

PHILIPPIANS

CHAPTER ONE

1. Who sent this epistle?

“Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:1).

The apostle Paul is the main sender and he had Timothy with him. Individual pronouns – I, me, my, mine – tremendously outweigh collective pronouns – we, us, our; even when the collective pronouns are employed, they almost always include the recipients, not the co-sender so much. Moreover, the statement *“I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you”* (Philippians 2:19) makes clear that Paul was primary and Timothy secondary.

2. Who were the recipients?

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). This letter is unique in mentioning congregational leadership in the opening salutation. Hebrews, which was not written by Paul, is the only other epistle to send greetings to overseers, but that was included in the farewell remarks (Hebrews 13:24).

3. Describe the establishment of the church in that location.

The beginning of the church in Philippi was directed by the Holy Spirit who prevented Paul, Silas, and Timothy from preaching in Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-8), and who showed Paul a vision of a Macedonian man inviting them to come preach (Acts 16:9-10). First, Lydia of Thyatira was converted at the riverside (Acts 16:11-15).

Some persecution happened (Acts 16:16-24), but the resulting incarceration actually yielded the jailer's conversion (Acts 16:25-34).

4. Explain what bishops and deacons are.

"Bishops" is a transliteration of a Greek word that is more helpfully rendered as *"overseers."* Those who oversee the church are also called *"elders"* and shepherds (1st Peter 5:1-2). Requirements to hold this office involve character, experience, ability, and qualified family (1st Timothy 3:1-7, 11; Titus 1:5-9). The work of these overseers is the most important on earth (Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1st Thessalonians 5:12-13) besides parenting (Ephesians 6:4).

"Deacons" is a word with both a generic and specific meaning. It appears dozens of times in the New Testament, usually translated *"ministers"* or *"servants."* In this instance, though, mentioned next to the bishops, deacons clearly refer to a specific office within the church. This office has serious qualifications resembling those of bishops (1st Timothy 3:8-13).

5. Where was the epistle written from?

Paul was a prisoner (Philippians 1:7, 13, 14, 16) in Rome (4:22).

6. How did Paul remember the Philippians?

He thought of them fondly, with thankfulness (Philippians 1:3), joyfulness (4), confidence (6), longing (8), and affection (8).

"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day

until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:3-8).

7. What did Paul have in mind referring to the Philippians’ *“fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now?”*

“Fellowship” is another word with various applications. The Greek term means participation and has reference to the relationship Christians have with each other and Christ (1st John 1:7; Galatians 2:9), or “communion” as in the Lord’s Supper (1st Corinthians 10:16), or giving to help needy brethren (Romans 15:26; 2nd Corinthians 8:4; 9:13; Hebrews 13:16).

The application here is in the vein of financial sharing, which we know because Paul refers to the same subject more straightforwardly at the end of the letter: “Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account. Indeed I have all and abound. I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things sent from you, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God. And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:15-19).

It is not incorrect to think of a preacher's pay as "wages" (2nd Corinthians 11:8), but it is incorrect to think of it **only** as wages. A preacher is not an employee, but a fellow, a partner, a co-worker.

8. What did Paul pray for concerning the brethren at Philippi?

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11).

He wanted them to keep loving so much that there was not only a sufficiency of love, but an overflow of it (Philippians 1:9_a). There had been no deficiency in love among the Philippians and this is no criticism, but an encouragement to keep doing what they were already excelling at.

He wanted them to love intelligently (Philippians 1:9_b) because love must be correctly channeled (1st John 2:15-17). Emotion without knowledge is unhelpful (Romans 10:2). With knowledge and discernment (1st Thessalonians 5:21), the Philippian brethren could approve excellent things and do so sincerely (Philippians 1:10).

With abundant love, directed correctly, causing them to sincerely approve of what is excellent, the Philippians would be righteously fruitful (Philippians 1:11; cf. Proverbs 11:30; Ephesians 5:9; Matthew 7:16-20).

9. Name two benefits the apostle observed about his incarceration.

“But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear” (Philippians 1:12-14).

First, Paul had been told he would bear Christ’s name before gentiles and kings (Acts 9:15), and here he was under custody to Caesar (Philippians 4:22), where Caesar’s guards recognized he was not a mere criminal, but a prisoner for Jesus’ sake (1st Peter 4:15-16).

Second, the people of God need role models, exemplars of the faith (1st Timothy 4:12), whose courage will motivate others (James 5:10-11). And Paul had become exactly that!

Like Joseph, who knew God can turn adversity into blessings (Genesis 50:20), Paul saw the good even in prison.

10. Why was Paul rejoicing?

“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (Philippians 1:15-18).

He was joyful that Christ was being preached, regardless of motive. He is not at all approving of any sin whatsoever, so they must not have been speaking error. Only

their motives were flawed. If people with impure hearts were preaching the pure gospel, then new souls could be saved, even if the proclaimers would be judged.

The details of this strange situation are not articulated and cannot now be known specifically. They are irrelevant (Deuteronomy 29:29). The take-away is that Paul's skin was thick enough to shrug off animosity directed toward himself and his heart was big enough to love hearing the gospel being proclaimed no matter what.

11. What did he expect through their prayers and the *"supply of the Spirit?"*

"For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:19). "And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again" (Philippians 1:25-26).

Paul believed in the efficacy of prayer (James 5:16) and of faith (Mark 11:22-23). He trusted his release from prison would be forthcoming as a result.

12. *"Whether by life or by death,"* what did Paul intend?

"According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death" (Philippians 1:20).

He meant to magnify Christ no matter what. If he perished, he would do so as a martyr, glorifying Jesus. If he was released from prison, he would credit answered prayer. Either way, the Lord would be praised.

13. What did he perceive to be the benefits either of life or death?

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:21-24).

For some, life is a career or a sport or a hobby or some other temporary activity (2nd Corinthians 4:18), but for Paul, life is Christ! He perceived no greater purpose to existence under the sun than to serve the Son of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Acts 17:26-27). If his life persisted, there would be fruitful labor inasmuch as his brethren needed him.

Death, though, was gain! Death was not hopeless annihilation nor terror-stricken judgment, but a reward to be received (2nd John 8). Departure would put him *“with Christ.”* Despite what many brethren insist on, that death means going to Hades to await final judgment, which may technically be true, that is not at all what Paul’s heart was set on! When he died, he wanted to be with the Lord and expected it confidently (2nd Corinthians 5:1-6).

14. What goals did he set before them?

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God” (Philippians 1:27-28).

1) Worthy conduct

- 2) Standing fast
- 3) Unity of spirit and mind
- 4) Striving for the gospel
- 5) Not terrified

15. What challenges lay before them?

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me” (Philippians 1:29-30).

What challenges they would face, all Christians must anticipate – suffering for His sake (1st Peter 4:13; 2nd Timothy 3:12). In their case, though, it was something God “granted” them because, like the apostles earlier, they were “worthy” (Acts 5:41), so it was something to “rejoice” about (Colossians 1:24; Matthew 5:10-12).