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Philippians

Philippians is the most personal letter Paul wrote to a church. It shows how well he knew the believers in Philippi and how much he loved them. Paul wrote this letter while he was in prison waiting for trial. This could have been in Caesarea or Rome (see Acts 21 – 28). Or it may have been earlier, when Paul was in Ephesus (see Acts 19; 2 Cor. 1:8-10; 11:23).

It was not unusual for a friend of a prisoner to write a letter to encourage the prisoner. But in this letter to the Philippians, Paul does just the opposite. He is the prisoner, but he writes to encourage them! He does not want the believers in Philippi to think that being in prison is shameful for him. He does not want them to be discouraged about what is happening to him. And he does not want them to feel hopeless as they face hard times without him. So he reminds them of the reasons they have to be joyful. And he encourages them to continue living boldly as followers of Jesus.

Paul tells the believers in Philippi to live in a way that honours Jesus. He wants them to follow Jesus' example. And he wants them to follow his own example. He does not want their grief over his time in prison to keep them from living for God. Maybe they thought that Paul's time in prison had hurt his mission of telling the Good News. But Paul says that it has actually helped. He

is sure that the Good News of Jesus will spread even further because he is in prison.

Paul had also heard bad news about two women in the church in Philippi who were his co-workers. A disagreement they had with each other was still causing a problem. Maybe this is why Paul decided to send Epaphroditus back home to Philippi earlier than expected. It may also explain why so much of this letter calls for love and respect among believers. Paul offers himself and his co-workers as examples of such behaviour. But more important for this purpose is the example of Jesus. King Jesus gave up his high position to accept a humble role as a servant of us all.

In this letter, Paul tells the church in Philippi that...

He is thankful for them and asks God to give them wisdom (1:1-11)

His time in prison is helping, not hurting his mission (1:12-26)

They must remain united (1:27-30)

They will encourage him by living like Christ (2:1-18)

They should honour the co-workers he is sending to them (2:19-30)

They should join him in seeking to "know" and follow Christ (3:1-21)

They must deal with the problems in the church (4:1-9)

He is thankful for their support (4:10-23)

1 Greetings from Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.*

To all of you in Philippi who are God's holy people in Christ Jesus, including your elders† and special servants.

***1:1 Christ Jesus** Or "King Jesus". The term "Christ" is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word "Messiah", a royal title. See Mark 15:32; Luke 23:2. See also Christ and Messiah in the Word List.

†**1:1 elders** Here, literally, "overseers". See elders in the Word List.

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Paul's Prayer

³ I thank my God every time I think of you. ⁴ And I always pray for all of you with joy. ⁵ I thank God for the help you gave me while I told people the Good News. You helped from the first day you believed until now. ⁶ God began a good work among you. And I am sure he will continue until he completes it on the day when Christ Jesus comes again.

⁷ I know I am right to think like this about all of you because you are so close to my heart. This is because you have all played such an important part in God's grace to me—now, during this time that I am in prison, and whenever I am defending and proving the truth of the Good News. ⁸ God knows that I want very much to see you. I love all of you with the love of Christ Jesus.

⁹ This is my prayer for you:

that the love you have will grow more and more with knowledge and complete understanding; ¹⁰ that you will see the difference between what is important and what is not and choose what is important; that you will be pure and free from blame, ready for the coming of Christ; ¹¹ that your life will be full of the many good works that are produced by Jesus Christ to bring glory and praise to God.

Paul's Troubles Help the Lord's Work

¹² Brothers and sisters, I want you to know that all that has happened to me has helped to spread the Good News. ¹³ All the Roman guards and all the others here know that I am in prison for serving Christ. ¹⁴ My being in prison has

caused most of the believers to put their trust in the Lord and to show more courage in telling people God's message.

¹⁵ Some people are telling the message about Christ because they are jealous of me and want people to follow them instead. Others share the message because they want to help. ¹⁶ They are doing it out of love. They know that God gave me the work of defending the Good News. ¹⁷ But those others tell about Christ because of their selfish ambition.[‡] Their reason for doing it is wrong. They only do it because they think it will make trouble for me in prison. ¹⁸ But that doesn't matter. What is important is that they are telling people about Christ, whether they are sincere or not. So I am glad they are doing it.

I will continue to be glad ¹⁹ because I know that what is happening will result in my freedom. This will come through your prayers and the Spirit of Jesus Christ that God has provided. ²⁰ I have the surest hope that I will not have any reason to be ashamed. I am certain I will continue to have the same boldness to speak freely that I always have. As long as I am here in this body, I want to bring more honour to Christ. It doesn't matter whether I live or die. ²¹ My only reason for living is to serve Christ. And dying would be even better. ²² If I continue living here on earth, I will be able to work for the Lord. But what would I choose—to live or to die? I don't know. ²³ It would be a hard choice. I really want to leave this life and be with Christ. That would be much better for me; ²⁴ however, you people need me here alive. ²⁵ I am sure of this, so I know that I will stay here and be with you to help you know the joy that comes from growing in your faith. ²⁶ When I am there with you again, you

[‡]1:17 *because of ... ambition* Or "in a way that supports their own group".

will be bursting with pride over what Christ Jesus did to help me.

²⁷ Just be sure you live as God's people in a way that honours the Good News about Christ. Then if I come and visit you or if I am away from you, I will hear good things about you. I will know that you stand together with the same purpose and that you work together like a team to help others believe the Good News. ²⁸ Don't be afraid of those who are against you. They will think your refusal to give up shows that you are on your way to ruin. But it is really proof from God that you are being saved.[†]

²⁹ God has blessed you to be able to serve Christ, not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. ³⁰ You saw the difficulties I had to face, and you hear that I am still having troubles. Now you must face them too.

Be United and Care for Each Other

2 Think about what we have in Christ: the encouragement he has brought us, the comfort of his love, our sharing in his Spirit and the mercy and kindness he has shown us. If you enjoy these blessings, ² then do what will make my joy complete: agree with each other, and show your love for each other. Be united in your goals and in the way you think. ³ In whatever you do, don't let selfishness or pride be your guide. Instead be humble, and honour others more than yourselves. ⁴ Don't think about what is good for you but about what is good for others. ⁵ That's the way you should think. It is the way Christ Jesus thought: ⁶ He was the same as God in every way, but he did not think that being equal with God was something to use for himself.

⁷ Instead, he gave up everything, even his place with God.

He accepted the role of a slave, appearing in human form.

During his life as a man,

⁸ he humbled himself by being fully obedient to God,

even when that caused his death—death on a cross.

⁹ So God gave Jesus the place of highest honour,

and he gave him the name that is greater than any other.

¹⁰ So every person will bow down to show honour to Jesus—

everyone in heaven, on earth and under the earth.

¹¹ They will all confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord,"

and this will bring glory to God the Father.

Be What God Wants You to Be

¹² My dear friends, you always obeyed what you were taught. Just as you obeyed when I was with you, it is even more important for you to obey now that I am not there. Continue to live with each other the way God expected when he saved you. This will show your fear and respect for him. ¹³ Yes, it is God who is working in you. He helps you want to do what pleases him, and he gives you the power to do it.

¹⁴ Do everything without complaining or arguing. ¹⁵ Then you will be innocent and free from blame. Live as children of God without any fault among the evil people who are living all around you. They have lost their sense of what is right. So you must shine like lights in a dark world, ¹⁶ offering them the message that gives life. Then I can be proud of

[†]1:28 *They ... saved* Or "This will be proof from God that you are being saved and that your enemies will be destroyed."

you when Christ comes again. You will show that my work was not wasted—that I ran in the race and won.

¹⁷ Because of your faith, you give your lives as a sacrifice in serving God. And like all of you, I am giving my life in my work and suffering for God.[§] But if that happens, I will be glad, and I will share my joy with all of you. ¹⁸ You also should be glad and share your joy with me.

News About Timothy and Epaphroditus

¹⁹ With the blessing of the Lord Jesus, I hope I will be able to send Timothy to you soon. I will be glad to learn how you are. ²⁰ I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares for you. ²¹ Others are interested only in their own lives. They don't care about the work of Jesus Christ. ²² You know the kind of person Timothy is. He has served with me in telling the Good News like a son with his father. ²³ I plan to send him to you quickly, as soon as I know what will happen to me. ²⁴ I am sure the Lord will help me come to you soon.

²⁵ For now, I think I must send Epaphroditus back to you. He is my brother in God's family, who works and serves with me in the Lord's army. When I needed help, you sent him to me, ²⁶ but now he wants very much to see all of you again. He is worried because you heard that he was sick. ²⁷ He was sick and near death. But God helped him and me too so that I would not have even

more sorrow. ²⁸ So I want very much to send him to you. When you see him, you can be happy. And I can stop worrying about you. ²⁹ Welcome him in the Lord with much joy. Give honour to people like Epaphroditus. ³⁰ He should be honoured because he almost died working for Christ. He put his life in danger so that he could help me. This was help that you could not give me.

Jesus Christ Is All Important

3 So now, my brothers and sisters, be happy that you belong to the Lord. It is no trouble for me to keep writing you the same things, because it's for your own good.

² Be careful of the dogs. I mean, be careful of those whose work does only harm. They want to cut on everyone.**

³ But we are the ones who have the true circumcision,^{††} we who worship God through his Spirit. We don't trust in who we are by birth or what we have achieved. All we have to be proud of is that we belong to Christ Jesus. ⁴ Even if I am able to trust in myself, still I don't do it. If anyone else thinks they have a reason to trust in themselves, they should know that I have a greater reason for doing so. ⁵ I was circumcised on the eighth day after my birth. I am from the people of Israel and the tribe of Benjamin. I am a true Jew, and so were my parents. The law was so important to me that I became a Pharisee. ⁶ I was so ea-

§2:17 I am ... God Literally, "I am being poured out as a drink offering." This was usually a cup of wine poured out on the ground as a sacrifice in honour of God.

****3:2 want to cut on everyone** There is a possible play on words here in Greek. The key word is similar to "circumcision" (see circumcision in the Word List), but it means "mutilation" or "cutting to pieces".

††3:3 we are ... circumcision Literally, "we are the circumcision." The word is used here in a spiritual sense. See circumcise, circumcision in the Word List.

ger to please God^{‡‡} that I persecuted the church. And no one could find fault with the way I obeyed the Law of Moses.

⁷At one time all these things were important to me. But because of Christ, I now understand that they are worth nothing. ⁸And not only these things, but now I understand that everything is worthless compared with the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I lost everything and consider it all worthless rubbish. The only thing of value for me now is Christ. ⁹I want to belong to him. In Christ I am right with God, but my being right does not come from following the law. It comes from God through faith. God uses my faith in[¶] Christ to make me right with him. ¹⁰All I want is to know Christ and the power that raised him from death. I want to share in his sufferings and be like him, even in his death. ¹¹Then there is hope that I myself will somehow be raised from death.

Trying to Reach the Goal

¹²I don't mean that I am exactly what God wants me to be. I have not yet reached that goal. But I continue trying to reach it and make it mine. That's what Christ Jesus wants me to do. It is the reason he made me his. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I know that I still have a long way to go. But there is one thing I do: I forget what is in the past and try as hard as I can to reach the goal before me. ¹⁴I keep running hard towards the finish line to get the prize of life above that God has called me to receive through Christ Jesus.

¹⁵All of us who have grown to be spiritually mature should think this way too.

And if there is any of this that you don't agree with, God will make it clear to you. ¹⁶But we should continue following the truth we already have.

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join together in following my example. Also, learn by watching those who are living the way we showed you. ¹⁸There are many who live like enemies of the cross of Christ. I have often told you about them. And it makes me cry to tell you about them now. ¹⁹The way they live is leading them to destruction. They have replaced God with their own desires. They do shameful things, and they are proud of what they do. They think only about earthly things. ²⁰But the government that rules us is in heaven. We are waiting for our Saviour to come from there. He is Jesus Christ our Lord. ²¹He will change our humble bodies and make them like his own glorious body. He can do this by his power, with which he is able to rule everything.

Some Things to Do

4 My dear brothers and sisters, I love you and want to see you. You bring me joy and make me proud of you. Continue following the Lord as I have told you.

²Euodia and Syntyche, you both belong to the Lord, so please agree with each other. ³For this I make a special request to my friend who has served with me so faithfully: help these women. They worked hard with me in telling people the Good News, together with Clement and others who worked with

^{‡‡}3:6 *eager to please God* Before Paul became a believer in Jesus as the Christ, he thought it was his duty as a good Pharisee to oppose the Jews who had become followers of Jesus.

[¶]3:9 *my faith in* Or "the faithfulness of".

me. Their names are recorded in the book of life.^{§§}

⁴Always be filled with joy in the Lord. I will say it again. Be filled with joy.

⁵Let everyone see that you are gentle and kind. The Lord is coming soon.

⁶Don't worry about anything, but pray and ask God for everything you need, always giving thanks for what you have.

⁷And because you belong to Christ Jesus, God's peace will protect your thoughts and feelings. His peace can do this far better than our human minds.*

⁸Brothers and sisters, continue to think about all that is good and worthy of praise. Think about what is true and honourable and right and pure and beautiful and respected. ⁹And do what you learned and received from me—what I told you and what you saw me do. And the God who gives peace will be with you.

Paul Gladly Accepts a Gift

¹⁰I am so happy that you have again shown your care for me. You continued to care about me, but there was no way for you to show it. ¹¹I am telling you this, but not because I need help from anyone. I have learned to be satisfied with what I have and with whatever happens. ¹²I know how to live when I am poor and when I have plenty. I have learned the secret of how to live through any kind of situation—when I have enough to eat or when I am hungry, when I have more than I need or

when I have nothing. ¹³Christ is the one who gives me the strength I need to do whatever I must do.

¹⁴But it was good that you helped me when I needed help. ¹⁵I am sure that you there in Philippi remember when I first came to tell people in Macedonia the Good News. After I left there, no other church sent me help. Like you, many churches receive help from me. But you are the only one that honours our partnership by giving something to me. ¹⁶In fact, while I was still in Thessalonica, more than once you sent me what I needed. ¹⁷Really, it is not that I want gifts from you. But I want you to have the benefit that comes from giving.

¹⁸I have everything I need. I have even more than I need because Epaphroditus brought me what you sent. Your gift is like a sweet-smelling sacrifice offered to God. It is a sacrifice that he accepts, and it pleases him. ¹⁹My God will use his glorious riches to give you everything you need. He will do this through Christ Jesus. ²⁰Glory to our God and Father for ever and ever. Amen.

²¹Give our greetings to God's people there—to each one who belongs to Christ Jesus. Those in God's family who are with me send you their greetings.

²²And greetings to you from all of God's people here, especially those who work in the service of the emperor.

²³May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with each one of you.

§§**4:3 book of life** God's book that contains the names of his chosen people. See Rev. 3:5; 21:27.

***4:7 can do ... minds** Literally, "surpasses (is better than) every mind", which could also mean "is beyond all understanding".