

Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson

September 5, 2021

Paul's Letter to Philippi

God's Work at Philippi

Situational Context: Paul writes from prison, but the location of the imprisonment is a matter of discussion. Some think he wrote from Ephesus, though Acts 19 says nothing of his being imprisoned during his lengthy Ephesian ministry. A stronger case can be made for his having written the letter during his imprisonment in Caesarea (Acts 23 -26). But it is probable, in accord with long-standing tradition, that Paul wrote Philippians during the Roman imprisonment described in Acts 28 and that he did so toward the end of this period, around A.D. 61. His references to the "imperial guard" (1:13) and "Caesar's household" (4:22) accord best with a Roman setting, and the language of 1:7–26 suggests legal proceedings at the highest level.

Letter themes: Paul's Affection for these saints; joy, The Trinity; Christ's humility, justification by grace through faith, and the discerning Christian life.

Lesson Theme: Philippians 1:3-8, The faith and growth of the church at Philippi demonstrates God's faithfulness to grow His church and sustain it in the physical absence of the apostolic founder, the Apostle Paul. Paul is convinced that the spiritual condition of the church evidenced by their faithfulness to the gospel, the fruit of regeneration, and their support for Paul personally in prison that they are an authentic work of God. Paul is reassured that God has got this and will move the church to further maturity.

1. A Sanctified Work: Philippians 1:1-2 (ESV) ¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:** ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Interpretation: Timothy, present at the founding of the Philippian church, is known to the readers. Elsewhere Paul calls himself "an apostle" and Timothy "our brother". A "servant" is a slave. Timothy is like a son to Paul, but both are under Christ the Lord. In Christ Jesus is one of Paul's favorite ways of describing the believer's union with Christ. This phrase occurs ten times in Philippians. Grace and peace describe a concise expression of the effect of Christ's saving work, appear together in all thirteen of Paul's salutations. The common source of grace and peace is "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." He calls them Saints, which describe that God has set them apart for His service.

Supporting Texts:

2 Corinthians 1:1 (ESV) ¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:

Romans 1:7 (ESV) ⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 1:3-5 (ESV) ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

Discussion Starters:

What does the phrase servants of Jesus Christ mean practically?

Why might a cynic doubt Paul's sincerity?

What is the importance of the phrase "In Christ"?

2. A Growing Work: Philippians 1:3-8 (ESV) ³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. **⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Interpretation: Paul's memory of the Philippians prompts him to pray for them frequently ("in every prayer of mine") and gratefully ("I thank my God"). Joy is a dominant theme in Philippians. In speaking of your partnership, Paul is referring to the Philippians' financial support during his imprisonment. The word "gospel," Paul's favorite term for his message, occurs nine times in Philippians (more, proportionately, than in any other letter). Paul and the Philippians are bound together by their common commitment to the gospel. The perseverance of the saints depends upon God's preserving them by grace.

Supporting Texts:

Philippians 1:18 (ESV) ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

Psalms 57:2 (ESV) ² I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfills his purpose for me.

Psalms 138:8 (ESV) ⁸ The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 (ESV) ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

Discussion Starters:

How did Paul see them as partners?

What was the source of Paul's confidence?

Why might Paul have stated the first clause in verse 8?

What was the evidence of God's good work "in them"?

3. A Fruitful Work: Philippians 1:9-11 (ESV) ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Interpretation: Christian belief ("knowledge and all discernment") comes to expression in Christian love and in behavior that is "pure and blameless". The absence of love shows that supposed knowledge is worthless and love is itself knowledge of the deepest kind. Not only is the sinner justified through faith in Christ, but "the fruit of righteousness," or the righteous life that ensues, is also "through Jesus Christ" through the work of His Spirit, "to the glory and praise of God" the Father. All three Persons of the Godhead are active in the sanctification of believers.

Supporting Texts:

Philippians 3:9 (ESV) 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—

Galatians 5:22-23 (ESV) ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Colossians 1:9 (ESV) ⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Discussion Starters:

I his prayer that their love would grow, why does he add those qualifiers, knowledge, and discernment?