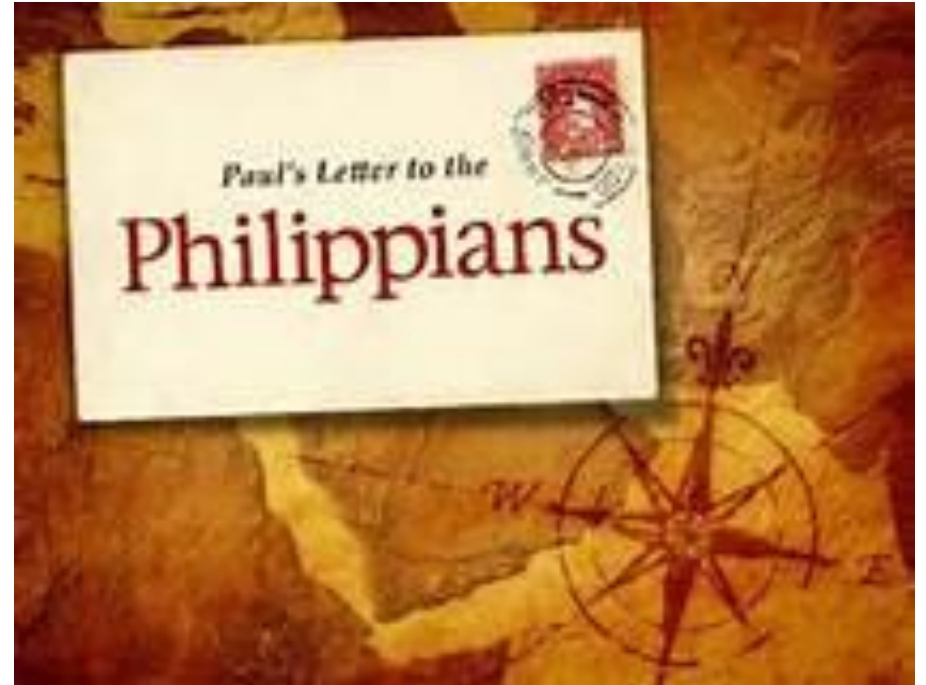


# Paul's Letter to the Philippians

**BIBLE CLASS #15**



## INTRODUCTION:

The Epistle of Paul and Timothy to the Philippians, often referred to simply as Philippians, is the eleventh book in the New Testament.

Philippi, in northeastern Greece, was a city of some importance in the Roman province of Macedonia. Lying on the great road from the Adriatic coast to Byzantium, the Via Egnatia, and in the midst of rich agricultural plains near the gold deposits of Mt. Pangaeus, it was in Paul's day a Roman town (Acts 16:21), with a Greek-Macedonian population and a small group of Jews (see Acts 16:13).

The area became Roman in the second century B.C. On the plains near Philippi in October 42 B.C., Antony and Octavian decisively defeated the forces of Brutus and Cassius, the slayers of Julius Caesar. Octavian (Augustus) later made Philippi a Roman colony and settled many veterans of the Roman armies there.

Paul, according to Acts (Acts 16:9–40), established at Philippi the first Christian community in Europe. He came to Philippi, via its harbor town of Neapolis (modern Kavalla), on his second missionary journey, probably in A.D. 49 or 50, accompanied by Silas and Timothy (Acts 15:40; 16:3; cf. Philippians 1:1) and Luke, if he is to be included in the “we” references of Acts 16:10–17.





### **AUTHORSHIP:**

Biblical scholars are in general agreement that the letter was indeed written by Paul of Tarsus. The introduction also makes that clear: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1 1-2).

### **WHEN & WHERE WAS IT WRITTEN (& CONTEXT):**

Paul's letter to the Christians at Philippi was written while he was in a prison somewhere (Philippians 1:7, 13, 14, 17), indeed in danger of death (Philippians 1:20–23).

Although under guard for preaching Christ, Paul rejoices at the continuing progress of the gospel (Philippians 1:12–26) and expresses gratitude for the Philippians' renewed concern and help in an expression of thanks most clearly found at Philippians 4:10–20. There has been ongoing debate regarding where Paul was when he wrote this letter (and therefore the date of the letter's composition). The location of Paul's imprisonment, and thus the date of the letter, are uncertain. The traditional view has been that it stems from Paul's confinement in Rome, between A.D. 59 and 63 (cf. Acts 28:14–31). One modern view suggests the period when he was imprisoned at Caesarea, on the coast of Palestine, A.D. 57 or 58 (Acts 23:23–26:32); another suggests Corinth (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:9). Much recent scholarship favors Ephesus, around A.D. 55, a situation referred to in 2 Corinthians 1:8 concerning "the affliction that came to us" in Asia Minor (cf. also 1 Corinthians 15:32). The reference at Philippians 1:13 to the "praetorium" (cf. also Philippians 4:22) can be understood to mean the imperial guard or government house at Ephesus (or Caesarea), or the praetorian camp in Rome. It has also been pointed out by experts that there are the several journeys back and forth between Philippi and wherever Paul is imprisoned, mentioned in the letter (Philippians 2:25–28; 4:14); this factor causes many to prefer Ephesus because of its proximity to Philippi.

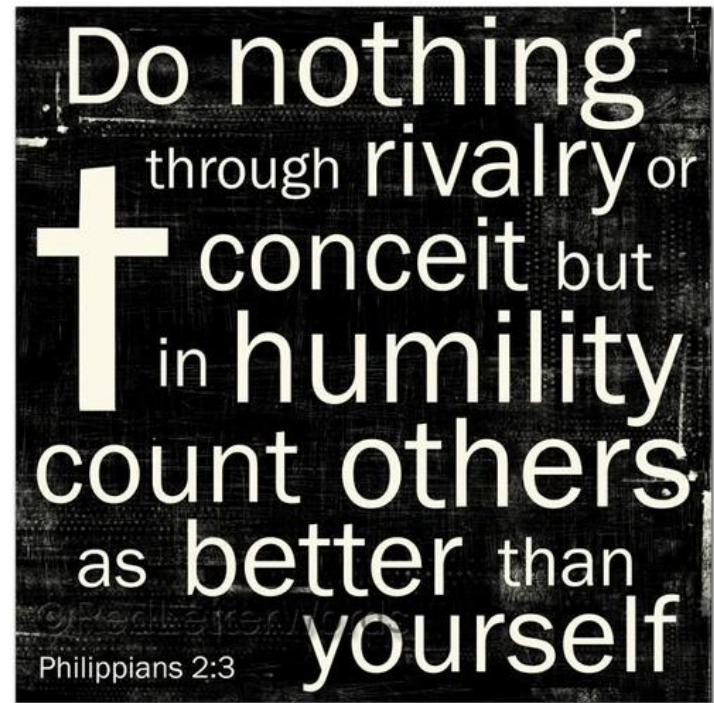
## OVERVIEW:

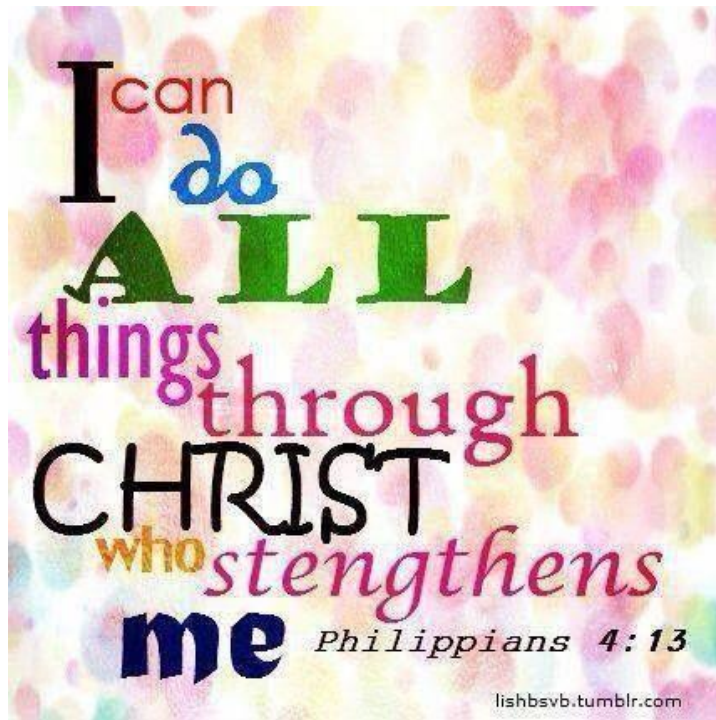
This beautiful letter is rich in insights into Paul's theology and his apostolic love and concern for the gospel and his converts. In *Philippians*, Paul reveals his human sensitivity and tenderness, his enthusiasm for Christ as the key to life and death (*Philippians 1:21*), and his deep feeling for those in Christ who dwell in Philippi.

The *Acts of the Apostles* tells us many things about Paul's relationship and ministry with the Philippians: it tells of the conversion of a business woman, Lydia (*Acts 16: 14*), who is regarded as the first documented convert to Christianity in Europe; the exorcism of a slave girl (*Acts 16: 16*); and, after an earthquake, while Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Philippi, the faith and baptism of a jailer and his family (*Acts 16: 22-31*).

None of these persons, however, is directly mentioned in *Philippians*. *Acts 16* concludes its account by describing how Paul (and Silas), asked by the magistrates to leave Philippi, went on to Thessalonica (*Acts 17: 1-10*), where several times his loyal Philippians continued to support him with financial aid (*Philippians 4: 16*). Later, Paul may have passed through Philippi on his way from Ephesus to Greece (*Acts 20:1-2*), and he definitely stopped there on his fateful trip to Jerusalem (*Acts 20:6*).

Much of the letter is devoted to instruction about unity and humility within the Christian community at Philippi (*Philippians 1:27-2:18*). Paul's desire for the Philippians is expressed on the 1st Chapter: *"And this is my prayer: that your love may increase ever more and more in knowledge and every kind of perception, to discern what is of value, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God"* (*Philippians 1: 9-11*).





Chapter 2 is a powerful plea for Plea for Unity and Humility: *“If there is any encouragement in Christ, any solace in love, any participation in the Spirit, any compassion and mercy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, with the same love, united in heart, thinking one thing. Do nothing out of selfishness or out of vainglory; rather, humbly regard others as more important than yourselves, each looking out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others. Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.*

*Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”.* (Philippians 2 1-11).

The letter seems to be drawing to a close at the end of what we number as Philippians 2, as Paul reports the plans of his helper Timothy (Paul’s disciple, and later his constant companion and co-worker in preaching), and of Epaphroditus (assistant to Paul and was the first Bishop at Philippi), (both of whom the Philippians had sent to aid Paul) to come to Philippi (Philippians 2:19–3:1), and even Paul’s own expectation that he will go free and come to Philippi (Philippians 1:25–26; 2:24)\*. At Philippians 3:2, Paul issues warnings against false teachers who threaten to impose on the Philippians the burdens of the Mosaic law, including circumcision. The section that follows, Philippians 3:2–21, is a vigorous attack on these Judaizers (cf. Galatians 2:11–3:29) or Jewish Christian teachers (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:12–23).

It gives us insights into Paul's own life story & 'autobiography' (Philippians 3:4–6) and into the doctrine of justification, the Christian life, and ultimate hope (Philippians 3:7–21). It tells them (and us) where our true citizenship is: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we also await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ". (Philippians 3: 20), Christians constitute a colony of heaven, as Philippi was a 'colonia' of Rome (Acts 16:12). It contains exhortations to growth, joy, and peace in their life together (Philippians 4:1–9).

Philippians consist of 4 chapters.

### **OUTLINE & CONTENT OF PHILIPPIANS:**

The principal outline and content of the Letter to the Philippians are the following:

- I. Address (1:1–11)
- II. Progress of the Gospel (1:12–26)
- III. Instructions for the Community (1:27–2:18)
- IV. Travel Plans of Paul and His Assistants (2:19–3:1)
- V. Polemic: Righteousness and the Goal in Christ (3:2–21)
- VI. Instructions for the Community (4:1–9)
- VII. Gratitude for the Philippians' Generosity (4:10–20)
- VIII. Farewell (4:21–23)

Do not be anxious  
about anything, but  
in everything, by  
prayer and petition,  
with thanksgiving,  
present your requests  
to God.

-Philippians 4:6

## **RESOURCES USED AND RECOMENDED:**

- NAB Bible, at: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>
- Agape Bible Study at: [http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape\\_Bible\\_Studies\\_Menu.php](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Agape_Bible_Studies_Menu.php)
- Agape Bible Study Lessons for the Letter of Paul to the Romans  
At: [http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Romans/Romans\\_Menu.php](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/Romans/Romans_Menu.php)
- Pauline Chronology: The Life and Missionary Work of St. Paul of Tarsus. Material provided by Rev. Felix Just, S.J. at:  
[http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline\\_Chronology.htm](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/Pauline_Chronology.htm)
- New Testament Letter Structure, from Catholic Resources by Felix Just, S.J. At:  
[http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT\\_Letters.htm#Edited](http://catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT_Letters.htm#Edited)

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