

Chapter 1

Background

To whom was this written?:	The entire church at Philippi
By whom:	The Apostle Paul
When:	60-65 AD
For what purpose?:	1) to respond to those who had sent him gifts. 2) To share information about his situation. 3) To address the problem of division within the church. 4) To warn of evildoers.
Theme:	Take joy in suffering
Under what Covenant?:	New Covenant

Outline

- I. Thanksgiving and prayer (1:1-11)
 - A. Salutation 1-2
 - B. Thanksgiving 3-8
 - C. Prayer 9-11
- II. Paul's situation and attitude (1:12-26)
 - A. The influence of his chains 12-14
 - B. Motives for preaching Christ 15-18a
 - C. To live is Christ, to die is gain 18b-26
- III. Oneness through service 1:27-2:18
 - A. Unity! 27-30

Points of Interest

Purpose: Paul begins this section with information about himself. This is a fairly unusual practice in Paul's writings, and even here he shows a higher purpose than simply writing about himself. He tells his readers about his situation, and how that situation has advanced the Gospel, thus even in providing his personal news, he is showing that his priority is on God's purpose. One might think that being in prison would keep him from furthering the Gospel, yet he reports that the opposite has taken place. This is not only an inspirational message, it not only shows that Paul had held up well... it shows that God was working through him and that God cannot be held back or limited by the circumstances here on earth. This is a point that we should grasp and practice: In all things, whether for good or ill in our lives, our priority must be on serving God's purposes.

vv 15-17: In this section Paul reports that there is more than one motive for preaching the Gospel. Some do it out of love, while others for more selfish motives. Notice that his position is that the important thing is that the Gospel is preached. Whether for good or bad motives, the Covenant priority under the New Covenant is always the Gospel (death, burial and resurrection of Christ). Obviously, it would be better if all of the motives were good; but the Gospel is the priority. (Consider what the priority of the MCC Vision Statement is!)

vv. 18-20: Much has been written and speculated about what Paul meant by his "deliverance" in this passage, but one thing is quite clear: To Paul the disposition of his legal situation was not all that important. What was important was the Gospel, and if he remained in prison, he would preach and encourage others to do the same. If he was released, he would serve God by serving his brothers, and if he was executed he would die for Christ and leave that as his witness.

vv. 21-26: Here, Paul demonstrates his meaning in verse 20 and expands upon it. However this present circumstance works out, he will rejoice, because living is all about Christ, and death is all about being with Christ. This is the attitude we must develop in order to achieve maturity in Christ.

vv. 27-30: In these final verses of the chapter, Paul has taken his accounts of his own circumstances, and applied them to the circumstances of his readers, including you and I!

Chapter 2:1-11

Outline

- III B. Appeal for unity 2:1-4
- C. Christ: Our Example 5-11

Points of interest

Background: This section is a continuation of the discussion that begins in 1:27. Here there are four motivations listed in verse one, followed by the desired result in verse two: unity. Verse three contains prohibitions on selfishness, while verse four exhorts us to place concern on the interests of others. In chapter one, Paul is taking joy in spite of his suffering because his attention is focused on Christ. Here, he is showing us how to do the same.

v. 1: Paul's approach here, as in Ephesians and Colossians, is to place motivation before a requirement. In doing so, he is not laying out a series of rigid rules to be followed, but rather reminding his readers of the benefits of their relationship with Christ, and assuming (correctly) that they will want to do certain things in response. Here, he sets out four motivations for good behavior: They who are "in Christ" have received comfort, love fellowship and tenderness and compassion. Note the use of the word "if". If you have received these things, then you are a Christian, and no doubt will be encouraged to do what he says in verse 2.

v. 2: Here is the call for unity in the body of Christ. Consider the way he puts it into words, and ask yourself how you measure up to the unity plea.

vv. 3-4: Again, he speaks of our priorities. Selfish ambition (compare to those who preach from bad motives in chapter 1) always placing our own interests first (looking out for number 1) are not the ways we should behave as Christians; it is not the way Paul was behaving in jail, and it was not ever the way Jesus had behaved. Putting others first; counting others as better than ourselves. This is true humility, and while it may run counter to modern cultural notions, and may even be counter-intuitive, it is how we are to behave like Christ: to become "like Him".

vv. 5-11" This passage is a Christological statement unlike any other found in the New Testament: It is a major theological statement. Care must be used to not over indulge in theological pronouncements that exceed the context of this letter, as well as not to overly confine it to the letter. It will be the major focus of our class discussion today.

Chapter 2:12-30

Outline

- III. D. Exhortation to Obedience 12-18
- IV. Paul's Co-workers 19-30
 - A. Timothy 19-24
 - B. Epaphroditus 25-30

Points of Interest

Background

This section continues from the passage we ended with last week (5-11) in which Paul gives us the example of Christ as the ultimate motivation for our behavior and service to the Lord. Here, he calls for an obedient response to this motivational message.

vv. 12-13: Paul commends to the Philippians the need to work diligently in the service of the Lord referring to the working out of their Salvation. An interesting idea jumps off the page when we read this verse. Notice that when Paul says: "...continue to work out your Salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." There is a combination of human and divine effort present here. Some say that we can work to earn salvation; others say that grace is so big that we cannot work at all toward salvation. Paul here combines the two together in a general call to action on our part. While human effort alone is not sufficient, the fact that God works in us to give us the will to act according to God's purpose indicates that we indeed have work to do! Now, putting this into context, how can we not respond in obedience when we have just been reminded how greatly Jesus obeyed God's command in all He has done for us? If Christ was obedient, how can you and I not respond to God's call as well?

vv. 19-30: In this section, Paul provides us with more biographical information about his situation and experience with both Timothy and Epaphroditus. In referring to both men, he takes pains to use them as examples of humility and service. As further examples of humility and service, we should be struck by the fact that once again, Paul is letting us know how we should behave. Consider that humility and service is what Paul himself was engaged in... saying that we should be as well. Humility and service is what Jesus did... and we should take on His attitude. Now, Timothy and Epaphroditus have exhibited humility and service... and so should we. It is almost inconceivable that we would miss his point: We must humble ourselves and live as Christ did. We must serve God by serving others in a way that promotes God's purpose: we must advance the Gospel of Christ, and teach others to live as Christ lived. This is what it is to be a follower of Jesus Christ!

Chapter 3:1-11

Outline

- V. A Warning and a New Life 1-11
 - A. Warning 1-6
 - B. New Life 7-11

Points of Interest

Background

As chapter 3 begins, Paul takes an interesting turn in the flow of the letter. While scholars do what scholars always do, and argue about why this happens here, it is clear to anyone with a basic understanding of writing, that the word translated as “finally” is a transitional device. (It is usually a transitional form that indicates the end is near, but it can also be a device that indicates the conclusion of a thought process) In this case, it seems to me that Paul is summing up the previous message of joy, overlooking his circumstances to focus on his (and our) mission and offering a final note of caution. While some scholars have difficulty in seeing this, if you pause to think about it, I’m confident that you’ll see it as such. Note that he says, “...it is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again...” He appears to have the thoughts of the previous chapter in mind, since he isn’t quoting anything directly.

vv. 1-2: “Rejoice in the Lord!” This can sum up everything that Paul has been saying to the Philippians up to this point. When we rejoice in the Lord, we naturally respond to His commands to be faithful and to serve Him. Also, by focusing on the Lord, we will go a very long way to avoid pitfalls and false teaching. In this section, Paul refers strongly to a false teaching that the people must be dealing with; that of the Jews who are claiming that salvation cannot be attained outside of circumcision. It would seem that Paul is claiming that evangelical Jews are doing evil by teaching Jewish Law, but really there is more to it than that. By taking Jewish Law to Christians, they seek (inadvertently, no doubt) to deprive Christians of salvation by teaching things that cannot save them: this is evil. Circumcision and the Law cannot save anyone, especially now that the New Covenant has come. This is easy to see for most Christians, as there is no requirement for circumcision in the New Covenant. It is also demonstrative of something else, the Apostolic Doctrine of Two Covenants. The Apostles taught that there is separation between New and Old Covenants; the New is in effect and the Old is over. Thus, there is no longer any circumcision. It is also interesting to note that circumcision in particular was a requirement of the Abrahamic Covenant; in fact it was the sign of that covenant. The Abrahamic Covenant must also be out of force and effect! Salvation is through Christ. The Church is Israel according to the Spirit. To be in relationship with Christ through His Covenant is true circumcision (sign) of a saving relationship. We have no confidence in the Law, for it creates Israel according to the flesh, and circumcision denotes relation with God through the flesh; it is temporary and will perish. Jesus told us that God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and truth, not merely in the flesh.

vv. 4-11: Paul takes his message further, pointing out that if anyone should be confident in the old way (“the flesh”) then it is himself. But he has no confidence in the old way because it is no longer in effect; it is now worthless, for God has sent His Son to establish a new covenant.

Chapter 3:12-4:1

Outline

- VI. Pressing on to the Goal 3:12-4:1
 - A. One thing I do 12-14
 - B. A Mature viewpoint 15-16
 - C. True and false models 3:17-4:1

Points of Interest

Background: Through this letter, Paul has been using several examples to point us toward the goal of advancing the cause of Christ in all circumstances. In doing so, he has used his own life's circumstances as examples, as well as the circumstances and dedication of others, and most particularly that of Christ Himself. In this section he, once again, uses his own circumstances as a model to encourage (and cajole) his readers to continue on to Christlikeness.

vv. 12-14: Paul begins here by admitting that even he is not yet "perfect". He uses the image of running a race to illustrate this point, and indicates that he still continues to run toward the finish line. It is a fascinating point to ponder; that even the Apostle Paul was continuing to press on. To fully comprehend this, we must recall the fact that we have been Commissioned by Christ to spread the Gospel, and to make disciples: this is our purpose for living on this earth. If all of the disciples were already made, there would be no point for this Age to continue! Therefore, all of us must continue to "press on". The question is: What does this entail? Pressing on refers to our obligation as Christ's servants to do everything we can do to become disciples, to reach the lost, and to bring them to discipleship all through our lives. A Christian never "retires" from his or her servant hood for Christ; we are only "called home" when our time comes. Are you doing *your* part...?

vv. 17-20: Paul moves on to exhort his readers to follow his example in the way in which they live their lives. This continues the theme of the letter, that we must place our priorities and talents and efforts into doing God's work. Then he moves on to mention certain individuals who are "enemies of the cross". It is the subject of conjecture to identify these people, but the most likely guess would seem to be that he is referring to erstwhile Christians, some we would assume to be "friends" who have turned themselves over to be "enemies". Based upon the verses that follow, these could well be Christians who have not allowed their lives to be changed since their conversion; people who live not for Christ, but for themselves and their own individual priorities, and not for God's. They could be people who also foster doctrinal error. Either way, their fate will not be a good one, unless they turn things around, and start running the race. Take heed!

3:19-4:1: Paul mentions that those of whom he spoke above are concerned with themselves, this world and indulging. Then he points out that we are to be citizens of Heaven, not citizens of this world and its pleasures. If our life's focus is on earthly things, we are headed for ruin. We are citizens of Heaven, and we are eagerly awaiting Christ's return, and our reward will be coming with Him! Therefore, stand firm in your faith, and press on with the work at hand: fulfilling the Great Commission that our Lord has given us!

Chapter 4:2-9

Outline

- VII. Exhortations, Unity, Prayer and Proper Thought
 - A. Unity 2-3
 - B. Joy, prayer, peace 4-7
 - C. Think and do 8-9

Points of Interest

Background: As we move into the final chapter of this book, Paul sums up what his message has been throughout by mentioning two women who, despite their long service and dedication, have apparently found themselves in some sort of a dispute. While we don't know exactly who they are or what the nature of their dispute, the important thing to note is that Paul encourages them to put their disagreements aside for the sake of the Lord. With this as a backdrop, Paul then enters into a plea for unity, maturity, prayer and an "attitude adjustment".

vv. 2-3: Here we have a plea to set aside disputes and work out problems. It isn't clear exactly who is being referred to here, or if the intention is that the entire church step up in this situation, but the overriding message is clear; settle your problems and do not allow them to hinder the Lord's work!

vv. 4-7: Here, Paul may be moving in to the closing of his letter, or he could be summing up his instructions in vv. 2-3. I take the view that vv. 2-3 are where they are in the letter because they provide us with another example of church problems that must be overcome, and this section of exhortation expands upon Paul's instruction to settle the matter. This would make a great deal of sense in application because we end up with a final chapter that sums up the previous three chapters and leaves us with the major themes of the letter reinforced and applied in life circumstances. Let's face it, it isn't easy to escalate a dispute while rejoicing in the Lord!

Prayer, thanksgiving, humility and centering our focus on Jesus all have a way of diminishing our irritation with our brothers and sisters in Christ. (not to mention friends, family and coworkers) Paul's reference to prayer also has the effect of pointing us into the ways of spiritual growth which will nearly always cause us to place less attention on irritants, and more attention to the cause of Christ in all situations, something Paul has been stressing for the entire book.

vv. 8-9: Here finally is the ultimate way to surmount difficulties in the Christian life: fix your attention where it should be affixed_ on Christ and the things of Heaven. Who can be angry when they do this? Who can be sinful when they do this? Paul goes further to tell us directly that this is an imperative: DO IT!

Chapter 4:10-23

Outline

VIII. Response to Generosity 10-23

Points of Interest

Background: As is so often the case, scholars find a lot to argue about here! The big debate topic for this last seemingly non-controversial section is whether or not Paul asked the Philippians for help. If you are anything like me, you roll your eyes at this one... Maybe Paul asked them to send him a “care package” and maybe he didn’t. We know that he had repented to the Corinthians about not *requiring* them to aid in his support when he was with them (1Cor. 9, 2Cor. 11). These kinds of arguments really do nothing to aid our understanding of his message, and the little secret is: the text doesn’t say anyway! What is clear in this passage is that Paul did receive gifts from Philippi, he was glad to have received them, and that giving is a big part of what the Christian life is all about.

vv. 10-12: Paul acknowledges the gifts he has received from the Philippians and shares that he rejoices in their receipt. While he doesn’t mention what kind of gifts they were, it is certainly likely that they are material in nature. Note that he doesn’t say “thank you” in this passage! Some have called this passage a “thankless thanks” because of this. It seems more likely that Paul has it in mind that this is a “teachable” moment, as we will see. He mentions that he has learned to be satisfied in any circumstance. Note that this is a recurring theme in the book... His satisfaction while in want (humility) and in plenty give us an almost casual attitude about things that are material; quite the contrast with those whose lives are governed by their stomachs!

vv. 13-14: Verse 13 is the reason for Paul’s apparent lax attitude regarding material circumstances. He receives his true needs from his relationship with Christ, and even when the things of this world are rough, his true need for his spiritual and eternal life are met through Christ. This verse is a favorite devotional verse, and is often misapplied because we tend to apply it to everything in life; this is not Paul’s point. The Lord may or may not take away a physical affliction, illness or poverty. Paul’s point is that these things are minor by contrast to all that life in Christ is. In the next verse, Paul indicates that it is good that they have shared in his needs: He appreciates their thinking of him. It is good because they have exhibited Christ-likeness, not simply because he needed something. This is an excellent example for us!

vv. 15-19: Paul continues to refer to their giving, noting that they have shown uncommon generosity and brotherly love that many other churches have not been eager to demonstrate. He then concludes by referring again to a higher need and benefit for giving. They have shared in his deprivations by offering gifts, not just to him, but to God. Voluntary giving to meet the needs of those who are less fortunate are not sacrifices or gifts to the recipients (needy) but to God Himself: this is behaving in a Christlike manner, and the Philippians have excelled in this area of discipleship. He concludes with a statement of wish (or prayer) that God will bless the Philippians as richly as they have blessed Paul. In truth, this is a theme that is often found in the New Testament; the idea that God will richly bless those who are themselves a blessing. Jesus Himself told us that as we care for the least of these, we care for Him. (Matthew 25:37-40)