

Gleaners Bible Studies C 6

“ALWAYS REJOICING” STUDIES IN PHILIPPIANS

Study 1

FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

Read

Philippians 1: 1-11

Philippi was a Roman colony, on the Egnatian Way - the great northern east/west highway. It was occupied by Italian settlers following Octavian's great battles. The colonists were proud of their special right and privileges, and intensely loyal to Rome. In Philippi, as in the province of Macedonia as a whole, women enjoyed high status. They took an active part in public and business life, a situation which is reflected in the church there.

The Church

Founded about A.D. 50 during Paul's second missionary journey (see **Acts 16: 12-40**). When Paul, Silas and Timothy left, Luke, the doctor, stayed on. Philippi was a medical centre, and may possibly have been Luke's home town. No doubt he did much to get the group established and helped to continue the evangelistic outreach. The letter reveals a church taking its share of suffering (**1: 29**), and in some danger of division (**1: 27, 2: 2**). There may have been some leaning to a doctrine of perfectionism (when we become Christians we are perfect) (**3: 12-13**). And the arrival of the Judaizers - that group of Jewish Christians who insisted that Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the law - introduced a new threat (see **3: 2**). But Paul loved this church and rejoiced over its progress.

The Letter

Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi is, in some respects, the most attractive of his writings. Yet it was probably written from a Roman prison. It is believed to have been written some time between A.D. 61 and 63, during the two years of imprisonment recorded in **Acts 28: 30**. We can be certain that the circumstances of his bondage were not calculated to inspire joy or a feeling of well-being, and Paul could be excused if he had expressed impatience or frustration. Yet, as you study this letter, you will find that the keywords are “*joy*” or “*rejoice*” and that he gives many indications of his readiness to rejoice and accept his lot without complaint. Look through the four chapters and see if you can find one grumble from the apostle about the hardness of his imprisonment. How wonderfully this tells us that the Lord is sufficient to satisfy those who are His, in any of life's circumstances which they may encounter.

It is interesting to keep in mind the way in which the gospel came to Philippi. Did you notice in **Acts 16: 6-10** how Paul and Silas were led to go to Macedonia? The Holy Spirit told them not to go into Asia (**verse 6**), but through a vision of a man calling them over into Macedonia, they concluded that God wanted them to preach the gospel in those parts (**verse 10**). We can be thankful that Paul obeyed the leading of the Holy Spirit, for it was through this that the gospel came to the western world. So they came to Philippi, where subsequent events were hardly designed to encourage the preaching of the Word!

But notice **Acts 16: 13-15** - the Lord was already at work there, and Paul and Silas were able, before they left, to meet with

the first group of believers in that city. In all probability these people, plus the jailor and his family, were part of the local church at Philippi when Paul wrote this letter.

In studying the first eleven verses of Philippians 1, you will see that verses 1-2 form the SALUTATION - the customary form of opening for such letters at that time.

Notice, however, the description of the writers; from Paul and Timothy, bondslaves (servants) of Jesus Christ. We have already said that Paul was a prisoner of Rome, but here he is not concerned with that; his 'enslavement' is to Jesus Christ, his Master. He writes “*to all the saints*” at Philippi. Remember, once you become a Christian, you, too, are a saint, set apart for Jesus Christ. Then he sends them a greeting of “*grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” What a wonderful way to begin a letter!

Verses 3-11 have to do with the FELLOWSHIP which existed between Paul and these Christians at Philippi. There are four things worth noting about these verses.

1. He PRAISES the Lord for them - verses 3-6.

From his place of imprisonment he remembers the wonderful way in which these people shared with him in the work of the gospel. Fellowship means sharing, working together in every way. It cheered Paul up and gave him confidence to look back at some of the ways in which the Philippians showed their interest in spreading the gospel message. Fellowship is also one of the keywords of this letter; see chapters **2: 1; 3: 10** and also **4: 14, 15**, where the same word is translated as “communication” or “sharing”. Thus, Paul could praise God for his memories of them.

2. He tells them of the PLACE they held in his life - verses 7-8.

Notice how close the bond was between Paul and these converts. In **verse 7** he says “*I have you in my heart*”, and in **verse 8**: “*God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.*” Affection speaks of deep inward feelings and thoughts. Christian friendship is a wonderful thing to enjoy. It is obvious from these writings of Paul, that he looked upon the Philippians as his dear friends. He would have loved to have seen them; nevertheless, distance could not spoil their friendship.

3. He speaks of the PURPOSE that God had for these Christians - verse 6.

He remembered that God had “*begun*” something good in them. This is true of every Christian. When God takes over our lives He begins a work in us which is good and which has tremendous possibilities. We may not fully realise all that this means, but Paul goes on to say that the God who has begun the work will “*complete*”, or ‘perfect’, it until the day of Jesus Christ (**verse 6**). This is a good truth to grasp. God will never fail in the work He begins to do in our lives. We may fail Him, but when the Lord Jesus comes again, the work of salvation begun down here in our hearts and lives will be completed.

4. He PRAYS for them - verses 9-11.

Paul must have had a very long prayer list. When you have time, look through Paul's epistles and make a note of all those people for whom he prayed. Paul not only PREACHED, and saw people saved, but he PRAYED for them afterwards. This

was essential for their well-being. Look carefully at **verses 9-11** and see the things which he desired for these Christians. We could say that he desired growth for them in 3 ways:

(a) In LOVE (verse 9)

It was to be an intelligent love with understanding.

(b) In LIGHT (verse 10)

He wanted them to be able to *“approve”* or *“test”* the values of their faith in such a way that their lives would be *“sincere”* and *“without offence”* until Christ’s coming. When he speaks here of the *“day of Christ”*, he means the day when Christians’ lives and service will be reviewed by the Lord Jesus.

(c) In LIFE (verse 11)

He desired that their lives should increase in faithfulness with all those things which were right and pleasing to God.

Study 2

FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

 **Philippians 1: 12-30**

When Paul was put in prison, he was not able to preach the gospel that he loved. It would seem as if his work was ended, at least for the time being. Notice in this chapter how often he speaks of the GOSPEL. It is obvious that this was a priority in his life. The furtherance, or progress, of the gospel was his main concern. But how could it be achieved if he was shut up in prison? Perhaps those who loved Paul and depended upon him spiritually might say that God was making a big mistake. Just when he was needed most, Paul was shut away. Had God lost control of the situation? Of course not! God never makes mistakes and is always in control. We shall learn this lesson from our study. In fact, the work of the gospel was actually strengthened and extended through this seeming tragedy.

We can look at four important points in our Scripture passage:

1. Verses 12-14 THE UNCONQUERABLE GOSPEL.

Paul makes it very clear that his imprisonment was not a defeat in the cause of the gospel. In fact, he says in **verse 12** that it resulted in the further progress of the Christian message. We can learn here that Satan often goes too far in his opposition to God’s plans, so that the actual reverse of his intentions takes place. This has often happened in the course of history, and it was just so here. We can be sure that Paul witnessed while in prison. It is thought probable, and is possibly suggested in **verses 12 - 14**, that even among Caesar’s guards in the palace there were those who became Christians through Paul’s imprisonment. No prison walls could keep so dedicated a preacher as Paul silent. And instead of other Christians becoming afraid by this seeming persecution, they were encouraged to be bolder in preaching God’s word (**verse 14**). We know this principle to be true even today. In communist countries, for example, where men have tried to stamp out Christianity, such persecution has a refining and strengthening effect on the church. Christianity might go ‘underground’ for a while, and there may be many ‘secret disciples’, but when the persecution is relaxed and a more favourable environment comes, it surfaces again and the church is found to be stronger than it ever was before because all the weak and insincere elements have been purged out. God’s word is alive, and cannot be suppressed!

2. Verses 15-18 UNPRINCIPLED PREACHING.

It seems that there were those who took advantage of Paul’s absence to preach the gospel out of envy and strife, seeking to hurt Paul. There was no sincerity about their preaching. It was a deliberate effort to undermine Paul’s happiness. We need to

be careful we have the right motives in our work for the Lord Jesus. Fellowship includes this; it is working together for the right reasons. Paul shows here that he is mature enough to master this sort of unkindness shown to him. He rejoiced that Christ was proclaimed - whatever the means by which the word was preached - or the reasons behind it. This shows us that if we live in touch with the Lord, we shall be able to take the slights which unkind folk sometimes give us. Paul’s love for Christ and His message was big enough to overcome such things.

3. Verses 19-26 AN UNSHAKABLE PURPOSE.

These verses are important because they give an intimate picture of Paul’s reason for living. Notice in **verse 19** how he was depending on the prayers of the Christians in Philippi. This shows us that there is *“fellowship”* in prayer too, for while in **verse 4**, he is praying for them, here he relies upon their prayers for his power. It is good, if in our Christian experience, we understand the true value of prayer. We can almost feel the determination in the words of Paul in **verses 20-23**. We could call this the purpose of a Christ-centred life. It is literally a matter of life and death - Christ magnified in his body - whether by life or death. Paul’s desire was that Christ would be seen and EXPRESSED in every area of his life. Thus, *“to me to live”*, (or, *“to me, living”*), **is Christ (verse 21)**. All Paul’s ENJOYMENT was found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Finally, he desires to be *“with Christ, which is far better.”* The Lord Jesus was EVERYTHING to Paul, and Paul just wanted to be with Him. If you wrote down your greatest desires as a Christian, as Paul did here, what would YOU say about Christ? It should be the purpose of every Christian to live a Christ-centred life. We notice also that Paul’s purpose for living extended even to the well-being of his fellow-Christians (**verses 24-26**). Although for him to be with Christ would have been wonderful, yet he was content to stay on earth in order that their faith and joy would progress. This was a true commitment to their needs.

4. Verses 27-30 A UNITED CAUSE.

Paul ends this section by calling for behaviour that is worthy of the gospel. The word *“conduct”* in **verse 27** means “manner of life”. We find it again in **chapter 3: 20**. The way we behave as Christians should correspond with what we say. Then Paul calls upon the Philippians to *“stand fast in one spirit”* and *“with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”* In other words, they were to present a united front to the enemy.

Finally, it is clear from **verses 29-30** that suffering FOR Christ was just as much a part of belonging to Christ as believing in Him. We learn from these verses that it can be very costly to make a stand for Christ and testify for Him. Unless **verse 21** is true of us, we could fail when opposition comes our way.

Study 3

COMMITMENT - ITS EXAMPLE

 **Philippians 2: 1-11**

We are going to study now a very important passage in the New Testament. It is important because at the centre of it is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul states in **verses 5-11** facts about Him which are vital to the Christian faith. We shall look at them carefully to see what they actually say, but at the same time we must look at the context in which they are found. Paul is speaking of the attitudes that should belong to Christians as they work and witness together. In a wonderful way he speaks of the Lord Jesus and His mind, and exhorts the Philippians to have this same mind within themselves.

If you compare the last verses of chapter 1 with the first four verses of chapter 2, you will see that there is more than a hint of division in the church here (see also 4: 2).

Paul urges them all to put aside their pride and to live and work and think as one. Anything less lets down the gospel and the Lord whose life on earth is the supreme example of humility. Notice in **1: 27** he speaks about being of one spirit and one mind. If you go through this letter you will find quite a number of things said about the mind. I suggest that you make a note of each mention of it, and then see with what it is connected. Here the idea is of being **“of one mind”**. Paul realised that this was not an easy thing. Too often strife and division spoilt God’s work, and he could see this happening among some of his converts. We can therefore look at the early verses of this chapter with this in mind.

How is it possible for the right spirit to be found in Christians who work together?

Paul uses two methods to answer this question.

- 1. He ARGUES from what they ENJOY in CHRIST.**
- 2. He APPEALS to them to apply the EXAMPLE of CHRIST.**

1. ARGUMENT.

Notice the chapter begins with four **“ifs”**. The **“if”** is often used to express doubt. ‘If he comes’ can mean that he may not come. But the **“ifs”** here are not used to imply doubt; they are used to further Paul’s argument for one-ness among these Christians. It is sad when Christians quarrel or fail to get on together. These things to be enjoyed are great blessings: **“consolation in Christ” - “comfort of love” - “fellowship of the Spirit”**. They should give a wonderful tone to Christian living. There is nothing harsh or cruel about them. If these are the kind of blessings we find in Christ, then we should be kind and gracious to those who share God’s work with us. According to these verses there should be:

- NO SELF-ASSERTION verse 3.**
- NO SELF-CONFIDENCE verse 3.**
- NO SELF-INTEREST verse 4.**

Are you easy to work with? Whose interests come first when you are serving the Lord Jesus? Look at these verses carefully, and then make sure that the right spirit controls your contact with other Christians.

2. APPEAL.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus”. (verse 5). This is a very important appeal. By **“mind”** Paul really means **“disposition”**. He is appealing to Philippian Christians to show the same disposition that the Lord Jesus did. Notice three things that Paul really says about the Lord:

(a) He was HIGHER than the HIGHEST (verse 6).

Much could be said today about those who hold high positions in Government. Presidents and Premiers, Kings and Princes, all have their places of power. Some are evil men and hold their positions through cruelty and fear. For some of them the position they hold is false. But Paul says about the Lord Jesus that he was **“in the form of God”** and that to be **“equal with God”** was His by right. Everything that belonged to God belonged to the Lord Jesus. There is not, and never will be, anyone with a higher position than He has. He is so wonderful that no one on earth can be compared with Him. Always remember that in every way the Lord Jesus Christ is God.

(b) He became LOWER than the LOWEST (verses 6-8).

Notice the steps downward. **“He made Himself of no reputation”**. Without pride and pomp, He quietly came down to meet men as a man. Stooping lower, He took **“the form of a servant”**. Yet lower still He came, until finally He submitted Himself to the shameful death of the Cross. This is true humility and lowliness of mind. What Paul was asking the Philippians to do in **verses 3-4**, the Lord Jesus did to perfection. Remember,

it was for others - for you and me - that the Lord Jesus died on the Cross. He **“became obedient to the point of death”** - that is **“even the death of the cross”**. He could go no lower than this. If the Lord Jesus is your Saviour, and I do hope He is, then His wonderful example of humility can be used to help form your disposition. towards others.

(c) He was made GREATER than the GREATEST (verses 9-11).

It is quite wonderful how Paul leads us to think about the way in which the Lord Jesus has been given the greatest possible position of power and glory. Notice that the Name of Jesus is given as the Name above every name.

Strange, that this was the same name nailed above the Cross. It is a tremendous witness to the fact that one day every knee in the universe will bow to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is because the Lord Jesus gave up all that was His by right - even His own life - that God has given Him the highest place of all. **Luke 18: 14** says: **“Everyone who exalts himself will be abased; and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”**

Study this statement in the light of the example of the Lord Jesus in **Philippians 2: 5-11**. Those who have His mind in their dealings with each other can leave the results with God. The atmosphere created by this will have an effect on others too with whom we share the work of the Lord. Most of all, remember that God has given the Lord Jesus the highest place of all - AND SO SHOULD WE!

**“To Him whom men despise and slight,
To Him be glory given;
The crown is His, and His by right
The highest place in Heaven.”**

Study 4 COMMITMENT - ITS EXPRESSION

Read Philippians 2: 12-30

From studying the Lord’s great example of commitment in our last lesson, we are now going to look at the expression of it in the lives of three Christians - Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus. It was good that at this point in his letter, Paul could illustrate in a practical way what he was trying to teach these Christians. Perhaps this is the best point at which to say that it is no good talking about committing our lives to the Lord Jesus, and all that that involves without putting it into practice. The Lord Jesus said in **John 13: 17**, as He set His disciples such a great example of humility, **“If you know these things, happy are you if you do them”**. So Paul was able to draw upon the actual love and devotion of these people to drive home to them the lessons he was seeking to teach.

Verses 12-16 are very interesting. Look at them carefully. They tell us what we ought to be in the world as we know it. We notice the kind of WORLD we live in. Paul calls it a **“crooked and perverse generation”**. In so many ways the world is a foreign country to the Christian. It is certainly a dark and wicked place, for often it has no sympathy with Christian aims and activities. Yet God puts you and me in it because He wants us to live for Him. Notice the WORK these verses speak of - **“work out your own salvation ... for it is God that works in you” (verses 12-13)**. By our obedience and loyalty to God’s commands, we work out, or give evidence of, the work of salvation in our lives. God is working out His purpose all the time, making us into the kind of people He wants us to be. Do you get the message? It is vital that you understand this! Now read about our WITNESS in this dark world. We are to shine as lights among all those who are in sin’s darkness. Paul said

that if the Philippians did this, it would be seen at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ that his work among them had not been wasted (**verse 16**).

From verses 17-30 we get three clear pictures of dedicated people and their example to us.

PAUL (**verses 17-18**): Commitment and SACRIFICE.
TIMOTHY (**verses 19-24**): Commitment and SERVICE.
EPAPHRODITUS (**verses 25-30**): Commitment and SUFFERING.

1. First look at the idea of a SACRIFICE (**verses 17-18**).

Paul was thinking of all the labour he had put in for the sake of the Philippians. If we consider, in a general way, the work of the apostle, we shall find there is no lack of evidence as to what it cost him in terms of suffering. He literally gave himself to the people he wanted to win for the Lord (**verse 17**). If you read **2 Corinthians 11: 24-33**, you will find details of the many things that he suffered for the sake of the gospel. The full meaning that we get from this verse is that he was being poured out as a sacrifice in the service of their faith. We shall probably never have to suffer in the way that Paul did, but every act of dedication to the Lord will bring sacrifice in some way or another. It may be that we shall have to give more of our time, or our energy. Whatever God asks us to do, we should be ready to do it, whatever the cost. Notice that Paul wanted to be sure that the product of his service would be joy. The Philippians themselves were evidence that his sacrifice was not in vain.

2. Now look at the SERVICE of Timothy (**verses 19-24**).

Paul was very fond of Timothy. In one scripture, **1 Timothy 1: 2**, he refers to him as his **“true son in the faith”**. Paul is going to send Timothy to them so that he can find out just how they are progressing. Look at **verses 20-23**. The bond that existed between these two men was one in which even their thoughts were united. Paul reckoned that, as a matter of course, Timothy would care for them because this was the way he dealt with people. Timothy’s interests were the interests of the Lord Jesus. Here is a lesson we can learn about Christian service. If we put the interests of the Lord Jesus first, we shall certainly act unselfishly toward others. There is such a need today for a real Christian concern to serve others. Notice what Paul says in **Romans 12: 9-18**. So the proof of Timothy’s commitment was seen in the way in which he served as a son to Paul in the gospel. What a wonderful bond this was! Paul could send him to his fellow-Christians with complete confidence. Yet he hoped eventually to be released from prison so that he could visit them himself.

3. Lastly, look at the SUFFERINGS of Epaphroditus (**verses 25-30**).

In these six verses it is amazing how much Paul says about this man. His commitment to the Lord’s work was total. Nothing could deter him from fulfilling his intentions in the cause of Christ. Look at the links that Paul suggests existed between them (**verse 25**). **“Brother”, “fellow worker”, “fellow-soldier”, “your messenger”, “he who ministered to my need”**: Paul cannot say enough about the nature of their relationship. Epaphroditus was hampered by an illness that nearly ended in his death. But God spared him, and thus Paul was spared this additional sorrow (**verse 27**). The most telling word that Paul says about this faithful warrior is in **verse 30: “not regarding his life” or “hazarding his life”** to supply their **“lack of service”** to Paul. Let this passage challenge the service we seek to do for the Lord. Commitment is costly, yet it brings great blessing to needy Christians and helps to form quality in our character. It is just like gold that is purified in the heat of the fire.

Questions

STUDY 1 FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

1. How did the gospel first come to Philippi?
2. Give two causes for rejoicing that Paul has found as he writes this letter.
3. Why did Paul praise the Lord for the Philippian Christians?
4. Give two things from **verses 9-11** that Paul desired the Philippians would have or know.
5. What, would you say, are the **“fruits of righteousness”** mentioned in **verse 11**?

STUDY 2 FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL

1. What, according to these verses, was Paul’s main concern?
2. Why was Paul’s imprisonment NOT the tragedy that it might have seemed?
3. What lesson can we learn from **verses 15 - 18**?
4. What was Paul’s greatest purpose in life?
5. What does this passage teach us about prayer?

STUDY 3 COMMITMENT - ITS EXAMPLE

1. Why is **Philippians chapter 2**, a very important passage?
2. In what ways does Paul show in the opening verses of this chapter that a spirit of unity can be obtained?
3. What two phrases in **verses 5 - 6** tell us that the Lord Jesus is God?
4. In what way is the Lord Jesus seen to be an example to Christians?
5. Mention one incident in the life of the Lord Jesus, and show how it demonstrates His humility.

STUDY 4 COMMITMENT - ITS EXPRESSION

1. What evidence was Paul looking for to convince him that his service in Philippi was not in vain?
2. How can we **“work out”** our own salvation? Read the lesson carefully before you answer.
3. Why do you think Paul called Epaphroditus his fellow-soldier?
4. Why did Epaphroditus **“hazard his life”**?
5. Give two things you have learned in this study about commitment to the Lord Jesus.