

# Part I: The Background Information

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## 1) The Author

- Paul is the author.

**Philippians 1:1** Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

- Few scholars today challenge this position. Some have in the past but those views did not gain traction among scholars. Some have even suggested that this letter comprises of two or three different ones. However they argue that even in that scenario the letters would have been from Paul. Therefore, his authorship is not questioned.<sup>1</sup>

## 2) The Date

- This depends on where Paul wrote it. What we know from the letter itself is that Paul was in prison at the time of his writing (i.e. 1:7; 17; 19; etc.) The question is during which imprisonment?
- 3 Possibilities:
  - Caesarea* - Paul was in prison in Herod's praetorium for two years (Acts 23:35). Some say he was there around A.D. 57-59. Others say he was there as late as A.D. 60. If Paul wrote this letter from there then A.D. 57-60 is suggested.
  - Ephesus* - This view is gaining steam but lacks strong evidence. If this is the case then A.D. 61 is suggested.
  - Rome* - Traditional and most popular view. One of the strongest evidences to this possibility is 4:22 where Paul sends greetings on behalf of the believers who were with him where he was which include "those of Caesar's household." Acts 28:30 tells us that Paul was imprisoned there for two years. If this is the case then A.D. 59-61 is suggested.

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<sup>1</sup> Homer A. Kent Jr in EBC, Frank E. Gaebelin, Gen. Ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), p. 96.

Note: This would have been his first imprisonment in Rome. He was later imprisoned again and martyred there under Nero around A.D. 64-67.

### 3) The Recipients



- The church at Philippi was established under Paul's preaching ministry described in Acts 16. God directed Paul to go there and preach through a vision (Acts 16:9-10). This was the first church established through his preaching in Europe.<sup>2</sup>
- Members of this church included Lydia and her household, "a seller of purple goods" (Acts 16:14ff); and the Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:25-34).
- Paul loved this church, as seen through this letter (i.e. 1:3-5; 7-8, etc.) The love is also reciprocated through their actions and what he says about them (i.e. the financial gifts that they sent him - 4:10-20; their ministry to him through Epaphroditus - 2:25, etc.)
- Philippi was "a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony." (Acts 16:12) This was located in modern day Greece.
- As an important city its citizens tend to take pride in the fact that they belong there. This is true today and no doubt was true then. This may be reflected in what Paul says to this church in 1:27 and 3:20 where he emphasizes their heavenly citizenship (by implication, not their Philippian citizenship) and how that should dictate how they live.

<sup>2</sup> ESV Study Bible (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), p. 2275.

- *“If you want to know how to read this letter, think of Paul writing to a group of young, scared, and discouraged Christians because he is in prison for preaching the gospel.”<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Dever, “The Message of the New Testament,” (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), p. 261.

## Part II: The Text – Chapter 1

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### I. PAUL'S PRAYER (& AFFECTIONS FOR THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI - vv. 1-11)

<sup>1</sup>Paul and Timothy, servants<sup>4</sup> of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek word here is “*duolos*” which means slave, or bond servants. This is how Paul saw himself and Timothy in relation to Jesus. But not only himself and Timothy, but also all Christians. Jesus is not your Savior unless he is also your Master. He is not your Savior unless He is also your Lord. These two go hand in hand - Savior and Lord. (Recommend: *Slave*, by John MacArthur)

Quote from footnote on page 12.

<sup>5</sup> Paul is addressing this letter to the church at Philippi as a whole. However, he acknowledges two “special” groups of people in this church, the “overseers” (“*episkopoi*” or bishops) and the “deacons.” This shows that these are two distinct groups of people. And it implies that these people are viewed as leaders of this church.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership<sup>6</sup> in the gospel from the first day<sup>7</sup> until now. <sup>6</sup> And I am sure of this, that he who

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<sup>6</sup> The “*partnership in the gospel*” that this church had with Paul is clearly displayed through:

- 1) Their **embracing of the gospel** message preached by him when he was there ten years prior, thus, establishing them as a church;
- 2) Their **financial support** for him (4:10-16);  
Paul also alludes to the support he received from a church in Macedonia in 2 Cor. 11:9. Most likely he was talking about the Philippian church. Later in 4:15 Paul says that when He left Macedonia no church sent him help except the Philippians. The Thessalonian church was also in Macedonia but in light of 4:15, 2 Cor. 11:9 could not have been a reference to them.
- 3) Their **concern for him and ministry to him** through Epaphroditus (2:25);
- 4) Their willingness to **stand and suffer with him** for the sake of the gospel (1:29).

<sup>7</sup> From the very beginning the Philippian church had been a partner with Paul in the gospel. They responded to his preaching and was established as a church (Lydia in Acts 16:15; the jailer and his family in Acts 16:33, 34) and immediately suffered with him as well as supported him in his ministry.)

began a good work in you will bring it to completion<sup>8</sup> at the day of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.<sup>10</sup> <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.<sup>11</sup> <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more<sup>12</sup>, with knowledge and all

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<sup>8</sup> Paul is absolutely confident that “*he who began a good work in you,*” namely, Christ will complete the work that he began. That is, he will keep them, sanctify them, transform them, present them to himself pure and blameless on the Day of Judgement. Paul says it like this in Romans:

**Romans 8:29-30** For those whom he foreknew (*this word is used again in Romans 11:1-6 where Paul illustrates what “foreknew” means*) he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. <sup>30</sup> And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Note that it is God who is doing all these things from beginning to end - from “*foreknew*” to “*glorified.*” So Paul’s confidence in the finished work that will happen is not placed in the Philippians themselves but in God. God is the one who will do this for them.

<sup>9</sup> The second coming of Jesus Christ. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 Paul refers to this day as “*the day of the Lord.*”

<sup>10</sup> Paul felt this way about the Philippians because they stood with him not only to advance the gospel (defend and confirm) but when things got tough they did not abandon him to save their necks when he is imprisoned.

<sup>11</sup> Paul loved this church!

<sup>12</sup> For love to “*abound more and more*” means that love would be expressed through actions more and more. It is not just that they would grow in their love for God, each other and the world, but that that love would be evident through acts of kindness and good deeds.

discernment,<sup>13</sup> <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.<sup>14</sup>

## II. PAUL'S ENCOURAGEMENT (TO THE CHURCH IN LIGHT OF TRIALS - vv. 12-18a)

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<sup>13</sup> Not only does Paul want and pray for the Philippians to grow in their love but that they would grow in their knowledge and discernment as well. That is, that they would grow in Godly knowledge so that they are able to discern right from wrong, good from evil, what pleases God what doesn't, etc. This is how he puts it to the Ephesians:

**Ephesians 5:6-10** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them; <sup>8</sup> for **at one time you were darkness, but now you are light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light** <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), <sup>10</sup> and **try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.**

Paul contrasts who the Ephesians used to be and who they are not and exhorts them to “walk as children of light.” What that means is that they should “try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.” The implication is that they should try to discern more and more.

Paul says a very similar thing to the Colossians:

**Colossians 1:9-10** And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that **you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,** <sup>10</sup> **so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.**

Growing in the knowledge of the Lord and bearing fruit “in every good work” always go hand in hand. Growth in the knowledge of God demands, and produces growth in good work as well.

<sup>14</sup> As the Philippians grow in their knowledge of God they are able more and more to “*approve what is excellent*” and do them. The result of this growth is that they be “*pure and blameless*” in God’s sight and brings glory to God.

<sup>12</sup> I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. <sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

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<sup>15</sup> Imprisonment was a shameful thing in the ancient world (ESVSB, p. 2280). But rather than disassociating themselves with Paul the Philippians chose to stand with Paul. This was why they were so dear to him, as communicated in verse 7.

They are “*partakers with me of grace*” because they stood with him in his imprisonment and...

So now Paul wants them to know that his imprisonment really serves to advance the gospel. This was what was most important to him. This is why this letter oozes joy. For Paul, this was his love and passion above all things. There are two reasons why he says this:

1) All those in the “*imperial guard*” (or the praetorium) knew that he was a prisoner not because of a crime that he had committed but because of the Christ that he preached; this implies that he has been witnessing to the people in the praetorium, or at minimum to the guards who were assigned to him;

Note: There are 4 possibilities for what Paul may mean by “imperial guard.” This could be a location or the guards themselves. If it is a location then it does not have to be the emperor’s palace in Rome. Multiple locations are possible in addition to Rome. (i.e. Pilate’s headquarters in Jerusalem - Matt 27:27; Mark 15:16; John 18:28; etc.; the Roman governor’s headquarters in Caesarea - Acts 23:35)

2) Most of the “brothers” became more bold in preaching the gospel. So instead of becoming fearful that the thing that happens to Paul may also happen to them they became more bold. The effect of persecution has the opposite effect on the church than one would think. (i.e. the **Chinese church** - Under persecution the church thrived.)

The question is why? Why did Paul’s imprisonment have this effect on the rest of the brothers? Some argue that it was because of Paul’s courage in the midst of persecution. As a leader his attitude toward persecution sets the tone and an example for others. Verse 16 does seem to imply that they were emboldened simply because they knew that Paul was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. I think this may have been true for many but Paul did not point to his example as the cause of their courage.



<sup>15</sup> Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. <sup>16</sup> The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. <sup>17</sup> The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. <sup>16</sup> <sup>18</sup> What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

### III. PAUL'S MOTIVATION (FOR LIVING & DYING - vv. 18b-26)

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<sup>16</sup> There are two kinds of preachers who seemed to have been emboldened by Paul's imprisonment. The first are those who preach the gospel from sinful motivations ("envy and rivalry"); the second are those who do it out of love. Those who have sinful motivations do it because of envy, rivalry (vs. 15) and because of selfish ambition (vs. 17). These two things are easier to imagine and understand - they envy Paul; they saw Paul as a rival to their ministry; they had selfish ambitions to gather for themselves more and more people. Paul warned the Ephesian Elders of this in Acts:

**Acts 20:29-30** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

However, what is Paul talking about when he says that these men are "*thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment*" (vs. 17)? John MacArthur explains this text like this:

"Paul's detractors used his incarceration as an opportunity to promote their own prestige by accusing Paul of being so sinful the Lord had chastened him by imprisonment." (The MacArthur Study Bible, 1790)

In other words, this is one scenario that would explain what it means that they were thinking of afflicting Paul in his imprisonment.

At the end of the day we do not know for sure. However, the main message is clear - Paul's imprisonment serves to advance the gospel, which is cause for his rejoicing. His imprisonment gave people boldness to preach Christ. And it does not matter if they had bad motives or good motives he rejoices that Christ is proclaimed.

*Note:* What Paul is not rejoicing over is the message of the "dogs" in 3:1ff. He tells this church to "*Look out for the dogs...*," which means to avoid them. These people are not preaching Christ. They are really enemies of the cross. They are preaching the message of the anti-Christ.

Yes, and I will rejoice,<sup>17</sup> <sup>19</sup> for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,<sup>18</sup> <sup>20</sup> as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by

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<sup>17</sup> Paul rejoices in the fact that the gospel advances. Whenever and wherever Christ is preached it is cause for rejoicing. That's what matters most to Paul. What happens to him is not important, so long as it serves to advance the cause of Christ.

*Illustration: Me and Prosperity Gospel Preachers*

*Point:* As much as I hate the bulk of their message I am to rejoice in any portion that is right concerning Christ.

<sup>18</sup> The question here is what does Paul have in mind for his deliverance? Does he mean release from prison or does he mean salvation? Scholars are on both sides of the argument on this. For me the most natural reading of this text seems to suggest that Paul was talking about his release from prison. In verse 24 he says, "*to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.*" Then in verse 25 he says, "*Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all.*" Then even later in verses 26 and 27 he talks about the possibility of him coming to the Philippians again.

However, Paul seems to also be open for the possibility of his departure as well. Verses 20-26 makes this clear. But regardless of whether we can nail down what Paul means here his main point is that whether he lives or he dies what he wants most is that Christ is glorified in his body (vs. 20).

death. <sup>21</sup> For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. <sup>19</sup> <sup>22</sup> If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. <sup>24</sup> But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. <sup>25</sup> Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, <sup>26</sup> so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

#### IV. PAUL'S EXHORTATION (TO CHRISTIAN LIVING - vv. 27-30)

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<sup>19</sup> This verse lays out the main point that Paul is making in this section - to live is Christ and to die is gain. This is how Christ is honored in his body. So what does this mean?

- 1) **Christ is honored in his body if living means “fruitful labor”** for him. Verses 24-26 explains what fruitful labor means - it means their “*progress and joy in the faith*” (vs. 25).

In other words, fruitful labor means that he will labor to build their faith in God. So, for Christ to be honored in his living means that he would continue to devote his life to mature the Philippian church thereby producing more joy in their lives.

- 2) **Christ is honored in his body if dying means** that he looks forward to being with Christ. Christ is honored when a person yearns to be with him.

*Illustration: A husband going on a business trip*

*Point:* If his family yearns to be with him and can't wait for his return the father is honored.

*Illustration: Chauffer's Response to My Question*

*Point:* The fact that he says he does not miss his wife shows that he does not treasure her, thereby, he does not honor her.

Paul says that for him “*to die is gain*” (vs. 21) The fact that he is torn between living and dying because to be with Christ “*is far better*” (vs. 23) shows how much he treasures Christ and thereby honors him “*in his dying.*” If Paul were given the news that he would be beheaded and he has peace and joy and longs to be with Christ there is no better way to honor Christ in his dying than that.

<sup>27</sup> Only let your manner of life<sup>20</sup> be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel<sup>21</sup>, <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from

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<sup>20</sup> The word that Paul uses here literally means “*to live as a citizen.*” In other words, they are to live as citizens of God’s kingdom. Later in 3:20 he says, “*Our citizenship is in heaven.*” This is an exhortation to take their cues for daily conduct from heaven, not earth.

The temptation for them would have been to take their cues from their Philippian citizenship. Put it differently, the way of the Philippians should not be their way. They are citizens of Philippi but not really.

<sup>21</sup> For a church to “*let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ*” means three things:

- 1) That they **stand firm in the one spirit**. This means that Paul is calling for unity among them. I don’t think he is talking about unity here, not the Holy Spirit. There is evidence that there was disunity in the church. In 4:2 Paul says, “*I entreat Euodia and...Syntyche to agree in the Lord.*” Later in chapter 2 he exhorts them again along this line (2:2).
- 2) That they **strive side by side** for the faith of the gospel. Striving side by side speaks to two realities:
  - a. First, there is a **struggle** (striving) here - Living as citizens of the kingdom requires that we fight, put forth lots of efforts;
  - b. Second, they are to do it **together** side by side. To be a Christian is to be part of a family, the church. Therefore, they are to labor together for the good of the whole, as well as the gospel itself. They have to have the same goal and objective. One cannot be pulling in one direction and another pushing in another direction, even if they are slightly off. Some may pull, some may push, and some may direct, but as in their unity they must all be working toward the same goal which is defined by the gospel of Christ.
- 3) That they are **not frightened** by their oppositions. In his letter to Timothy Paul puts it like this:

**2 Timothy 1:7** for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

God<sup>22</sup>. <sup>29</sup> For it has been granted<sup>23</sup> to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, <sup>30</sup> engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

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<sup>22</sup> What is from God - The destruction of the opponents, or the salvation of the believers? Neither. The construction of this Greek sentence points to “the fact that **believers have been granted courage** from God to stand firm in their struggles and so are demonstrating their salvation.” (Homer A. Kent Jr, Philippians in EBC, Zondervan, 119.) Paul puts it this way in a letter to Timothy:

**2 Timothy 3:12** Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

This is exactly what Paul is exhorting these believers to do - to strive for the faith of the gospel.

<sup>23</sup> Suffering and persecution is a gift from the Lord. The Philippians were not only given the faith but they were also granted the privilege, really to “suffer for his sake” (vs. 29). This is evidence that they belong to God.