

INTRODUCTION to Philippians (1:1-11)

I. Address or Greeting, 1:1-2

A. Paul & Timothy, "Servants of Christ."

- indicating Special Calling

" Complete Devotion

B. The addressees are "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."

"Saints" = committed Christians.

-Those belonging to the new and true people of God who are heirs to the promises made to Israel.

Emphasizes their consecration more than their moral perfection.

Paul's famous phrase "in Christ Jesus" helps to define what sainthood means, those in Christ, in communion with him, and in the new community of body of which he is the Head.

Paul writes, as Barclay says, "as a friend to his friends"; he doesn't need to emphasize his official position, or explain why he has the apostolic right to write, or why they have the duty to listen. Paul was probably closer to this church than to any other to whom he wrote.

C. Perhaps we would find it profitable to spend some time on what Paul meant by specifying by title the local church officials as bishops and deacons. Philippians is unique in this.

Karl Barth noted how Catholic Bible scholars rejoiced over this early public citing of bishops, but John Calvin exulted in the fact that the congregation is mentioned first and the office-holders are tacked on by the preposition "with." We can never be exactly sure just what were the duties and functions of these church officials, because there is simply not enough information about this in the early church or in the NT.

Other references to "bishops" in the NT will be found in Acts 20:28; I Timothy 3:2; and Titus 1:7. The only other clear use of the word "deacon" in a technical sense is I Tim. 3:8-13.

The Greek word translated "bishop" means "overseer." Our "superintendent," derived from Latin, is almost an exact equivalent.

Bishops were not a governing body but were men to whom the oversight of certain matters had been committed by the church.

To the extent that a pastor or elder is charged with supervision of a church, he is a bishop.

Similarly, "deacons" are another order of lay ministers of the church.

The word is a transliteration of the Greek word for servants (Jn. 5:2).

The idea that deacons are to be a governing board in a church, ruling its policies and regulating its affairs, is foreign to the NT (Ralph Herring).

Deacons may properly RECOMMEND policy to the church, but they do not ESTABLISH OR DETERMINE IT.

It is quite possible that the word translated here as "bishops," meaning "overseers," might be applied to certain Christian pastors in Philippi to whom had been assigned certain administrative duties.

It is agreed by many, if not most, Bible scholars that in the NT "pastor" and "elder" and "bishop" refer to the same office, depending on which emphasis is desired, whether shepherding care, or status, or supervisory function.

If this is so, then the deacons must have been their assistants, perhaps specially charged with financial matters and the care of widows and orphans within the fellowship.

In Paul's own case here in writing this letter, the deacons might very well have been the persons who actually transmitted the Philippian Church's gift to Paul (4:10-13).

D. Perhaps what we need to be asking here is not about the ministry roles of these officials in the early church, but why Paul singles them out, since this may have a bearing on the concerns of his letter, and may help us in the understanding of it. One solution has been offered about this difference between the leaders and the church members which is quite appealing. Notice that Paul does not mention his rank or title as Apostle at all in the greeting. Could it be that the Philippian church officials had shown some inappropriate pride in some way regarding their ecclesiastical titles and positions, and that

Possibly Paul was quietly rebuking them for this subtle differentiation of rank by omitting his own title, apostle, and by describing himself and Timothy as slaves (lowly servants, *douloi*) of Christ Jesus. This is clearly the meaning in 2:7, "He took the form of a slave," or humbling himself even to the point of death on the cross.

Consequently, Paul may be intentionally down-playing any ecclesiastical dignity he possesses by emphasizing that he serves only in a lowly position. He points away from himself to his Lord.

This possible interpretation about why Paul mentions the bishops and deacons here is in keeping with the emphasis on humility which we find throughout the letter. Perhaps they were not living in humility and were not regarding others better than themselves (2:1-4), and might have had too much confidence in the flesh and human titles and prerogatives.

Perhaps this is at least part of the reason why Paul underlines his own role as a "bondslave" of Christ, by pointing to the lowly service of Christ who "emptied" and "humbled" himself (2:5-8), and to the attitude of Timothy, who did not look after his own interests but "slaved" with Paul in the gospel (2:19-22).

II. Key Themes

A. To thank the Phil. for their gift, 2:25-30 and 4:10-20.

B. To deal with certain troubles in the church (1:6, 9-11).

Exhortations to unity (1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2-3).

C. To reassure those who were concerned about him, 1:7.

They were "partners in his affliction," 4:14.
To suffer for Christ is a "grace," not a "disgrace," (1:29).

III. Marks of the Christian Life, 1:3-11.

A. Christian joy

1:4, joy of prayer

1:18, joy that J.C. is preached

1:25, joy of faith

2:2, joy of Xtn fellowship

2:14, Joy of suffering for Xt.

2:28, joy of news of loved ones

2:29, joy of Xtn hospitality

3:1 & 4:1, joy of the man in Xt.

4:1, joy of the soul winner

4:10, Joy in a gracious gift

B. The Christian Sacrifice

1:6, Gr. words for "begin" and "complete" are technical terms referring to the SACRIFICE. This is the same idea as in Rom. 12:1, the Xtn life as a sacrifice.

C. The Xtn Partnership

1. Partakers in grace

2. Partakers in the work of the Gospel

3. Partakers in suffering for the gospel.

4. Partakers with Xt, vs. 8,
(seat of the emotions and affections).

IV. The Christian Progress and Goal

A. Vs. 9 & 10: Growing love

Discriminating love, fr. "dokimazein" =
"to test."

Pure love

Sensitive love; does not cause anyone to
stumble.

B. The Xtn aim is "to please God."

V. The Meaning of Paul's Imprisonment, 1:12-26

A. The Effect of his imprisonment on those around him.

1. The Gospel is proclaimed to his captors.

2. Believers have been encouraged to spread the gospel without fear, even though some preach from bad motivation, vs. 15-17.

3. Lesson to be learned:

a. Whatever Christians' circumstances, they have opportunity for service for God's glory.

b. The gospel is not preached always by well-trained, mature, properly-motivated, effective preachers. We can be charitable toward them and wish them well in their work, but this does not mean we would want them as our pastor.

B. The implications of the imprisonment for Paul personally.

1. Like Job he was confident of vindication, 1:19.

2. The help of the Spirit, 1:19.

3. Death is gain, not loss.

4. The believer is immediately with Christ at death, but this does not mean that Paul has abandoned his often-stated belief in a general resurrection at the end time.

Surely we can trust God to take care of all the details, although we may not fully understand how He does everything (see article by David E. Garland in The Review & Expositor, Summer 1980, p. 335).

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VI. Living Worthily of the Gospel, as Citizens of the Kingdom, 1:27-30 (Barclay's trans., p. 29).

A. Appeal for conduct worthy of the gospel, with primary attention to oneness (v. 27).

1. Gr. word "politeuesthe" meaning "Let your life as a citizen be..."

2. This is not the normal word which Paul would usually use. He wants to make a special emphasis.

3. Neither can it be translated today as it was in 17th c. Eng.--not "conversation." It refers not to how you talk, but how you live, and more than that, how you live as a citizen--not just as a citizen of Rome, but a citizen of heaven.

Christians are called to a higher citizenship.

Paul is going to use this word in this way again in 3:20.

4. Barclay suggests four things Paul expects of the Philippians as good citizens of heaven:

a. To stand fast

b. To be united

c. An unconquerable spirit

d. A cool, calm courage.

5. Walking "worthily of the gospel of Christ" required that they stand side by side in or by "one spirit" and that they strive together for the faith of the gospel; and they do so "with one mind" ("psyche"). They must remain united at all costs.

Little differences and tensions had begun to hurt the Christian community in Philippi, and Paul insists that a united front was the only right attitude in the face of opponents who were threatening them.

Would to God that Southern Baptist zealots today could put aside their hair-splitting denominational differences and see the wisdom of presenting a united front to the foes facing us all!

B. Living worthily means a refusal to be intimidated by opponents, v. 28.

1. To be a Christian in Paul's world, and in the entire N.T. age, meant to be opposed.

2. Vs. 28 calls for a boldness which refuses to be frightened by any opposition.

Such freedom from fear signals the defeat of the opponents and the victory of the Christians.

3. The opponents of vs. 28 might be the Jews who were against the gospel, or they might be heathen antagonists of Greek & Roman culture.

4. The strength of the Christians came not from within their own determination but from the supernatural power of God.

C. Moreover, living worthily of the gospel meant the acceptance of suffering as the normal experience of every Christian, and also a sign of a special spiritual privilege and gift of God's grace (vs. 29-30). This sets the stage as an introduction for all that follows through 2:30 in particular, and in general for a basic concern of the entire letter.

1. Vs. 29 links "to believe" and "to suffer" as privileges traced to the grace of God.

"It has been granted" (RSV) renders the verb form of the Gr. word for "grace." In other words, "It has been graced to you."

2. The same grace of God that comes to us in salvation also comes to us in the privilege of joining with Christ in his servanthood and suffering. We are going to get into this subject more in 2:1-11.

3. This "conflict" (v. 29) is the struggle (agon) common to Paul, the Philippian Christians, all Bible heroes, and indeed to Christ Himself.

4. This is the figure of the Olympic games, illustrating the struggle of the athletes to win the prize, showing the stuff of which champions are made.

5. Story of the French veteran talking to the young army recruit who was trembling on the brink of battle: "Come son, and you and I will do something fine for France." So Paul says, in effect, to the Philippians: "The battle is on for you and me. Let us do something fine for Christ."

VII. The Christian Life, 2:1-18

A. Call to Unity and Humility, 2:1-5

B. The Christ Hymn, 2:6-11 (Wed. 6-3-87)

C. Cooperate with God in your Salvation, 12-18

6-10-87
1. Paul is not thinking of works which a man must do in order to earn his salvation; he is concerned with THE FRUITS of the Christian life which can appear only as God produces them in us, and which can not appear if man resists God's work in his heart.

Progress in the spiritual life always depends on the grace of God; but without man's cooperation God himself is helpless.

2. Paul gives five signs of salvation, as Dr. Barclay suggests:

-- the sign of fear and trembling, a sense of our own creatureliness and powerlessness, and the fear or reverence which drives us to seek God.

-- the sign of serenity and certainty, which does all things without murmurings and questionings, not like the low, threatening, discontented muttering of a mob on the verge of an uprising, and not like the useless and vicious disputing and debating of those who distrust their leaders.

-- the sign of purity, explained by the terms

-- "blameless" = "amemptos," showing what the Christian is to the world - so pure that none can find anything in him or her to find fault with.

-- "innocent" = "akeraios," expressing what the Christian is in himself or herself, literally meaning "unmixed" or "unadulterated."

-- "without blemish" = "amomos," describing what the Christian is in the sight of God. Suggests an unblemish sacrifice to God.

-- the sign of missionary endeavor:

(1) the proclamation of the gospel in words which are clear and unmistakable, and

(2) the witness of a life that is absolutely straight in a world which is warped and twisted.

2. Two vivid word-pictures:

a. From the life of the athlete: the gymnasium and the Olympic Games; not only the physical training ground but also the intellectual club of the day; not only for athletes, but also for writers, historians, poets, and sculptors. (See also Phil 3:14, a picture of runners pressing along the course to the goal, and also 4:1, the victor's laurel crown).

b. From the libation offering poured out as a sacrifice to their God. Paul is willing for his life to be poured out like a libation on the altar on which the Philippians are making their offering to God.

VIII. Paul's plans, 2:19-30.

Two little letters of recommendation for Timothy and Epaphroditus.

A. Concerning Timothy, 19-24:

-- "No one like him..."

-- Perhaps Paul was anxious to keep Timothy with him, and tried first to send others but had received only refusals, because they were so concerned with their own interests, vs. 21.

"Timothy's worth you know," suggesting metal which has been tested and found genuine.

Note vs. 24; what does it suggest about where Paul might have been when he wrote this?

Close to Philippi, or far away in Rome?

If Paul is writing from Rome, isn't it strange that he plans, soon his release, to go to Macedonia, and that he does not so much as mention his plan to go west to Spain, which he declared in Romans 15:28? He had previously spoken of coming to Philippi, in Phil. 1:26. This would be quite convenient and natural had he written this letter while he was in Prison in Ephesus rather than Rome.

This is something to think about!

B. Concerning Epaphroditus, vs. 25-30.

-- The name means "charming."

He was probably from Philippi, possibly one of their local pastors.

He had been sent to Paul in Prison to take their present of money to Paul, and to stay with the Apostle as long as he needed him.

He had served Paul with such devotion that he had fallen seriously ill, and word had travelled back to Philippi of this illness, and Epaphroditus was dismayed because they were so worried about him. Word could travel back and forth rather quickly and easily from Philippi to wherever Paul was imprisoned.

The heart of Epaphroditus was where his responsibility was. Is ours there too?

Paul has to ask the Philippians to receive and honor Epaphroditus. Perhaps he was not properly appreciated there.

Even in our churches today it is not always the best Christians who are most highly esteemed.

Our estimates of men are apt to be affected by things like money and prestige rather than by their faithful service for Christ.

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CHAPTER 3
TWO OBSTACLES TO THE CHRISTIAN PATH
(1. Legalism, vs. 1-16;
2. Libertinism, vs. 12-21)

I. Indestructable Spiritual Joy (3:1)

II. Warning Against False Teachers (3:2-3)

A. Three times he repeated the warning, "look out, beware of."

B. He characterizes these enemies of his as "dogs, evil workers, party of the mutilation."

C. Christian believers were the "true" circumcision (vs. 3).

The mark of true devotion to God is not physical, outward, ceremonial, but spiritual, inward, and moral righteousness of the heart, along with a changed attitude and obedient life.

Dr. Wm Barclay lists three signs of that real circumcision, according to Paul:

1. We worship in the Spirit of God; or, we worship God in the Spirit.

2. Our only boast is in Jesus Christ.

3. We place no confidence in merely human things, not even in the performance of the duties of the Law.

III. Paul's Grounds for Confidence in the Flesh (3:4-6).

A. Here Paul changed the pronoun from "we" to "I" (v. 4). The Gentile Philippian Christians could not claim the external privileges which the Jews claimed, but Paul, being a Jew could claim them.

- Paul had once been where the Judaizers found themselves.

Former assets he now considers liabilities or "disadvantages." The key word "zemia" occurs twice in the noun form and once in the verbal form in vs. 7 & 8. It meant "loss" as well as "disadvantage." It is just the opposite of "kerde" or gain or asset.

The privileges of Paul:

1. He had been circumcised when he was 8 days old.

2. He was of the race of Israel.

3. He was of the tribe of Benjamin (and therefore held a special place in the aristocracy of Israel).

B. Paul states his achievements in the Jewish faith.

1. He was a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents in the dispersion, and they had stubbornly refused to be assimilated to the nations amongst whom they lived, and they deliberately and laboriously retained the Hebrew language.

2. As far as the Law went, he was a trained Pharisee, one of "The Separated Ones," with the purest and strictest morality, Judaism's most loyal, patriotic, and religious party, very knowledgeable of the Scriptures and faithful to them.

3. A persecutor of the church.
Here he uses the verb meaning "to hunt" and so to persecute by chasing and harrying the quarry, or hounding the early Christians to face trial, jail, and death, as he did before his conversion.

4. As far the righteousness which the Law could produce, he was blameless.
He uses the word which suggests "blame for the sins of omission."

Dr. Barclay writes (on p. 61): "All these things Paul might have claimed to set down on the credit side of the balance; but when he met Christ, he wrote them off as nothing more than bad debts... All human achievement had to be laid aside, in order that he might accept the free grace of Christ.... He was not condemning Judaism from the outside. He had experienced it at its highest point; and he knew that it was nothing compared with the joy which Christ had given.

He knew that the only way to peace was to abandon the way of human achievement and accept the way of grace.

(READ BARCLAY'S TRANS. OF 3:8-9 TO INTRODUCE STUDY FOR NEXT WED. ON "THE WORTHLESSNESS OF THE LAW AND THE VALUE OF CHRIST")

Philippians ch. 3 -- New Values for Old

I. A Song of Joy Turns into a Message of Warning, 1-4

II. Revised Estimates of True Worth, 5-16

A. Things That Once Were Gain, 5-7

B. The Radical Revision, vs. 7,8

C. Gaining Christ, vs. 9-14

1. A New Position, vs. 9

Our safety lies in our position "in Christ," but our fruitfulness lies in the extent to which Christ lives in us.

"That I may...be found in him..."

Here the tense and voice of the verb "found" combine to indicate a sudden disclosure that will reveal exactly WHERE a man is and WHAT he is.

2. A New Fellowship, vs. 10-11

3. A New Purpose, vs. 12-14.

Paul has not yet "arrived" at a state of perfection.

D. The Norm of Maturity, vs. 15-16.

It is the mark of the mature mind to recognize that there is yet much to learn.

III. The Heavenly Citizenship, vs. 17-21

A. Paul, the Example, vs. 17

We have no choice between being an example and not being one; we can only choose between being a GOOD example and being a BAD one.

B. Enemies of the Cross, vs. 18-19.

This seems to apply more directly to some who, posing as Christians, have made license of their professed liberty and have fallen victims to materialism, which is the worst form of idolatry.

Paul gives four characteristics of these enemies of Xt:

1. "Their end is perdition."

They are on the road to hell.

2. "Their god is their belly."

3. "Their glory is in their shame."

4. "Who mind earthly things." This may be the greatest danger of all. Like carbon monoxide gas, this frame of mind is more lethal because it is often so undetected.

C. The Coming of the King, vs. 20-21.

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OVER

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