

II. Lesson 2: Dear Philippians/A Sharing Church – Phil. 1:1-5

September 20/21, 2006

Aim: To see the relationship between Paul and the church at Philippi as an example and challenge to our relationship to the church and each other.

- *‘Many Christians find Philippians the most attractive of all Paul’s letters’ (p. 1). Has that been your experience? What particular things in it stick out in your memory as being important?*

A. Dear Philippians (Phil. 1:1-2)

Letters in the ancient world began with three words: 1) the name of the writer; 2) the name of the recipient; and 3) ‘greetings.’

1. Correspondents (1:1a)

a) Paul & Timothy

Timothy is included not only because he was with Paul, but also because he was involved in the founding of the church at Philippi (Acts 16:1ff). However, there is not indication that Timothy shared in the writing of the letter.

b) Bondservants of Jesus Christ

All Christians are servants, bond-slaves of Jesus. Yet Paul uses that description of individual Christians relatively infrequently. We are either servants of the Lord or servants of the devil. The service of the Lord brings joy and peace. The title of ‘servant’ emphasizes not servitude but instrumentality, that is, God is pleased to work through His servants.

2. Readers (1:1b)

a) Saints

‘Saint’ (*hagios*) or ‘holy one’ is the word used in the New Testament to describe every Christian (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1). Saints are ‘set apart’ for God’s glory and separated from the world and all its contamination. Thus, we can see a double separation involved; negatively there is a separation from evil, and positively, a dedication to God and His service. The word does not refer only to certain outstanding Christians whom the church recognizes in a special way.

b) In Christ Jesus

How do they become saints? It is only through belonging to Jesus Christ. Our call to ‘sainthood’ or ‘holiness’ is in the context of being ‘in Christ Jesus’ as opposed to ‘in Adam.’ Jesus is, for Paul, the ‘second man’ and ‘the last Adam’ (1 Cor. 15:22, 45, 47). When we come to trust in Christ, we begin to share in the blessings of all that He did for us (*cp.* Eph. 1:3).

c) In Philippi

Paul will later say ‘our citizenship is in heaven’ (3:20), not here on earth. Yet for the moment we live in a sinful environment, whether ‘in Philippi’ or in Houston. Here we are called to live as alien residents.

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d) Congregation

Paul addresses them as a fellowship, a congregation of Jesus Christ, and not merely isolated individuals. This is the only one of Paul's letters which is addressed to both overseers and deacons as well as all the saints. Paul was concerned to show that every church member has a part to play in the church. Leaders should have due respect shown to them and are to be obeyed, but they are not more important than the humblest church member.

e) Overseers

'Overseers' is the literal translation of the Greek work *episkopos*, sometimes translated as 'bishop.' It refers to the office of 'elder' (*presbuteros*). In Acts 20:17 the office of 'elder' is equated with that of 'bishop' in Acts 20:28. 'Elder' refers to the seniority of the leader or his spiritual maturity; 'bishop' describes the ministry he exercises—he oversees or leads his fellow Christians. The responsibilities of these leaders are of nourishing and protecting the flock of God.

f) Deacons

'Deacons' (*diakonos*) were responsible to see that the practical affairs of church life were spiritually organized (*cf.* Acts 6:1-7). The deacons of Philippi may have been the ones who took the initiative in collecting and sending the gift of the church by the hands of Epaphroditus (2:25; 4:18).

- *Four things are said to characterize the first readers of this letter. What are they? In one sense these things embrace all of our relationships (in ourselves, to Christ, in our context, to Christian leaders). In what ways does Paul's teaching about these relationships challenge us?*
- *These Christians were 'in Christ' but 'at Philippi.' From what you know of Philippi (see Acts 16:11-40), what difficulties and opportunities did that present to them?*

3. Greetings (1:2)

a) Grace

'Grace' (*charis*) is God's love for the unworthy, revealed in the coming of Jesus and His self-giving on the cross (*cp.* 2 Cor. 8:9). Grace is the spring or fountain of God's unmerited favor from which all of God's blessings flow. When we speak of the grace of God, we mean His many-faceted kindness which He has granted to us (*cp.* 2 Cor. 8:9).

b) Peace

'Peace' (*eirene*) echoes the familiar Hebrew greeting *shalom*, spiritual and physical well-being. We have peace because we have been reconciled to God through Christ. We read of two main kinds of peace in the Bible. First, there is peace *with* God (*cp.* Rom. 5:1). All those who have truly been born again have peace with God. We also read about the peace *of* God (*cp.* 4:7). This is something which is experienced by the believer who is undergoing trials of one kind or another.

c) Trinity

Two persons of the Trinity (Father and Son), are mentioned here; the third, the Holy Spirit, is implied.

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B. A Sharing Church (Phil. 1:3-5)

The relationship between a pastor, especially a *founding* pastor, and a congregation is inevitably one of the most important features in the life of a church.

1. Thankful (1:3)

Paul's 'I thank' is *eucharisteo* in Greek. Paul is thankful as he remembers the Philippian church. An alternate translation of verse 3 is possible, that Paul is thankful 'for all your remembrance of me.' In this translation, the apostle's thanksgiving to God is based upon the prayerful remembrance that his beloved Philippian church has of him in his confinement, along with their generous gift.

2. Prayerful (1:4a)

Paul prays for the Philippian church 'always.' When Paul settles down to pray for the church at Philippi he did not just pray for the overseers and deacons, but for all the saints who were at Philippi. Here his prayer is thankful; later on, he will exhort the Philippian church in various matters.

3. Joyful (1:4b)

Paul's prayers were not only thankful; they were also joyful. The apostle's irrepressible and constant joy (*charas*) even in the midst of his sufferings is a distinguishing feature of this epistle.

Here Paul teaches us about the mystery of prayer. It is not simply a listing of the requests we have; it involves entering into others' situations, needs, triumphs and failures, and carrying them into the presence of God.

4. Partnership (1:5)

'Partnership' translates the Greek word *koinonia*, which means communion, participation, or fellowship. In the New Testament, *koinonia* or 'fellowship' refers to sharing or holding something in common. We have almost made the word synonymous with good food and a few laughs. But it means more than merely enjoying each other's company. It was a partnership.

a) Gospel-Centered Partnership

They share in Paul's task of sharing the gospel (*euangelion*) (*cp.* 1:27). In the gospel, Christ not only draws us to Himself by the Spirit's work; He also draws us nearer to each other. Christian fellowship is a marvel. People who by nature have nothing in common find a common life in Christ. Our commitment to Christ always implies a commitment to Christ's people (*cf.* Heb. 11:25-26).

b) Material and Personal Partnership

We often think of fellowship as spiritual in distinction from material; we mean little more than enjoying conversation and discussion with our fellow-Christians. The Philippians did more: they sent a monetary gift (4:14), and they sent a person with the gift – Epaphroditus – to minister to Paul personally in prison (2:25). The sign of our professed love of the gospel is the measure of sacrifice we are prepared to make in order to help its progress.

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c) Ongoing Partnership

These young Christians had remained faithful to Paul throughout the years (4:14-16; 2 Cor. 11:9) and had supported him whenever they had the opportunity and the resources to do so (4:10).

Being a Christian means entering into a partnership with others, to share in the work of Christ. There is, ordinarily, no such thing as an isolated Christian. We belong to those who belong to Christ! Indeed, where there is no giving, no caring, no loving, no sharing, there is no true fellowship.

C. Application & Discussion Questions

- *Paul had a special responsibility for the Philippian church as a founding apostle. But the kind of love for the church which he expresses in verses 3-5 derives from a Christian heart, not from an office in the church. What can we learn from his example (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1)?*
- *Discuss the comment: 'It is ...never money wasted when we send people to encourage missionaries as well as provide them with financial support' (p. 8).*
- *The Philippians were partners with Paul in his work. What three things do we need to notice about this partnership? Can you add to this? What practical things can you do (as an individual or fellowship) to follow their example?*
- *Is it significant that Paul begins with gratitude rather than complaints? Why do some of us instinctively do the reverse whenever we mention other Christians? Does the way in which Paul thinks of the Philippians help here?*
- *In what ways can you help to promote true Christian fellowship (koinonia) at Covenant and with other Christian friends?*

For next time: Read Philippians 1:5-11 and Ferguson chapters 3-4.