



**Sunday School Lesson**  
**Phil. 1:1-26**  
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**Living in Joy**



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With this study, we begin a five session study of Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Essentially about a chapter a session will be covered. This document is traditionally a part of the so-called "Prison Letters" in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament. That is, it is one of the letters that was written while the sender was in prison. The letters in the Pauline section of the New Testament that are grouped this way include Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. For more details about the background of these letters and this grouping see my "Relationships Among the Prison Letters" discussion at [Cranfordville.com](http://Cranfordville.com).

Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon have a close relationship with one another (see the [above article](#)), while Philippians is independent of literary or historical connections to these three letters.

**I Context**

The contextual issues with this passage take on a level of higher importance because of the scripture text being a part of an ancient letter. Of the four [basic kinds of writings](#) found in the New Testament (gospel, history, letter, apocalypse), the letter genre is generally more dependent upon contextual concerns than the other types.

**a. Historical**

The ancient letter, especially as found in the New Testament, are occasional documents. That is, their writing is prompted by specific circumstances and concerns arising during the second half of the first Christian century. This is particularly true of the letters of Paul. The so-called General Letters (Hebrews, James, 1-2 Peter, 1-2-3 John, and Jude) are somewhat less circumstantial, especially Hebrews and James.

With the letters of Paul in particular, clear understanding of the meaning of much that is said depends upon understanding the specific circumstance that prompted the writing of the letter to begin with. As has often been stated, reading a letter of Paul is much like listening to one side of a telephone conversation. It helps a lot to know who is on the other end of the phone line. The same is true for the letters of Paul.

With the letter form, a recipient of the letter is designated in the Adscriptio section at the beginning. This can range from an individual (1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon) to several churches scattered over a region (Galatians) to a community of faith located in a particular town or city (all the remaining letters). With the latter, we are not dealing with one congregation in a town; rather with a collection of house churches located in a particular town. The exact number of these groups in each city is unknown, but indications suggest from half a dozen to two or three dozen clusters of Christians meeting in private homes. These include Corinth, Colossae, Ephesus, Rome, Thessalonica, and Philippi. As you will notice from the map on the next page, all but Rome are located in the Aegean Sea region. In addition, 1 and 2 Timothy are addressed to Timothy while he was in Ephesus, and Titus was on the island of Crete at the south end of the Aegean Sea. Philemon was in the province of Asia with Ephesus as its principle city. Thus, all but two



(Galatians and Romans) of the Pauline letters went to communities of faith and individuals located around the Aegean Sea. Not accidentally, this was the primary location of activity for both the second and third [missionary journeys of Paul](#) as described by Luke in Acts 16-20. All but Rome were communities of faith that Paul had himself established through his preaching of the gospel. The time frame for this activity was the decade of the 50s during the first Christian century.

With this general background in place, let's now zero in on Philippians. The story of the founding of the congregation by Paul is told in [Acts 16:11-40](#). This was in early 50s while Paul was on the second missionary journey. His subsequent visit to the congregation in the mid 50s is only alluded to in [Acts 20:1-2](#), while on the third missionary journey; no details about activities there are reported by Luke. Although Philippians contains numerous references to historical events, the early days of the founding of the church are mentioned only in [Phil. 4:15-17](#) (NRSV): "15 You Philippians indeed know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you alone. 16 For even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs more than once. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the profit that accumulates to your account." Nothing is said about the time spent in Philippi. Rather the emphasis is upon the almost immediate missionary zeal of the Philippian church in supporting Paul elsewhere soon after its beginning.

But the writing of this letter to the Philippians took place quite some time after the time he spent in the city. How much longer is a matter of debate. Several factors come into play here. First, is this letter really from Paul? Although some modern scholars are not convinced that it is, a large segment of New Testament scholars today agree with early church tradition that accepted it as an authentic letter of Paul. The next questions are more difficult to answer with certainty. Mainly, where was Paul when the letter was written? The letter itself makes the situation clear that it was written while Paul was under Roman custody as a prisoner. The exact details of his custody are not spelled out. The references inside the letter include [Phil. 1:12-26](#), where Paul is awaiting trial under the custody of the imperial guard but is hopeful of being released and visiting the Philippians again. He is hoping to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi ([Phil. 2:19-30](#)) in order to learn more news about the Philippians. He mentioned two women in the church, Euodia and Syntyche, who had had some disputes with one another ([Phil. 4:2-3](#)). He encouraged them to



reconcile their differences. Also he referred to a love offering that the church had recently sent him while under custody ([Phil. 4:10-18](#)), which Epaphroditus had brought from Philippi.

The problem is that these references provide little clear indication of where Paul was at the time of the writing of this letter. The mention of the Imperial Guard ([Phil. 1:13](#)) used to be considered an indication of Rome, but study of ancient Roman documents has shown that segments of this guard, which functioned somewhat like the U.S. Secret Service, were located all over the Roman Empire just as the Secret Service has offices scattered all over the United States. Thus, this reference provides no clear indication of where Paul was.

The speculation about where he might have been ranges from Ephesus to Caesarea to Rome. The least likely is Ephesus, but Paul does mention in [1 Cor. 15:32](#) and [2 Cor. 1:8](#) that he had been imprisoned in Ephesus. Generalized references to imprisonments are also mentioned in 2 Cor. 11:23 and 2 Cor. 6:5. Clement of Rome in 96 AD wrote about seven imprisonments of Paul ([1 Clem. 5:6](#)), which some take to include one in Ephesus. If Ephesus is the correct location, then the dating of the letter to the Philippians is during the third missionary journey in the mid 50s. More likely, however, is that the letter was written after the third missionary journey while Paul was a prisoner either during the lengthy stay at Caesarea ([Acts 23:23-26:32](#)) in the late 50s, or after he arrived at Rome about AD 60 and was under house arrest there ([Acts 28:16-31](#)). This would place the writing of the letter sometime from about 58 AD to 61 AD.

The letter is prompted by the arrival of Epaphroditus from Philippi bringing a love offering from the church to help Paul while in prison ([Phil. 4:18](#)). Paul expresses his joy over the Philippian Christians, brings them up to date somewhat about his situation, and addresses some issues in the Philippian church that Epaphroditus had evidently shared with him. The tone of joy and happiness dominates the letter, amazingly, given the circumstance that Paul was in when he wrote the letter.

## b. Literary

The [letter to the Philippians](#) follows the customary format of [ancient letters](#), which is as follows:

Praescriptio: 1:1-2

Proem: 1:3-11

Body of letter: 1:12-4:20

Conclusio: 4:21-23

The body of the letter falls into several natural segments of thought:

Paul's present circumstances: 1:12-30

Imitating Christ's humility: 2:1-11

Shining as lights in the world: 2:12-18

Timothy and Epaphroditus: 2:19-3:1a

Breaking with the past: 3:1b-11

Pressing toward the goal: 3:12-4:1

Exhortations: 4:2-9

Acknowledgment of the Philippians' gift: 4:10-20

The content of the body, which we will study over the next five studies, is a mixture between personal history and admonitions to Christian living with some Christian teaching mixed in. Our passage for this first study, chapter one, includes elements of the Praescriptio, Proem and first segment of the body of the letter. We will cover them in that order.

## II. Message

### a. Praescriptio, vv. 1-2

#### The Greek New Testament

<1:1> Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος  
δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ πᾶσιν τοῖς

#### NRSV

1 Paul and Timothy, servants  
of Christ Jesus,

#### NLT

1 This letter is from Paul and  
Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus. It

ἀγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις, <1:2> χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

is written to all of God's people in Philippi, who believe in Christ Jesus, and to the elders and deacons. 2 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

### Comments:

The ancient letter Praescriptio (pre-writing) typically contained three elements: (1) Superscriptio, identifying the sender of the letter; (2) Adscriptio, identifying whom the letter was sent to; and (3) Salutatio, a greeting building a positive bridge of connection between sender and recipient of the letter. Philippians follows this pattern with some expansion elements thrown in to develop the core structure.

*Superscriptio:* “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus” (NRSV; Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ). The letter is identified as coming from both Paul and Timothy, rather than just Paul. Three of the four [Prison Letters](#) are set up as from both Paul and Timothy: Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians. Timothy is also included as sender in 2 Corinthians, as well as 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Thus in six of the thirteen Pauline letters Timothy is involved in the sending of the letter. Then he is the recipient of two more letters. Just this alone would suggest how extensive Timothy was involved in the ministry of Paul. He had joined Paul during the second missionary journey ([Acts 16:1-3](#)), when Paul came through Lystra in the early 50s. A decade later he is still with Paul and involved in ministry. In [Phil. 2:19-24](#), Paul will heap praises upon this faithful servant of God. Both men are identified as “servants of Christ Jesus.” In this part of the letter, this served a credentializing role, setting forth the basis of authority for the demands that would come in the body of the letter. The term, itself not an expression of authority, becomes one because of its following the Old Testament prophets’ self-designation as “servants of the Lord.” This was their claim to be able to declare, “Thus says the Lord....” Paul and Timothy are claiming the same authority to speak in behalf of Christ Jesus.

*Adscriptio:* “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (NRSV; πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις σὺν ἐπισκόποις καὶ διακόνοις). The letter is addressed to both the Christians in Philippi as well as their leaders. Notice the plural, ‘bishops and deacons,’ in this designation. The NRSV translation of ἐπισκόποις as ‘bishops’ is following a traditional English translation pattern, but the modern English word carries a lot of accumulated baggage that wasn’t a part of the original Greek word. The Greek word literally means “those who take care of,” “who see after.” It is a synonym of “pastor” and “elder” as [used in the New Testament](#). Not until much later than the first century did Christianity begin developing structures of clergy. The other leaders are designated as ‘deacons’ (διακόνοις). This term had its roots in the structure of slaves in the ancient Roman household. The diakonoi were the slaves charged with the responsibility of preparing and serving the food in the house. They were to be channels of nourishment to the family. This naturally led to the use of [this term](#) to refer to those charged with providing spiritual nourishment to the family of God. This included Christ, the apostles and others, who served God’s Word to his people.

Thus the letter is sent to the entire Christian community at Philippi. This included a number of house church groups with their twofold leaders giving direction. How large the community was by the late 50s is unclear, but probably included a substantial number of individuals. What both Acts and Philippians do clearly indicate is the major role that women played both in the establishing of the church and in its expansion.

*Salutatio:* “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (NRSV; χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). Paul took the customary ‘hello’ in Greek, χαίρειν ([2 John 10](#)), also with the customary Hebrew greeting ‘peace’ (shalom) and made a Christian greeting from them: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη. Grace and peace come from both God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The formal language used here reflects the seriousness of Paul’s view.

The Praescriptio provides several spiritual insights that can help us. Partnership in ministry is important. Paul depended upon a number of others who served with him. Timothy was one of those who became close to Paul over the years. We need also to remember that when we hear the voice of Paul in this

letter, we are hearing someone speaking in behalf of Christ Jesus. Paul's words are Christ's words to us. The bridge of connection between sender and receiver of this letter is divine grace and peace. That was true of the original readers of this letter, and is still true for us as modern readers. Through God's grace and peace we have connection to this ancient apostle and his assistant.

## b. Proem, vv. 3-11

### The Greek New Testament

<1:3> Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ μνεΐα ὑμῶν <1:4> πάντοτε ἐν πάσῃ δεήσει μου ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν, μετὰ χαρᾶς τὴν δέησιν ποιούμενος, <1:5> ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης ἡμέρας ἄχρι τοῦ νῦν, <1:6> πεποιθῶς αὐτὸ τοῦτο, ὅτι ὁ ἐναρξάμενος ἐν ὑμῖν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐπιτελέσει ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ· <1:7> καθὼς ἐστὶν δίκαιον ἐμοὶ τοῦτο φρονεῖν ὑπὲρ πάντων ὑμῶν διὰ τὸ ἔχειν με ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμᾶς, ἐν τε τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου καὶ ἐν τῇ ἀπολογίᾳ καὶ βεβαιώσει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου συγκαινωνοῦς μου τῆς χάριτος πάντας ὑμᾶς ὄντας. <1:8> μάρτυς γάρ μου ὁ θεός ὡς ἐπιποθῶ πάντας ὑμᾶς ἐν σπλάγχνοις Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. <1:9> καὶ *τοῦτο προσεύχομαι*, ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύῃ ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει <1:10> εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα, ἵνα ἦτε εἰλικρινεῖς καὶ ἀπρόσκοποι εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, <1:11> πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον θεοῦ.

### NRSV

3 *I thank my God every time I remember you*, 4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, 5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ.

7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus.

9 And *this is my prayer, that* your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight 10 to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, 11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

### NLT

3 Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. 4 I always pray for you, and I make my requests with a heart full of joy 5 because you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now. 6 And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.

7 It is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a very special place in my heart. We have shared together the blessings of God, both when I was in prison and when I was out, defending the truth and telling others the Good News. 8 God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

9 I pray that your love for each other will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in your knowledge and understanding. 10 For I want you to understand what really matters, so that you may live pure and blameless lives until Christ returns. 11 May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation – those good things that are produced in your life by Jesus Christ – for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

### Comments:

The Proem of ancient letters was typically a brief prayer expression invoking the blessings of the patron deity of the sender upon the recipients of the letter. Often this took the form of an expression of wishing for good health and prosperity. For Paul this prayer language provided an opportunity to invoke the blessings of the Heavenly Father upon the readers of the letter. This Proem of Paul follows a frequent pattern in that the prayer of thanksgiving (vv. 3-8) shades over into an intercessory prayer for the Philippians (vv. 9-11).

Also to be noticed are the expansion elements working off the core prayer expressions. For the thanks-



giving, Paul used his common expression “I give thanks to my God...” (Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου), which is the [dominant pattern](#) throughout the Pauline letters. Quite helpful is the elaboration of this core expression in verses four through eight. The thrust of this expansion is an expression of gratefulness to God for the Philippians because of their partnership with him in gospel ministry. That support of Paul has been over the duration of the existence of the congregation, since its beginning. They have stood with Paul through his trials and are continuing to support him now. Thus Paul is confident that the work of divine grace begun in the Philippians will continue through to the end (v. 6).

But he wants more for them. Thus his intercession in their behalf (vv. 9-11) is for God’s fullness to continue to unfold before the Philippians, bringing them ever increasing spiritual depth and insight. Notice the connection of spiritual insight with love. The reason for this insight is to make the right decisions (v. 10a), which will lead to a wonderful day of judgment by Christ at the close of the age (vv. 10b-11). Then on that day of judgment the Philippians’ spiritual achievements will go out to the praise of God (v. 11).

What can we learn from these verses? One important insight relates to our praying. How often do we thank God for fellow Christians? How much do we intercede to God in their behalf? Paul’s language of prayer here is challenging. He lifted his voice in thankfulness to God for fellow Christians. Quite fascinatingly, in [every letter](#) to a congregation in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament, he found something to thank God for in regard to the initial readers of his letter. The only exception is the Galatian letter.

Also we see from this the value of a congregation getting involved in the missionary work of a servant of God. This church was supportive of Paul from the beginning. They stood with him in difficult times. I suspect this had something to do with the spiritual vitality of the congregation. The people of God exist to minister to others; such is basic to spiritual health. The church received blessings from their involvement in Paul’s ministry. The aged apostle -- probably in his early 60s at the time of the writing of this letter -- reached out to them in love and with a spiritual jewel of a writing to them.

How much do we value spiritual insight? Paul placed this at the top of the list in his praying for the Philippians. Not because they lacked it, but because they deserved even greater wisdom. Paul coupled the prayer for insight with growing love by the congregation as well. A loving congregation is one growing in its understanding of God’s ways. Notice also that this was all targeted ultimately toward facing God in final judgment. Paul never lost sight of the fact that even God’s people face a day of accountability before their Maker at the close of human history. Love and spiritual insight can help us look forward to that day, rather than be scared of it.

### c. Present Circumstances, vv. 12-30

#### The Greek New Testament

<1:12> Γινώσκειν δὲ ὑμᾶς βούλομαι, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι τὰ κατ’ ἐμὲ μᾶλλον εἰς προκοπὴν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἐλήλυθεν, <1:13> ὥστε τοὺς δεσμούς μου φανεροὺς ἐν Χριστῷ γενέσθαι ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ πραιτωρίῳ καὶ τοῖς λοιποῖς πάσιν, <1:14> καὶ τοὺς πλείονας τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἐν κυρίῳ πεποιθότας τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου περισσοτέρως τολμᾶν ἀφόβως τὸν λόγον λαλεῖν.

<1:15> Τινὲς μὲν καὶ διὰ φθόνον καὶ ἔριν, τινὲς δὲ καὶ δι’ εὐδοκίαν τὸν Χριστὸν κηρύσσουν· <1:16> οἱ μὲν ἐξ ἀγάπης, εἰδότες ὅτι εἰς ἀπολογίαὶν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου κεῖμαι, <1:17> οἱ δὲ ἐξ ἐριθείας τὸν Χριστὸν καταγγέλλουσιν, οὐχ

#### NRSV

12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear. 15 Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16 These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defense of the gospel; 17 the others proclaim Christ out of self-

#### NLT

12 And I want you to know, dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. 13 For everyone here, including all the soldiers in the palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. 14 And because of my imprisonment, many of the Christians here have gained confidence and become more bold in telling others about Christ. 15 Some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. 16 They preach because they love me, for they know the Lord brought me here to defend the Good News. 17 Those others do not have pure

ἀγνώως, οἰόμενοι θλίψιν ἐγείρειν τοῖς δεσμοῖς μου. <1:18> τί γάρ; πλὴν ὅτι παντὶ τρόπῳ, εἴτε προφάσει εἴτε ἀληθείᾳ, Χριστὸς καταγγέλλεται, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ χαίρω. ἀλλὰ καὶ χαρήσομαι, <1:19> οἶδα γὰρ ὅτι τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν δεήσεως καὶ ἐπιχορηγίας τοῦ πνεύματος Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ <1:20> κατὰ τὴν ἀποκαταδοκίαν καὶ ἐλπίδα μου, ὅτι ἐν οὐδενὶ αἰσχυνθήσομαι ἀλλ' ἐν πάσῃ παρρησίᾳ ὡς πάντοτε καὶ νῦν μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστὸς ἐν τῷ σώματί μου, εἴτε διὰ ζωῆς εἴτε διὰ θανάτου. <1:21> ἐμοὶ γὰρ τὸ ζῆν Χριστὸς καὶ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν κέρδος. <1:22> εἰ δὲ τὸ ζῆν ἐν σαρκί, τοῦτό μοι καρπὸς ἔργου, καὶ τί αἰρήσομαι οὐ γνωρίζω. <1:23> συνέχομαι δὲ ἐκ τῶν δύο, τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν ἔχων εἰς τὸ ἀναλῦσαι καὶ σὺν Χριστῷ εἶναι, πολλῶ [γὰρ] μᾶλλον κρεῖσσον· <1:24> τὸ δὲ ἐπιμένειν [ἐν] τῇ σαρκὶ ἀναγκαιότερον δι' ὑμᾶς. <1:25> καὶ τοῦτο πεποιθὼς οἶδα ὅτι μενῶ καὶ παραμενῶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν εἰς τὴν ὑμῶν προκοπὴν καὶ χαρὰν τῆς πίστεως, <1:26> ἵνα τὸ καύχημα ὑμῶν περισσεύῃ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐν ἐμοὶ διὰ τῆς ἐμῆς παρουσίας πάλιν πρὸς ὑμᾶς.

<1:27> Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε, ἵνα εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπὸν ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν, ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι, μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθροῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου <1:28> καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων, ἧτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας, ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ· <1:29> ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν, <1:30> τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες, οἷον εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί.

ish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. 18 What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance. 20 It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death.

21 For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23 I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24 but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25 Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, 26 so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

27 Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, 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, 28 and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing. 29 For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well — 30 since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

motives as they preach about Christ. They preach with selfish ambition, not sincerely, intending to make my chains more painful to me. 18 But whether or not their motives are pure, the fact remains that the message about Christ is being preached, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice. 19 For I know that as you pray for me and as the Spirit of Jesus Christ helps me, this will all turn out for my deliverance. 20 For I live in eager expectation and hope that I will never do anything that causes me shame, but that I will always be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past, and that my life will always honor Christ, whether I live or I die.

21 For to me, living is for Christ, and dying is even better. 22 Yet if I live, that means fruitful service for Christ. I really don't know which is better. 23 I'm torn between two desires: Sometimes I want to live, and sometimes I long to go and be with Christ. That would be far better for me, 24 but it is better for you that I live. 25 I am convinced of this, so I will continue with you so that you will grow and experience the joy of your faith. 26 Then when I return to you, you will have even more reason to boast about what Christ Jesus has done for me.

27 But whatever happens to me, you must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing side by side, fighting together for the Good News. 28 Don't be intimidated by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. 29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. 30 We are in this fight together. You have seen me suffer for him in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of this great struggle.

## Comments:

This first segment of the body of the letter recounts Paul's present situation at the time of the writing of this letter. The verses are a combination of describing his situation (vv. 12-26) and admonition (vv. 27-30). The tone of joy and hopefulness is foundational to what is said. We get something of that in the very first sentence (v. 12): "I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel,..." (NRSV). In prison and possibly facing execution, Paul decided to 'make lemonade out of the lemons' that life had dealt him. He had the insight to see the hand of God at work in his imprisonment using it for positive good. A couple of aspects are stressed. First, he had opportunity to witness to soldiers inside the Roman military that he would not have had otherwise (v. 13). Secondly, his experience had encouraged other Christians where he was in prison to be more courageous in their witnessing to non-Christians (v. 14). To be sure, the motivation of some of these was highly questionable (vv. 14-18a). Some despised Paul enough to witness in the hope of creating enough problems for Paul with the Roman government so that they could be rid of him! Astounding on one hand, but not so much when you pause to consider that Paul had enemies inside Christianity most all his career. Yet Paul chose the higher road of thanking God for even these people, since their witnessing was leading other to faith in Christ.

Verses 18b - 26 contain some of the most eloquent expressions of faith found anywhere in the Bible. Paul believes that the intercessory prayers of the Philippians for him will contribute to his being released from prison (vv. 19, 25-26). But which ever way his case before the authorities goes -- whether in release or in execution -- his bottom line goal is to glorify Christ in the way he conducts himself before the authorities. He has come to grips with the possibility of his own death, and is fully prepared for it, since he knows death simply means a deepening of the believer's relationship with Jesus. But his gut instinct is that God still has work for him to do and thus will spare his life (vv. 24-26).

Growing out of this comes an admonition to the Philippians to live a worthy life of service before God whether Paul is able to be with them or not (vv. 27-30). He wants to hear good news about their faithfulness to serve the Lord. The Philippians' faithfulness is indeed a condemnation of those who oppose the gospel at Philippi. Paul's final thought to them is most challenging to modern pleasure oriented American Christians. God has favored the Philippians not only with the privilege of believing in Christ, but also with the *privilege of suffering* for Christ! The "privilege of suffering" is not a common sermon topic these days. Paul has sensed his own sufferings as a privileged blessing from God, and the struggles of the Philippians have bonded the Philippians with the aged apostle in that privilege of suffering.

The lessons from this passage are numerous. Joy in the midst of suffering. Joy in the face of stinging opposition from fellow Christians. Joy in facing the possibility of execution. Most of all, joy in seeing the hand of God at work in every conceivable situation. Joy in the forward look of being with Jesus in death. Joy in the confidence that God is doing something wonderful in the lives of fellow Christians. Joy in the belief that God still has ministry ahead after all these thirty plus years of service since the Damascus Road experience. Paul provides us with so many reasons to rejoice and to praise our God in whatever circumstance we find ourselves.