**DEATH GRIP**

**A Study in Philippians**

**Historical Background**¹

During his second missionary journey, Paul visited the town of Philippi where several people heard the gospel message and accepted Christ as their Savior. Some of these who are recorded in the Book of Acts were Lydia and her family and an un-named Philippian jailer and his family (Acts 16:14–34). This was the beginning of a local church in Philippi. This group of believers provided Paul with assistance in his ministry in a number of ways. In large part, this letter was written to thank them for their help and to assist them in growing in their faith.

Philippians is personal and practical in its tone and teaching. Experiencing joy in the Lord is a major theme. Paul emphasized the need for believers to rejoice in Christ. “Joy” (chara) is used four times (Phil. 1:4, 25; 2:2; 4:1); “rejoice” (chairō) occurs eight times (1:18 [twice]; 2:17–18; 3:1, 4:4 [twice], 10); and “glad” occurs thrice (2:17–18, 28). (In 1:26 the word “joy” is a

¹ Adapted from *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Vol. 2, “Philippians” by Dr. Robert Lightner.
different Gr. word; there it is the word “glad,” “boast,” or “glory,” \[kauchēma\], which also occurs in 2:16 and 3:3.) Paul wrote frequently in this epistle about the mindset of a child of God. The character of one’s life is truly a reflection of what occupies his or her mind.

The Theme of the Letter

Though many exhortations and challenges are given, one major theme or emphasis is repeated throughout the book … “joyfully living as a Christian in spite of difficult circumstances”.

The Human Author

Most scholars agree that the Apostle Paul wrote the Book of Philippians. Clearly the work claims to have been written by him (1:1). Reference to Timothy is also significant since he was with the apostle when Philippi was evangelized (cf. Acts 16). Also the information the writer gave about himself (Phil. 3:4–6) harmonizes perfectly with Paul’s life. Furthermore, the writings of the early church fathers support Pauline authorship.

The Date of Writing

It is clear that Paul was in bondage when he wrote Philippians. This is why many refer to Philippians as one of Paul’s “prison epistles”. Most biblical scholars believe that he was in Rome at the time; but some some suggest he was in Caesarea; and a few argue for Ephesus. The date of the writing would then be A.D. 61 or 62.

The Historic Occasion

When the believers in Philippi heard about Paul’s imprisonment at Rome, they sent Epaphroditus, who may have been their pastor, to minister to him. Epaphroditus personally comforted Paul, practically expressing to him the love and concern that the Philippians had for him. This concern led them to send a financial contribution to provide for his needs while he was under house arrest awaiting trial (4:18). Three times before—twice when Paul was at Thessalonica, and once when he was at Corinth (Phil. 4:15–16; cf. 2 Cor. 11:9)—the believers had ministered to his needs. A significant reason that Paul wrote the Book of Philippians was to thank them for their generosity and thoughtfulness. While Epaphroditus was in Rome, he became so ill that he almost died (Phil. 2:27). After he recovered, he returned to Philippi, bringing Paul’s letter to the church with him.

Philippi was a Roman colony (Acts 16:12). After the Battle of Philippi in 42 B.C. some Roman soldiers were ordered by Anthony to live there. Then in 30 B.C. Octavian forced some people in Italy to give up their homes and settle in Philippi and elsewhere. These Philippian residents were given special privileges including the “Italic right.” This meant that the colonists, in return for their displacement, were treated as if their land were part of Italian soil. So the residents were citizens of Rome, their “mother city,” and enjoyed the full rights of Roman citizenship, including exemption from taxes. So Paul’s words (Phil. 1:27) “conduct yourselves” (lit., “live as citizens”) and “our citizenship is in heaven” (3:20) had special meaning to the Christians at Philippi.
The Purposes for the Epistle

The initial reason for writing, as indicated, seems to have been to thank the Philippians for their support in sending Epaphroditus and providing a generous financial gift. But Paul also took advantage of this opportunity to address some of the problems in their church. Apparently rivalry and personal ambition were present among some of the believers (2:3–4; 4:2). False teachers were also gaining a hearing (3:1–3) with some of their number. Some of these false teachers, called Judaizers, were teaching that in addition to faith in Christ, people needed to follow the Jewish laws and traditions in order to be saved (compare with Galatians 2:11-3:29). Others went to the opposite extreme, claiming that because a person is forgiven by grace, he or she is free from any moral restraints and can live however he or she pleases (3:18–19). This false teaching is frequently called “antinomianism”. This teaching does not recognize the biblical teaching (Romans 6, etc.) that while Christians are indeed freed from sin by grace, they are not free to sin.

**OUTLINE**

1. Encouragement for Living the Christian Life (1:1–30)
   A. Paul’s praise of the saints at Philippi (1:1–8)
      1. Introduction (1:1–2)
      2. Praise for their constant witness (1:3–6)
      3. Praise for their concern for the gospel (1:7)
      4. Praise shown by his love for them (1:8)
   B. Paul’s prayer for the saints at Philippi (1:9–11)
      1. Prayer for love (1:9–10)
      2. Prayer for the fruit of righteousness (1:11)
   C. Paul’s presentation of himself to the saints (1:12–30)
      1. Stalwart testimony (1:12–18)
      2. Settled convictions (1:19–26)
      3. Solemn exhortations (1:27–30)
2. Examples for Living the Christian Life (2:1–30)
   A. The Son of God whose attitude the believer is to share (2:1–18)
      1. The declaration (2:1)
      2. The exhortations (2:2–4)
      3. The humiliation of Christ (2:5–8)
      4. The exaltation of Christ (2:9–11)
      5. The exhortations continued (2:12–18)
   B. The servants of God whose manner of life the believer is to follow (2:19–30)
      1. Timothy and Paul (2:19–24)
      2. Epaphroditus and Paul (2:25–30)

---

2 The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Vol. 2, “Philippians” by Dr. Robert Lightner.
III. Exhortations for Living the Christian Life (3:1–21)
   A. Believers are to have no confidence in the flesh (3:1–14)
      1. The exhortation introduced (3:1)
      2. The example to be avoided (3:2–3)
      3. The example to be followed (3:4–14)
   B. Believers are to have a walk that pleases God (3:15–21)
      1. A walk of maturity (3:15–16)
      2. A walk of watchfulness (3:17–19)
      3. A walk completed (3:20–21)

IV. Enablement for Living the Christian Life (4:1–23)
   A. Christ at the center (4:1–7)
      1. Standing fast in Him (4:1–3)
      2. Rejoicing in Him (4:4)
      3. Living in the light of His presence (4:5–7)
   B. God’s presence with believers (4:8–9)
      1. Thinking worthy thoughts (4:8)
      2. Doing worthy deeds (4:9)
   C. God’s supply of human needs (4:10–20)
      1. The lesson of contentment (4:10–13)
      2. The blessing of giving and receiving (4:14–20)
   D. Conclusion (4:21–23)
“POWER UP!”

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Greeting
1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
   To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving and Prayer
3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 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. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. 3

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Who are the principle characters? What do you know about them? (vs.1)

2. From the background information provided, what do you know about Philippi?

   How would that have influenced the believers and the church that was founded there?

---

3. What does Paul pray that the Philippians will experience from God? (vs. 2)

What do each of these terms mean?

Why is it important that they would experience these attributes of God’s presence?

4. Paul assured the Philippians that he is thankful for them. (vs.3-8)
   a. What term or concept is repeated at least three times that would indicate that thanksgiving is a major part of Paul’s prayers? (vs.3-4)
   b. What specifically does Paul thank God for regarding the Philippians?
      i. Their ________________ in his ministry. (vs.5)
      ii. Their ________________ in the Christian faith. (vs.6)
   c. How does Paul feel about the Philippians? Why does he feel this way? (vs.7-8)

5. In addition to thanking God for the Philippian believers, what does Paul pray for them? (vs.9-11)
   a. That they would abound in ____________ (vs.9)
   b. That they would increase in _______________ and ________________ (vs.9)
      How are these two characteristics similar? How are they different?
   c. What are the desired results of the Philippians spiritual growth in these areas? (vs.10-11)
LIVING OUT THE TRUTH

1. How can we “partner” with Christian ministers, missionaries and Christian leaders? Especially those who serve in dangerous and difficult areas of the world?

   Why is it important to do this?

2. Is thanksgiving for other believers a significant part of your prayer life? For whom do you thank God? Why do you thank God for this person/these people?

3. What do you characteristically pray for others? How do your prayers compare with what Paul prayed for the Philippians?

4. Why is it important for the Philippians to know how Paul feels about them and what he is praying for them?

   Why is it important for Paul to pray these things for them and to let them know that he is praying this way for them?
PHILIPPIANS 1:12-26

The Advance of the Gospel

12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

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

To Live Is Christ

Yes, and I will rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, 20 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 death. 21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

When Paul writes to the Philippians about “what has happened to me” (vs.12), he is referring to being detained by the Roman authorities while awaiting trial. Since there are many different forms of “imprisonment” that are referenced in the Bible, it is important to consider what Paul’s “imprisonment” would have involved. One encyclopedia on biblical topics states:

During the period of Roman occupation in Palestine the public prison functioned only for short durations of incarceration. It served as a place to detain both suspects awaiting trial and convicted criminals awaiting sentencing and

---

punishment. Imprisonment itself was not considered a form of punishment under the Roman legal system (cf. *Oxford Classical Dictionary* [2nd ed 1970], p. 879).

Another reputable Bible encyclopedia makes this observation:

Paul imprisoned others before his conversion (Acts 8:3) and afterward frequently was committed to prison for his faith, and was also beaten frequently (Acts 16:22-29; 22:23ff, 2 Cor. 6:5; 11:23). In Rome, he was under house arrest (Acts 28:16). His imprisonment resulted in the so-called “prison epistles” --- Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians. Following his release, the evidence leads to the assumption that he resumed his activity for a time, but only to be imprisoned again prior to his execution (2 Tim. 1:8; 2:9).

Even though Paul is under arrest and awaiting a trial that may lead to his execution, he is concerned about encouraging the Philippians. He also frequently mentions how he is “rejoicing”. What does he have to rejoice about? (vss.12-26)

1. His imprisonment has resulted in __________________________ (vs.12).

2. Especially among ____________________ and ____________________, the gospel is advancing in that it is clear that Paul’s imprisonment is due to his faith. (vs.13)

3. In addition, most of the other Christian leaders are exhibiting ______________ in the Lord and are boldly preaching the gospel without __________. (vs.14)
   a. Even though some see themselves in competition with Paul, they are still preaching the gospel (vs.15, 17). While these people have flawed motives, they are NOT the false teachers that Paul condemns in other passages … Paul calls them “__________” (vs.14) and states that they “preach ____________” (vs.15, 18).
   b. Others are demonstrating solidarity with Paul and are preaching the gospel with purer motives of __________ (vs.15-16).

4. Even though Paul acknowledged differing motives of fellow Christian workers, he rejoiced in the fact that __________________________ (vs.18a).

5. Because Paul’s central reason for living was to ________________, he could rejoice even if his incarceration led to his death. (vs.20)

---


6. However, Paul anticipated that God would deliver him which would lead to more ministry opportunities with the Philippians. (vss. 18b-19, 22-26)

   a. Paul believed that God would deliver him in response to the Philippians’ ____________ (18b-19a).

   b. Paul believed that God would deliver him through the help of ________________ (vs.19b).

   c. Paul believed that God would deliver him so that he could continue to ________________. (vs. 25-26)

**LIVING THE TRUTH**

1. How could Paul’s life be characterized by joy in the midst of such uncertain and threatening circumstances?

2. What past circumstances caused you to feel uncertain, threatened or fearful?

   What present circumstances are producing feelings of uncertainty, apprehension or fear?

   What future circumstances cause you the most concern, apprehension or fear?

3. How would you feel if your efforts to serve God resulted in rejection and persecution?

4. What does it mean “to live is Christ and to die is gain”?

5. How can this type of a Christ-centered life be reflected in my experience?
“NO FEAR”

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

27 Only let your manner of life 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, 28 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 God. 29 For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, 30 engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have. 7

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What does the phrase “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ” mean? (Compare this with Ephesians 4:1)

   NOTE: Understanding the meaning of this phrase is essential to understanding the meaning of this paragraph as it is the core or central command upon which all of the other thoughts are dependent.

2. In this context, “living worthy of the gospel of Christ” means taking a confident stand for Christ. That confidence in Christ is reflected by:

   a. Being ______________ with other believers in proclaiming forgiveness through faith in Christ (vs.27).

   b. Not allowing the opposition coming from a non-Christian culture to ______________ them into staying quiet about the Christian faith or abandoning their convictions. (vs.28a)

   c. Trusting that God will ______________ those who oppose the gospel message and will ______________ those who courageously stand for the truth. (vs.28b)

   d. Realizing that a person’s faith in Christ will often be accompanied by ______________ similar to what Paul experienced (vs.29-30). NOTE: Compare these verses with Jesus’ words to His disciples in John 16:33 and Paul’s instruction to his protégé, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:12.

LIVING THE TRUTH

1. What are some of the things that tend to cause division in the body of Christ today?

2. What causes you to be divided from your brothers and sisters in Christ?

3. What frightens you about taking a stand for Christ in your family, with your friends, in your workplace or neighborhood? What are you afraid of?

4. If you were to identify more openly with Christ, how is it that God may cause you to “suffer” for the sake of Christ?

   How do you feel about this?

5. What mindset can help you to overcome this fear?
“HUMBLE BEAST”

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11

Christ’s Example of Humility

2 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 3 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 4 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

This passage calls for believers to be one in Christ (vs.2). This requires that they understand the spiritual realities that are theirs because of their new identity in Christ (vs.1). It also requires that they respond to one another in humility (vs.3-4), even as Christ provided the supreme example of humility in accepting the limitations of human body (vs.5-7) and in allowing Himself to be crucified (vs.8). However, even though many did not recognize the deity of Christ nor respond by honoring Him, God the Father exalted Him so that no one could ultimately deny that Jesus is truly God and is worthy of worship and praise (vs.9-11). While this passage is a call to Christian unity, it is also one of clearest revelations of both Christ’s humanity and deity in all of scripture.

It is important to understand the grammatical construction of this passage to fully grasp the flow of thought. The first verse begins with “conditional” phrases that are completed in the second verse. The classic construction of a conditional sentence is “if” (stating the condition) followed by a phrase or phrases introduced by the word “then” (identifying the result). In English, this may look like the following … “If it rains this weekend, then we will move the picnic inside.” The first phrase states a possible condition that may or may not take place. However, sometimes in the Greek language in which these verses were written, these are known as “first-class” conditions or statements of reality rather than possibility or probability. They may be more accurately translated “since” rather than “if” these qualities or conditions exist in reality, therefore we should respond accordingly. For example, “since” there is encouragement from

---

Christ’s love for us (vs.1), we should encourage others by demonstrating the same type of love toward them (vs.2).

1. What do the spiritual realities that are listed in verse 1 mean?
   a. Since there is “comfort in Christ”
   b. Since there is “encouragement in love”
   c. Since there is “affection”
   d. Since there is “sympathy”

2. Based on these spiritual realities, how should believers relate to one another (vs.2)?
   a. We should NOT …
   b. We should …

3. Through the manner of His birth, his life as a human and his death, Christ set the supreme example of humbly serving others (vs.5-8).
   a. How did Christ “make himself nothing” or “empty himself” by being born and living as a human being?
   b. How did Christ’s death on a cross demonstrate his humility?

4. How did God “highly exalt” Christ? (vs.9-11)

**LIVING THE TRUTH**

1. What hinders us from living with other believers in unity?

2. How is it possible to consider others to be more important than yourself without considering yourself to be worthless?

3. In what ways can you “deny yourself” or “take up your cross” (Matt.10:38; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23) in following Christ’s example of humbly serving others?

4. While we will exalt Christ in eternity, how can we practically exalt Him and honor Him as God while we are on the earth?
PHILIPPIANS 2:12-30

Lights in the World
12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. 17 Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. 18 Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

Timothy and Epaphroditus
19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.
25 I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. 9

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What does it mean to “work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (vs.12)?

How does the following phrase “for (or “because”) it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work His good pleasure” (vs.13)?

Compare this verse with Ephesians 2:8-10. What does this add to your understanding?

2. What are the characteristics of believers who “shine as lights in the darkness”?
   
a. They are __________________________ to the Word (vs.12)?
   
b. They do all things without ________________ or ________________. (vs.14)
   
c. They are ___________________, _________________ and without ________________ (vs.15). What do these terms mean?
   
d. They are faithfully holding onto _______________________. (vs.16)

How does this compare with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:14-16?

3. How is the lifestyle of unbelievers described?
   
a. They are ______________________________.
   
b. They are ______________________________.

What do these synonyms mean? How does their lifestyle contrast with that of believers?

4. How could Paul “be glad” and “rejoice” in the Philippians faith, even if he did not know if he would be released or if he would be killed for his faith? (vs. 17)

How could the Philippians also “be glad” and “rejoice” if Paul were executed? (vs.18)

5. Paul anticipated sending both Timothy and Epaphroditus to minister to the Philippians and that he himself would be released to return to Philippi. (vs.19-30)
   
a. These men had been a big part of Paul’s support while he was under house arrest awaiting his trial in Rome. What does his willingness to send them tell you about Paul and his relationship with the Philippians?
   
b. What do you learn about Timothy from Paul’s description? (vs.19-24)

   c. What do you learn about Epaphroditus? (vs.25-30)
LIVING THE TRUTH

1. Why is it important to “work out our salvation”?

   What part does “fear” and “trembling” play in this process?

2. What causes you to fall into “grumbling” and “disputing”?

3. What are the characteristics that you see in the life of these men that you would benefit from imitating?

   a. Paul

   b. Timothy

   c. Ephaphroditus

   Where, with whom, and/ how can you start to do this?
"DOG TIRED"

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you.

2 Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh.

3 For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

4 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

5 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

6 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

NOTE: While there were many false teachers that plagued Paul and the early church, one particular group that threatened to influence the Philippians were called Judaizers. These false teachers confused the gospel of grace by adding works of the law, both for salvation and for Christian living. In particular, they taught that a person had to be circumcised in order to be saved. They did not omit faith in Christ but added works of the flesh. Paul called such men “deceitful workmen” (2 Cor. 11:13). Paul also called the Judaizers dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh. He considered their work dangerous and not of God. Therefore, Paul warned the Philippian believers to refrain from following their teaching.

It was common for some Jews to refer to Gentiles as dogs, which were considered unclean animals. Paul used the term to describe those Jews who mutilated the gospel by insisting on the need to mutilate the flesh in order to be rightly related to God. What they did was actually evil, even though they may have had good intentions. The Old Testament rite of physical circumcision was not only a sign of covenant relationship, but it was also intended to reflect the spiritual condition of the person’s heart, that he had been set apart to God (cf. Deut. 30:6). Writing to Philippians, who were Gentiles, Paul made it clear that he and they were the true circumcision

---

because they had no confidence in the flesh and instead worshiped by the Spirit of God and gloried in Christ Jesus alone. Instead of boasting in human accomplishments, as the Judaizers and Jews did, a child of God should glory in Christ Jesus alone. The word glory used here means "boast" or "exult" (cf. 1:26; 2:16; 2 Cor. 10:17).11

1. What was dangerous about this form of false teaching?
   What groups promote similar doctrines that threaten the church in the 21st century?

2. Paul reminded the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord” (vs.1).
   How would this have helped them to cope with opposition to their Christian faith from the unbelieving world (like the Roman government)?
   How would this have helped them to avoid opposition of the false teaching of religious leaders (like the Judaizers)?

3. Paul reasoned with the Philippians that even though his religious “pedigree” was superior to that of the false teachers (vs.4-6), he was putting his trust in the finished work of Christ rather than to put confidence in his works (vs.7-10).
   What were some of the elements in his religious heritage and accomplishments in which he could have chosen to put his faith (vs.4-6)?
   How did he view them in light of the greater value of Christ’s work (vs.7-10)?

**LIVING THE TRUTH**

1. What specifically do you have to “rejoice in the Lord” about? How does this help you to deal with life’s difficulties? How does this help you to deal with opposition to you or your faith as a Christ-follower?

2. Do you think that Paul was teaching that it does not matter how we live as long as we have faith in Christ? Why or why not?

3. If you were to stand before God and he were to ask you “Why should I let you into my heaven?” what would you answer?

---

11 Adapted from Dr. Robert Lightner’s comments in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* on Philippians
“GOING THE DISTANCE”

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-21

Straining Toward the Goal

12 Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13 Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15 Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16 Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. Even though Paul was a spiritual leader, he stressed that he was still a work in progress, that he had room to grow spiritually (vs.12). In his ongoing process of spiritual maturation, what was behind him that he chose to “forget” (vs.13)?

   What did he focus his mind and his efforts on (vs.14)?

2. What is the mindset of a mature believer to be (vs.15-16)?

3. What was in Paul’s life that provided a good example for the Philippians to follow (vs.17)?

4. What characterized the mindset of those who were “enemies of the cross of Christ” (vs.19b)?

---

What will be the end result of this mindset and lifestyle (vs.19a)?

What was Paul’s attitude toward these people (vs.18)?

5. In contrast to the false teachers who “set their mind on earthly things” (vs.19), what was Paul’s mindset (vs.20-21)?

What does it mean that our “citizenship is in heaven” (vs.20)?

How did having this perspective influence Paul and the Philippian believers?

**LIVING THE TRUTH**

1. Where would you say that you are on the following scale of spiritual maturity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Seeking</th>
<th>New Christian</th>
<th>Growing</th>
<th>Mature (but still growing)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Definition of terms:

Seeking  Have a degree of spiritual sensitivity and interest, but cannot honestly say that I have accepted Christ yet

New Christian  Have accepted God’s offer of forgiveness through trusting in Christ’s death & resurrection; still largely dependent on others for my spiritual growth; sometimes referred to as a baby Christian

Growing  Beginning to mature spiritually as evidenced by starting to take responsibility for my own growth through reading/studying the Bible, regularly praying, meeting with other Christians and talking about my faith experience with others; more of an adolescent or young adult

Mature  Have matured to be a spiritual “adult”, still growing but increasingly taking responsibility to help (parent) younger Christ-followers to grow in their faith
2. What experiences or practices do you need to “forget” or leave behind in order to continue to mature as a Christ-follower?

3. What experiences or practices do you need to focus on in order to continue to mature as a Christ-follower?

4. How can knowing that “our citizenship is in heaven” provide us with hope during this season of political change in the U.S.?
BONUS SECTION … Philippians Chapter 4

“OVERCOMING SIBLING RIVALRY”

PHILIPPIANS 4:1-3

4 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

Exhortation, Encouragement, and Prayer
2 I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. 3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. 13

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. The use of the word “therefore” indicates that Paul is drawing a conclusion based upon what has previously been stated. A maxim that is helpful in understanding the context of a statement is “Whenever you see the word ‘therefore’, you should ask what is it there for?”. So … What teaching immediately precedes this passage in Philippians 3:17-21?

How does this context help us to understand what Paul wrote in Philippians 4:1?

2. What does it mean to “stand firm in the Lord”?

Why did the believers in Philippi need to be encouraged to “stand firm in the Lord”?

3. How does Paul address the Philippian believers? What does he call them?

What does this tell you about his relationship with them?

Why is it important that he tell them this?

---

4. From your own research and reading of the commentary that is included by John MacArthur, answer the following questions.

What is the meaning of the term “entreat”?

Who were the individuals who were being identified (more than their names)?

What was their problem?

What were they being asked to do?

**Commentary from John MacArthur**

The fellowship and support of the body of Christ is an important factor in developing and maintaining spiritual stability. The general strength of the fellowship becomes the strength of each individual. The more isolated a believer is from other Christians, the more spiritually unstable he or she is likely to be. The church should be a place where people support each other, hold each other accountable, and care for each other. …

But Paul knew that such edifying ministry could take place only in an atmosphere of harmony. Therefore any threats to the church’s unity must be confronted. Paul dealt with a serious threat to the Philippian church’s unity in verses 2 and 3. He identified the problem in specific terms, naming the two women who were involved, and exhorting a third person to help resolve the crisis.

Since conflict between influential people in a church will generate instability throughout the congregation, the two quarreling women at Philippi posed a danger to the entire church’s stability. There was a real possibility that the Philippians would become critical, bitter, vengeful, hostile, unforgiving, and proud. Paul knew that unless decisive action was taken quickly, the Philippian church could dissolve into divisive, hostile factions. It was imperative that the Philippians be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3; cf. Col. 3:14)
The twice repeated phrase *I urge ... I urge* shows Paul to be in a pleading, begging, encouraging mode as he addressed the issue of the divisive women. The apostle’s mention of such a seemingly mundane matter after the lofty doctrinal material of chapter 2 and the warnings against dangerous false teachers in chapter 3 may seem surprising. But Paul understood that discord and divisiveness pose an equally crippling threat to the church. Even if its doctrine is sound, disunity robs a church of its power and destroys its testimony. And a church facing hostile external enemies cannot afford to have its members fighting among themselves. Such inighting frequently gives the enemies of the Cross an avenue of attack. The resulting discord, disunity, and conflict could have devastated the integrity of the Philippian church’s testimony.

There are hints earlier in this epistle of Paul’s concern for the Philippian church’s unity. In 1:27 he urged them, “Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.” He pled with them in 2:2 to “make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.” That Paul’s joy was not complete implies that there was some discord in the Philippian congregation. A further hint of discord among the Philippians was the apostle’s exhortation to “do all things without grumbling or disputing” (2:14).

What he had earlier hinted at, Paul now addressed directly. Little is known about Euodia and Syntyche, but several facts about the situation are evident. First, they were church members, not troublemakers from outside the congregation. Second, their dispute was evidently not over a doctrinal issue. If it had been, Paul would have resolved it by siding with the one who was correct and rebuking the one who was in error. Third, they were prominent women, well respected by the Philippian congregation. … Already the dispute between these women was causing significant dissension in the Philippian fellowship.

Paul’s solution to the quarrel was simple and direct: he commanded the two women involved to *live in harmony in the Lord*. There is a time when conflict is acceptable, namely when truth is at stake. … But mere personal conflicts must be resolved and harmony restored, so Paul commanded Euodia and Syntyche to *live in harmony*. The Greek text literally reads, “to be of the same mind”—an essential prerequisite if Christians are to *live in harmony*. To the quarreling, faction-ridden Corinthian church Paul wrote, “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10). Agreement between Euodia and Syntyche was essential, and the sphere in which they had to find their harmony was *in the Lord*. Paul knew that if they both got right with the Lord, they would be right with each other.
Because of the seriousness of their disagreement, Paul realized that Euodia and Syntyche needed the church’s help to resolve their animosity. The Greek particle translated indeed expresses strong affirmation and could be translated “yes,” or “certainly.” Then Paul addressed someone whom the NASB 1995 identifies as true companion. Suzugos (true companion) means “yokefellow,” and refers to someone who shares a common burden. The picture is one of two oxen pulling the same load.

Some believe that this individual was an individual Paul knew, but chose not to name. But since in the immediate context Paul named Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement, why would he not have named this individual? The Philippians surely knew who he was, whether or not Paul named him. Others argue that Paul used the singular term suzugos in a collective sense to refer to the Philippian church as a whole. The best explanation is to leave suzugos untranslated and take it as a proper name. That Paul calls him true or genuine Suzugos is a play on words, indicating that Suzugos was a genuine yokefellow and thus lived up to his name. … Suzugos was a genuine yokefellow, just as Onesimus was genuinely useful and Barnabas was a true son of encouragement. Suzugos was probably one of the overseers (elders) mentioned in 1:1. The elders obviously had not resolved the dispute between Euodia and Syntyche, since it was still going on. So Paul reminded Suzugos of his duty by writing, I ask you also to help these women.

Paul also had a personal reason for wanting Euodia and Syntyche to be reconciled: they had shared his struggle in the cause of the gospel. Sunathleō (shared my struggle) means “to fight alongside of” or “labor together with.” As noted above, Euodia and Syntyche may have been two of the women who heard Paul preach when he first came to Philippi (Acts 16:13). …

The tragic conflict between Euodia and Syntyche reveals that even the most mature, faithful, and committed people can become so selfish as to be embroiled in controversy if they are not diligent to maintain unity.

**LIVING THE TRUTH**

1. What causes you to get “weak-kneed” or to waver in your Christian beliefs and witness?

How does it help to remember that we have a powerful Savior who is coming again and who will “transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body” (Phil.3:20-21)?

---

2. What do you think that the conflict between Euodia and Syntyche may have been about? (Use your imagination, but also your knowledge of human nature ... which hasn’t changed very much over the last 2,000 years ... to make some “educated” guesses.)

3. How could this have negatively impacted the overall church and its mission?

4. What should other believers and/or church leadership have done to help them resolve their differences?

5. What types of disagreements and divisions are common in the church today?

6. How should we respond in seeking to restore unity?

7. How have you seen division in a local church when conflict has not been handled well?

8. How have you seen unity preserved in a local church when conflict has been handled appropriately?
“DON’T WORRY … BE HAPPY HOPEFUL”

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. What does it mean to “rejoice in the Lord always” (vs.4)?

   Why do you think that Paul repeated this command 2x in the same verse?

2. Paul instructs the Philippians to “Let your ‘reasonableness’ be known to everyone” (vs.5)

   After reading the following note, how would you define “reasonableness”?

   NOTE: The Greek word (epieikes) is translated by the ESV as “reasonableness”. This is a good English translation which is influenced by how the term would have been used in Classical Greek and other extra-biblical settings of the day where it was used of rulers who made “reasonable” decisions or exercised their responsibilities in an “equitable” manner. However, it may not provide us with a complete picture of the nuances of this Greek term. A well respected Greek lexicon (dictionary) of Koine Greek (the language of the New Testament) rather translates this term as “yielding, gentle, kind” as in “let your forbearing spirit” be known to everyone.

   Why is it important that this characteristic should be evident to everyone?

3. What does it mean that “the Lord is at hand” (vs.5)?

   Understanding the historical context of Paul’s letter, why is this reminder important?

---

4. The third and fourth imperatives in this list of commands are set in contrast to one another … “Don’t be anxious about anything, but pray about everything … with thanksgiving” (vs. 6-8).

“Don’t be anxious about anything” literally means “stop being anxious”. Read the following commentary to enhance your understanding.

(This phrase) … has the negative connotation of “anxious harassing care” (Lightfoot, 160), attempting “to carry the burden of the future oneself” (Caird, 151), or “unreasonable anxiety” (Plummer, 93), especially about things over which one has no control. Paul and the Philippians had ample reason for anxiety since the one was in prison and the others were threatened with persecution (cf. 1:28). So he is not speaking of imaginary troubles or phantom anxieties. Hence, when he tells them to stop worrying, to be overly anxious for nothing, leaving them no exceptions (μηδέν, “nothing”; cf. 1 Cor 7:32), it is not because he makes light of the troubles that they face but because he knows that God is greater than all their troubles 18

What does it mean to “not be anxious about anything” or to “stop being anxious”?  

How does this compare with Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 6:25-34?

Why would Paul have needed to tell them this?

It is easy to tell someone to stop worrying, but that exhortation alone is not sufficient to provide and antidote for anxiety. In reality, the more that we try to stop worrying about something, the more we tend to think about it and even become more worried (or feel guilty) that we are experiencing anxious, fearful and worrisome thoughts. Instead of simply telling the Philippians to stop worrying, Paul provided them with a positive and powerful alternative … start praying with thanksgiving. We observe a similar pattern in 2 Timothy 2:22 where Paul exhorts Timothy to “flee youthful lusts” but “pursue righteousness” … The answer is NOT the willful repression of negative or hurtful thoughts or emotions, but the decision replacement of them with something that is stronger and better.

Instead of being anxious, the Philippians were instructed to pray about everything with thanksgiving. Their response to circumstances and situations that normally would produce anxiety, apprehension and fear was to talk with the Lord about their concerns while making sure to thank God for His person, His promises and His past provisions. Let’s look at this more closely …

What is “prayer”?

What is “supplication”?

Why is it important to present our prayers and supplications to God with thanksgiving?

5. What is the promised result of consistently presenting our concerns to the Lord in prayer with thanksgiving (vs.7)?

6. According to Paul’s instruction of the Philippians (vs.8), what types of things should we consciously focus our thoughts upon?

   Whatever is __________ - meaning ____________________________________.
   Whatever is __________ - meaning ____________________________________.
   Whatever is __________ - meaning ____________________________________.
   Whatever is __________ - meaning ____________________________________.
   Whatever is __________ - meaning ____________________________________.
   Whatever is __________ - meaning ____________________________________.

   Furthermore, think about things that are:
   ______________ - like ______________________________________________.
   ______________ - like ______________________________________________.

7. What is the progression of learning biblical truth that Paul referenced in verse 9?

   What is the promised result of living according to biblical truth?

   How does this relate to the same promise in verse 7?
LIVING THE TRUTH

1. What are some specific truths or experiences in which you can rejoice in the Lord?

2. Are you known as being a “reasonable” or “forbearing” person?
   Why or why not?

3. What most frequently causes you to be anxious?
   What is your default reaction to anxiety? How should you respond?

   When you are feeling anxious, for what can you still legitimately thank God?

4. What specific things can you focus your thoughts on to help to alleviate (or at least minimize) anxiety?

5. What practices that Paul exemplified can help us to experience God’s peace?
“THANK YOU”

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

God’s Provision
10 I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. 11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
14 Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. 15 And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. 16 Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. 17 Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. 18 I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. 19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

1. How had the Philippians “revived their concern” (vs.10) for Paul?

Who brought this gift to Paul (vs.18)?

What else do we know about this person (see Philippians 2:25-30)?

2. Concerning the receipt of their gift, what did Paul want them to be aware of (vss.10-19)?

3. What does it mean to “be content” (vss. 11-12)?

What is the “secret” of being content (vss.12-13)?

---

4. What is the context of “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (vs.13)?

How do we usually see or hear this phrase used?

5. How had the Philippians helped Paul previously?

6. If Paul was content in his present situation and confident in Christ’s strength to deal with any and all circumstances, why was he so thankful for the Philippian’s gift? (vss.17)

7. What do the following phrases mean:
   a. “I seek the fruit that increases to your credit” (vs.17)
   b. “the gifts that you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (vs.18)
   c. “My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (vs.19)

8. What do the following passages add to our understanding about the ministry of giving?
   Proverbs 3:9-10
   1 Timothy 6:17-19
   2 Corinthians 8:1-15
   2 Corinthians 9:6-15
LIVING THE TRUTH

1. Why do you think that it is difficult for most people to be content with their financial circumstances?

In what situations do you find it the most difficult to be content?

2. What is the difference between being “content” and being “complacent”?

3. How does believing “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” empower us to be at peace with our circumstances and to live in contentment?

4. Do you believe that it is important to be involved in giving financially to provide for the Lord’s work? Why or why not?

Whose responsibility is it to give? Why?