

## OVERVIEW OF THE BIBLE PHILIPPIANS

November 28, 2018

### Answers to Lesson 33 – Galatians / Ephesians

*Teachings of the False Brothers* – According to the false brothers, Gentile Christians should be circumcised and should observe all the rituals of Jewish law. The problem became so prevalent that Acts 15 records that a council at Jerusalem was called to deal specifically with this problem.

*Freedom from the law* – The law has no power to save. It only makes us conscious of our sin. Salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot work to achieve it by our own merit.

*Fruitfulness* – Freedom from the law does not mean freedom to practice immorality. On the contrary, it is this freedom that compels us to do what is right. Christians are to live by the Spirit and not by the law. Sin and Christianity do not mix.

---

*Circular Letter* – The absence of any personal greetings or references to specific problems has resulted in the conclusion that Ephesians was originally a circular letter. It was intended to be circulated among various churches, Ephesus and Laodicea being among them. Since the church at Ephesus held a prominent position among the first-century churches it was natural that this letter would be preserved there.

*Provision for the Church* – Chapter 1 records the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. We have been adopted as sons and daughters (a position we received by grace). We have redemption through the blood of Christ. We have experienced forgiveness of sin. We have been given wisdom and understanding. We have the Holy Spirit as a guide for our lives.

These blessings and provisions bring praise to God because they affect how we live. Just as Paul pointed out in Galatians the fruitfulness that accompanies freedom so he shows here that the provisions of God (through Christ) are to affect our practice as a church.

---

*The Practice of the Church* – Paul elaborates on Ephesians 4:25-32. We are to put off bitterness, rage and malice. Instead we are to be kind and compassionate. We are to be imitators of God. We are to find what pleases God and do it ... and to be careful how we live.

*Influenced by Our Relationship with Christ* – Paul lists mutual submission between husbands and wives and between parents and children and between slaves and masters. Paul states that every aspect of our lives should be touched by our relationship with Christ. The life we live, we live for God.

*The Power of the Church* – Putting on the armor of God is essential because we are in a spiritual warfare. This battle cannot be fought using human resources. It requires the armor for ultimate protection and victory so that when the day of evil comes we may be able to stand.

God and the Bible are our true sources of power. Paul calls upon the church to take advantage of that power by praying on all occasions with all kinds of prayers.



Founding of the community at Philippi marked a significant development in the ministry of Paul. Philippi was a fairly small city and northeast of Thessalonica. It was an agricultural center and part of the Roman colonies. When Paul came to Philippi he would have found a sizable number of Roman citizens.

No archaeological evidence has been found for a Jewish presence in the city. Luke makes no reference to a synagogue in Philippi. Paul discovered a *place of prayer* but the only people gathered there were women. The converts to Christianity would have been entirely (or almost entirely) Gentiles.

The authenticity of the epistle is not disputed. More serious questions have been raised concerning the integrity of the letter. Some scholars believe that it consists of two or three letters that have been joined together. Evidence of this is found in the abrupt jumps in his arguments as in 3:1. Also Paul recently received a gift from the church and he thanks them in 4:10-20. Courtesy and literary convention suggest Paul would have done that sooner.

Paul wrote the letter from prison in Rome (traditional consensus). It is also assumed that he wrote the letter around 60 AD.

Paul seems to have two main reasons for writing. First is to assure his readers about his own situation to allay their concern for him. Other reason is to commend Epaphroditus and to explain why he is returning to Philippi. Characteristic tone of the letter is one of joy. Although in prison the faith of Paul triumphs any adversity and causes him to rejoice.

## Chapter 1

Opening section follows the typical pattern of Paul's letters.

A greeting is following by words of thanksgiving and (in this case) a prayer of intercession.

In his words of thanksgiving Paul touches on three topics to which he will return:

- 1) the participation of the Philippians in the gospel
- 2) way in which God is going to continue the work begun in them until the day of Jesus Christ
- 3) Paul's own imprisonment and defense of the gospel

Philippians reflects the transformation brought by the gospel to every part of human life.

All are in Christ Jesus and so all belong to the fellowship of God's people.

In these words of thanksgiving Paul is intensely personal.

Paul refers twice in vs 3-8 to the fact that the Philippians have shared in the gospel and in grace. Constant prayers of thanksgiving for the church would have strengthened his bonds with them.

Introduction concludes with his prayer for the Philippians.

Prayer is that their love may increase more and more in knowledge and insight.

Aim is that they should be pure and blameless on the day of Christ.

Because their purity derives from righteousness it will be to the glory and praise of God.

In this section of the letter we witness Paul's confidence in God.

God will complete what God has begun.

Paul is also confident that the grace of God is with him in prison.

So Paul can be confident that his prayers for the Philippians will be answered.

In spite of his imprisonment his work as an apostle is continuing.

His confidence is not a vague hope but based firmly on what God has done in the past.

In his opening words Paul does not give the people a report on his own situation.

Rather he gives a description of how the gospel is progressing because it is his chief concern.

He begins on a positive note and ends with a triumphant reference to future boasting in Christ.

He proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus through his words and with his whole life.

His afflictions are seen as an opportunity for the gospel to be preached.

In spite of all its failures the church can bear witness to the power of the gospel.

At the heart of the gospel message is the fact that oppression leads to growth.

Paul cheerfully accepts whatever circumstances he finds himself in (even imprisonment).

At the end of the chapter (vs 27-30) Paul turns to pastoral advice.

He gives advice on how the Philippians should behave but the instructions are general.

Overall, Paul wants to instill in them an attitude of Christ.



## Chapter 2

In the first four verses Paul talks about our life in Christ.

Union with Christ forms the basis for an appropriate way to live.

Because Christians are *in Christ* we are united with him and with one another.

This union is our source for encouragement that provides consolation and comfort of love.

Philippians had already brought him joy.

If their behavior reflects their common life in Christ then they will continue to fulfill his joy.

Actions of Christ provide an example for believers and are the foundation for their existence.

### The Christological Hymn (2:5-11)

Passage falls into two main sections.

First section deals with Christ's voluntary humiliation and the second with his exaltation.

All the focus is on the actions of Christ.

Some scholars note that the background to this hymn is the Servant Song found in Isaiah 53.

Others suggest that the background is based on the story of the fall of Adam in Genesis 3.

It is read on Palm Sunday (also known as Passion Sunday).

After these critical verses Paul continues with his appeal concerning their behavior.

As in 1:27 he urges them to live in a way that is appropriate to the gospel.

He emphasizes that they are to act this way whether he is present or absent.

His appeal is based firmly on what he just said about Christ.

The Philippians have always been obedient and it is God to whom they owe obedience.

Paul is simply the one through whom the commands of God are channeled.

Here we see the way in which theology and ethics are inseparably joined together.

Theological affirmation leads to ethical demands (neither can exist without the other).

The theological part concentrates on the actions of God through Christ.

This upsets our normal assumptions about what God is like and what God expects of us.

Those who confess Jesus as Lord should not look for status or power.

Rather they should be humbly considering others better than themselves.

We see that Christian obedience must be understood as the response to the grace of God.

Response we are called on to make is the response made by Christ himself.

Do nothing out of *selfish*  
ambition or vain conceit.  
Rather, in *humility* value others  
above yourselves, not looking  
to your own interests but each of  
you to the *interests* of the others.

*Philippians 2:3-4*

In verses 2:19-30 Paul turns from exhortation to practical matters. Although separated from them he plans to keep in touch by sending Timothy and Epaphroditus. Verses read like a letter of commendation. Timothy seems to have been one of Paul's most constant companions. He is mentioned frequently in Paul's letter and in Acts 16-20. In 1:1 he is named as co-author of the letter but that was probably done out of courtesy. Earlier the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to bring Paul their gift and to assist him in prison. Now news had reached the church that Epaphroditus was seriously ill. They needed to be reassured that he had fully recovered.

### **Chapter 3**

In 3:1 the word *finally* (as in close to the end) has a more general meaning of *and so*. It is used to pick up and reiterate the command to rejoice that is found in 2:18. In this passage Paul is spelling out some of the implications of what it means to believe. To believe in the gospel is to put our trust in God. To trust in something or someone means to rely on them. Complete trust suggests there is no need to rely on anything else. Before Paul could accept Christ he had to renounce those things on which he had relied.

At his conversion Paul renounced reliance on the law. Paul in his zeal to keep the law of God had persecuted Christians. Now he discovered that loving other people was more important than living according to rules. However we cannot be led to believe that there is no need for personal discipline.



His image of the Christian life as a race reminds us that we cannot rest on our own successes. This particular race is not a competition. The end is assured not because of what we do but by virtue of the hold Christ has on us. Paul describes the goal of the Christian as *knowing Christ* and sharing his mind. Christ is the blueprint for Christian behavior. To not share in the mind of Christ and to be like him is to live as an enemy of the cross.

## **Chapter 4**

In this appeal to Euodia and Syntyche we find at last some evidence of dissension. Paul addresses each woman by name.

He urges them to agree with each other in the Lord.

He also appeals to a loyal companion to help these two women.

He gently reminds them of the relevance of his teaching to their situation.

In all of his missions women played an important role in the Christian community.

Once again Paul assures the Philippians that they will have peace.

This time the promise refers to the God of peace rather than the peace of God.

It is another reminder that God (and not just his blessings) is with his people.

Paul ends with a personal word of thanks.

His gratitude is not due to any real need on his part since he has learned to be content at all times.

It arises from the special relationship Paul has with the Philippians.

The only possible response to the revelation of God's glory is to give glory to God.

Note of joy continues to echo throughout this chapter.



## **Assignment for December 5**

Complete the Exercises from Lesson 34 on Pages 81-184

Read *Colossians* or the portions outlined on Page 184