

# Philippians Bible Study

Prepared by Alex Jordan at Lutheran Church of the Savior, Bedford, MA. Nov. 1-22, 2020.

## Week 1 - Intro and Context

Teaser: who here supports missionaries? If you do, you likely get a “prayer letter”, or a ministry update, or a sweet coffee mug every couple of years. Imagine if you got a whole Epistle!

This month, we’re going to study Philippians. There are four chapters, each of which is a gem, and we’ll try to do one each week. Today, we’ll start with an outline of the whole book, then dig into Chapter 1. Ready? Let’s go!

The Basics:

- Who wrote this letter, and to whom did he write it?
- Why did Paul write it?
- What are the major themes of the letter?

Where is Philippi?



Philippi was originally settled by settlers from Thrace in 360 BC, and was called Krenides (“Fountains”) until 356 BC, when Phillip II of Macedon (father of Alexander the Great) conquered it and renamed it Philippi. By Paul’s time, it had been conquered by the Romans and resettled by Octavian’s veterans from the Roman Civil War, which resulted in Octavian becoming the Emperor Augustus. Emperor Claudius began a rebuilding campaign in Philippi around 49 AD, as it was an important trade city on the routes to the Black Sea (*Via Egnatia*).

Importantly, people who lived there were Roman citizens, and there was an imperial garrison. This was an outpost of imperial power, and the main religion in the city was the cult of the Divine Caesars (at least until Paul showed up).

To me, one of the more interesting things about Philippians is that we know a *lot* about the church that he's writing to. Let's flip to Acts 16:

- The scene: Paul and his ministry team are on their second missionary journey (49-51 AD), and they are prevented "by the Spirit of Jesus" from entering Asian Minor. Paul has a vision of a man from Macedonia begging him for help - so they pack up shop and head to Macedonia.
- They land in Neapolis and then to Philippi, the leading city of the region. On the Sabbath, they head out to the river to see if they can find any Jews to talk to. This means that there were fewer than 10 Jewish men in the entire city -- otherwise, there would have been a synagogue. So this is a little different than the other places where Paul goes to the synagogue and reasons with the people who meet there.
- They get into some trouble in Philippi: they cast a demon out of a fortune telling slave, and then get attacked by the men who own her for wrecking their business plan. They get thrown in jail. Later that night, there's an earthquake that springs open the doors of the prison, and the jailer is about to kill himself. Instead, Paul stops him and gives him the Gospel - and he becomes a God-follower!
- The magistrates release them, and *then* find out that Paul and Silas are Roman citizens. In a Roman city, this is a big deal - it means they were flogged and imprisoned without a trial, so they hustle Paul and Silas out of town.
- Paul comes back during his third missionary journey, and has a continued relationship with the people of Philippi

There's some debate about where and when the letter was written - it's definitely from jail, but it's either in Rome in the early 60s, or Ephesus in the early 50s. Some modern academics tend to favor Rome in the early 60s, but church history, tradition, and Biblical scholars favor the Ephesian interpretation. It gets... pretty academic.

But what we do know, from the letter itself, is that the church in Philippi had raised money and sent it to Paul in the care of a believer named Epaphroditus to support him while he was in jail. Paul is very grateful for this gift, and writes them this lovely thank you letter in return. In it, he not only thanks the Philippians for their generosity, he also gives them some words of encouragement, some words of warning, and writes them one of the finest pieces of early Christian poetry that we have. Throughout the whole letter, Paul is emphasizing one major theme: believers are given a precious gift in Christ, and in response, we should live a life worthy of the Gospel.

Let's get to it!

# Overview and Chapter 1

Philippians is a *letter of friendship* - basically, a thank you note, with some incredible theology thrown in for good measure. There are a handful of major themes, arranged something like this:

- Opening (1:1-11)
- Missionary Report (1:12-26)
- A Call to Sanctification (1:27 - 2:30)
- “Doctrinal Polemics” (after Silva) or “Further Exhortations” (after LSB) (3:1 - 4:1)
- Thanksgiving and Greetings (4:2 - 4:23)

Today, we’re going to cover the opening and the missionary report. Next week is Chapter 2, which contains the great Christ Hymn, which is maybe the earliest statement we have about the nature of Jesus: fully God, yet also fully man. This is probably the spiciest meatball on the plate, so make sure you come next week, and then the next two weeks after that to see if I was right.

## Let’s read Philippians 1: 1 - 2

Paul structures this letter like a letter you’d write to a friend. In fact, one of the reasons scholars like Philippians so much is that it’s a great example that matches a lot of other letters of friendship that we have from antiquity. They all start with the same formula: <sender> <receiver> *chairein*, (which means “greeting”). Paul gets tricky here and uses *charis* instead, which means “grace”, and then adds on “peace”, and the source of both of those: God.

You’ll notice too here that Paul uses the term “saints in Christ Jesus” -- Jesus is not just the object of loyalty and devotion. He’s also somehow the glue that holds the church together. It’s not that the people he’s writing to are all Mother Teresa mixed with St. Francis, or that they’re already perfect... their perfection is bound up in Christ. “It remains undiminished in Christ while standing in tension with their lesser selves on earth.” (Hunsinger:3).

Interestingly here, Paul also calls out the “overseers and the deacons”. Some commentators have argued that this means that the early church had hierarchical ‘offices’ (and we know they eventually did, but not yet), and others have argued that this is a functional description of what people in the church were doing. I agree with Silva that it’s most likely a combination of buttering them up for the rebuke they’re going to get later, and also a recognition of the fact that they were probably the ones who led the capital campaign for the offering.

After the greeting is out of the way, Paul launches into an opening prayer, as he does in many of his letters. Let’s read **Phil. 1:3-11**

Ok - are you confused by 3-5? It’s ok - the Greek is apparently... Greek to everyone who reads it<sup>1</sup>. The translation into English is a little awkward, but what Paul is saying here is that he loves

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<sup>1</sup> Funnily enough - the phrase “It’s Greek to me” probably comes from medieval monks who couldn’t read Greek very well. They used to copy manuscripts, and write it in the margin when they couldn’t figure out what it said! The modern phrasing comes from Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

the church in Philippi, and that he is incredibly grateful for their partnership in ministry. He's also encouraging them -- (re-read v6) -- in light of uncertainty and anxiety. The commentators all remark that it seems like Paul is trying to sooth anxiety he sees in the church in Philippi. Maybe they're suffering for their convictions, maybe they're being ostracised by their families, maybe they're starting to ask themselves, "Is this all really worth it?". What does Paul tell them? He appeals to the faithfulness of God.

*The apostle is at least sure of one thing: the faithful should look on their hardships in light of the gospel, not the other way around. This policy is the benchmark of his evangelical realism. It is not their hardships that contradict the gospel, he believes, but the gospel that contradicts their hardships. ... The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has triumphed over death and the things that make for death. The promise of the gospel is not that the faithful will be spared hardships but that they will be sustained in the midst of their afflictions... Above all, God will not abandon the work of His hands.*  
~ Hunsinger, p. 12

So, *What does Paul pray for the church in Philippi? Why does he want that for the church, and not something like missionary zeal, financial health, or something else?*

- Central concern is *knowledge that cultivates love* (Silva:50)
- Total sanctification: what they have now in part will be brought to full fruit for the day of Christ
  - Not "filled with righteousness", since they're already saints! But instead, the *fruit* of righteousness, fulfilling the gift of their calling (Hunsinger:16)
- Approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless... Be wise and discerning, and put what you learn into practice!

If you compare all of the other introductions to his letters, most of them start with some sort of prayer of thanksgiving. However, there are two special things about this one -- Philippians and Philemon are the only ones where Paul uses the word *joy* and the only ones where he uses the word *koinonia*. This is important, as it's different from his shout-outs to the Romans and Thessalonians, where he thanks them for contributing to the advance of the faith. It's only here that he commends a church for "partnering" or "fellowshipping" in the gospel. It's an active faith, as evidenced by their gifts for the advance of the gospel, and Paul is glad to see it!

At this point, Paul gets on to the ministry update. Let's read **Phil. 1:12-18**

- Paul is in *jail* - how can he be filled with joy?

The Philippians are really worried about Paul. This is like hearing that the pastor who founded your church and has been your shepherd for years is now in jail. They need some reassurance. What good things does Paul see coming out of the challenges he's facing?

- It's advancing the Gospel (how?)
- The imperial guard has been witness to his imprisonment, and knows it's for Christ
- The other brothers are boldly speaking the word without fear

- Christ is being proclaimed!

You know what's awesome? In the Greek, this isn't "it happened in spite of the challenges" -- it's "it happened *because* of the challenges". This isn't some consolation prize for being in chains... it's the whole point. Because it's God at work, Paul can rejoice in it!

Who do you think these people are in v15 that he's talking about? The commentaries I read seem to suggest that it's people who were trying to use Paul's imprisonment as an opportunity to grow their own factions and circles of influence within the church. Even in *this* Paul rejoices, because the gospel is being advanced.

Ok - Paul is not usually such a Pollyanna. What's going on?

### **Let's read Phil. 1:18-26.**

Paul's circumstances do not determine his attitude!

- Joy in Salvation (18-20)
  - What is the *this* that's going to turn out for his deliverance? What's he being delivered from? (v19)
    - It's ambiguous in the text -- some commentators think it means just his current imprisonment, but I think it's pretty clear that he means his perseverance in faith. (compare with 2 Timothy 4:6-8)
  - How is this going to turn out all right?
    - The prayers of his brothers in Philippi
    - The continued work of the Holy Spirit
    - Even Paul's personal growth does not take place in isolation from the church! In fact, the Spirit works often through the *koinonia* of fellow-believers!
- Death is no threat (21-24)
  - v21 is one of *those verses* -- it's on t-shirts, bookmarks, tombstones, etc.
  - Paul isn't sure he's going to make it out of this alive. Is he concerned? *Why?*
  - Paul's pretty sure he knows how this is going to end up, though. What's he think, and why?
  - "Whether hidden or revealed, whether in suffering or in glory, whether in this world or in the age to come... Paul belongs to Christ and Christ belongs to God." (Hunsinger:22)
- Words of Reassurance (25-26)
  - Paul doesn't want to leave the Philippians hanging, so he encourages them with an assurance:
    - I will remain and return to you
    - For joy and the progression of your faith
    - The abounding glory of Christ through Paul's work with them

Should Christians live dour and sad lives now, and wait to be happy in Heaven? NO!

And now, we get to Paul's overture: **let's read 1:27-30**. This will form the theme for the rest of the letter, so pay attention!

Are you excited? This is the good stuff, friends -- someone read v27 again. In these verses, Paul is raising the battlecry! Whether he makes it back or not, whether he dies in captivity or not, *stand firm in the Gospel!* There are adversaries who wish to do you harm, and there are circumstances that will grind you down, but these things are proof of the gospel at work within you.

## Week 2 - Phil. 1:27 - 2:30

Opening: start with a picture of Paul's prison in Philippi

Last week, we talked about Philippi, and the situation the church found itself in. Paul was imprisoned, the people in Philippi were worried about him, and they sent him money to aid him while he's in prison. Paul, as a way of saying thank you, and updating them on his ministry, sends them this letter. We got some good time on the first chapter up through 1:26, and we focused primarily on Paul's attitude. The key concept we talked about was that Paul's circumstances do not dictate his attitude. As Pastor Manor said so well: "pain is inevitable -- misery is optional"

As we continue into the next section, we see Paul's call to arms. He has just given the Philippians the overview of his current situation, laid out his prayers for the church, and now, we're going to launch into the sermon. Let's read: **Philippians 1:27 - 2:4**

Last week, I referred to this passage as Paul's *overture* - in here, he gives us the main theme of the letter and shows us a glimpse of what's on his heart. The phrase that's translated "manner of life" here is a neat Greek word *politeuesthe* -- it's the idea of "living as a citizen", same root as *polis*, a city/nation. You might also translate this as "Behave like citizens of heaven, in a manner worthy of the gospel". As a Roman outpost in the Macedonian countryside, the Philippians were proud of their Roman citizenship - they were exempt from some types of taxes, they spoke Latin (not Greek) in their official duties, and they had rights that were different than those of the people around them. Paul is contrasting that kind of citizenship with heavenly citizenship, a theme to which he'll return in a couple chapters.

What specifically is he praying for these people?

- 1) Standing firm in the Spirit
- 2) Not frightened of anything

Why is this what he's praying for, rather than success in missionary work, favor among the people, material blessing, etc.?

How will the people in Philippi know that they're on the right path? What's the "sign of their salvation" that Paul refers to?

So how are they supposed to bear up under this persecution and trial? *In Christ*.

The next section of the letter describes how this is going to happen -- they follow Christ's example, in the unity that our new life together in Him provides.

In v. 1 - 4, Paul is talking about how this "life worthy of the Gospel" might look. What are some of the features of the community when it's living in that promise? What might that look like in our church here in Bedford in 2020?

What are the key characteristics of the believers that will make this life together work?

What's the glue that holds the whole thing together? CHRIST!

At this point, Paul gives us a beautiful example of the humility to which we aspire. It's the life of Jesus, the perfect example of humility. **Let's read v. 5 - 11**, the "Christ Hymn" of great repute.

There are huge swaths of commentary about this passage, and I'd encourage you to engage with them as you have interest. For the sake of this study, though, we'll focus on how it fits into the rest of Philippians. Here, Paul is using this passage as a way to inspire the Philippians to a higher calling through the example of Christ.

Think about it this way: Jesus is subjecting himself to a series of humiliations. As one of the three persons of the Trinity, Jesus is the self-existent and almighty being, the very Form (*morphe*) of God - the I AM. Yet, instead of using his divinity as a way to avoid the incarnation, he *fully emptied himself*, adopting the *morphe* of a servant. And it wasn't just that he took on the nature of mankind - he also took on the likeness and appearance of man. He wasn't a glowing avatar that was shaped like a person, not a magical human-shaped godling, but in *fact* a man. This is not a change in degree - this is a complete change of ontological category! And he didn't stop there -- he didn't come as a king, or an emperor, or even a prince, as would have been his right. Instead, he came as a lowly carpenter's son, in a backwater town, in a dusty corner of the Empire. And STILL he didn't stop! As God, he could have lived a worthy life, taught in the synagogue, and become a great philosopher of wisdom. Instead, he even humbled himself to death, "even death on a cross".

This complete abasement then becomes the basis for Christ's exaltation in v9 - 11. Ironically, by going from the absolute highest position (the Godhead), down to the lowest position, Jesus Christ comes fully into His Name: Jesus ("Salvation of the Lord") Christ (the anointed one). Names, especially in ancient times, were describers of those who carried them. (E.g.: Thomas called Didymus -- the Twin), and in the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, Jesus embodies the highest attributes of God: love, exhibited through self-sacrifice.

As the Formula of Concord says, "After His resurrection, He entirely laid aside the form of a servant, but not the human nature, and was established in the full use, manifestation, and declaration of the divine majesty. In this way, He entered into His glory."

Now, from the passage... to what end has God done this? (v11)

Let's read Isaiah 45:18-25 -- this is the triumph that Paul is alluding to. Think of the implications when we apply this passage to Jesus!

So now... what does this mean for us, day to day? Helpfully, Paul tells us. We are to live in the light of the Gospel. Let's read **Phil. 2: 12-18**



Let's take this apart and talk it through. What is Paul encouraging the Philippians to?

There's been a lot of ink spilled talking about what it means to "work out your salvation in fear and trembling". Paul *clearly* does not mean that we are adding anything to our salvation. Instead, he's talking about carrying to its conclusion, or living out the consequences of our salvation. In the Bible, "salvation" is not limited merely to the act of being made right before God (our justification) -- it also includes our continued growth in holiness (our *sanctification*).

And the fear and trembling is not being afraid of God's judgment. I love what Lenski says here:

He is assuring the Christian readers that, in their complete dependence on God for their salvation, this God will never, never disappoint them but by working in them by means of Word and Sacrament will ever bring them to keep on in their willing and to keep on in their working... There is no uncertainty, no fear and trembling before God but only gospel assurance that he is the very One to supply all that we need to keep willing as well as working. This is not to present God as the Judge who holds us to our accountability, but this invites us to God as the unfailing source of all the power and the supply we need.

The key here is that even our own good works are from God: "it is God who works in you!"

So now we talk about some specific instructions: what do you see here?

The final one is my favorite: "Likewise, you also should be glad and rejoice with me."

At this point, Paul returns to his missionary update. There are a lot of interesting things here that we don't have time to dig into, but suffice it to say, Paul gives Timothy a glowing recommendation, and sends Epaphroditus back to the Philippians.

## Week 3 - Phil. 3:1 - 4:1

Last week, we read through (most) of Philippians 2, where we got to see a glimpse into Paul's heart -- his desire for the believers in Philippi, the example that Christ set for them, and the consequences of that example in how they should live. Paul gives us "The Christ Hymn", which lays out the path that Jesus takes from Godhead to humiliation on the Cross and back to glory. At the very heart of it, Paul repeats himself - "Likewise, you should also be glad and rejoice with me!" He rejoices because his circumstances do not dictate his emotions!

It was an action-packed week, and I hope it gave you some good things to think about during the week.

Let's open with a word of prayer...

Alright... so Paul opens chapter 3, at the midpoint of his letter, with a rather optimistic "finally". It seems like a rather abrupt change of topic, from the commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus to leap into what seems like a left turn into theological musings, but I think as we read it, it should become clear that this is part and parcel of what Paul has been talking about all along. In fact, I suspect Paul was intending to end the letter here and had a "oh wait - I forgot to tell them about..." moment, and ended up writing another two full chapters. It's like listening to a sermon where the pastor hits his high note, the major application point... and then you hear "Now brothers and sisters, what does this mean?" and you know you better buckle up for the second half of the sermon. Or like the end of *The Lord of the Rings* -- Erin knows what I'm talking about!

Anyway, let's read the first section here. Can someone **read 3:1 - 3:6**, someone else **read 3:7 - 3:12**?

Ok - so, Paul's going to launch into one of his favorite topics here. He starts off with a simple command - "rejoice in the Lord"! What could be easier?

What's this business about mutilators of the flesh? It's not clear from the letter itself, but given the context of Paul's other letters (e.g., Galatians, 2 Corinthians), we suspect that it's a series of false teachers who call themselves Christians, but put fellow believers back under the yoke of the law.

I think what Silva says here is really instructive: "Paul, therefore, is making a startling point: the great reversal brought in by Christ means that it is the Judiazers who must be regarded as Gentiles." By insisting on the circumcision (by which we assume Paul means the whole set of Mosaic laws about ritual cleanliness, not *just* circumcision itself), the Judiazers have forsaken the Gospel and put themselves outside the covenant. In fact, their greatest source of pride (ritual cleanliness) is just pointless self-mutilation when done as an act of self-righteousness.

What are the characteristics of the *true* followers of God?

Now why does Paul launch into this business about confidence in the flesh? Why is this such a big deal?

- Circumcised in the precise manner commanded in the Law
- He's a native born son of Abraham - not a convert rejecting a Law he doesn't like
- He's from the tribe of Benjamin, the only ones who stuck with David's line when Judah and Israel split -- he's OG Jewish
- His family couldn't be accused of being Hellenized ("Greekified"), polluted by outside philosophies
- He studied with Gamaliel, the leading Pharisee of the day (the Harvard of Jewishness)
- *Faultless* under the Law. 100% on the entrance exam, close the book

You could go back to Jerusalem and ask Paul's friends growing up if these things were true. They're objective facts - and nobody could argue that the only reason he became a Christian was because he was a failed Jew.

Here's the \$100,000 question - *why did Paul become a Christian?*

**Because he met Jesus!**

Can someone re-read 3:7 - 3:11? The Silva commentary calls this "The Essence of Pauline Theology" with good reason -- in five short verses, we're going to get his doctrine of justification (how we're made right with God), his experience of sanctification (how we're made holy in Christ), and his hope for the resurrection (how we're made alive forever in Christ). Buckle up, friends - here we go!

Did you catch that in v. 8? He doesn't say Christ Jesus -- he says "Christ Jesus, my Lord". This is an intensely personal passage, and it's in fact the only place in his letters that Paul says *my* Lord. Paul isn't talking about some abstract theological nuance of the particular meaning of some Aramaic term -- he's speaking directly from his heart, pouring it out for the Philippians to see.

There's a progression in Paul's thinking here: (again, this is from Silva, whose commentary is remarkable)

The Old Life	The New Life
Whatever things I have reckoned a loss	For Christ!
I reckon these things loss	For the value of knowing Christ
I have lost <i>all</i> things	For Christ
I reckon them rubbish / dung	That I may gain Christ

Paul is crying out here the words of Jesus from Matthew 16:26 -- “what profit will a man have if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?” He’s also echoing the parables of the man who sells all he has to buy the buried treasure or the great pearl. Paul’s not just adjusting the deck chairs of his life - he has undergone a total conversion experience.

Now, friends, we get to see what Paul has spent all his treasure to buy: “IN ORDER THAT I MAY GAIN CHRIST”!

- **Justification** -- I’m made right with God by the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith
  - This righteousness can’t come from anywhere else -- the Law can’t do it, our own goodness can’t do it -- it has to come from Christ
  - And it’s not just “justification by faith” -- it’s “being found in Christ”, a union with Him, founded on His work of salvation
- **Sanctification:** since we’re united with Him, we become more and more like Him
  - The verb “know” here has special meaning - it’s not just intellectual assent, but it’s
  - Compare with Romans 6: Dead to Sin, Alive in Christ
- **Glorification:** We look forward to the resurrection, alive in Christ forever!
  - Compare with Rom 8:17 “we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him”

So now what? What do we do? What do our lives look like now?

### Let’s read v. 12 - 4:1

It’s all nice and good to talk about suffering with Christ, in the abstract. How do we handle this in the concrete, in the now? What does Paul tell us to do?

- Press on toward the goal
- Fight the fight
- Stay the course

What’s Paul’s goal that he’s pressing for? And why is he confident that the race is worth it? V12

Hold firm, stand fast, and trust God to reveal to you the path forward.

Now, Paul has just said that all this personal righteousness stuff is bunkum. Why does he immediately return to what looks like prescriptions on the behavior of believers?

- Being ruled by their flesh can mean a whole variety of things - but it’s likely either libertines, who “take the low road” (e.g., Col 3:2 “set your mind on what is above not on what is on the earth”, or even maybe still the Judiazers and their ilk who are more concerned with what goes into the belly than with what comes out of the heart (e.g., Matt. 15).
- Either way, these people are not living a life worthy of the Gospel to which they’ve been called -- Paul’s main point in this letter. If they put their hope in the things of the flesh, or in the pleasures of the world, they’re going to get what they deserve.

Instead, we are called to live out our citizenship which is in Heaven! There are so many parallels you can draw here to Jesus's parables -- the bridesmaids waiting for the groom, the king who goes to the far-off country while his servants manage his kingdom, etc.

What does it mean for us that our citizenship is in Heaven, and not of this world?

By what hope and assurance can we live as citizens of heaven? The power of Christ!

4:1 is one of the *great* Pauline THEREFOREs in all of scripture. THEREFORE, dear ones, who I love and long for; THEREFORE, the ones in whom I'll rejoice before my Father in heaven, THEREFORE, STAND FIRM THUS IN THE LORD.

What a great promise for us to start the week!

## Week 4 - Phil. 4:2 - End

Last week, we read Philippians 3, “the heart of Paul’s theology”. That was verses 7-11, which are worth reading again:

*7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*

Awesome, huh?

We also looked at what this means for our lives. We talked about striving toward the goal, standing firm in the faith, and living lives that shine in the darkness around us. Inspiring stuff!

At this point, Paul is going to talk brass tacks - there are some things that need to be addressed, and now that we all have a baseline of what it means to be alive in Christ, to count everything else as loss, and to stand firm in the faith, Paul can do some pruning. Like many of the last chapters of Paul’s letters, this one’s a little scatter-shot, but if we look closely, there’s a theme that binds the whole thing together. See if you can spot it as we read!

Let’s open with a word of prayer, and then dig into Chapter 4.

Could someone please read **4:2 - 3**?

<Record scratch> Have you ever gotten into an interpersonal conflict so bad that people were talking about it 2000 years later? That’s apparently what we have here - two women, Euodia and Syntyche are on the outs, and Paul entreats them to agree. On what basis can they do this? Why is this sufficient grounds, even for a serious disagreement?

Something interesting here that Silva and Dumit both point out is that there are other people who have a role to play. Who are they, and what role do they have?

At the end of v3, Paul mentions something important that all believers share, and can lend some much-needed perspective in conflict. What is it? Why does it matter?

Ok. Let’s read **4:4-7**.

Under what circumstances should a Christian be joyful? Where does that joy come from?

If you're wondering about that word "reasonableness", other translations give a sense of what Paul's talking about: "forbearing spirit", "gentleness", "not being a jerk" -- it's the idea of living at peace with the people around you. We are called to be people of peace, and we can do that because we belong to Christ!

Our world is suffering from a tidal wave of anxiety and fear, especially in 2020. What's Paul's prescription for that anxiety? What's the promise that comes from that prescription?

Have you ever had an experience of that kind of peace? Anyone want to share their story about it?

How do we engage in that kind of prayer? What does it look like in our lives in 2020 in Massachusetts during a lockdown?

Let's read **4:8-9**.

In this little snippet, I think what we're seeing are a couple of practical ways to live lives of peace. If you track the self-help literature, there's a huge emphasis on mindfulness, living lives of thanksgiving, etc. You may see it on Facebook with things like 30 days of thankfulness, where people post something they're thankful for every day in November. Paul is like 20 centuries ahead of Facebook here -- what we think about and the people we follow *shape how our minds work!* This is super important! If you feed your brain junk, you shouldn't be surprised with what you get!

How can we "think about these things"? What does that look like today? Not "times like these", but in fact, November 22nd, 2020 at 3:49 PM, EST? How can we help each other with this?

Let's read **4:10-13**.

How can Paul be content in all things? How does Paul know? What can we learn from this?

Let's read **4:14-20**. This is weird when you read it with 21st century eyes, but if you think about it in its original context, it makes a lot more sense. Paul is trying to thread a very fine line here - he's trying to help the Philippians understand that the gift they sent was very valuable to him, without making them feel like they need to send him more! The way I read this, he's essentially saying something like "I *knew* that God would provide for me, somehow. I'm so happy, for your sake, that He used you to do it! And you know what? God knows that you've sacrificed to provide for me, and He'll honor that sacrifice."

I don't think there's a lot more to it than that. What do you think?

Can someone please read the last verses? **4:21-23**.

This is a beautiful Pauline sign-off - we're done!

## Recap

So, as we look back over the entire book of Philippians, what are some of the themes that jumped out at you?

For me, the major theme is "IN CHRIST". We talked about joy, about unity, about justification, about sanctification, about how it's all going to end up in the end, and it's always *In Christ*.

I think another key theme from the letter is that in our new life in Christ, our circumstances do not determine our attitude. As the Pastor says, "Pain is inevitable -- misery is optional". I'm going to get that tattooed on my forehead!

Any other closing thoughts on the book at large?

I've really enjoyed this study, and I hope that your faith has been encouraged, challenged, and inspired. Paul's letters are gold mines, each and every one, but I have really loved reading Philippians with you all.

Join us next week as we start a new study on the life of Joseph, "Carpenter of Steel". Dave, would you like to say a few words to inspire the crew?



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