

Message #1

Various Texts

The first Bible analysis course I ever took in school for credit back in 1979 was a study of the book of Philippians. I was excited to study it; after all, some of our favorite lines and verses of the Bible come from Philippians:

“For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain” 1:21

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” 2:5

“at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”
2:10, 11

“forgetting what is behind, press on toward the goal for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus” 3:13-14

“rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice” 4:4

“the peace of God that passes all comprehension will guard your hearts and mind in Christ Jesus”
4:7

“I can do all things through Him that strengthens me” 4:13

“My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches” 4:19

I read those verses. I believed those verses. I loved those verses. I wanted to study that book.

The instructor was top-notch and he marched us through this book in a way that whetted my appetite to systematically study every book of the Bible. As we went through the book I realized how little I knew. As I look back on that, it is interesting that this was the first book I studied because this was the first book God gave to Europe.

Our historical roots stem from this little church in Europe (Macedonia). This is the first book of the Bible that God gave to the first church in Europe and there is no doubt that it does mean something to us and it does whet your appetite to know more about God’s Word.

Gordon Fee, who is a Biblical grammarian and theologian, said if you ask believers what their favorite Pauline letter is, a vast majority will say Philippians. He said there are some good reasons for that. Philippians is a warm and personal letter to dear friends in a church. Plus, it is filled with memorable statements. But then Mr. Fee said if you ask those same people to trace the flow of thought that Paul presents in Philippians, you will often get a blank stare because most people don’t have a clue what you are even asking (*Philippians*, p. 11).

Philippians is one of those Bible books that many love to quote, but few actually carefully study. Well, we are going to change that in the next few weeks because, by God’s grace, we are going to take you on a journey of the book of Philippians, which is a very special book of God’s Word.

Now to begin our journey, we would like to begin by asking and answering a series of introductory questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study the book of Philippians?

Let me give you five reasons why we are going to study the book of Philippians.

Reason #1 - Because Philippians is an inspired book of God and God only gave 66 books.

This is the only reason we ever need for studying any book of the Bible. The fact that Philippians is an inspired book of the Bible has never come into question. Dr. Donald Guthrie writes: "It is hardly necessary to discuss the question of the epistle's genuineness...as the great majority of scholars regard it as indisputable" (*New Testament Introduction*, p. 526).

I enjoy reading the introductory works of D. Edmund Hiebert and he said concerning Philippians that "No trace of doubt concerning the authenticity of Philippians was ever raised until modern times" (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Vol. 2, p. 288).

I want you to think about this for a moment. About 2000 years ago, a tent maker was thrown into jail and while he was in jail he dictated a letter. It was scribbled down on vellum (animal skin) and leaves from a papyrus plant and that little letter is the Philippians in your Bible.

Now one of the things that I find fascinating is the study of preserved Greek manuscripts. I don't want to bore anyone but I love analyzing the Greek manuscripts God has preserved because it ends up supporting the fact that each book of the Bible is, in fact, a remarkable, inspired book of God.

Basically, when it comes to establishing that a book is truly an inspired book of God, there were three main witnesses: 1) Preserved Greek Manuscripts; 2) Ancient Bible translations; 3) Early Church Leader quotations. Now to give you some idea as to how many manuscripts God has preserved pertaining to the New Testament:

There are nearly 6000 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts; there are 10,000 Latin manuscripts and there are 9300 manuscripts written in other languages. If you compare this to any other secular writings, there is no comparison. No secular writing has this many manuscripts.

The manuscript support for the book of Philippians is tremendous. In the famous manuscript known as p46, which contained 86 leaves of papyrus paper in book form, which measures 11 by 6 1/2 inches, is the entire book of Philippians. This manuscript is dated at A.D. 250.

Furthermore, Philippians is called an authentic book by the great leaders of the church: Irenaeus (A.D. 130-202); Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215); Cyril of Jerusalem (A.D. 315-386); Eusebius (A.D. 325-340); Jerome (A.D. 340-420); and Augustine (A.D. 44).

Also all of the major canon listings included Philippians as an inspired book of God: Marcion (A.D. 140); Muratorian (A.D. 170); Apostolic (A.D. 300); Cheltenham (A.D. 360); and Athanasius (A.D. 367).

Also all of the major church council meetings said that Philippians was an inspired book of God: Nicea (A.D. 325-400); Hippo (A.D. 393); Carthage, in both A.D. 397 and A.D. 419.

There is no question that Philippians is one of those rare inspired books that God has given to man and this is the reason we need to carefully study every word of it.

Reason #2 - Because Philippians is a book that exalts Jesus Christ.

The noun “Christ” shows up **17 times in chapter 1; 6 times in chapter 2; 9 times in chapter 3; 4 times in chapter 4** for a **total of 36 times**. The noun “Jesus” shows up **7 times in chapter 1; 3 times in chapter 2; 4 times in chapter 3; 2 times in chapter 4** for a **total of 16 times**. The noun “Lord” is used **2 times in chapter 1; 3 times in chapter 2; 2 times in chapter 3; 5 times in chapter 4** for a **total of 12 times**. So there are 64 times Jesus is specifically named in a book of only four chapters.

When we consider the fact that there are only 104 verses in Philippians, we see Christ is specifically named in 63 percent of the book, more than every other verse. It is quite obvious that the stress of the book is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the key to everything. He is the key to salvation. He is the key to joy. He is the key to survival.

There is an old prayer that says, “To know Christ more clearly, to love Him more dearly and to follow Him more nearly.” Philippians is a book that challenges us to this very end. Philippians is a book that challenges us to know Jesus Christ.

Reason #3 - Because Philippians is a book that really emphasizes the use of our minds.

Philippians is a book that challenges believers to use their minds and focus them on the things of God. We will never be happy or even spiritual until our minds are focused right. Joyful lives come from sound minds that are focused on sound doctrine. There are a series of different Greek words used in Philippians that truly express the importance of what we are doing with our minds: “remembrance” “discernment” “mind” “think” (1:3, 7, 9, 12, 27; 2:2, 3, 5; 3:4, 7, 13, 15, 16, 19; 4:2, 7, 8). What we do with our minds is critical to our joy, our lives and our spirituality.

Did you ever stop to ask yourself, how did Paul actually reach such a spirituality that when facing the possibility of his own death he could say, “for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain”? (1:21). He reached this point by a faith that resulted from the focus of his heart and mind. We need minds focused on Jesus Christ.

He challenges all of us to use our minds to develop a mindset like that of Jesus Christ (2:5).

Reason #4 - This is a book that emphasizes joy. 1:18, 25, 26; 2:2, 16, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10

We live in a gloomy world. It isn't getting any better and it isn't getting happier. We live in times that feature things that are dark, depraved, depressing and scary. The irony is that people are still on some quest to find happiness in this gloomy kind of world. People try to find happiness in education, career, drugs, alcohol, sex, sports, money, and it all comes up short.

Paul's world was very depressing. It is about as depressing as it could be and yet here is this man who not only had joy, he shows the rest of us how we may have it.

In this book of Philippians we see that God wants His people to have joy and He wants them rejoicing. That is the way it was for Paul. This man is in a very life-threatening, depressing situation but that did not prevent him from experiencing joy **because he kept his mind focused on Jesus Christ and that is where joy is found in the Christian life. The key to happiness and joy in life is to focus our minds on Jesus Christ.**

Philippians is a book designed to put joy back into the life of the believer who has been depressed. Richard Lenski said, "Joy is the music that runs through this epistle, the sunshine that spreads over all of it. The whole epistle radiates joy and happiness."

This world of ours has plenty of gloom in it, but Philippians is a book that will bring us some joy. No matter what your circumstance, your relationship with Christ can make you joyful.

Reason #5 - Because this is a book that is very positive for the church and God's people.

Most books of the Bible have some warnings and rebukes in them, but not Philippians. This is an entirely different kind of book. Philippians was a letter written to a good church in which the people were doing well. This is the most positive and uplifting book that Paul ever wrote to any church. William Graham Scroggie said this is "the most beautiful of all the Pauline Epistles."

Oh the church was not perfect and there were a few minor problems in the church, because when you have sinful people in a church there will always be a few minor issues; but there was nothing too serious and nothing real negative. This will be a very convicting book, but it will also be a very positive book and that is why we are going to study it.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote Philippians?

There is no doubt that Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul. We may prove this by offering three evidences:

Evidence #1 - The internal evidence proves Paul wrote the book.

The letter begins by saying it is a letter from Paul (1:1). The letter discusses much of Paul's life (1:12-13; 2:19, 25; 3:4-6).

Dr. Henry Alford, in his Greek commentary on Philippians, said, "he must be a bold man who would call its authorship in question." The truth is one would have to be very foolish to do so because any who read the letter literally will conclude it was, in fact, written by Paul.

Evidence #2 - The external evidence proves Paul wrote the book.

Polycarp, who was martyred by being burned at the stake in Smyrna in A.D. 160, said Paul wrote the book. In fact, he wrote a letter to the Philippian church around A.D. 110 and in that letter he said, “Neither I nor any like me can keep pace with the wisdom of the blessed and glorious Paul, who, when he was among you, in the presence of the men of that time, accurately and reliably taught the word concerning the truth. And when **he was absent he wrote to you letters; if you study them carefully** you will be able to build yourselves up in the faith that has been given to you” (*The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 124).

Irenaeus (A.D. 180), who was Polycarp’s student, said Paul wrote Philippians. Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 190), the great Biblical scholar and teacher said Paul wrote Philippians. Tertullian (A.D. 200), the Latin Church Father, who opposed infant baptism, said Paul wrote Philippians.

The external evidence is overwhelming; Philippians was written by Paul.

Evidence #3 - The absence of doubt proves Paul wrote the book.

It was not until the 19th century, beginning with F. C. Baur (1792-1860) of Germany, where there any questions that were ever raised doubting Pauline authorship. In fact, Homer Kent said that “Even those who have questioned the unity of Philippians have usually concluded that Paul was the author of the various parts.”

Baur claimed he saw some references to Gnosticism in Philippians and since that heresy did not rise until toward the end of the first century, Paul would have been already dead and could not have written the book. Dr. Henry Alford said Baur’s conclusions were ludicrous on the same level as the book “Historic Doubts Respecting Napoleon Bonaparte,” which was an insane book that questioned the existence of Bonaparte. As William Barclay said, “no reputable critic has ever doubted that Philippians was an authentic letter of Paul.”

QUESTION #3 – Where was Paul when he wrote Philippians?

It is clear from the opening chapter of the book that Paul was a confined prisoner when he wrote Philippians (1:13) and he did not know whether or not he would be sentenced to life or death (Philippians 1:21).

Now this is amazing to realize that a man can write a letter that is so joyful and was written from practical circumstances that were so miserable. You don’t expect people in jail to be so joyful, especially if they believe there is a good chance they will be executed.

The problem pertaining to Philippians is to determine which prison sentence he was actually serving when he wrote Philippians.

We know much of Paul's life was spent in and out of jail. In fact, Paul referred to this very point when stating what his life had been like (II Cor. 11:23). He served time in many jails. He spent time in jail in Philippi (Acts 16:23). He spent time in jail in Jerusalem (Acts 21:33-34). He spent time in jail in Caesarea (Acts 23:23/24:27). He spent time in jail in Rome (Acts 28:16, 20, 30).

The best and most logical evidence seems to be that Paul wrote Philippians when he was imprisoned in Rome.

There are seven proofs of this:

Proof #1 - It was the place where the whole palace guard was located, which was Rome. **1:13**

Proof #2 - It was the place where Caesar's house was located, which was Rome. **4:22**

Proof #3 - It was a place that could sentence a person to life or death, which was Rome. **1:20-21**

Proof #4 - The courage of many believers suggests a larger church, which existed in Rome.
1:14

Proof #5 - The circumstances of the imprisonment fit Rome—visitors allowed
(Acts 28:16, 30, 31).

Proof #6 - Paul's strong hope of being released does not fit Caesarea but Rome (Acts 24:26-27).

Proof #7 - A prologue to a Marcionite letter says Philippians was written by Paul from Rome.

Now the great lesson to learn from this background is this—a believer whose mind is focused on Jesus Christ can experience great joy and have an impacting ministry when personal circumstances are terrible.

QUESTION #4 – When did Paul write Philippians?

Paul wrote Philippians while in a two year imprisonment in Rome around A.D. 60-62 (Acts 28:30-31).

Now if Paul came to faith in A.D. 35, what we learn from this is that his focus of mind on Jesus Christ had given him such a great joy that he is enjoying his life and still ministering faithfully for the Lord nearly 30 years later.

QUESTION #5 – Why did Paul write the letter to the Philippians?

There are at least seven reasons:

Reason #1 - The Pauline care reason. 1:7

Paul cared a great deal for the people of this church. He loved them and thought about them when he didn't even know for sure whether or not he would live or die.

Reason #2 - The Pauline appreciation reason. 1:5, 22-23; 4:14-19

Paul appreciated the fact that these people supported him time and time again. They supported him in a big time way financially and he wanted them to know that by doing that they had laid up a great account in heaven (4:17). As he was thinking about the fact that he could die, he thought about these dear people who had supported him and he appreciated them and he wanted them to know it.

Reason #3 - The Personal information reason.

Paul wanted these people to have personal information about the status of Paul (1:12-18; 2:24); of Timothy (1:1; 2:19-24); and of Epaphroditus (1:25-30).

From this we may learn that to this church Paul was a very open person and he wanted them to know exactly what was happening.

Reason #4 - The Theological danger reason.

Paul wanted believers cemented in the fact that they are saved by faith in Christ. Not by any keeping of the law (Philippians 3:9). Paul was very concerned that some faulty people and doctrine could get into this church, so he warned of two dangerous types of people:

- 1) He warned the church against the legalistic Judaizer. 3:2-6 - put under legalistic laws.
He called these people "dogs" and "evil workers" (3:2).
- 2) He warned the church against the licentious antinomianist. 3:17-19 - libertine earth focus who does shameful things with their bodies and minds.

Reason #5 - The Christ-like character reason. 2:5; 3:14-15

As great a church as this was, there is always room for greater Christ-like development in attitudes and staying focused on the prize of our high calling until we get to the finish line. In fact, Paul himself was after this in his own life (3:14).

Reason #6 - The Church unity reason. 1:27-30; 2:2-4; 2:12-18; 4:2

God wants unity in His church. There are some personality conflicts in even the best of churches, but the best churches still strive for unity in the midst of the conflicts.

Reason #7 - The Christ-like other-oriented mindset reason. 2:3-4

If you were born between 1946 and 1964, you are considered to be a “baby boomer.” One danger of this generation is that if we are not careful, we can develop a mindset that only looks out for ourselves. Actually this just isn’t a problem among baby boomers. This can be a problem for all believers. If you want a challenge from Philippians, here it is: “regard one another more important than yourself” (2:3). Philippians is a book that promotes that even among strong Christians.

QUESTION #6 – What is the theme of Philippians?

We must be very close to the theme of the book when we suggest that this book was written **to motivate believers in the church to keep their minds focused on Jesus Christ until He returns and work on developing a Christ-like character so we may experience great joy in this life and great rewards in the next life.**

The Christian life can be joyful or it can be miserable. The determining factor will be the focus of our minds. If we set our minds on things on this earth, we will be miserable. If we set our minds on Jesus Christ, we will be joyful.

Make no mistake about this fact. The only thing that will save you is a righteousness that is found in Jesus Christ. You will not be saved by your works. You will not be saved by trying to keep the O.T. Law. Philippians says you are saved by faith alone in Christ (3:9).