

## p 7 WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

### Getting Acquainted

Paul wrote to the Philippian church to thank them for their support and prayers, and to give updates on the welfare of Epaphroditus, Timothy, and himself (matters to which we will return below under “Date and Historical Background”).

But *Philippians* is not just a letter of thanks and updates. Ever the teacher, Paul also writes to encourage their faith and growth. More specifically:

- to spur them on to progress in their Christian growth (2:12; 3:12–17)
- to warn of those who proclaim another gospel (3:2, 18–19)
- to reiterate the true gospel and encourage them to hold tightly to it (3:3–11)
- to encourage their unity and confront any lack of unity (2:1–4; 4:2–3)
- to call them to joy and thankfulness and peace (2:18; 3:1; 4:4–7)
- to plead with them to keep their eyes on Christ and the hope of heaven (3:2–21)

*Philippians* is an amazingly *practical* letter—sort of a “101” on Christian living—but it is also a deeply *doctrinal* letter. For example, in *Philippians* 2:5–11 we find some of the clearest and most important teaching in all of Scripture on Christ and his incarnation. And yet, the primary purpose of this section of the letter is to show Jesus as a model of humility and selfless service so that the Philippian Christians might be further unified and Christlike. So the doctrinal and practical elements are inseparable and intermingled throughout *Philippians*. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, pages 2275–2279 or visit [www.esvbible.org](http://www.esvbible.org).)

### p 8 Placing It in the Larger Story

By the time Paul writes *Philippians*, the events recorded in the book of *Acts* have all come to pass. Of course, that means that the Messiah has come—living righteously, dying sacrificially, and rising victoriously. In so doing he has ushered in a new covenant for his people (*Jer.* 31:31–34). He has sent his followers into the world to proclaim the gospel, to make disciples of the nations, and to plant local churches. The book of *Acts* records just that—30 or so years of the gospel spreading and churches forming. Thus, it is clear that the kingdom has come—it is *now*. But it is also still coming. It is both *now* and *not yet*. Christians are redeemed but must keep pressing on: standing firm in their confession, working out their salvation in Christian growth, resisting false teachers, embracing suffering and persecution, holding out the gospel of hope to the world, and committing to live out Christ’s love and humility with each other in the church.

Paul wrote several biblical letters to churches and individuals (Romans-Philemon). From one angle, they all share a general purpose—to encourage and equip Christians for the *advance of the gospel* (1:12) and *progress in the faith* (1:25). But, from another angle, each letter has its own unique purpose, context, background, and emphases. One distinctive of Philippians is its emphasis on *partnership* or *sharing*. The Philippian Christians share the gospel and the gospel mission with Paul, as they do among themselves as a church. This has important and far-reaching implications (See 1:5, 7, 14–19, 27; 2:1–8, 17–18, 22, 25, 30; 3:16–17; 4:1–3, 10–16).

## Key Verse

“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” (Phil. 1:27).

## Date and Historical Background

Paul had a long history with the Philippian Christians, beginning with the conversion of Lydia’s family, a demon-possessed girl, and the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:14–40). Paul returned to Philippi at least twice, but mutual care and communication between the apostle and the Philippian church seem to have been regular. He prayed frequently for them with much thankfulness and affection (Phil. 1:3–11). The Philippians stood with Paul, financially and otherwise, when others did not (1:7; 4:14–16). In concern for Paul’s present imprisonment (1:12–19) they sent one of their best men, Epaphroditus, to bring financial support and to minister to Paul’s needs (2:25).

**p 9** While imprisoned in Rome, in roughly AD 62, Paul pens this letter we know as Philippians. He writes to thank the Philippian church for their care for him and support of his ministry. He writes to assure them that, despite his present imprisonment, the gospel is spreading (1:12–18) and he is well cared for (4:18). He also relays that Epaphroditus, their messenger, is well after having become ill on his journey to Paul (2:26–30). Epaphroditus is now returning to the Philippians with Paul’s letter. Timothy, another worthy servant and Paul’s “right-hand man,” may be coming in due course (2:19); and Paul himself is eager to do the same, if the Lord permits (1:8, 25–26).

## Outline

- I. Greeting and Prayer (1:1–11)
- II. Encouragement about His Imprisonment (1:12–30)
  - A. Paul’s imprisonment has meant progress for the gospel (1:12–18)
  - B. Christ will be magnified in Paul’s life or death (1:19–26)
  - C. Exhortation to walk worthy of the gospel (1:27–30)
- III. Exhortation to Humble Service (2:1–30)
  - A. A call to unity, humility, and service to one another (2:1–4)
  - B. Christ’s example of humble service (2:5–11)
  - C. Living as lights in the world (2:12–18)
  - D. The Faithful Examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19–30)

#### **IV. Warning about Distortions of the Gospel (3:1-21)**

- A. Contrast between false teachers and the true people of God (3:1-3)**
- B. Contrast between self-righteousness and receiving Christ's righteousness (3:4-11)**
- C. Paul's progress in the pursuit of Christ (3:12-16)**
- D. Contrast between earthly-mindedness and heavenly-mindedness (3:17-21)**

#### **V. Concluding Exhortations and Thanksgiving (4:1-23)**

- A. A call to unity (4:1-3)**
- B. A call to rejoice, trust, pray, and think rightly (4:4-9)**
- C. Thanksgiving for the Philippians' gift; Paul's contentment in God (4:10-20)**
- D. Greetings and benediction (4:21-23)**

### **p 10 As You Get Started ...**

Read the book through in one sitting. Then, more slowly, read the verses that were referenced in the Getting Acquainted section of this lesson.

What do you think is unique about the book of Philippians?

Which themes stood out to you?

Which passages or ideas did you find confusing?

### **As You Finish This Unit ...**

**Take a moment now to ask the Lord to work in your heart and mind through the rest of this study in Philippians.**