

# The Letter to the Saints at Philippi—Part 1

## Southside church of Christ, Huntsville

Reading Assignment—Philippians 1-2

### Introduction

The letter to the Philippian brethren was written by Paul. Like many of his other epistles, this letter was written while he was imprisoned in Rome (Ph. 1:12-14; 2:17-18). Timothy was probably present with him at the time of writing and also sent his greetings (Ph. 1:1), and would likely head to Philippi to find a report for Paul (Ph. 2:19). The book seems to have been delivered by Epaphroditus who was probably from Philippi as he is mentioned as the Philippian's messenger (Ph. 2:25; 4:18). Regardless, the brethren had some attachment to Epaphroditus because they were very concerned about his sickness (Ph. 2:26).

We have a fairly good record of how the church at Philippi began. Philippi was the most remote city in that part of Macedonia; as such, it the first city Paul and Silas encountered in the province (Ac. 16:12). Philippi was notable because it was a Roman colony. As a colony, the city was a piece of Rome itself. Philippi had its own government with a senate; it had all the same laws as Rome and used Latin as its language. This respect for Roman law explains why the magistrates were so fearful when they learned Paul and Silas were Roman citizens (Ac. 16:38). There were probably not many Jews in Philippi, so there was not a synagogue. However, there was a place of prayer called a Proseucha. Interestingly the book does not mention the error of the circumcision as if it were present. Beside the lack of a synagogue, this is probably further proof that there were not many Jews living in the city. Still, like any good evangelist, Paul warns them of the danger of the circumcision even though they could say, "we don't have this problem here." In Philippians 3:2-3 Paul warns them to "beware of the concision" because we "have no confidence in the flesh," but are spiritually circumcised.

Paul has no strong rebuke or correction to offer the brethren at Philippi. Instead, he refers to how much he loves them and rejoices in their faithfulness. His only admonition is to remember to be lowly minded (Ph. 1:27; 2:1-16; 4:1-3). All men struggle with selfishness, so it is remarkable that this appears to be the main shortcoming of the Philippian brethren.

In chapter 1 Paul offers a greeting and update on his state of bonds. Even though this letter was written later in his imprisonment, when he relied mostly on others to preach for him (Ph. 1:13-18), he continues to be joyful and focused on the cause of Christ. In fact, he realizes that whether he lives or dies, the cause of Christ will be achieved. Still, Paul always feels there is more work to accomplish (Ph. 1:24).

Chapter 2 begins with an exhortation that the brethren love each other in humility. He instructs them to be of "one accord" and "one mind." It is very easy for a local congregation to become divided along social lines. When this type of division is present the separate groups will always end up in conflict with each other; sometimes the conflicts will be over the smallest of

issues. However, the admonition to be of one mind implies that we are all part of one body. As one body, we should be able to work together to further the cause of Christ. Paul advises that the way to accomplish this is to think of others as being better than yourself. After all, Christ, who was God, was willing to fully humble himself. Christ humbled himself to the point of sacrifice. In return, God exalted him and has given him all glory and authority.

Starting in Ph. 2:12, Paul shifts topics slightly to remind the brethren to remain faithful. God was faithful to Christ and will keep his promise to those who do his will. Paul reminds them again to be lowly minded as that is the only way to “shine as lights in the world.”

Paul closes the chapter with a discussion of the faithful brethren Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy had some care for the Philippian church (Ph. 2:20). Even though the account in Acts is slightly unclear, Timothy was probably present at the beginning. The brethren loved Epaphroditus and were very concerned that he had been sick. Paul tells them to honor him for his hard work. Even though he was extremely sick, Epaphroditus was not willing to let the cause suffer. Indeed, such work ethic is worthy of appreciation. Often we begin to think very highly of men who are zealous for the gospel. However, they are only worthy of that honor as long as they continue to be faithful. No matter the source, we must always test what others preach (1 Jn. 4:1). Regardless of someone’s reputation, we must compare their doctrine to the standard. Epaphroditus was not worthy of his reputation because he was a great speaker. His reputation was earned because of his faithfulness. Let us pray that each of us would have the same reputation.

### **Instructions**

While reading chapters 1 and 2, be sure to identify the major and minor themes as well as the major arguments used to support the themes.

#### **Chapter 1**

Major Theme:

Major Argument:

Minor Themes:

#### **Chapter 2**

Major Theme:

Major Argument:

Minor Themes:

### **Questions**

1. How sick was Epaphroditus?

2. Paul wanted their love to abound in what? (Ph. 1:9)

3. Paul used his bonds to preach where?

4. What were the two motives for preaching the gospel?

5. What did Paul do when he thought about the Philippians?

6. How were the Philippians to regard each other?

7. Why was Paul going to send Timothy?

**True or False**—Be sure to provide scripture for your answer.

T or F—Paul was afraid of dying.

T or F—Paul's bonds were hurting the cause of Christ.

T or F—Epaphroditus helped Paul in the Philippian's stead.

T or F—The world is crooked and perverse.

T or F—Paul wanted the Philippians to stand fast in one spirit.

**Thought Questions**

1. What is the attitude of Christ which Paul instructs us to take on? (Ph. 2:5)

2. What does it mean to “work out your own salvation?” (Ph. 2:12)

3. Find at least 3 phrases where Paul instructs the Philippians to be unified (e.g., of one mind).  
Be prepared to discuss what Paul means.