea of union with Christ is an intense personal relationship with Christ
- For Paul, the Christian life is not to be understood simply in terms of belief in a set of doctrines, as important as that may be, but it is also a spiritual experience of a relationship with God through Christ

# Conclusions

- Paul clearly wrote this letter to thank the Philippians for their gifts to him, and considered them partners of the gospel
- He then gives a very succinct and rich exposition of the gospel as the very basis for Christian relationship and spiritual unity
- The life, work, humility, and service of Jesus Christ is the only paradigm by which we can live out the gospel in real life relationships
- Only when we know him deeply and share in the fellowship of his suffering can we find the spiritual resources to effectively live out the gospel in our lives