

BOOK-A-MONTH CLUB

~ February ~

Philippians with Patrick Hill

Philippians is broken down into four chapters. This fits well into the "Book-a-Month" format. I would suggest spending each week of February on one chapter. Let it soak in. Get to know it. Study it. Meditate on it. I have done my best to get you better acquainted with the background and content of the book. I have provided some questions for each chapter and some personal thoughts afterward. I pray that you are blessed by this study.

Background:

Author: Philippians is one of 7 letters with undisputed authorship attributed to Paul (1st Thessalonians, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Romans and Philippians).

Setting: Philippians is most commonly believed to have been written while Paul was in a Roman prison between 61-63 A.D.

Occasion: Paul was writing to the Philippians to say thank you for a gift that had been sent to him by the church. He sent the letter with Epaphroditus who had been sent by the church to care for Paul while he was in prison. Epaphroditus had fallen ill and, though better, was now being sent back to the Philippian Church. Paul makes sure to defend Epaphroditus so that the church won't think that he was a quitter. Paul also tries to comfort the church concerning his situation in prison and offers encouragement to stay unified.

Differences: The Letter to the Philippians is different than all of his other letters. First of all, he does not have to defend his authority because, it is assumed, the Philippian Church readily accepted it. This letter was a simple letter. It was much more personal than all of his other letters because of his strong bond with the church.

Themes: While the letter to the Philippians is simple, it is of great theological importance because of the discussion on Christ's humiliation and exaltation. Still, its main theme is joy and it is often referred to as "The Epistle of Joy" or "The Epistle of Excellent Things".

The City of Philippi

Philippi was founded by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, in the 4th century B.C. He picked this location for its strategic location eight miles inland from the Aegean Sea and near a set of hills that divide Europe from Asia. It's original name was Crenides which means, "the fountains" or "the springs" because of the numerous springs on neighboring plains. After Philip founded the city, each of the springs was renamed for him. Collectively, they were known as "the Philips."

Philippi became a commercial center of the ancient world because of the gold and silver mines that were near by (although these mines had been exhausted by Paul's day). Most notably, Philippi is known for the place that the Roman republic came to an end. Here, in 42 B.C., the armies of Marc Antony and Octavian defeated that of Brutus and Cassius after the death of Julius Caesar, thus making Rome and empire. After this, the site was used as a place to relocate veteran soldiers. It was a place of honor because of the aforementioned battle.

Paul and Philippi

According to the account in Acts 16, Paul was on his Second Missionary Journey (49-52 A.D.) with Timothy and Silas when he had a vision of a man from Macedonia pleading with him to, "Come over to Macedonia and help us. (Acts 16:9)" After this, he concluded that God had called him to preach the Gospel in Macedonia, so the three men sailed with Luke to Neopolis, and then traveled to Philippi.

The first conversion in Philippi was Lydia, who was a seller of purple and an Asiatic (Acts 16:11-15). This was also the site of Paul and Silas's imprisonment. They were freed by an earthquake and were able to lead the Philippian jailer to Christ (Acts 16:16-40). The Philippian Church became the first Christian Church in Europe.

Paul would eventually be forced to leave Philippi because of persecution, but the church remained dear to him and he shared a close bond with the people there. He would later return on his Third Missionary Journey for a short period of time.

Chapter 1

Objective(s): Learn from Paul's attitude concerning persecution, death and the purpose of life.

Questions and Thoughts:

1. In what two ways does Paul *specifically* say he partners or shares with the Philippians (v. 3-11)?

Embedded in the passage, Paul also partners with the Philippians in the work of the gospel. They share a common task and a common goal ("defending and confirming the gospel"). The Philippian Church is also a partner with Paul in his sufferings. These are things that we are called to do. Work for the gospel and be willing to suffer for it's sake when called upon. How often do we take those responsibilities and leave them out? How often do we suffer for the gospel. Here, not much, probably. But are we even willing to suffer?

2. What is Paul confident of concerning the Philippians?

This is our promise. Take heart! He's not done with us yet!

3. Notice the four things that Paul prayed for on behalf of the Philippians (v. 9-11).

May these things be true of us as well. Most of these things aren't easy. They require more time and commitment from a people whose lives are filled with busyness. They require us to study, to make a commitment to be more like Christ (which in itself will require more study...and practice).

4. What was the effect of Paul's imprisonment?

The result of our sufferings for Christ. To be willing to suffer, we must realize that this effect is vital for the world around us to hear.

5. What was Paul's attitude toward life and death (v. 21)?

Too often we value our lives too much to look forward to death. But what a victory to those who are in Christ! Why would we not look forward to that day? According to Paul, our lives here do have a purpose. We live for Christ until we gain Him in our death.

Key Verse:

1:27- "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel..."

Chapter 2

Objective(s): Appreciate the importance of unity, and how it can be maintained by following Jesus' example of humility. Understand what is involved in "shining as lights in the world."

Questions and Thoughts:

1. What should the nature of our unity be (v. 2)?

This isn't a call to always agree with everything and everyone. It is a call to be unified by the same task. Despite our disagreements, we find common ground in our mutual belief in Jesus Christ. We find a common purpose in preaching Him and Him crucified. We set aside petty disagreements to make these things happen; and we always continue to love.

2. What things are necessary to maintain unity (v. 3-5)?

It all boils down to love. If we love others as Christ loved us, then we will do all of these things. We will maintain unity because we are willing to sacrifice anything for our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

3. The name of Jesus should compel everyone to do what?

Just the name. How often do we hear Jesus' name and not do these things. What a powerful name to command all of heaven and earth to humility!

4. What two things are necessary if we are to be children of God without fault, blameless and pure, shining as lights to the world (v. 14-16)?

Wow. This passage should be something we remind ourselves of daily. Sometimes even hourly. If we do these things, we show our love. If we show our love, people will recognize us as His disciples.

Key Verse:

2:3-5- "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

Chapter 3

Objective(s): See the error of placing confidence in fleshly accomplishments. Understand the need to strive toward perfection in our desire to know Christ. Be reminded of our true citizenship in heaven.

Questions and Thoughts:

1. How did Paul view fleshly things (v. 7-8)?

The word Paul uses that is translated as rubbish, actually refers to the excrement of animals. That's a pretty strong word for things that we tend to value quite a bit. Our cars. Our clothes. Homes. The list goes on and on. Rubbish. All at a complete loss when put in comparison to knowing Christ!

2. What was Paul's earnest desire (v. 9-11)?

Paul speaks not of an intellectual knowledge, but an intimate knowledge that comes by a personal experience with a person. The power of His resurrection is our guarantee that nothing in life or death can separate us from Him! Praise the Lord for this guarantee!

3. What was the "one thing" Paul did (v. 13-14)?

There is no glorying in past achievements. No excuse to relax in our work for Christ. There is only the work that is still to be done. And this, we race hard to the finish with our eyes on the prize.

Key Verse:

3:7-8- "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ..."

Chapter 4

Objective(s): Glean Paul's secret for joy, peace, contentment and strength.

Questions and Thoughts:

1. What is the antidote for anxiety (v. 6)?

How often we get anxious. We let our stomach turn in knots. We sweat. We worry. But here, Paul gives us a simple remedy that is all too often forgotten. Imagine for a moment the peace of God. Imagine how great it is that we can't even wrap our finite minds around it. Imagine it guarding our hearts and minds. And all because we took what Paul said to heart. I heard a quote once, years ago, that has stuck with me all this time that is all too applicable here: "If we, as Christians, truly understood the power we possess when we pray, we would never get off of our knees!"

2. Upon what things should we meditate (v. 8)?

Our thoughts too often get wrapped around the negatives. We can't watch the news without feeling a sense of sorrow or a lack of hope for the world at large. Another remedy against anxiety and on to peace. Fix our eyes and our thoughts on the things Paul lists here.

3. What has Paul learned (v. 11-12)?

This reflects what Paul said in Chapter 2. "Do everything without arguing or complaining." If we can achieve this, we will be content. If we can achieve contentment, then we will not argue or complain.

4. How was Paul able to do all things (v. 13)?

Our source of absolute strength. Our source of joy. Our remedy for anxiety. We can do all things!

Key Verse:

4:4- "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

Resources Consulted

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