

Philippians

Theme: To Express Heartfelt Thanks and to Promote Joy and Unity

Author: The Apostle Paul (1:1)

Courier: Epaphroditus (4:17)

Destination and Recipients: Church at Philippi

- Founded by Paul on his 2nd missionary journey (Acts 16)
- First converts were Lydia and a Roman Jailer
- Includes: “All the saints . . . bishops and deacons” (1:1)

Date of Writing: c. A.D. 60–63

Place of Writing: Rome

Philippians

Paragraph Titles		
1:1	Two Servants to a Local Church	1:2
1:3	An Affectionate Prayer for Discernment	1:11
1:12	Bad Circumstances + Positive Outcome = Rejoicing	1:26
1:27	Worthy Conduct Involves Unity and Suffering	1:30
2:1	Humility + Sensitivity = Unity	2:4
2:5	Jesus' Example: Humility Results in Exaltation	2:11
2:12	Work Out Your Own Salvation—Labor Not in Vain	2:18
2:19	Timothy's Example: Genuine Concern	2:24
2:25	Epaphroditus' Example: Hard Work	2:30
3:1	Glory in Christ / No Confidence in the Flesh	3:6
3:7	All That Was Loss—Christ is Everything	3:11
3:12	Press On	3:16
3:17	Eagerly Awaiting a Savior	3:21
4:1	Help Those Women Get Along!	4:3
4:4	Rejoice!—Don't Worry!—Pray!	4:7
4:8	What to Think About	4:9
4:10	Thanks for Your Generosity	4:20
4:21	Greetings and Grace	4:23

Introduction to Philippians

I. Authorship (Authenticity/Genuineness)

A. Traditional View: The Apostle Paul. This was the universal view of the church until the modern era.

1. Internal evidence such as its self-claim (1:1-2) and the personal references by the author (1:12-24; 2:19-24; 3:4-14; 4:10-16) strongly support this view.

The picture the author presents of himself is in agreement with what is known of Paul from other sources such as Acts, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. In style and language, no NT letter can make a stronger claim to be Pauline.

2. External evidence for Paul is early (cited in the writings of Clement of Rome, ca A.D. 95) and widespread geographically being cited in the writings of the Church Fathers at Rome (Italy), Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch (Syria) and Smyrna (Asia Minor). This supports the internal evidence.

B. Objections to the traditional view: minimal

1. Pauline authorship was challenged by the critical scholar F. C. Baur (1792-1860) and the Tübingen school of NT interpretation that he founded. This radical view was not convincing to most; and except for occasional “revivals,” it has largely disappeared.
2. The vast majority of contemporary NT scholars accept Pauline authorship (eg. Guthrie, p. 526; Hiebert, 2:288-89; Harrison, p. 320; Kümmel, p. 332; Martin, pp. 10-14; Hawthorne, pp. xxvii-ix).
3. Many scholars regard Phil. 2:6-11 as an early church hymn about Christ (pre-Pauline), which Paul utilizes in his letter. Others believe Paul authored it himself.

Conclusion: There is no good reason for rejecting Paul as the author of Philippians.

II. Origin and Date

- A. Philippians gives no explicit statement regarding its place of origin or date.
- B. Several internal factors should be considered in making a decision:
 - 1. Paul was in prison when he wrote (1:7, 13, 17).
 - 2. He faced a trial that could end in either his death or acquittal (1:19-20, 25; 2:17, 24).
 - 3. Timothy and Epaphroditus were with him (1:1; 2:19-30)
 - 4. The praetorium (1:13) and “those who belonged to Caesar’s household” (4:22) were at the place of writing.
 - 5. The place of origin also has a church of some size (1:14; 4:15, 16) and there were extensive evangelistic efforts going on (1:14-17).
 - 6. The letter itself indicates that at least two round trips were made between Philippi and the place of writing within the time span of Paul’s imprisonment (approx. 2 years, cf. Acts 28:30).
- C. Traditional view: Philippians was written in Rome between A.D. 60-63 (cf. Acts 28:16-30). [Advocates: Guthrie, pp. 527-31; Hiebert, 2:290-92; Harrison, pp. 392-301.]
 - 1. This view seems to account best for the internal evidence.
 - 2. The Marcionite Prologue, an early church document, gives early external attestation of Rome as the place of composition.
- D. Objections to the traditional view
 - 1. The great distance between Rome and Philippi (ca. 800 miles, a 7-8 week journey) makes it difficult to fit all known trips back and forth within a two-year time span. (However, two and, at the most three, round trips with a reasonable time in between is not inconceivable for a two-year period from a communication/ transportation center such as Rome).
 - 2. It appears from Phil. 1:30 and 4:15, 16 that Paul had not been back to Philippi since the church was founded there. However, if Paul was writing from Rome, he had been to Philippi twice between its founding and his trip to Rome (cf. Acts 16; 20:1-6). (This objection

is very weak and an unwarranted assumption drawn from 1:30 and 4:15-16).

3. In Phil. 2:24, Paul expressed a desire to visit Philippi upon release from prison, but in Rom. 15:24-28 his expressed intention was to go West to Spain; therefore, Rome was not the place of origin. (Paul's intentions and plans could change by new unforeseen circumstances such as his imprisonment).

E. Alternative proposals for a place of origin and date:

1. Caesarea, Palestine between A.D. 57-59 (cf. Acts 23:33-35) [Advocates: Lohmeyer, Hawthorne, pp. xli-iv.]

The supporting arguments are cumulative but the major evidence comes from the fact that Luke states that Paul was imprisoned in Caesarea in the praetorium of Herod for at least two years (cf. Acts 23:35; 24:27). The objections are also cumulative but two major ones are: (1) There is no hint that Paul's life is in peril in Caesarea (cf. Phil. 1:13, 20-22, 30, and (2) The church there was probably not as large and influential as indicated in Philippians (cf. 1:14).

2. Ephesus between A.D. 53-55 (cf. Acts 20:18-19) [Advocates: Kümmel, pp. 329-32; Martin, pp. 48-57].

Again, the supporting arguments are cumulative but the major support comes from the fact that Ephesus is relatively close to Philippi (a one-week journey) and we know Timothy was with Paul in Ephesus (cf. Acts 19:22). There are several objections to the Ephesians hypothesis, but the major one is that there is no record of an Ephesian imprisonment in Acts and, thus, the hypothesis is built on mere conjecture.

3. Corinth ca. A.D. 50 (cf. Acts 18:1-18).

There is a recent revival of an eighteenth century view that has little support because there is no record of a Corinthian imprisonment for Paul and, thus, the theory is based exclusively on conjecture.

Conclusion: The traditional view—Rome, A.D. 60-63, as the place of origin and date—though not problem free, has the strongest internal and external support.

III. Destination

- A. Philippi (1:1)—named after Philip of Macedon, father of Alexander the Great. Chief city of that part of Macedonia (Acts 16:12—*From there we traveled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.*)

Population: approx. 200,000 to 500,000. Mostly Greek. Note that Paul’s first evangelistic meeting was held outside the city by a river—this suggests there may have been no synagogue (Acts 16:13—*On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there.*) The first converts: Lydia and a jailor.

The city is commonly referred to as the “birthplace of European Christianity.” The first converts resulted from the organized mission work in Europe on Paul’s second missionary journey, approx. A.D. 50. Luke ministered there after Paul left (Acts 16).

A reputable school of medicine was there. (Some think this was Luke’s home town.)

- B. Philippi was an important and strategic city for the advance of Christianity into Europe. The origin and nature of the Philippian church (A.D. 49-50) plus a follow-up visit by Paul (A.D. 55-56) is recorded in Acts 16:11-40 and 20:1-6.

IV. Occasion (Historical Setting) and Purpose

- A. The occasion of the epistle is plainly clear from the letter itself. It revolves around the return of Epaphroditus to Philippi following his serious illness in Rome (cf. 2:25-30). He was most likely the bearer of the letter (4:17).
- B. The purpose of the epistle is basically pastoral. The following features indicate why Paul wrote to the Philippians:
1. To give them an update on his present situation and the prospects for his future (cf. 1:12-26; 2:24).
 2. To exhort them to stand firm for the gospel with joy despite suffering and adverse circumstances (cf. 1:27-30; 2:18; 3:1; 4:4).
 3. To exhort them to unity and harmony within the church (cf. 1:27; 2:2-4, 16; 4:1-2).

4. To inform them about the ministry of Epaphroditus whom they sent to minister to his needs (cf. 2:25-30).
5. To warn them about deceptive, false teachers (cf. 3:2-21).
6. To express thanks for their generous gifts (cf. 4:10-20).

V. Literary Structure, Characteristics, and Unity

- A. Philippians is a very personal apostolic letter that follows the traditional Hellenistic epistolary form: (1) Salutation or Greeting—1:1-2; (2) Body—1:3-4:20; (3) Conclusion—4:21-23.
- B. Philippians has several interesting characteristics:
 1. It is an intensely personal, warm, spontaneous letter to dear friends. The first person singular pronoun or verb form occurs about 120 times. This helps account for seemingly abrupt changes in topic and tone.
 2. Though this letter is not a theological treatise, Paul's focus is Christological. For him, Christ is everything (1:20-21) and this is evident throughout the letter (note the Christological hymn in 2:6-11).
- C. The traditional view that Philippians is a literary unity is disputed by some. Is Philippians a single letter by Paul or a compilation by an anonymous editor of two or more brief Pauline letters to the Philippians? The debate centers around Phil. 3:2–4:3 and to a lesser extent 4:10-23.
 1. The case for the view that Philippians is a compilation (or viewing 3:2-4:3 as an interpolation) is based upon:
 - a. External evidence: Polycarp's use of the word "letters" in reminding the Philippians that Paul had written them several times (ca. A.D. 135 in Phil. 3:2).
 - b. Internal evidence: (1) the abrupt change of topic and tone at 3:2; (2) the fact that 3:1 and 4:4 fit together so well that it appears a "harsh letter" (3:2-4:3) has been inserted between them, and (3) the thanksgiving of 4:10-20 appearing at the end of the letter instead of the beginning as one would expect. Was this a separate earlier letter added on at this point?

2. In response the case for viewing Philippians as a compilation is not convincing. Note the following:
 - a. External evidence: Polycarp’s reference to “letters” does not prove that these letters were combined into one letter by an anonymous editor.
 - b. Internal evidence: (1) the abrupt change in topic and tone had to do with the personal nature of Paul’s letter and the identity of his opponents; (2) the same themes occur in both the accepted and disputed sections (cf. 1:21 and 3:7; the verb “to reckon” is in both; 1:27 and 3:7 themes of unity and joy are in both; 1:29-30 with 3:10-11; and 1:7 with 4:10ff) and (3) why would an intelligent editor intending to unify various fragments arrange the letter in this “unusual” way?
3. Conclusion: There is no compelling reason to doubt the integrity (unity) of Philippians. There has only been one canonical letter to the Philippians from the beginning of its manuscript history (P⁴⁶, A.D. 200). Compilation theories really solve nothing—they merely shift the problems of order and organization from Paul to an unknown, hypothetical editor.

VI. Special Problems/Issues

- A. The identity of the opponents in Phil. 1:28; 3:2; and 3:18.
 1. Basic questions: Are these opponents from within or from outside the church, and are they the same group throughout or are they two different groups?
 2. The opponents had three basic features:
 - a. They emphasized circumcision in conformity with Mosaic Law.
 - b. They emphasized spiritual perfectionism.
 - c. They focused on earthly, material pursuits.
 3. Conclusion: Judgments differ.
 A popular view is: (1) the opponents in 1:28 are unbelievers who pose a physical threat to the church; (2) the opponents in 3:2-16 are

Judaizers (professing Jewish Christians) and (3) in 3:18-19, they are Christian Gnostic libertines. These latter 2 groups pose a spiritual threat from within the church. However, it is more probable that the opponents throughout are simply unbelieving self-righteous Jews.

- B. The authenticity of the Christ-hymn in Phil. 2:6-11—Pauline, pre-Pauline, non-Pauline? The answer is not crucial. Some view it as a Pauline commentary on Isaiah 53 consisting of two stanzas: (1) Christ's humiliation, 2:6-8 and (2) Christ's exaltation, 2:9-11.

VII. Vocabulary and Style

- A. This epistle contains less censure and more praise than any other epistle. There are no OT quotations. There are 65 words not found in other Pauline epistles. The book is more practical than doctrinal (but note Phil. 2:6-11).
- B. There is an overriding positive attitude about the epistle. Words such as "joy" and "encouragement" stand out. The general atmosphere is uplifting, encouraging, and positive. All this is in the context of difficult circumstances.
- C. There seems to be an emphasis on positive examples. Several are given: Jesus (2:5-11), Timothy (2:19-24), Epaphroditus (2:25-30), and Paul (3:17, 4:9).
- D. It seems as if chapter three marks a turning point—Paul makes a warning to avoid evil men (legalists = mutilators of the flesh).

Philippians

(Paul's Jailhouse Journal of Joy)

Theme: The joy that is found in Jesus

Key verses: 1:12, 21; 2:5; 3:1, 10; 4:4, 13, 19

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| I. | <u>Through Jesus Be Joyful</u> | Chapter 1 |
| | 1. Joy is found among the saints. | (vs. 1-11) |
| | 2. Joy is found in strife. | (vs. 12-18) |
| | 3. Joy is found in the Savior. | (vs. 19-26) |
| | 4. Joy is found in suffering. | (vs. 27-30) |
| II. | <u>Through Jesus Be Humble</u> | Chapter 2 |
| | 1. Humility is found in the Son. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The example of Jesus | (vs. 1-11) |
| | 2. Humility is found in sacrifice. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The example of Paul | (vs. 12-18) |
| | 3. Humility is found in service. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The example of Timothy | (vs. 19-24) |
| | 4. Humility is found in surrender. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The example of Epaphroditus | (vs. 25-30) |
| III. | <u>Through Jesus Be Faithful</u> | Chapter 3 |
| | 1. Faithfulness is found in the person of Christ. | (vs. 1-11) |
| | 2. Faithfulness is found in the purpose of Christ. | (vs. 12-16) |
| | 3. Faithfulness is found in the pattern of Christ. | (vs. 17-21) |
| IV. | <u>Through Jesus Be Thankful</u> | Chapter 4 |
| | 1. Thankfulness is discovered because of God's peace. | (vs. 1-9) |
| | 2. Thankfulness is discovered because of God's power. | (vs. 10-13) |
| | 3. Thankfulness is discovered because of God's provision. | (vs. 14-23) |

