

PHILIPPIANS

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BACKGROUND

Paul, now in Rome under house arrest, had founded the Philippian church during his second missionary journey ([Acts 16:11-40](#)). The believers at Philippi, the main city of Macedonia, had assisted in Paul's support while he was at Thessalonica and Corinth ([Phil. 4:15-16](#); [2 Cor. 11:9](#)). Upon hearing of his imprisonment, they sent Epaphroditus to Rome with another financial gift, which was probably what enabled Paul to live in his own rented house ([Acts 28:30](#)) rather than in jail. While in Rome, Epaphroditus became ill and nearly died ([Phil. 2:27](#)). When he recovered, Paul used the occasion of his return to Philippi to send this letter, essentially a thank-you note for their gift.

AUTHOR

Paul ([Phil. 1:1](#); [Phil. 3:4-6](#); see [Romans: Author](#)).

DATE AND LOCATION

Since Paul seemed confident of either acquittal or release from prison ([Phil. 1:19, 25](#); [Phil. 2:24](#); see [Philemon 1:22](#)), he probably wrote Philippians toward the end of his time of house arrest, c. A.D. 61, about a year after he wrote Ephesians and Colossians.

» **See also:** [Illustration: Epistles of Paul, The](#)

PURPOSE

- To thank the Philippian believers for their financial help
- To address problems in the Philippian church, especially the rivalry between two prominent women, Euodia and Syntyche
- To refute the teachings of the Judaizers ([Phil. 3:1-3](#)) and of some who were going to the opposite extreme, perhaps advocating a total disregard for law or a hedonistic lifestyle ([Phil. 3:18-19](#))

UNIQUE FEATURES

- Philippians is the most personal of Paul's letters to churches, with more than 100 first-person pronouns in its four short chapters.
- It is a letter of joy (see [Outline](#)).

- It contains one of the Bible's most often-quoted passages on the person of Christ ([Phil. 2:5-11](#)).
- It contains no direct quotations from the OT.
- It is the only letter of Paul in which he mentions church officers in the salutation ([Phil. 1:1](#)).

COMPARISON WITH OTHER BIBLE BOOKS

Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, 2 Timothy:

- All were written during Paul's imprisonments.

2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, Philemon:

- These, with Philippians, are Paul's most personal letters.

OUTLINE

1. REJOICING IN CHRIST'S SERVICE ([Phil. 1](#))

1. Salutation; appreciation for the Philippians ([Phil. 1:1-11](#))
2. The progress of the gospel ([Phil. 1:12-26](#))
- C. Exhortation to faith and courage ([Phil. 1:27-30](#))

II. REJOICING IN CHRIST'S SELFLESSNESS ([Phil. 2](#))

- A. Christ's selflessness ([Phil. 2:1-11](#))
- B. Imitating Christ's selflessness ([Phil. 2:12-18](#))
- C. Two imitators of Christ's selflessness ([Phil. 2:19-30](#))

III. REJOICING IN CHRIST'S SUFFERINGS ([Phil. 3](#))

- A. The power of his death and resurrection ([Phil. 3:1-11](#))
- B. The purpose of his death and resurrection ([Phil. 3:12-21](#))

IV. REJOICING IN CHRIST'S SUFFICIENCY ([Phil. 4](#))

- A. Rejoicing in his peace ([Phil. 4:1-9](#))
- B. Rejoicing in his power ([Phil. 4:10-13](#))
- C. Rejoicing in his provision ([Phil. 4:14-23](#))

TIMELINE

| | |
|-------------|---|
| A.D. 35: | Paul's conversion |
| c. A.D. 51: | Paul in Philippi on 2nd journey |
| A.D. 57: | Paul in Philippi on 3rd journey |
| A.D. 60-62: | Paul imprisoned in Rome, writes Philippians |
| c. A.D. 67: | Paul martyred |

Phil. 1:7-11 *"Only God knows how much you mean to me."* Paul felt a deep affection for this particular church, which had helped him so much ([Phil. 1:7-8](#); see [Background](#)). He prayed that they would grow in knowledge, wisdom, and righteousness.

Phil. 1:12-18 *Want to reach hundreds? Go to jail!* Paul rejoiced that, far from hindering his ministry, his imprisonment had actually enhanced it. Apparently even some of the soldiers guarding him had come to faith ([Phil. 1:12-13](#)). For different reasons, both friends and foes of Paul had stepped up their preaching activities following his imprisonment. Some of his timid believer friends had been jolted into greater boldness ([Phil. 1:14](#)). Others, perhaps jealous of the impact of this newcomer to Rome, were stepping up their evangelistic outreach "out of jealousy" ([Phil. 1:15-17](#)). Whatever the motivation, Paul rejoiced that the gospel was being heard ([Phil. 1:18](#)). He knew, as did Asaph the psalmist, that "human opposition only enhances [God's] glory" ([Psalm 76:10](#); see exposition on [Ezra 6:1-12](#)).

Phil. 1:19-26 *"To be here or not to be here: That is the question."* Though apparently confident that he would soon be released from prison ([Phil. 1:19, 25](#)), Paul's first choice would have been to die and be with Christ ([Phil. 1:23](#)). His sense of duty, however, required him to remain here on earth ([Phil. 1:24](#)). Whatever happened, Paul's overriding desire was that his life "always honor Christ" ([Phil. 1:20](#)). While death would be "better" for Paul, his goal in continuing to live was summed up in one word: *Christ* ([Phil. 1:21](#)).

Phil. 1:27-30 *Wonderful news! You get to suffer for him!* Paul exhorted the Philippians to be steadfast in their faith and bold before their enemies, counting it a privilege to suffer for Christ. Suffering is promised to all true believers (see [2 Tim. 3:12](#)).

Phil. 2:1-4 *Blessings from Christ for others.* Those who have been blessed in Christ should want to pass those blessings on to others. To concentrate on others, not on ourselves, is an important step in Christian growth.

Phil. 2:5-8 *What Christ did for us: Humiliation.* Christ is the supreme example of selflessness. When the mighty Son of God became the lowly Son of Man, he did several things:

- He left heaven's glory for earth's poverty (see [John 17:5](#); [2 Cor. 8:9](#)).
- He "made himself nothing," or "emptied" himself ([Phil. 2:7](#)).
- He did not lay aside his deity. He was, is, and ever shall be the Son of God (see [John 1:1](#); [Col. 1:15](#); [Col. 2:9](#)).
- He did, for a while, hide his heavenly fame in an earthly frame. Even though he retained every single attribute of deity while on earth, he surrendered the independent exercise of those divine characteristics (compare [Mark 9:12](#) and [Romans 15:3](#)).
- He "appeared in human form" ([Phil. 2:7-8](#); see [John 1:14](#); [Romans 8:3](#); [Galatians 4:4](#); [Hebrews 2:14, 17](#)). This simple fact can hardly be grasped by the human mind. The

infinite, holy Creator suddenly came into the world in the likeness of his creatures. One might compare that to a human king voluntarily becoming a peasant. But a better comparison would be a human king becoming a lowly ant—though even that comparison would be inadequate!

- He "took the humble position of a slave" ([Phil. 2:7](#)). He did not come as a mighty human king or philosopher, but as a lowly servant.
- He "humbled himself" ([Phil. 2:8](#)):
 - He talked our language, wore our clothes, ate our food, breathed our air, and endured our vicious treatment. Contrast Christ's humble statement in the Garden of Gethsemane (see [Matthew 26:39, 42](#)) with the statement of arrogance that many scholars attribute to Satan (see [Isaiah 14:13-14](#)).
 - Christ's ultimate humiliation came as he allowed himself to be killed ([Phil. 2:8](#); see [Matthew 26:39](#); [John 10:18](#); [Hebrews 5:8](#); [Hebrews 12:2](#)). And this was not just any death but "a criminal's death on a cross," the worst kind of death both physically and judicially (see [Psalm 22](#); [Isaiah 53](#); [Galatians 3:13](#)).

[Phil. 2:9-11](#) *What God did for Christ: Exaltation.* Because Christ humbly gave himself for our sins

- God has "raised him up to the heights of heaven" ([Phil. 2:9](#); see [Isaiah 52:13](#); [John 17:1](#); [Acts 2:33](#); [Hebrews 2:9](#)).
- He has been given a name (a position and place of authority) above all other names ([Phil. 2:9](#); see [Ephes. 1:20](#); [Hebrews 1:4](#)).
- Someday ([Phil. 2:10-11](#)) he will be acknowledged as Lord by everyone:
 - "in heaven" (angels)
 - "on earth" (human saints and sinners)
 - and "under the earth" (demons)

See [Psalm 22:27-28](#); [Isaiah 45:23](#); [Isaiah 66:23](#); [Romans 14:11](#); [Rev. 15:4](#). On Christ's millennial reign, see [Isaiah: Background](#).

[Phil. 2:12-18](#) *"Do it because God is doing it for you."* Christians are to "put into action God's saving work in [their] lives," knowing that God himself is at work within them ([Phil. 2:12-13](#)). God gives us both the desire and the ability to serve him. As we do this, we will "shine brightly" before unbelievers ([Phil. 2:14-16](#); see [Matthew 5:14-16](#)).

[Phil. 2:19-30](#) *Two tremendous spiritual soldiers.* Paul hoped soon to send Timothy to minister to the Philippians. He commended him to them as one who displayed something of the servant heart of Christ ([Phil. 2:19-24](#)). Epaphroditus was also an example of selflessness ([Phil. 2:25-30](#)).

[Phil. 3:1-11](#) *The choice: Circumcision or Christ.* Paul warned against the Judaizers who wanted to "mutilate," that is, circumcise them. Christians, he declared, are the ones who are truly circumcised ([Phil. 3:1-3](#); see [Romans 2:29](#); [Romans 9:6-8](#); [Galatians 6:14-15](#)). Few, if any, could match Paul's credentials as a Jew ([Phil. 3:4-6](#)), yet he considered those credentials nothing in light of God's new revelation of salvation and eternal life through Christ ([Phil. 3:7-11](#)).

Many Christians want the first half of [Phil. 3:10](#), "to really know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised him from the dead," but show little interest in the second half: to "learn what it

means to suffer with him, sharing in his death." But these go hand in hand, as saints throughout the ages can attest (see [Romans 8:17](#)).

[Phil. 3:12-16](#) *"No, I'm not there yet, but I'm on my way."* Paul wasn't perfect in his walk with the Lord, but he looked toward that day (in Christ's eternal Kingdom) when he would be. While perfection is not possible in this life, we should strive for spiritual maturity.

[Phil. 3:17-19](#) *"Follow me, not them."* Thinking of both this letter and the times he had taught the Philippians in person, Paul urged them to follow his example and teachings, and not those who, because of their wrong teaching, were actually "enemies of the cross of Christ." Paul probably had in mind both the legalizers ([Phil. 3:2](#)) and the hedonists or antinomianists (meaning those "against law") whom he described in these verses.

[Phil. 3:20-21](#) *The new you.* As an antidote to hedonism, Paul reminded them of the promised resurrection, when our lowly bodies will be transformed and we will be citizens of Christ's eternal Kingdom.

[Phil. 4:1-3](#) *Love expressed, love needed.* Paul expressed again his great affection for the Philippians (see exposition on [Phil. 1:7-11](#)), then asked a mature believer in the church to help reconcile two quarreling women.

[Phil. 4:4-7](#) *The peace of God: Precious and protective.* Christians should be joyous and even-tempered ([Phil. 4:4-5](#)). Instead of being anxious, they should be at peace ([Phil. 4:6-7](#)). The peace of God ([Phil. 4:7](#)) comes through prayer and transcends all understanding. Paul gave two golden rules for those who seek such peace:

- "Don't worry about anything" ([Phil. 4:6](#)). The KJV translates this as "Be careful for nothing." The Greek word used here for *worry* or *careful* describes being pulled in different directions. It is not reasonable concern but panic (see [Psalm 55:22](#); [1 Peter 5:7](#)).
- "Pray about everything" ([Phil. 4:6](#)). Our prayers should be both definite and devotional. It has been said that there are only two things the Christian should not worry about:
 - those things he or she can change, in which case *perspiration* is the answer;
 - those things he or she cannot change, in which case *supplication* is the answer.

All Christians enjoy peace *with* God (see [Romans 5:1](#)), but only those who have successfully substituted prayer for care can enjoy the peace *of* God, a peace that

- guards our hearts, protecting us from wrong feelings;
- guards our minds, protecting us from wrong thinking ([Phil. 4:7](#)).

Contrary to the popular saying, prayer does not always change things. But sincere prayer does always change us, by protecting against those things that can drive us to despair (see [Isaiah 26:3](#); [2 Cor. 10:5](#)).

[Phil. 4:8-9](#) *The real power of positive thinking.* Another key to peace is focusing our thoughts on positive things. We can do this in no better way than by focusing on the things we have learned from Paul concerning the person and work of Christ.

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[Phil. 4:14-23](#) *"By the way, thanks for the care package!"* Paul acknowledged the latest gift from the Philippians ([Phil. 4:10, 14](#)) and recalled all their past generosityes ([Phil. 4:15-16](#); see *Background*), adding that his main source of joy was the efforts and thoughts behind those gifts ([Phil. 4:17-18](#)). He assured them of blessings in return and committed them to God's grace. The greetings from people in Caesar's household ([Phil. 4:22](#)) show how effectively Paul had proclaimed the gospel from his involuntary confinement (compare [Phil. 1:12-13](#)).