

Philippians—

The subject or theme of this letter is Jesus Christ and his availability for coping with the problems of life. The church at Philippi to which Paul wrote was not beset with serious doctrinal problems but only the normal, usual problems of everyday, commonplace existence -- Christians who did not get along with one another, and incipient divisions within the church created by certain persons who were trying to mislead others with ideas not quite in accord with the Christian faith. To deal with these problems, Paul designed this epistle as a guide for ordinary living. It faces the normal problems a Christian has, and proclaims the victory which a Christian can appropriate in overcoming these problems. The recurring theme, running throughout the letter, is that of joy and rejoicing. Repeatedly the apostle uses phrases like, "Rejoice, and again I say rejoice, rejoice in your sufferings, rejoice in your difficulties.' This becomes, then, a letter in which we are instructed how to live victoriously and joyously in the midst of the normal difficulties of life.

—Stedman, Ray C., “The Message of Philippians”

Helpful Study Links:

Additional Commentary: (Great Resource!)

http://preceptaustin.org/philippians_commentaries.htm

Sermon Links:

“Your Own Salvation” by Charles Spurgeon

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/1003.htm>

“Joy, a Duty” by Charles Spurgeon

<http://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/2405.HTM>

“The Message of Philippians” by Ray C. Stedman

<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/0251.html>



Author: Clearly identified as Paul (1:1)



Time: It is most likely that Paul wrote Philippians between a.d. 61 and 63 from imprisonment in Rome. The references to the palace guard (1:13) and Caesar’s household (4:22) fit with Paul’s Roman imprisonment. In addition, Paul’s statements in 1:12–20 and 4:22 strongly suggest that the imprisonment was fairly long. Thus, this letter appears to have been written sometime after the beginning of Paul’s imprisonment recorded in Acts 28.



Theme: JOY! (Jesus Others Yourself)

This letter not only exhorts us to joy, but is a great example of joy, as Paul illustrates the joy found in Christ in dismal circumstances. The word “joy” (Greek: *chara*) is found five times (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1) and the verb “to rejoice” occurs eleven times (twice in 1:18; 2:17, 18; 4:4; and once in 2:28; 3:1; and 4:10). Despite his unpleasant circumstances in prison, Paul manifests a joyous confidence in God’s provision for him personally and for the Philippian Christians.



Another emphasis is *the mind*. As we read Philippians, note how many times Paul talks about *remembering* and *thinking*. We can summarize the theme of the book as “the Christlike mind that brings Christian joy.”

Philippians is one of Paul’s most personal letters. In it he shares his own experience with Christ, and his struggle over whether to prefer dying to be with Christ or living to serve the Philippians (1:21–26). The Philippians were in his heart and they supported him in his imprisonment (1:7), a fact which explains the note of gratitude that Paul frequently sounds (1:3–11; 2:19–30; 4:10–20).

The first church founded in Europe was planted by Paul in Philippi (see Acts 16) on his second missionary journey. After Paul moved on to Thessalonica, the Philippian believers sent him support (Phil. 4:15, and see 2 Cor. 11:9). Five years later, while on his third journey, Paul visited Philippi on the way to Corinth, and then on the return trip (Acts 20:1–6). There was a deep love between Paul and the people at Philippi. Certainly their church gave the apostle little trouble!

Introductory Notes

By J. Sidlow Baxter

Taken from *Explore the Book*.

[W]e miss everything in this epistle if we fail to perceive and appreciate its wonderful fourfold presentation of Christ in relation to the experience of the individual believer. Once this fourfold Christ of Philippians is seen, the little epistle gleams and flashes with an altogether new luster—it becomes a gem precious beyond all words.

Fortunately, in Philippians the four chapters accurately represent the four movements of this main theme (except that the first verse of chapter 4 obviously ends chapter 3.)

We find a key verse, expressing a key idea in each chapter. In the first chapter the thought is expressed in verse 21: “To me to live is Christ.” Everything in this first chapter centres in the thought that Christ is the believers’ *life*.

In the second chapter the key thought is expressed in verse 5 “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus: The whole of this second chapter gathers round the thought that Christ is the believer’s *mind*.

In the third chapter the key thought is expressed in verse 10: “That I may know Him.” Here everything centres in the truth that Christ is the believer’s *goal*.

In the fourth chapter the key thought is the enabling power of Christ, as expressed in verse 13: “I have do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” In this last chapter the apostle’s thought is gathered up in the truth that Christ is the believer’s *strength*.

Thus we see in the progress of this epistle a fourfold truth as rich with suggestion as it is vital to Christian experience. Let us get it photographed clearly in our minds:

- Chapter 1: Christ our life
- Chapter 2: Christ our mind
- Chapter 3: Christ our goal
- Chapter 4: Christ our strength.

The sequence here will be at once obvious. If Christ be truly our life, as in chapter one, His life will express itself in and through our mental activity, as in chapter two. Then, the mind being thus suffused with His life, the desires will become more and more toward Christ as the perfect ideal, the sum of the objective perfection and subjective satisfaction, the supreme goal of desire, as in chapter three; while finally, as in chapter four, Christ Himself is the strength by which ideal becomes the actual, and by which the objective reality becomes subjectively realized in experience. In these four Philippian chapters, therefore, we observe clear progress and completeness.

Are You Ready To Be Offered?

By Oswald Chambers

Taken from *My Utmost for His Highest*

"Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your
faith,
I joy and rejoice with you all."
Philippians 2:17

Are you willing to be offered for the work of the faithful - to pour out your life blood as a libation on the sacrifice of the faith of others? Or do you say - "I am not going to be offered up just yet, I do not want God to choose my work. I want to choose the scenery of my own sacrifice; I want to have the right kind of people watching and saying, 'Well done.'

It is one thing to go on the lonely way with dignified heroism, but quite another thing if the line mapped out for you by God means being a door-mat under other people's feet. Suppose God wants to teach you to say, "I know how to be abased" - are you ready to be offered up like that? Are you ready to be not so much as a drop in a bucket - to be so hopelessly insignificant that you are never thought

of again in connection with the life you served? Are you willing to spend and be spent; not seeking to be ministered unto, but to minister? Some saints cannot do menial work and remain saints because it is beneath their dignity.

“I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.”

Philippians 4:11

By Oswald Chambers

Taken from *Morning and Evening*

These words show us that contentment is not a natural propensity of man. “Ill weeds grow apace.” Covetousness, discontent, and murmuring are as natural to man as thorns are to the soil. We need not sow thistles and brambles; they come up naturally enough, because they are indigenous to earth: and so, we need not teach men to complain; they complain fast enough without any education. But the precious things of the earth must be cultivated. If we would have wheat, we must plough and sow; if we want flowers, there must be the garden, and all the gardener’s care. Now, contentment is one of the flowers of heaven, and if we would have it, it must be cultivated; it will not grow in us by nature; it is the new nature alone that can produce it, and even then we must be specially careful and watchful that we maintain and cultivate the grace which God has sown in us. Paul says, “I have learned ... to be content;” as much as to say, he did not know how at one time. It cost him some pains to attain to the mystery of that great truth. No doubt he sometimes thought he had learned, and then broke down. And when at last he had attained unto it, and could say, “I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content,” he was an old, grey-headed man, upon the borders of the grave—a poor prisoner shut up in Nero’s dungeon at Rome. We might well be willing to endure Paul’s infirmities, and share the cold dungeon with him, if we too might by any means attain unto his good degree. Do not indulge the notion that you can be contented with learning, or learn without discipline. It is not a power that may be exercised naturally, but a science to be acquired gradually. We know this from experience. Brother, hush that murmur, natural though it be, and continue a diligent pupil in the College of Content.