

Philippians Study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

Unlike most of Paul's letters, he does not defend his apostleship to the Philippians. They *knew* who Paul was, and the absence of this defence is further evidence of the bond that Paul had with them.

In his usual style, Paul begins with an introduction. He then builds a bridge between the Philippians and himself by examining the similarities of their situations.

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Homework and preparation for next week:

Read chapter 2 in preparation for next week.

- *Why might God have decided that a consequence of being a christian is that we will suffer persecution?*
- *How does this 'promise' rank amongst the other promises of God?*

Notes for study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

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Body of the Study

What are the important things that Paul wants them to know?

The introduction (by Paul) to the letter is found in 1:1-11. The main part of the letter begins in 1:12 "But I want you to know brethren..."

As an exercise, highlight the key words in the introduction section, and then look to see if you can find the same key words also in the conclusion of the letter. Draw a line linking the key thoughts / words together.

What does this tell you about the things Paul is going to say in the letter?

Some of the key things that we find are:

Paul and Timothy write to the Elders and Deacons at Philippi (1:1). Paul has strong remembrance of them (1:3) and has been a partner with them from the very beginning (1:5; 4:15). They have shared in his chains as well as his defence of the gospel (1:7). He longs for them all (1:8) and they have continually shared in his work (4:15-18), even when he was troubled (4:14). Despite their concern for him (4:10) they need not worry, because Paul has learned contentment (4:11-12). What is important, is to learn discernment (1:10) and to pursue excellent and lovely things (4:8), so that we might be pure and blameless (1:10) and filled with the fruit of righteousness (1:11) so that God will meet all of our needs (4:9, 4:19).

Who does Paul address the letter to?

This is the sole letter in the New Testament that is addressed to the Elders and Deacons of the church. That does not mean that this was the only church to have Elders and Deacons (since Paul and Barnabas had appointed *elders in every church* in Galatia on the first journey (Acts 14:23), and Paul had instructed Titus to appoint *elders in every city* (Tit 1:5), and Paul instructs Timothy that those who seek to be appointed as elders must first have proven themselves through the office of a deacon (1Tim 3:10)).

The letter is not solely addressed to the elders and deacons, but clearly is directed to the church – *to all the saints...in Philippi* (1:1).

As in all other places in the New Testament, the description of the elders is plural. There were no churches in the New Testament where there was a singular elder (or bishop, or presbyter, or pastor – which are all terms describing the same office) overseeing the congregation. In all cases there was a plurality of elders overseeing a single congregation.

Timothy had been with Paul from the beginning of the ministry in Philippi, and he had been chosen by Paul in Lystra in Galatia (Acts 16:1), and Paul took him on the journey with them (Acts 16:3). He was therefore, well acquainted with the brethren in Philippi, and Paul hoped to send hi to them very shortly (2:19).

Greetings and Salutations

As Paul's usual style, he begins the letter with the usual greetings and salutations. Paul's affinity with the Philippian brethren comes through very strongly. "...*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you...*" (1:3); "...*always in every prayer of mine...*" (1:4); "...*for your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now...*" (1:5); "...*when I was first acquainted with you and left Macedonia, no church financially supported me except you alone – even while I was in Thessalonica you sent aid to me again and again...*" (4:15-16).

But Paul is in prison "...*in chains...*" which may be physical (unlikely, since he was essentially under house arrest *in his own hired house* (Acts 28:30)), or metaphorically – since he did not have the freedom to go where he wanted to go. The bondage of chains was not unlike his bondage to Christ, and his bondage to the Philippians. Even although he might not have chosen the physical bondage, yet in every situation, Paul had learned to be content (4:11). Our bondage to Christ has some similarities – if we were left to our own choice, we would choose to indulge in *the pleasures of the world*. Paul discusses the struggle that we have with these things in Rom 7:15-23. Yet, because *we want to be* God's children, the things of the world do not hold the fascination for us, and we learn to be content in the things that we have.

Specifically, Paul's desire for the Philippians is for them to "*abound more and more in knowledge and discernment...*" (1:9). He wants them to *grow*, and *to approve the excellent things*. He is implying that they should not grow into and approve the things that are not excellent, and brings these into contrast in the conclusion.

How does Paul describe his bondage?

The things that happened to him, whilst it might be thought would have hindered the gospel, have in fact turned out to help it. Paul's plan was to go to Spain via Rome after he had been to Jerusalem in AD 58. Instead, he spent 2 years in custody in Caesarea, and then the best part of another year travelling to Rome under arrest. At the time he writes Philippians he has been under house arrest for at least a year (and maybe longer). It has been at least 4 years since he left Corinth intending to go to Rome quite quickly.

But his house arrest gave him access into Caesar's household – since the reason that he was in Rome was that he had exercised his Roman right to appeal to the Emperor. Had he arrived in Rome as a free citizen, he would never of had such access (under the normal circumstances, although when God is involved, the circumstances are never *normal*). Paul specifically discusses the effect that he has had on the Praetorian Guard – those who have been guarding Paul during his house arrest – it has become evident to all of them that "...*his chains are in Christ...*" (1:13).

The guard would have been in place around the clock, and would have changed on 4 hour shifts. Consequently, a whole group of the guards would have come in contact with Paul, and would have come to know of the reason for his house arrest – and like the soldiers who escorted him to Rome, would have learned of his genuineness to be a slave serving God. The effect was not only on the guard, but also on those of the Palace. The guards would have talked. And Paul would have come in contact with officials from the Palace.

After discussing the effect of his imprisonment on the Romans, Paul then turns to the effect on the church. His imprisonment has brought strength to the church at Rome “...*they are much bolder to speak the word without fear...*” (1:14).

The comments that Paul makes are telling of the dynamics of the church in Rome:

- *Some preach Christ because of goodwill,*
- *Some preach Christ out of envy and strife.*

There are those in the church who are bursting with enthusiasm to preach the gospel that they just can't hold it in. But then there are others who are not as outgoing, and are shy to teach the word. They do it because they know that they have to (it is after all one of Christ's commandments – Mt 28: 19-20). But Paul says even more about some of these people – “...*that they are trying to add affliction to his chains...*” (1:16). They are hoping that Paul will go away and leave them in peace – back into their comfort zone. If they tell enough people about Paul, then perhaps the authorities will put him in prison – or even worse. Perhaps they were saying (as they were preaching) that Paul has got his just desserts, and that they are the ones who are preaching the truth and practicing christianity correctly! But the message that they are preaching doesn't undermine Paul at all. His credentials are sound, and are well known – and he is well respected by the authorities. So, it only goes to bring about growth of the gospel.

The things that Paul has to say about the gospel in Rome mirror the situation that he is later to describe about the gospel in Philippi (2:13; 21; 4:2-3).

How does Paul describe his devotion to the work?

In the not too distant view is the coming of Paul's expected trial. He doesn't know how things are going to turn out – but what he has seen so far has turned out for the best, when he would have imagined that they would have turned out for the worst. So, Paul had absolute confidence in the outcome – whatever it might happen to be. And, it could even be his death (1:20), although he has confidence that he will be released – because of God's answer to the prayers of the Philippians (1:19). Even though *Paul* might be the one in bondage, yet the Philippians are inextricably *bound together with him*, through God's Spirit.

No matter what circumstances threw at Paul, his chainage to God was unshakeable. Even if he was to be put to death, his devotion would be unwavering. If he lived, he would live for Christ to the fullest. If he was to be put to death, he would die as a martyr. “...*For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...*” (1:21)

If he gets to live, then it will mean that he is able to continue his work as an evangelist, and there will be some fruit as a result. But, if he doesn't get to live, it will be better for him, since he will be able to go and be with Christ.

Remaining for the present time is far better for the Philippians, as he will be able to minister to them again. And the evidence from the prison epistles and from the traditional writers does suggest that Paul did in fact visit Philippi again after his release.

Verse 21 almost goes hand in hand with Gal 2:20 “...*I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I – Christ liveth in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me...*”

Where does Paul make the transition from his affairs, to “your affairs”?

Up until vs 26, Paul has been talking about his affairs. He is somewhat quiet about his actual sufferings and condition – but then we need to remember that the Philippians already knew about Paul’s circumstances, and that was why they had sent Epaphroditus to Rome. He was soon to return to Philippi, and would tell them first hand about Paul’s condition, so there was no need for him to write about that to them.

In vs 27, Paul makes the transition – their conduct was to be like his conduct. They had heard about Paul’s bondage and imprisonment. But Paul has already shown that he real bondage is to Christ – and he wants to hear about the faith of the Philippians – about their bondage to Christ and how that was expressed in their lives. Like Paul, the Philippians were being oppressed (1:28), and he wanted to hear of their unity – “...*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...*” (1:27 NKJV).

Just like the problems that Paul was facing from his adversaries, the Philippians should “...*not in any way be terrified by your adversaries...*” (1:28).

Literally, when Paul tells them to *let your conduct be worthy...* (1:27) he is telling them to *live as worthy citizens...* The import of this must be considered when we remember that Philippi was a Roman Colony – and the citizens prized Roman citizenship. Just as the Philippians physically lived their lives in a way that was worthy of the Roman citizenship, so Paul was imploring them to live their spiritual lives as a colony of the true homeland in heaven, in such a way that was befitting of heavenly citizens. The parallels would not be lost on the Philippians.

What do the adversaries prove?

“The fact that the Philippians are being persecuted has a double edge. It seals the doom of the persecutors as the enemies of the gospel, and it confirms the eternal *salvation* of the faithful who endure to the end. See Mk 13:13 and Rom 13:11 for this meaning of salvation as the ultimate state of the persevering believer but including the thought of God’s preserving care extended to him in his trial. The Philippian Christians are to stand fast in the faith in spite of their affliction; but it is only the Lord who enables them to stand in their evil day (Eph 4:13 c/f Rom 14:4 for this interplay of human responsibility and divine grace, in another context)¹.

Indeed, persecution was not a strange thing for the christians in the New Testament, and it is not a strange thing for christians today. Jesus was made perfect through suffering (Heb 2:10), and all christians will face persecution at some time in their lives (2 Tim 3:12).

The persecution – and the Philippians reaction to it – made the divide between those who belonged to God, and those who didn’t.

The Philippians were bound together with Paul in the things that he was facing. Paul exhorts them to make the same response that they have heard about him (1:30).

¹ Martin, Ralph P: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries “Philippians” ISBN 0-85111-860-7 p.88