

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY IN PHILIPPI

Greeting from Paul and Timothy

1 From Paul and Timothy, servants^a of Christ Jesus, to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi,^b together with their pastors^c and deacons.^d Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ!

Thanks for Your Support!

I thank my God every time I think of you. I always pray for you all with joy every time I say my prayers.^e Because you've been partners^f in the good news from the first day right up to now. And I'm convinced about *one* thing: that the One who started such a good work in you is going to fully complete it, right up to the day

^a Or "slaves."

^b Paul founded a Christian community in Philippi (see Acts 16:11-40). Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, in his letter to the Philippians, says that Paul wrote "letters" to them, not just one letter (Polycarp Phil. 3:2), and it appears to me that in canonical Philippians we probably have a complete letter with significant portions of two earlier ones tucked into the middle of it. I think that the complete letter, the last to be written, is made up of Phil. 1:1-3:1a + Phil. 4:21-23, and is a letter sent from prison in Rome by the hand of Epaphroditus. Paul is sending Epaphroditus home to Philippi, and he feels hopeful of being acquitted soon (1:22-26; 2:23-24), although he is preparing himself for any outcome to his trial (2:17-18, 23). I think that the first inserted partial letter comprises 3:1b-4:9, and seems to be written in the heat of a controversy around circumcision very similar to what we see evidence of in Galatians. There are a number of close parallels. It's probably the earliest of the three letter portions that we have from Paul to the Philippians, and it may be roughly contemporary with Galatians (however, see Phil. 3:1b which appears to refer to an even earlier letter). I think that the second inserted partial letter is made up of 4:10-20, and is a quick thank you note for a generous gift of money that the Philippians have sent to Paul during his imprisonment. Whether Paul is on his way to Rome or in Rome when Epaphroditus reaches him is unknown. Epaphroditus delivers the funds and plans to stay with Paul to be a practical help to him. Paul's thank you note is probably sent more or less immediately upon the arrival of Epaphroditus, and then anything from a couple of months to a year or more goes by before Paul's final letter (Phil. 1:1-3:1a; 4:21-23) is composed and sent. In the time between the thank you note and the last letter, Epaphroditus gets very ill, and word is sent to the Philippians about his illness (2:26). Presumably, enough time passes after that message that Epaphroditus fears that they will be badly worried if they don't hear any more (2:26).

^c Or "overseers"; traditionally: "bishops." See Acts 20:28 for the metaphor of the shepherd being applied to this role, to bring out its combined responsibilities of leadership and protection.

^d A deacon, or "server," is a person entrusted with arranging provision for the practical needs of the spiritual community and its members.

^e Lit. "...I think of you, always in all my prayer for you all, making my prayer with joy."

^f Lit. "...my prayers, over your partnership." Their partnership is what makes Paul so joyful.

of Christ Jesus. ⁷After all, it's right for me to feel this way about you all. Because you've held *me* in your hearts.^a While I've been in chains, and while I've been making my defense, and proving the good news,^b you've all been my partners in grace. ⁸Because God is my witness—I miss you all so much, with the affection of Christ Jesus! ⁹And this is my prayer: that your love will keep overflowing more and more, with deep knowledge and complete discernment.^c ¹⁰That way you will value the things that are really important, and be open-hearted, with nothing offensive in you,^d ready for the day of Christ. ¹¹You will have produced the harvest of integrity^e that comes through Jesus Christ, and results in glory and praise for God.

Paul's News from Prison

¹²Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what's happened to me has actually gone towards the advancement of the good news. ¹³It's to the point where my imprisonment for Christ^f has become known throughout the palace guard, and to everybody else. ¹⁴And most of our brothers and sisters in the Lord have been convinced by my imprisonment^g to speak God's^h word all the more fearlessly.

Keeping the Faith

¹⁵Now, some are also doing it out of envy and petty rivalry, but most are preaching Christ out of goodwill. ¹⁶They're doing it out of love—they know that I'm destinedⁱ to defend the good news. ¹⁷But the others are spreading the word about Christ^j out of competitiveness, not sincerely. They think they can make trouble for me while I'm in chains. ¹⁸So what? All I care is^k that for whatever reason, whether for an excuse or for real, people are spreading the word about Christ.^l And I'm glad about *that*. And I'm going to keep on being glad. ¹⁹Because I know that this is going to turn out for my salvation, thanks to^m your prayers and the support of the Spirit

^a Or, less likely, "Because I have you in my heart."

^b Lit. "in my bonds, and in my defense, and in the confirmation of the good news."

^c Lit. "And I pray this: that your love will overflow even more and more with deep knowledge and all perceptiveness."

^d Lit. "so that you'll be free from hidden motives and without offense."

^e "The harvest of integrity": traditionally "the fruit of righteousness" (see "Bible Words"). No single contemporary English word captures the sense of this multifaceted word. It can mean justice, personal integrity, legal innocence, and moral goodness.

^f Lit. "my bonds in Christ."

^g Lit. "my bonds."

^h Some mss have "the word," but "God's word" is implied in any case.

ⁱ Or "appointed" (by God). Under Roman law, it was illegal to belong to a new religion, and Christians were vulnerable to being arrested and treated as criminals. Paul is in prison in Rome because he has been arrested and has appealed to Caesar. He hopes that his case will set a legal precedent that the Jesus movement is an organic outgrowth of the Jewish religious tradition, not an illegal "new religion" (see Acts 21:17–28:16).

^j Lit. "publicizing Christ."

^k "All I care is": lit. "But."

^l Lit. "Christ is being publicized."

^m Lit. "through."

of Christ Jesus. ²⁰That's what I'm yearning and hoping for: that I won't be ashamed in any way, but in total openness, now as always, Christ will be glorified^a in my body—whether through life or through death. ²¹Because for me, living means Christ—and death is a bonus.^b ²²But suppose I end up living on in the flesh. To me that just means fruitful work. So^c I don't know what to choose. ²³I'm torn between the two: I have the desire to leave and be with Christ, because that's much better. ²⁴But staying here in the flesh is more necessary because of you. ²⁵And I'm sure of this: I am *going* to stay alive, and I'm going to spend time with you all, for your advancement and joy in the faith. ²⁶That way, you'll be able to brag all the more about Christ Jesus with me, thanks to my second visit to you.^d

²⁷Just live in a way that's worthy of the good news of Christ. That way, whether I come and see you, or whether I hear the news about you while I'm away, you're^e standing in one spirit, in one soul, striving together for the faith of the good news. ²⁸And you're not frightened in any way by those who stand against you. That's a sign to them of their destruction and your salvation, which comes from God. ²⁹Because you've been given the gift not only of believing in Christ, but also of suffering for him. ³⁰You're facing the same struggle that you've seen me face, and now you're hearing that I'm facing it.^f

Imitating Christ's Humility

2 So if you've experienced some encouragement in Christ, some comfort from love, some community in the Spirit, some compassion and mercy—²make my joy complete by having the same attitude, holding to the same love, being together in spirit, with one common attitude. ³Don't do anything out of competitiveness and petty status-seeking, but humbly value one another more than yourselves. ⁴Each person shouldn't just be looking out for their own interests, but also for each other's. ⁵Think like this with each other, which is also how Christ Jesus thinks.^g

Although he was in the form of God,
 He didn't regard equality with God as something to run off with.
 Just the opposite: he poured himself out.^h
 He took the form of a servant, and became the same as a human being.ⁱ

^a Or "praised."

^b Traditionally: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."

^c Lit. "And."

^d As Paul writes this, he is facing a possible death sentence. He is prophesying that he will be found innocent and be released, and that he will live to visit the Philippians again, so they can celebrate Christ's victory in his trial together.

^e Lit. "that you're," implying, "I will find that you're."

^f Lit. "...suffering for him, having the same struggle that you've seen in me and now hear in me."

^g Or, more literally, "Have this attitude among you, which is also in Christ Jesus."

^h For the imagery of "pouring himself out," see Isa. 53:12.

ⁱ Or "was born in the same form as a human being"; lit. "having become [or: having been born] in the likeness of human beings."

And being found^a in the shape of a human being, ⁸he humbled himself,
 And was obedient all the way to death, even death on a cross.
⁹Because of that, God has lifted him up high,
 And has given him the name that's above every name,
¹⁰So that at the name of Jesus
 Everyone—in heaven, on earth, and under the earth—is going to kneel,^b
¹¹And every voice^c is going to confess
 That Jesus Christ is Lord,^d
 To the glory of God the Father.

¹²So then, my dear friends, just as you've always listened to me^e—not just like you did when^f I was with you, but now much more, while I'm away—let each of you be working, with fear and trembling, to achieve your own salvation. ¹³Because God is the one who is in you, enabling you both to desire, and to achieve, what pleases him.^g

¹⁴Do everything without grumbling and arguing—¹⁵that way you'll be faultless and innocent, blameless children of God in the middle of a twisted and perverse culture.^h You shine in front of them like stars in the world,ⁱ ¹⁶as you hold onto the Message of Life.^j You're going to make me proud on the day of Christ! Because I won't have run my race and done such hard work for nothing.^k

Preparations ahead of Paul's Hoped for Release from Prison

¹⁷However, even if I get poured out on the sacrifice and offering of your faith, I am celebrating, and I'm celebrating with you all. ¹⁸I want you to do the same: celebrate, and celebrate with me.^l

¹⁹I'm hoping in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon: I'll feel better when I know how things are going with you. ²⁰You know, I don't have anybody else who feels like I do, and who'll really care about your concerns. ²¹Because they're all looking out for themselves, not for the concerns of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know how tried and true Timothy is. You know he's been a servant of the good news

^a Or "finding himself," or "being."

^b Lit. "Every knee—heavenly ones, earthly ones, and under-earthly ones—will bend."

^c Lit. "tongue."

^d See Isa. 45:23.

^e Or "obeyed."

^f Some mss have, "—not just when."

^g Lit. "For God is the one enabling/accomplishing in you the will and the accomplishment for the sake of the good will."

^h Lit. "generation."

ⁱ Or "You shine on them as stars shine on the world."

^j That is, the good news.

^k Lit. "...day of Christ, that I didn't run in vain nor labor in vain."

^l Paul is convinced that he's going to be released, but even if he turns out to be wrong, and he does get condemned to death, he urges the Philippians to look on the giving of his life for Christ as a "drink offering," a kind of "topping" on top of the offering to God that they too are making by living as Christians in a hostile world (see Lev. 23:13, 18, 37; Rom. 15:16; 2 Tim. 4:6). He urges them to see it not as a tragedy, but as a gift joyfully given to God.

alongside me—how we’ve been like father and son. ²³So I’m hoping to send him, just as soon as I get a sense of how my case is going. ²⁴But I’m sure^a in the Lord that I’m going to come to you soon myself.

²⁵I also think I’d better send you our brother Epaphroditus,^b my co-worker and fellow soldier. He’s been your representative,^c and a servant to me in my time of need. ²⁶I’m sending him because he’s been missing you all, and he’s been very upset because you’ve heard that he was ill. ²⁷And actually he *was* ill—he nearly died.^d But God was merciful to him—and not only him, but to me too. I was spared so much grief!^e ²⁸So I’m sending him to you that much more urgently—so you’ll get to celebrate seeing him again, and I’ll be relieved too.^f ²⁹So welcome him in the Lord with a big celebration.^g Hold people like him in high esteem, ³⁰because he nearly died doing^h the work of Christ. He risked his life to fill out the rest of your service to me.ⁱ

Beware of People who Claim That You Have to be Circumcised

3 Well,^j my brothers and sisters, be happy^k in the Lord. It’s no trouble for me to repeat some things,^l and it’s a safeguard for you. ²Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evildoers, and watch out for those who practice mutilation.^m ³After all, we’re the circumcision.ⁿ We’re the ones worshiping with the Spirit of God.^o And we’re proud of Christ Jesus, rather than putting confidence in our

^a Or “I’m persuaded.”

^b Pm. a-paf-ro-dye-tas.

^c Or “emissary”; this is the same word that is usually translated as “apostle.”

^d Lit. “almost to death.”

^e Lit. “...me too, that I might not have grief upon grief.”

^f Paul well knows the pain of being in anxious suspense about somebody’s health. So in one sense his relief won’t be complete until they get the in-person proof that Epaphroditus is all right.

^g Lit. “with all joy.”

^h Lit. “For because of Christ’s work he came near to death.”

ⁱ Lit. “to fill up the lack of your service towards me.” Paul doesn’t at all mean that they were lacking in their service to him. He means that they sent him a gift of money (see 4:10-18), but, not feeling that money was enough, they also sent one of their members to give him practical help.

^j Lit. “Finally.” He’s beginning to wrap up the letter.

^k Or “goodbye.” “Be happy” is a standard farewell greeting, like “be well.” But Paul adds “in the Lord,” making it a Christian parting blessing. Probably Phil. 4:21-23 once followed immediately on this sentence, and what starts at 3:1b is the main portion of a letter Paul wrote to them some years earlier. See the nt. on 1:1.

^l Lit. “to write the same things.”

^m Paul is parodying his opponents here. Certain Jewish-Christian preachers are going from place to place insisting that one is not a true Christian, acceptable to God, unless one is circumcised (see “Bible Words” under “circumcise”) and becomes a Jew. (His letter to the Galatians deals with the same issue.) “Dogs” and “evildoers” appear to be abusive names Jewish people typically used to refer to the “uncircumcised,” i.e. the non-Jews, the Gentiles. But the epithets turn upside-down when he follows them not with “the uncircumcised,” but with “those who practice mutilation,” referring to unnecessary circumcision.

ⁿ By this he means both Gentile and Jewish Christians.

^o A key ancient ms leaves out the words, “of God.”

flesh—even though I have a reason for confidence in my flesh.^a If somebody else thinks they have a reason to be confident in flesh, I have more reason:

- Circumcised on the eighth day
- From the people of Israel
- From the tribe of Benjamin
- A Hebrew born of Hebrew parents
- In relation to the Law, a Pharisee
- In relation to zeal, a persecutor of the Christian community
- In relation to the innocence that you get from the Law,^b faultless

Giving Up Everything for Christ

But because of Christ, I regard everything that's to my credit as a loss.^c Absolutely:^d I regard everything as a loss, because of the much greater value of knowing Christ my Lord. Because of him I've experienced the loss of everything. And I regard it all as garbage,^e so that I can gain Christ, and be found in him. I won't be getting my innocence^f from the Law, but through faith in Christ. It's the innocence^g that comes from God on the basis of faith. It's about knowing Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and knowing what it is to share in his sufferings. It's about being molded into the pattern of his death, so I can somehow make it^h to the resurrection from among the dead.

It's not that I've already gotten there, or already been made perfect. But I'm striving for it, trying to take hold of it,ⁱ because I've been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.^j Brothers and sisters, I don't regard myself as having gotten there.^k But I do know one thing: I'm forgetting what's behind me, and reaching out for what's in front of me. I'm striving for the goal, going for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. So, those of us who are mature, let's agree on this. And if you think differently about something, God will reveal that to you too. Just let's hold on to what we've already achieved.^l

Brothers and sisters, join together in following my example. And also look to those who live according to the model you have in us. After all, I've told you

^a Lit. "the flesh."

^b Traditionally: "the justification/righteousness that's in the law."

^c Lit. "But whatever things are gain to me, these I regard as loss because of Christ."

^d Or "Yes indeed."

^e Or "crap."

^f Traditionally: "righteousness" or "justification."

^g Traditionally: "righteousness" or "justification."

^h Or "...death, if I can somehow make it."

ⁱ "Trying to take hold of it": lit. "if I might also take hold of it."

^j A number of mss leave out "Jesus."

^k Some mss have, "gotten there yet."

^l Lit. "attained."

many times—and I’m crying as I’m telling you now—there are a lot of people who go around as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their destination is destruction, their god is their own stomach, and what they’re the most proud of is what shames them.^a Their thinking is all about the earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven. And it’s from there that we’re expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He’s going to transform these humble bodies of ours into the same form as his glorious body. He’ll do it through^b the active power that enables him to make literally everything^c obey him.

Final Greetings and Challenges

4 Well,^d my dear brothers and sisters, that I miss so much—you’re my joy and my crown.^e Keep standing firm in the Lord, dear friends!

I challenge Euodia,^f and I challenge Syntyche,^g to agree with each other in the Lord. ³Yes, and I also ask you, my true partner,^h to work with them. They’ve worked hard with me in spreading the good news, along with Clement and all my other co-workers. All their names are in the Book of Life.ⁱ

Be happy^j in the Lord, always. I’ll say it again: be happy.^k Be known to everybody for your gentleness.^l The Lord is nearly here! Don’t worry about anything.^m Instead, in all your prayers and requests, be thanking God as you tell God your requests.ⁿ And God’s peace, that’s beyond all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever’s true, whatever’s honorable, whatever’s just, whatever’s pure, whatever’s pleasant, whatever’s commendable, or if there’s some virtue, or something that deserves praise, think about those things. And keep putting into practice the things that you’ve learned, received, heard, and seen in me. And the God of peace will be with you.

^a Lit. “and whose glory is in their shame.” Paul thinks they ought to be ashamed of their bigotry and belief in their own superiority, not proud of it.

^b Lit. “according to.”

^c Lit. “even everything.”

^d Lit. “So—” He’s making a move to wrap up the letter yet again (see 3:1 and the note there).

^e This is a crown of reward or recognition, rather like a medal, not a royal crown.

^f Pm. you-oh-dia.

^g Pm. sin-ti-kee.

^h Lit. “yokefellow.” Nobody knows who Paul is talking about. Is it Epaphroditus? Timothy? It’s even been suggested that he’s addressing a person named Partner.

ⁱ See Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 3:5; 21:27.

^j Or “goodbye.” “Be happy” is a standard farewell greeting, like “be well.” But Paul adds “in the Lord,” making it a Christian parting blessing.

^k Or “goodbye.”

^l Or “for your lack of legalism.”

^m Or “Never worry.”

ⁿ Lit. “with thanks let your requests be made known to God.”

Thanks for Your Gift of Financial Support!

10I'm really pleased in the Lord that you've thought of me again!^a Of course, you'd already been thinking of me, but you didn't have an opportunity to show it. 11It's not that I'm talking out of need. Because I've learned to be self-sufficient in my circumstances. 12I know how to be destitute, and I know how to have more than enough. Everywhere, and in all circumstances, I've learned the secret of being well fed and going hungry, of having more than enough and going without. 13I have strength for all of it in the One who strengthens me. 14Still, you've done well by standing with me in this trouble.

15You also know, Philippians, that back during the first preaching of the good news, when I came over from Macedonia,^b none of the Christian communities shared with me in this business of giving and receiving—except for you. 16Because even when I was in Thessalonica,^c there was a first and a second time when you sent something to me for my needs. 17It's not that I am after the gift—far from it. I'm after the additional credit^d that goes to your account. 18Because you've paid me back everything, and more!^e Now that I've received the gifts you sent with Epaphroditus,^f I'm totally provided for. Your gift is a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice that's pleasing to God. 19And may God also fill all your needs, in line with the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. 20And may God our Father get the glory forever and ever.

21Say hello to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus. 22The Christian brothers and sisters say hello to you, especially those who work in Caesar's residence.^g 23The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

^a Probably 4:10–20 is the main portion of a letter Paul wrote to the Philippians some months earlier than the main letter that starts at 1:1. See the nt. on Ph1:1.

^b Pm. mass-a-**doe**-nee-a.

^c Pm. thess-a-lo-**nye**-ka.

^d Or “the profit that accrues.”

^e I think he's saying they've supported him out of gratitude for his work in bringing them the good news (see Acts 16:11–40), but they've more than paid him back for what he has done for them.

^f Pm. a-paf-ro-**dye**-tas.

^g Lit. “especially those of Caesar's household.”