

12a. Letter to the Philippians



*A Joyful Letter in the Midst of Affliction and a Song
Praising the Condescension, but Paul's Concerns Still
Mount*

Occasional Situation of Philippians



Paul and the Philippians



- ☞ First church in Europe, established during the "Second" Missionary Journey of AD 49-52
 - ☞ Met Lydia and converted her household the first sabbath there
- ☞ Paul and Silas imprisoned and mistreated but later released for being Romans
- ☞ *Paul stayed in close touch with the church and this was the only one from which he accepted gifts*



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Where Was Paul When He Wrote Philippians?



- ☞ Philippians is **one of the "imprisonment" epistles** since Paul was in bonds when he wrote it
 - ☞ *Early Christians assume that all of these were written during his famous (and last?) imprisonment in Rome*
- ☞ **c. 56 if from Ephesus**
 - ☞ *Preferable in terms of geographic proximity to Philippi and the nature of the content; however, no imprisonment here is explicitly mentioned in Acts or Paul's writings*
- ☞ 58-60 if from Caesarea
- ☞ **61-63 if from Rome**
 - ☞ The traditional place of origin and date for this letter; places Philippians in a group of "Imprisonment Letters" including Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon



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Occasion of Philippians



- ☞ Philippians **had heard of Paul's imprisonment** and sent Epaphroditus to him with a gift (probably of money for his support)
- ☞ Epaphroditus relayed news of the Philippian church to Paul
 - ☞ **By-and-large the Church was faithful**
 - ☞ **External opposition:** to some extent the Philippians understand Paul's suffering
 - ☞ **Internal threats:** some **false teaching from preachers Paul called "dogs,"** probably **Judaizers**, from within
 - ☞ They had not yet had success like they did in Galatia
 - ☞ This would seem to date the letter earlier
 - ☞ **Some disunity in the church**
 - ☞ Particularly between two prominent women, **Euodia** and **Syntyche**
 - ☞ *Interesting evidence for the prominent role of early Christian women (remember Lydia?)*

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Overview of Philippians



- ☞ **Date and Place of Origin:** **Open** (dependent upon where Paul was imprisoned when he wrote it; see Phil 1:7, 13-14, 17; here accepted as an early imprisonment letter)
 - ☞ c. 56 if from Ephesus
 - ☞ 58-60 if from Caesarea
 - ☞ 61-63 if from Rome
- ☞ **Audience:** **the church at Philippi** (evangelized in the Second Missionary Journey; see Acts 16:11-40)
- ☞ **Authenticity:** not questioned
- ☞ **Form:** **a real letter**, but lacking the strict division of the body into indicative and imperative sections
- ☞ **Unity and Integrity**
 - ☞ Some suggest two or three letters because of the frequent change in topic, change in tone, and the movements of Epaphroditus.
 - ☞ **Good case can be made for unity:** one can write in a "stream-of-consciousness" style, especially when dictating a letter
- ☞ **Issue and Topics**
 - ☞ **Joy in the advance of the gospel and his partnership with the Philippians**
 - ☞ **Concern about the "dogs," enemies of the cross of Christ (3:2, 18) ≈ Judaizers?**
 - ☞ **Exhortations to live worthily of the gospel**

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Literary Questions about Philippians



What kind of writing and rhetoric does Paul use in it? How is the letter structured?

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A Letter of Encouragement and Friendship



- ☞ While Philippians is **primarily deliberative**, intending to advise and dissuade its audience, **its rhetoric is nonetheless mixed**
 - ☞ some Pauline scholars have suggested that this is the case with many of Paul's letters and that his writings resist Classical qualifications
- ☞ Primary rhetorical subject: **"What manner of life is worthy of the gospel?"** (1:27-30)
- ☞ **Paul's love for them and their care for Paul** is patent throughout the letter – so much so that scholars refer to the letter's **"rhetoric of friendship"**
 - ☞ "I have you in my heart" (1:7)
 - ☞ "I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (1:8; NIV, "God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus")
 - ☞ "fulfill my joy . . . having the same love" (2:2)
 - ☞ "I joy and rejoice with you all" (2:17)
 - ☞ "my brethren dearly beloved and longer for, my joy and my crown" (4:1)
 - ☞ "I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again" (4:10)

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Issues, Topics, and Themes in Philippians



- ☞ **Joy in the advance of the gospel and his partnership with the Philippians**
- ☞ **Concern about the “dogs,” enemies of the cross of Christ (3:2, 18) ≈ Judaizers?**
- ☞ **Exhortations to live worthily of the gospel**
- ☞ In addition to the major issues and topics treated in the letter, some overarching themes also emerge
 - ☞ **Love**, as introduced in Paul’s opening prayer (1:9a)
 - ☞ This love comes from **knowledge of Christ** (1:9b and especially the Christ hymn of 2:6–11)
 - ☞ **Peace**, as pled in his final prayer (4:7)

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Structure of Philippians



- ☞ **Opening Formula** (1:1–2)
 - ☞ “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, **to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons**: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”
 - ☞ Early evidence of the existence of the offices of *episkopos* (overseer, bishop) and *diakonos* (servant, deacon)
- ☞ **Thanksgiving** (1:3–11) – *effusive!* (contrast this with the lack of a thanksgiving in Galatians)
- ☞ **Body** (1:12–4:20, moves back and forth between teaching and exhorting)
 - ☞ Paul’s Circumstances (1:12–26)
 - ☞ **Exhortation to Live Worthily of the Gospel of Christ** (1:27–2:18)
 - ☞ **Christological Hymn (2:6–11)**
 - ☞ Paul’s Interest in the Philippians (2:19–3:1a)
 - ☞ **Warnings against False Teachers** (3:1b–4:1)
 - ☞ **Ethical Exhortations** (4:2–9)
 - ☞ Acknowledgment of the Philippians’ Gift (4:10–20)
- ☞ **Concluding Formula**

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Teachings and Admonitions in Philippians



Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9–11)

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Paul’s Circumstances (1:12–26)



- ☞ **Paul’s Situation in Prison (1:12–18a)**
 - ☞ Despite his sufferings, Paul is not despondent
 - ☞ “Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me *has really served to advance the gospel.*” (1:12 NIV)
 - ☞ My chains in Christ have become well known not only to all the **Praetorium** (KJV, “the palace”), but to everybody else” (1:13 NJB)
 - ☞ *Praetorium* can refer to the emperor’s palace, the governor’s headquarters, a commander’s tent, the imperial guard, or any official’s body guard . . .
 - ☞ Paul’s example has led others to preach the gospel more boldly and without fear
- ☞ **Hope for Deliverance and Attitude towards Death (1:18b–26)**
 - ☞ “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. . . For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” (1:21, 23–24)

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Live Worthily of the Gospel of Christ (1:27–2:16)



- ☞ **Paul and the Philippians Share Similar Struggles** (1:27–1:30)
 - ☞ “Only **let your conversation** be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (1:27)
 - ☞ “conversation” (*politeuesthe*) better translated “conduct yourself, live your life (as a citizen)”
 - ☞ NRSV “Only, **live your life** in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ”
- ☞ **Imitate Christ** (2:1–11)
- ☞ **Christological Hymn** (2:6–11; more below)
- ☞ **Shine as Lights in the World** (2:12–18)
 - ☞ “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (2:12)
 - ☞ “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, **in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation**, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, **that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.**” (2:16)
 - ☞ “crooked and perverse nation,” or “in a crooked and depraved generation” (NIV)
 - ☞ Greek athletic imagery

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Christological Hymn (2:6–11)



- ☞ One of several **hymns**, probably earlier than Paul, incorporated into New Testament texts
 - ☞ Others include the canticles of Luke 1-2; the *Logos* Hymn of John 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20; and Eph 1:3-14
 - ☞ May have had Aramaic precedents that were as early as the mid-30’s!
- ☞ **Christology**: the focus on the person and work of Jesus: **Who** he is and **what** he did

⁵Τούτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

⁶ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων
οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,

⁷ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν
μορφῇ δούλου λαβών,
ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος·

⁸καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθείς ὡς ἄνθρωπος
ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν
γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου,
θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.

⁹διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερέψωσεν
καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα
τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα,

¹⁰ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πάντες γόνιμοι κάμψῃ
ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων

¹¹καὶ πάντα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται
ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς
εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς.

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Philippians 2:6–11

⁵Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in the form of God,
thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

⁷But made himself of no reputation,
and took upon him the form of a servant,
and was made in the likeness of men:

⁸And being found in fashion as a man,
he humbled himself,
and became obedient unto death,
even the death of the cross.

⁹Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him,
and given him a name
which is above every name:

¹⁰That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
of things in heaven, and things in earth, and
things under the earth;

¹¹And that every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

- ☞ The structure is somewhat debated, but it seems to divide into two sections (one about Christ's humbling himself, the other of his exaltation) of three strophes each
- ☞ "But made himself of no reputation," literally "**emptied himself**" (*ekenōsen*)
 - ☞ The concept of **kenosis**, Christ's voluntarily setting aside or veiling some of his divine glory and power during his mortal ministry

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The Condensation



- ☞ The **Kenosis** of Philippians is roughly equivalent to the Book of Mormon doctrine of the **Condensation**
 - ☞ From the Latin *condensio* and *condescendere*, literally meaning "to come down" and "dwell with"
 - ☞ English definitions include "a voluntary descent from one's rank or dignity in relations with an inferior"
- ☞ **The condensation of God the Father and the Son** (1 Nephi 11:12–25)
 - ☞ "... an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou? And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins. And he said unto me: Knowest thou **the condensation of God?** ... I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: *Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father!*"
- ☞ **The condensation of God the Son** (1 Nephi 11:26–33): **Christ's ministry and suffering in the flesh**
 - ☞ "The the angel said unto me again: Look and behold the condensation of God! And I looked and beheld the Redeemer of the world... that **he went forth ministering unto the people**... He was taken by the people; yea *the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world*; And I, Nephi, saw that *he was lifted up upon the cross and slain for the sins of the world.*"

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“Jesus Christ is Lord . . .”



- ☞ The final stanza of the hymn (2:11) alludes, among other things, to Isaiah 45:18, 22-23:
 - ☞ “Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens... I am the LORD and there is none else... Look unto me, and be ye saved... I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, **That unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.**”
 - ☞ LORD is the conventional way of rendering the Hebrew sacred name YHWH (Jehovah); in Greek it is *kyrios*
- ☞ The hymn includes a confession of Christ’s divinity
 - ☞ “Paul recorded that Jesus was given ‘a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow...and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord’ (Philip 2:9-11). The word translated ‘Lord’ is the Greek *kyrios* [sic], which has several possible meanings. In what way for Paul was Jesus *kyrios*, or Lord? In this passage Paul was quoting the words of Jehovah to Isaiah that ‘unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear’ (Isa 45:23). Paul testified that Jesus is the Lord, *Adonai*, the Hebrew substitute for the divine name of God, Jehovah.” (Craig J. Ostler, “What is a Mortal Messiah?” in *The Apostle Paul, His Life and His Testimony*, 154)

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Paul’s Interest in the Philippians (2:19–3:1a)



- ☞ **Plans to Send Timothy** (2:19–24)
 - ☞ “But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.” (2:22 NIV)
- ☞ **Epaphroditus** (2:25–3:1a)
 - ☞ The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to Paul with their gift, but when he arrived he got dangerously sick
 - ☞ Paul feared for Epaphroditus’ life, but he was miraculously healed and now Paul was sending him back, presumably with his letter

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Warnings Against False Teachers (3:1b-4:1)



- ☞ Breaking with the Past: **Beware of the Dogs Confident in the Flesh!** (3:1b-11)
 - ☞ The “dogs” are **apparently Judaizers**, like those who had misled the Galatians, because they “have confidence in the flesh,” **putting confidence in outward signs of the law such as circumcision**
 - ☞ In a passage **rich in biographical information**, Paul explains that if observing the law was what gave one confidence of God’s approval, he was as good or better than the dogs, but “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.” (3:4-7)
 - ☞ “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and **the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.**” (3:10 NRSV; note again Paul’s view of participating in Christ’s atonement)
- ☞ Paul’s Example a Contrast: **Striving for the Goal of Christ** (3:12-4:1)
 - ☞ **Philippians 3:12-14 is an example of tough Elizabethan language; Look at the following translation and then read it again in the KJV: “Not that I have secured it already, nor yet reached my goal, but I am still pursuing it in the attempt to take hold (KJV, “apprehend”) of the prize for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not reckon myself as having taken hold of it; I can only say that forgetting all that lies behind me, and straining forward to what lies in front, I am racing towards the finishing-point to win the prize of God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus.”** (3:12-14, NJB)
 - ☞ KJV “apprehending” refers to **winning a race, obtaining a goal, taking a prize**

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Ethical Exhortations (4:2-9)



- ☞ **Euodia and Syntyche Urged to Be of One Mind** (4:2-3)
 - ☞ “I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel . . .”
 - ☞ *Prominent women, such as Lydia, the first convert in Philippi, were instrumental in spreading the gospel*
- ☞ **General Admonitions** (4:4-9)
 - ☞ “**Be careful for nothing** (*mēden merimnate*); but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (4:6-7)
 - ☞ “**Do not worry about anything**” (NRSV)
 - ☞ “**Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.**” (4:8)
 - ☞ Cf. Thirteenth Article of Faith

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Concluding Formula (4:21-23)



☞ Final Greetings and Benediction (4:21-23)

☞ "Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Caesar's household. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all.
Amen

☞ *Kaisaros oikias* = Roman *familia Caesaris*: this consisted of slaves and freedmen of the emperor not only in the palace and in Rome but all over the empire

☞ *Not necessarily evidence that Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this letter*