

Philippians: *Paul's Joy in Christ*

A Missionary Prayer Letter

Philippi was Paul's pride and joy. Arms of friendship extended between Paul and the believers at Philippi that didn't exist in the other churches. None of his other letters has such abundant expressions of tender personal dedication and benevolence as this letter.

STYLE OF WRITING: This is the most personal, informal and cordial letter Paul wrote to a church. It is a thank you letter in response to a gift they have sent to Paul while he was in Rome. The reader senses the conflicts, hope, faith, determination, high purpose, deep driving passion of a man who seeks to glorify Christ in every dimension of his life. His greatest fear is to run and be disqualified. Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians reach spiritual peaks found nowhere else in Scripture. This letter expresses joy and peace during a time of affliction and uncertain future. He hasn't received financial help from the other churches. The letter is filled with expressions of gratitude and thankfulness for their expression of love and faithfulness which he has received on several occasions. He writes his letter from the position of one who is secure in the place he occupies in the hearts of his readers. Therefore, he can share from his heart his personal convictions and his internal conflicts about the future. It is filled with joy, peace and thanksgiving. The words "joy," "rejoicing," "rejoice" are repeated many times in these short 104 verses.

This is indeed written in the style of a spontaneous, loving sincere letter with general everyday moral exhortations. It is as a friend simply opens up his heart to those whom he loves.

AUTHOR: Paul (Phil. 1:1). There is nothing in the letter, linguistic or historical, which can cause any doubt as to its authenticity. External evidence includes: Clemens Romanus, Ignatius, Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian, Marcion's Apostolicon, and Muratorian Canon.

PLACE OF WRITING: It was written from prison in the city of Rome (1:7, 13; 4:22). Paul refers to his imprisonment in 1:7, 13, 14; 2:17. According to Acts he was a prisoner at Philippi (16:23, Jerusalem (21:33ff), Caesarea (23:25) and Rome (28:16, 30, 31). Paul was in prison two years while at Caesarea, however no final decision in his case was ever expected there. He was in prison at Rome for two years, pending his appeal to Caesar. The whole tradition of the early Church pleads for Rome. Moreover, Phil. 1:13, the "praetorian guard" and Phil. 4:22, "Caesar's household," would indicate the imprisonment at Rome. The Praetorian Guard was a force of 9,000 men at the disposal of Caesar. The final decisions regarding his appeal and, indeed, his life would certainly decide for Rome.

RECIPIENTS: was the Church at Philippi (Acts 16:11-40; 17:14; 19:22; 20:3-4; Phil. 2:19). Paul, Timothy, Silas and Dr. Luke were all a vital part of the founding of the Church at Philippi. Luke seems to have been their first pastor for about five years after its establishment in Acts 16. Paul directs his letter to the "saints" at Philippi (1:1; cf. Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; II Cor. 1:1).

DATE: A.D. 61 or 62, possibly early part of 63, after the two years of which Acts 28 makes mention. The letter was written about the same time as Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. If the imprisonment of Paul began between the years 58-60, and ended before the burning of Rome in A. D. 64, logically the epistle would have been written during the time between this period. If Lightfoot is correct, and his arguments are very solid, the letter was probably written before Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, about a year after he

very solid, the letter was probably written before Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, about a year after he arrive in Rome, between 62 and 63 A. D. as recorded in Acts 28:30. The conservative position is that there were two imprisonments with a brief period of freedom to minister between them.

OCCASION, PURPOSE CHARACTER:

Philippians 1:5-7; 4:16 indicates it is a missionary prayer letter thanking the Philippian Church for their gifts and support, sharing with them the outreach in Rome and presenting prayer requests in their joint participation in the Gospel. Epaphroditus brought the gift from the Philippians to the apostle at Rome (Phil. 4:14, 18; 2:25), spends some time helping Paul, and then returns to the church with the letter from Paul (2:26-28). Paul takes advantage of the opportunity to encourage them to continue in unity and steadfastness (2:3-5; 3:2, 3; 4:1, 2; 1:27-30). It is written for personal reasons. "The frank and hearty tone, the artless form, the cheerful mood even under oppressive circumstances, the practical purport —these all bear a very personal stamp, and make it —to a measure surpassing any other letter of the apostle —a letter, the effusion of the heart to a Church he loved." The Philippians sent Paul at least four gifts to support his ministry (II Cor. 8:3-4; II Cor. 11:8-9; Phil. 4:10-14, 15-16). Paul is over joyed with the encouragement and remembrance of their love for him and his love for them (v. 3-4).

The leading thought of the Letter is joy and gratitude for being in joint-participation in the furtherance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:5-7). The word "rejoice" or other words of similar meaning, appears sixteen times in the Letter. Paul rises to two great spiritual peaks in 2:5-11 where he presents the *kenosis* —the self-emptying or self-humiliation of Christ, and 3:10-14 when he reveals the drive to know the resurrection and the upward call of God in Christ. The Judaizers, with their legalism, have followed Paul here and there is an echo in chapters one and three of their opposition to Paul.

Tragic as it may seem, the fact seems to be that the prominence of the church at Philippi ceased with the life of Paul. There is no more mention of the church until a hundred years after the death of the great apostle. There are only a few references in the primitive history of the ancient church. Even though the church at Philippi was the first church to be established in Europe it passes by in obscurity. No church existed in Philippi for centuries, nor did the city exist. The church was born in the world with a beautiful promise, and then the church at Philippi which had lived in history passed from memory, except for this beautiful letter.

THEME: Paul's joy in Christ.

KEY VERSE: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (1:21).

KEY WORD: "Rejoice"

THE GOSPEL IN PHILIPPIANS: "the fellowship in the gospel" (1:5), "confirmation of the gospel" (1:7), "progress of the gospel" (1:12); "defense of the gospel" (1:17), "worthy of the gospel" (1:27), "striving for the faith of the gospel" (1:27), "service in the gospel" (2:22), "labor in the gospel" (4:3), and "the beginning of the gospel" (4:15).

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Introduction to Philippians: Paul's Joy in Christ

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