

Philippians Study 6: Review

Introduction

Philippians stands out amongst the New Testament letters, because of the way in which Paul opens up to the brethren. We get some great insight into the “inner Paul” and we can begin to see the things that are driving him onwards. He hardly has any criticism of the church, of which he has forged a bond – which is reminiscent of the bond with chains that Paul is physically in. But Paul’s true bondage is to the Lord.

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Homework:

Re-read the notes as a refresher of the study.

Notes for study 6: Review

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Background of Philippi

Philippi was “...a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia...” (Acts 16:12 NIV), and located on the *Engation Way* – the Roman “highway” than went from Rome to Byzantium - known today as Istanbul.

Roman colonies enjoyed self-government, freedom of paying taxes to the Emperor, and the same rights as those who lived in Italy – Roman dress, language, coinage, and holidays. Roman citizenship was a great benefit to the Philippians and a sense of great pride. It received autonomous government, immunity from tribute, and treatment of its residents as if they actually lived in Italy.

The church was started by Paul, who with Silas, Luke and Timothy stopped there on the second journey in AD 52. Paul made a second visit to Philippi in A.D. 55-56 on his third missionary journey (Ac 20:1-6). He passed through the city twice: on his outward trip toward Corinth and again on his return on the way to Jerusalem (AD 58). Luke had apparently been left with the church during the first visit, and was picked up by Paul on the third visit. If this was the case, then Luke spent around 6 years working with the Philippians.

Greek names abound amongst those named in the church at Philippi. This gives us some useful insight into the make-up and culture of the Philippian church, which was strongly Gentile, although undoubtedly with some Jewish members.

Date and Occasion of the Letter

The Philippian letter is clearly one of the *Prison Epistles*, from the first Roman imprisonment in AD 62 / 63. Paul mentions the palace guard (literally the praetorian guard 1:13). He also sends greetings to the Philippians from “...those of Caesar’s household...” (4:22).

The occasion of the letter is clearly Epaphroditus’ return to Philippi. He had been sent by the church there with a gift (certainly of a considerable sum of money) to Paul (4:18).

The style of the letter

The style of the book is a “friendship letter”. A strong bond existed between the Philippians and Paul, and the friendship was linked and forged like a contract. When someone attacked Paul, they immediately became the enemies of the Philippians and vice-versa.

This is the sole letter in the New Testament 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)). 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).

Key things of the letter

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).

Greetings and Salutations

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).

Paul's bondage of chains was not unlike his bondage to Christ, and his bondage to the Philippians. He might not have chosen the physical bondage, yet in every situation, he 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*. 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.

Whilst the things that happened to Paul might have hindered the gospel, they have rather turned out to help it. Instead of going to Spain via Rome after the return to Jerusalem in AD 58, Paul 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. His house arrest gave him access into Caesar's household. Had he arrived in Rome as a free citizen, he would never of had such access.

The things that Paul describes 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).

Paul's devotion to the work

Paul's trial is expected in the not too distant future. 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, he has absolute confidence in the outcome – whatever it might happen to be. 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 and be able to continue his work as an evangelist. If he were to be put to death, he would die as a martyr. It will be better for him, since he will be able to go and be with Christ.

“...For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...” (1:21). If he gets to live, then it will mean that, and there will be some fruit as a result.

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...”

Paul’s concern for the affairs of the Philippians

The Philippians already knew about Paul’s circumstances. That was why Epaphroditus had been sent 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.

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). Paul tells them to *live as worthy citizens...*(1:27) 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 implores them to live their spiritual lives as a colony of the true homeland in heaven, in such a way that is befitting of heavenly citizens. The parallels would not be lost on the Philippians.

Persecution seals the persecutors as the enemies of the gospel, and confirms the eternal *salvation* of the faithful who endure to the end. It 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). Persecution – and the Philippians reaction to it – made the divide between those who belonged to God, and those who didn’t.

The four motives for unity

Although Paul has a great bond of affection with the Philippians, yet things in the church are not as sweet as they ought to be. Some people were being self centred to the detriment of others in the church. Paul’s argument is built on four things:

- Our consolation in Christ
- Our comfort of love
- Our fellowship of the Spirit
- Our affection and mercy

He could have just said “be united and in one mind”, but with the strong bond that he shares with the Philippians, he puts a very strong and straightforward case for unity. We all share these things through Christ – so how could we be divided, when we have these things in common? The answer is obvious. But he goes a little further. Apparently there was some problems in the church – and Paul says “...let each of you...” (2:4), and he gives some quite specific instruction as to their conduct (both in their lives and in their worship). In his usual style, Paul drives home the point in 2:2 “...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind...” (2:2 NKJV).

The Philippians were apparently behaving in self-centred ways, and were typified by the following characteristics:

- Selfish ambitions
- Conceit
- High mindedness
- Self interest

That is not the way that it ought to be. He gives the perfect example – the example of Christ. Jesus’ character and behaviour was not at all like the things that appear to be happening in Philippi – in fact on the contrary – he was exactly the example that Paul was pointing them to:

- *He did not think being equal to God was a thing to be grasped*

The Philippians were being high minded. Jesus was humble. But not just humble – He was absolutely humble!

- *He made himself of no reputation and took on the form of a servant*

His humility was such that the King was prepared to wash the feet of the pilgrims. God became a man – and His name was called *Emmanuel* – “*God with us*” (Mt 1:23).

- *And he came in the likeness of men, and was found in appearance as a man*

Jesus lived as a man, and went through all of the things that we all go through. He certainly felt grief at the passing of Lazarus (Jn 11:35). He came in the fullness of flesh. He was born as a baby, and grew in the normal manner of any child, and would have been educated as any other Jewish child. Most writers believe that He would have learned the carpentry trade from Joseph.

- *He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross*

Jesus’ humility was complete. He could go no further. Not only did He go to the point of death, it was the cruelest and slowest death imaginable. Yet in all of this, Jesus was obedient and humble. He was perfected through suffering (Heb 2:10).

- *Therefore God has highly exalted Him, and given Him the name above every name*

As a result of His obedience and humility, Jesus was exalted (c/f Heb 2:9). Jesus was crowned with glory as a result of His obedience. He became King after His ascension (Heb 10:12), so that

- *At the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue should confess Jesus Christ is Lord*

None of us will escape. We will confess Jesus in this life, or we will confess Jesus on the day of judgement. There will be no denial of the fact. Our obedience to God in this life is the prerequisite for the life to come.

What do we need to do about it?

The Philippians *knew* what they needed to do, but Paul reminded them anyway. “...*Therefore as you have always obeyed...*” (2:12). We need to obey God. Paul says *therefore* – which relates directly to the preceding verse – *therefore obey!* We are to work out our salvation to ensure that we will receive the gift that God gives – but that is **not to say** that we earn it! But in working at our salvation, we are not to grumble about it “...*do all things without murmuring and disputing...*” (2:14 NKJV). People will see the contrast. They will note that we are different. We are called to be different. We are called to be *transformed*, not *conformed* to the world (Rom 12:2).

Paul specifically relates his personal experiences with the Philippians to their obedience. If they fall away, then he says that he would have laboured (amongst them) in vain. It would have been a wasted effort. Paul knew that it was quite possible for the Philippians who had been obedient to stop being obedient and fall away. In contrast, if Paul is sacrificed for the sake of the Philippians “...*poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith...*” (2:17), then that would be sufficient grounds for his gladness and rejoicing. Here again the strong bond of affection for the Philippians – and them for him is shown (2:18).

Paul's expectation for his circumstances

Paul hopes to send Timothy as soon as he knows of the outcome of his trial (2:23), and is hopeful of coming shortly himself. He is optimistic of the outcome.

The bond between Paul and Timothy is strong. Timothy had been with Paul on the second journey when they first went to Philippi. Paul says he has no-one like minded. Whilst he was in Rome, he was busy writing letters, and with his visitors. The respect that Paul had for Timothy (and Luke) stands out amongst the rest “...for all seek their own, not the things of Christ...” (2:21). Paul shows his concern for the Philippians, in that the reason that he wants to send Timothy is so that he might know and hear back about their affairs, and “...be encouraged when I know your state...” (2:20).

What is going on in Philippi?

Paul is asking the Philippians to *rejoice*. But not just rejoice – rejoice in the Lord! The thought flows from the earlier part of chapter 2, where he has been encouraging them to get along, and do so without murmuring and disputing (2:14). The Judaisers were potentially causing trouble everywhere, and he describes them in three ways:

- Dogs,
- Evil workers,
- Mutilators

The NIV is clearer to show that it is the same group that he is describing with three different descriptions:

“... Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh...” (3:2 NIV)

In contrast to the Judaisers – who are characterised by the act of circumcision that they insist should be administered to all (male) christians, the true Jews (Paul describes as the true circumcision) are we who are true christians. The characteristics are that we:

- Worship God in the Spirit,
- Rejoice in Christ Jesus,
- Have no confidence in the flesh.

Paul's “qualifications”

Paul had a perfect background in the Jewish religion – far more than almost anyone else could claim. Of pure Jewish stock, every Jew would regard Paul as a strict keeper of the Law. He had gone way beyond any other Jew in his observance of the Law, and his zealotry for doing everything that he could to see that it was kept. But that was no comparison compared to salvation in Christ. “...All of the things that I had gained, I gladly counted as loss for Christ...” (3:7) Paul goes to the greatest length possible in order that he might continue and grow as a christian.

Everything is a loss compared to (being a christian). I strive for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. I have let go of everything else. It is all rubbish compared to Christ. I want to be found in Him. I don't want my own righteousness (that comes from the Law). I want the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ. This righteousness comes from God by faith (by implication, compared to the righteousness that the Jews were trying to impose by the physical keeping of the Law – expressed through circumcision). The end is that I might know Jesus, and know the power of His resurrection. Share with His sufferings, be conformed to His death. I want to attain the resurrection form the dead (and be raised with Christ).

The comparison is strong and deep. It comes by faith in Christ, and obedience to that faith. Paul's obedience to that faith was just the same type of obedience that Abraham displayed.

What is the sign of maturity?

By having things in perspective, we can really understand our priorities. We will not let anything hinder us. Our maturity comes if we have a right understanding of our relationship with God (as Paul has outlined), and have our lives under control so that we can be focused on our lives and being the people that God wants us to be. That doesn't mean that we don't sin. Paul still regarded himself as *the chief of sinners*, and he still had a war going on within between what he knew he ought to do and the things that he actually did (Rom 7:15-25). The sign of maturity is not being *free from sin* (in the sense of not committing sin), but in recognising our state, our total dependence on God, and our determination to forget the past things and move relentlessly towards the reward in heaven.

Again, Paul calls on the Philippians to *be of the same mind*. He is manoeuvring them to unity.

Whilst Jesus is **the** example that we are called to follow, Paul says that we should follow him. This might seem egotistical, but it needs to be taken in the same context to what he said in to the Corinthians “...*be followers of me as I also am of Christ...*” (1 Cor 11:1). He had set a wonderful example amongst the Philippians. They had seen in him (and the others that were with him – Silas, Luke, and Timothy) the example that Christ calls us to live. We are to follow after these good examples, and live our lives in such a manner.

In contrast, some do not walk by the example that Paul has given us. They walk disorderly. These are the enemies of Christ. Paul calls us to unity. The enemies are calling the brethren to division. That is not the way God intends it to be. Such is the distress that Paul tells them *even weeping*. His distress is obvious, and the answer is obvious.

The Roman citizens of the colony of Philippi are reminded that our true citizenship is in heaven. They would immediately understand the connection. It is who we are – citizens of heaven, not the citizens of our temporary residence on earth.

What do the Philippians need to do?

They need to *stand fast in the Lord*. He doesn't leave it there – he builds them up and encourages them – “...*my beloved and longed for brethren, my joy and my crown...*” Again the strong and affectionate bond that Paul has with the brethren is clearly shown. The brethren were faithful, and Paul's greatest joy would be to present them to the Lord on the day of judgement (2:16).

But there is a problem in the Philippian church. Two of the sisters are at odds with one another. And having the two in such a relationship is enough to tear the church apart. Paul uses very strong language “...*I implore...*” them to sort the issues out. He wants unity in the congregation, but not unity at any price. Unity comes from “...*being of the same mind in the Lord...*”

These women once worked side by side with Paul – so he has personal knowledge of them – perhaps they might have been amongst the first converts at Philippi – from those amongst the riverside.

We have here (possibly) one sister who is full of good works, and another who is good at making things happen, and they are both at odds with one another on how they can serve the Lord effectively. Neither of them is to be criticised for their motives, but the problem is bringing the church undone. The *behaviour* of the Philippians has caused a problem between some of them. It is one thing to have perfect understanding of what God wants us to do, and quite another to put these things *into practice* in our lives. Paul's call to the Philippians is to how to address the situation, and come to a practical resolution of how we live and create values in our lives.

- ***Rejoice in the Lord always***

Paul says not only to rejoice, but he says that that rejoicing is to be in the Lord. But he doesn't leave it there – he repeats it for emphasis – *and again I say, rejoice!* Perhaps some of the brethren

in Philippi enjoyed being miserable. We have every reason to rejoice as Christians, and the reasons are spelled out through the letter.

- ***Let your gentleness be known***

They needed to be willing to yield one's personal rights and to show consideration and gentleness to others. It is easy to display this quality toward some persons, but Paul commands that it be shown toward all – Christian friends, unsaved persecutors, false teachers, anyone at all.

- ***Be anxious for nothing***

This verse is one of the better known verses in the entire scriptures. It almost needs no comment. We need to learn to put our trust in God, for He supplies all of our needs. We must not forget to pray – we talk to God, and He supplies our needs – and *with thanksgiving* we let our requests be made known to God.

- ***The peace of God***

The peace of God comes after we have done the things above – rejoiced in our blessings (and our persecutions) – expressed our gentleness to others – and traded our anxiety for prayer and thanksgiving – then we will have the peace that comes from God, and the peace will guard our hearts and minds – we will enjoy God's happiness as long as we let His peace dwell in us.

Paul uses a repetitive phraseology for the things that we should think about. There is an implied contrast to the things that we should not think about! Think about things that are:

True, Noble, Just, Pure, Lovely, Of good report, Virtuous, Praiseworthy

In contrast to the things that we see in the world, and the things that world *thinks about*, we are to think on the spiritual things. Paul next uses his personal example amongst the Philippians as the type of example to follow.

Concluding remarks

Paul's example amongst them was exemplary, and his care and concern for them is also exemplary. The Philippians always cared for Paul – and they would have cared and helped him more, but they lacked the opportunity to do so.

Paul is not trying (in any way) to criticise the Philippians for what they hadn't done. He says that in whatever circumstances that he finds himself in, that he can find contentment in it. But the real strength that he has comes from the Lord (vs 12-13).

The Philippians had done some extraordinary things in supporting Paul. From the very first, they had supported him where no other churches had done so. He mentions Thessalonica. After the (relatively) short stay in Philippi, he went to Thessalonica. *Time and again* the Philippians sent him money whilst he was there.

The picture that we have here of the Philippian church is one of a caring and sharing church. One that puts themselves into debt for the sake of Paul and the gospel:

2CO 8:1 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (2 Cor 8:1-5 NIV)

The chief example of the churches that Paul has in mind is the church at Philippi.