

A Short Introduction to Philippians

In Philippians Paul has the delicate task of writing to good and exemplary believers to urge them on in their walk before the Lord and before one another. Heresy is not the issue it was in Galatia, nor is immorality and carnality the problem it was in Corinth. They are a caring, generous, missionary minded church -- yet this is not enough if they are to continue to work *together*, shining as lights in the world.

This letter is an exhortation to a serving church to serve *together* (1:27) without strife and empty pride (2:3), murmurings or disputings (2:14), blameless, harmless and irrebukable (2:14, 15). It is a gentle plea to those who have consistently helped Paul and worked with him (15; 4:3, 15, 16) to work with and help one another (4:2, 3). A rejoicing church is encouraged to rejoice *always* (4:4) and *more abundantly* (1:26). An evidently well instructed congregation, one Paul could easily reason with, is urged to allow that "sweet reasonableness" (Wuest) to show in their lives before all men (4:5). A group of saints who have been consistently concerned for Paul (4:10), and deeply touched by the sickness of Epaphroditus (2:26), is instructed to be concerned for Euodia and Syntyche (4:3).

In short, Philippians is a loving exhortation to a *good* church to be, fully and evidently, a *GODLY* church!

As Colossians is God's answer to the doctrinal attack on the Head of the Body -- "Not holding the Head" (Col. 2:19) -- so Philippians is the answer to the experiential attack on the Body itself -- seeking to mask its spiritual unity with outward division through quarrels among the saints (4:2). The answer to attack against the unity of the one Body is for each believer to have the same mind (2:2) -- the *Mind of Christ* (2:5).

The frequent use of the word "all" indicates the believers *are* one in Paul's thinking, as they should be in their own experience. The epistle cannot be properly understood unless this practical problem is noted as the background for nearly every part of it. For instance, the "salvation" of 2:12 appears to be deliverance of the church from a split. Practical advice to prevent or heal such division, like the admonition in 4:8, 9, is scattered all through the epistle.

When Paul was in prison in Philippi (Acts 16), the Lord worked a miracle and set him free -- resulting in the salvation of the jailer. Now he is in prison in Rome and no miracle takes place. The ability to "distinguish things that differ" (1:10) is needed in order to understand *why*. Before, Paul cast out a demon; now, he is unable to heal his faithful co-worker, Epaphroditus (2:25 - 30). It is not because Paul has lost his faith, or has backslidden, that the miracles are missing -- it is during this time he wrote Ephesians! Rather, a dispensational change has taken place as this age entered into its normal course.

Does the absence of miracles herald a tragic decline in his situation? No, surprisingly, he is better off without them! Though Paul doesn't heal miraculously, God *is able* to heal *in answer to prayer*, when it is His will, and Epaphroditus regains his health (2:26, 27). Paul isn't miraculously delivered from prison, yet he expects to go free *in answer to PRAYER* (1:19, 25, 26; 2:24; Philemon 24). Even if "worse comes to worst," as those who love him might see it, and he is executed, he will "be with Christ" which would be *"far better!"* Though his jailer is not won through a miraculous earthquake, those who guard him, and even members of Caesar's household, *are* being won through his testimony and preaching *in his bonds* (1:12, 13; 4:22).

This "thank you letter" from a missionary to a church supporting him is much more than an expression of Paul's gratitude. The faithfulness of their messenger is commended (2:25 - 30). They are prepared for the coming of Timothy and Epaphroditus and (later perhaps) his own

arrival (2:19 - 24). He is able to reassure them that the dispensational changes taking place during the transition period are for the best, and, in ministering to their need for harmony among them, he gives them instructions in many areas deeply and gloriously theological.

What a superb example of Paul's follow-up ministry! What a blessed epistle from his pen!

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