

(2) Philippians 1 vv.1-6

- This chapter begins with a brief *introduction*, greeting the saints at Philippi (**vv.1-2**).
- As is often the case, Paul makes *intercession* for the saints, being thankful to God for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (10 years) and prays for their spiritual development and blessing (**vv.3-11**).
- One of the purposes of this epistle was to give *information* about Paul's circumstances under house arrest. All that Paul has endured has turned out to the furtherance of the gospel (**vv.12-26**). His *inspiration* is Christ (v.21).
- The chapter closes with the first *imperative* of the epistle (v.27) which governs the whole letter. Paul is sure he will see the Philippians again (v.26). In the meantime, they are to live lives worthy of the gospel they preach (**vv.27-30**).

Paul's Introduction [vv.1-2]

v.1. Unusually, Paul does not begin this letter with a reference to his apostleship. This is the case in only *four* of his letters – the others being the epistles to the Thessalonians and Philemon (a personal letter). Both Thessalonica and Philippi were in Macedonia, where believers seem to have enjoyed a high level of mutual respect and affection with the Apostle – he is writing to supportive friends. Hence neither his apostolic authority or doctrine were being questioned and did not need to be re-asserted. Also, Philippians is a letter that emphasises humility – a character trait which the saints needed to exercise increasingly. Hence it would be inconsistent to assert his authority as Apostle. John Phillips writes, *“In this rare Epistle there was no doctrinal error to correct as in Galatians, and no gross carnality to rebuke as in 1 Corinthians. He was not breaking new theological ground. He was not stating one of the mysteries, as he did in his letter to the Ephesians... True, there were some family squabbles in Philippi, but he felt no need to invoke apostolic authority to deal with them. He was sure that a word to the wise would be sufficient.”*

Paul, his Roman name, means ‘little’ or ‘small’ and was perhaps a constant reminder of the grace of God that saved his soul – after all, he referred to himself as “the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3.8). Gromacki says, *“[the name Paul] manifested the change from the pride of Pharisaism to the humility of Christianity.”* Paul likely carried both his Jewish (Saul) and Roman (Paul) names from birth. In the early chapters of Acts, he is referred to as Saul until a transition in Acts 13.9. From this point, as in all his letters, the apostle is known as “Paul”. This is probably to stress his unique ministry and calling as the apostle to the Gentiles. The common misconception that his name was changed to Paul at conversion has no NT support. Even the Holy Spirit uses his Jewish name in Acts 13.2.

In this letter, Paul associates himself with **Timotheus**, as in *five* other epistles. In every other epistle, a clause is added between them, e.g. “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother”, (Colossians 1.1). But not here in Philippians – because in this epistle Paul is seeking to emphasise shoulder-to-shoulder fellowship in the gospel – both with Timothy (personally) and the Philippians (collectively). Timothy is mentioned in the salutation because he was well-known to the Philippians, having been a member of the missionary team that first brought the gospel to Philippi (Acts 16.1, 3; Philippians 2.22). Timothy was not, of course, the co-author of the epistle (cf. v.3). This was, rather, a gesture of friendship, with Timothy acting as a corroborating witness and/or amanuensis.

Paul describes both himself and Timothy as **the servants [doulos] of Jesus Christ** or “Christ Jesus” [RV]. Ironically, this is what the demon possessed damsel called Paul in Acts 16.17, “the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.” The word *doulos* refers to a person born into slavery – and describes willing, determined, and devoted service. Paul served God to the disregard of his own interests. GC Willis tells the story of a slave that was bought at a very high price. His new master took the chains from his hands and feet and said, “I bought you to set you free. You are a free man!” At which the freed slave was filled with such love and gratitude, he fell at the feet of his redeemer and cried, “I am your slave forever!” The bonds of love are stronger than bonds of steel (Exodus 21.5-6). Paul knew that the friction at Philippi could be cured by an attitude of humility, which attitude is manifested by serving others. Such an attitude is exemplified in this epistle by Christ (2.7), Paul (2.17), Timothy (2.22) and Epaphroditus (2.25). As a bondsman, Paul belonged to **Christ Jesus** – a high honour indeed. “Christ Jesus” refers to the *glory* of Christ, emphasising the exaltation of the One who once humbled Himself to become obedient unto death. In contrast, “Jesus Christ” emphasises His *grace*.

Paul writes to **all the saints**. It is possible Paul mentions “all” the saints because of disunity in the company. Paul is therefore modelling the kind of behaviour which does not take sides – his letter is for *all*. The word “saint” [*hagios*] means ‘holy’, describing what is dedicated or consecrated to the service of God. This is the positional standing of every believer before God. And what we are in position, God expects of us in practice. The saints are **in Christ Jesus** – their *spiritual* location and status, and **at Philippi** – their *geographical* location. Their status as saints is only possible because they are united to the risen Christ. Believers are united to Christ and members of His body (incorporation).

But Paul does not write only to the saints. He also addresses **the bishops** [*episkopos*] and deacons. The bishops (overseers) and deacons were saints, but identified and distinct among the saints. The “bishops” are elsewhere called *elders* (their maturity, Acts 20.17), *shepherds* (their ministry) and *stewards* (their accountability, Titus 1.7). The word “bishop” (overseer) emphasises spiritual responsibility – they keep a watchful eye on the activities of the assembly, and the behaviour of the saints. They are not looking for faults but fitting quality and behaviour. Indeed, the word *episkopos* is used in 2 Chronicles 34.17 [LXX] to describe men responsible for inspecting public building schemes. When Polycarp wrote to the Philippians (50 years later), it was still administered by a plurality of leaders to whom he referred as “elders”.

The word translated **deacons** [*diakonos*] is the ordinary word for the basic duty of rendering service to others. It may derive from the preposition *dia* (through), and *konis* (dust), portraying a servant who creates a trail of dust by his haste to perform his duties. One of the important meanings of the *diakon*- word group is *agency* or *instrumentality* – their primary role is to assist (support) the elders in their work. Deacons are therefore those who are called upon by the elders and given specific responsibility in some practical (Acts 6.2) or spiritual matter (Acts 6.4), especially the public preaching and teaching of the word of God (cf. 1 Timothy 3.9).

v.2. As is typical of Paul, he takes the customary Greek and Jewish greetings and combines them into a Christian salutation. **Grace**, the common Greek greeting, describes the ongoing daily grace for life, i.e. God’s provision for our every. **Peace**, the common Jewish greeting, signifies comfort, tranquillity and well-being. Note. It is only when Paul writes to individuals (rather than churches) that he adds “mercy” (1 Timothy 1.2). Grace describes the sum of all God’s activity toward us – nothing is deserved. The subsequent benefits we experience at God’s bountiful hand is “peace” – everything that makes for a person’s highest good. Grace is the source from which peace flows.

In an epistle where unity is prominent, John Phillips beautifully says, “*Where there is grace there can be no commencement of hostilities. Where there is peace there can be no continuation of hostilities. Grace means that war is impossible; peace means that the war is over. Contention only flourishes in the absence of grace and peace.*” Thus, Paul’s desire is for the saints to enjoy the unlimited supply of both grace and peace from the throne of God. Indeed, the source of such blessing flows **from** [*apo*] **God our Father** and **from the Lord Jesus Christ**. In the Greek text, there is only one preposition [*apo*] which links Father and Son together as the common source of such blessings. Thus the high view of Christ in this epistle begins, as one who is alongside and co-equal with the Father – the source, with Him of all blessing.

Paul’s Intercession [vv.3-11]

v.3. Every time Paul thought of the Philippians, they filled his heart with thankfulness and joy and stimulated him to prayer and thanksgiving. Could the same be said about us? As to prayer, its specific *content* is not uttered until v.9. Until then Paul describes the *constancy* (v.3), *character* (v.4) and *cause* of his prayer (v.5). As to thanksgiving, Paul speaks of his *confidence* in God to finish His work in them (v.6), and his heartfelt *care* for all the saints (vv.7-8).

Paul was a thankful Christian. He could even sing “praises unto God” when he was thrust into the inner prison during his first visit to Philippi (Acts 16.25)! Except for Galatians and 2 Corinthians, Paul begins every epistle with thanksgiving – **I thank my God upon every remembrance of you** denotes continuous action in present time. That is, whenever the Philippians came to mind, the soul of Paul was caused to give thanks before God. On this particular occasion, they had come to mind because of their recent gift sent with Epaphroditus (4.10, 18). The fact that Paul is thankful to God suggests they had been the channel through which God took care of Paul.

v.4. The adverb **always** is grammatically connected with Paul’s “making request with joy”. It is not, therefore, that Paul was continuously praying for the Philippians every moment, but rather, whenever he prayed for them, his requests were consistently accompanied by **joy**. A possible paraphrase is, “In every prayer I make for you all, I always make my request with joy.” The words **prayer** and **request** are two translations of the Greek word *deēsis*, an unusual word which only occurs 12 times in the NT (twice in this verse). The word means to make an earnest or urgent request to God, cf. Romans 10.1. Perhaps Paul was particularly mindful of the persecution they were enduring at the hands of their adversaries (1.28-29). In any case, whenever Paul prayed, he prayed for **all** or ‘every one of them’ – there was no partiality with Paul. The combination of “always”, “every prayer” and “every remembrance” (v.3) gives a strong picture of habitual, frequent and consistent intercessory prayer.

v.5. Paul’s particular cause of joy in prayer was their ongoing **fellowship in the gospel**. From the **first day** the gospel came to Philippi and souls were saved (Acts 16), a partnership in the furtherance of the gospel had begun and had continued **until now** – 10 years later. It was a joint participation in a common endeavour. Such fellowship included financial assistance (4.15-16), but was much broader, extending to prayer, hospitality and wholehearted devotion to the spread of the gospel – whether in Rome, Philippi or elsewhere. Indeed, when Paul was with them in Philippi, several of them had

contended at his side in the cause of the gospel (4.3). This was true fellowship that centred “in” [eis] the gospel. *Eis* is a preposition that denotes movement or direction toward a goal, suggesting progress toward an intended end. Their fellowship advanced the gospel and furthered its interest. Carson insightfully says, “*Paul does not commend them for the fine times they had shared watching games in the arena. He doesn’t mention their literature discussion groups or the excellent meals they had. What lies at the centre of all his ties with them, doubtless including meals and discussion, is this passion for gospel, this partnership in the gospel. What holds us together? The gospel. If we are sold out to the gospel and to the Christ of the gospel, we will be committed to each other. If we are not, we’re far more likely to split.*”

v.6. Paul is **confident** (convinced) that their fellowship in the gospel will continue – and such confidence rests not so much in the Philippians, as it does in God. It is God who has **begun a good work in** them. The fellowship and zeal they showed were unmistakable evidence of the divine work of grace in their hearts (Ephesians 2.10). The same God who *began* the work at conversion would **perform it** [*epiteleō*], bringing it to its intended completion – a glorious consummation at the day of Jesus Christ. Thus, this good work begins at conversion and embraces the work of the Spirit throughout the believer’s life on earth. Interestingly, the words Paul uses for ‘to begin’ and ‘to complete’ (perform) were technical Greek terms which could be used in sacrificial contexts. Paul may therefore view the life of every Christian as a sacrifice, continually offered as a burnt offering upon the altar to Christ (cf. Romans 12.1).

The **day of Jesus Christ** refers to an eschatological period associated with events in heaven, when the saints are gathered together with Christ. It commences at the rapture and will reveal the people of God in their completed and perfected condition. In Philippians, there is a great emphasis on the Day of Christ (cf. 1.10; 2.16). Why? Because at that Day, there will not only be something for us – a reward – but also joy for Him as He sees the great harvest of the gospel gathered in for His glory. This is in keeping with the prominence of Christ in this epistle.

Scripture speaks of *four* eschatological days (periods characterised by certain features):

- **Man’s Day** (1 Corinthians 4.3). The present age. A period that is evil and hostile to God. During this age, human beings sit in judgment upon one another, evaluating everything according to their own distorted *human* standards. But Paul was more concerned about the (future) *divine* evaluation of his service. This is a day of rebellion.
- The Day stands in contrast to the Day of the Lord, when Christ will bring all things into true judgment.
- **Day of Christ** (Philippians 1.6, 10; 2.16; cf. 1 Corinthians 1.8, 5.5; 2 Corinthians 1.14). Commences at the rapture and concerns events in heaven for the church. It therefore includes the Judgment Seat (bema) and Marriage of the Lamb.
- This is a day of rejoicing, when the saints are gathered to Christ and His servants receive their reward.
- **Day of the Lord** (Acts 2.20; 1 Thess. 5.2; 2 Thess. 2.2 [JND]; 2 Pet. 3.10). In contrast to the Day of Christ, this period concerns events on *earth* when the rights of the Lord will be re-established in this world.
- The Day of the Lord encompasses the judgments of the tribulation as well as the millennial reign of Christ. This is the day when divine rights are established and Christ begins His reign.
- **Day of God** (2 Peter 3.12). A day of eternal rest in a new heavens and new earth. God will be at home in the new universe, where every part of it will reflect His own nature. All things will be subject to God and exist for His glory.