

THE LETTER OF PAUL TO THE PHILIPPIANS  
– NOTES FOR PRIVATE OR GROUP STUDY – PART ONE

Are you or someone you know finding life tough? This book could change the way you respond to the times when everything seems to be going wrong.

Paul's first visit to Philippi on his second missionary journey was memorable.(Acts 16) It had been short, eventful and effective. He had travelled there in response to God's call in a dream to come and help the Macedonians. He, Silas, Luke and Timothy had spent probably only a few weeks in the city. There were not enough Jewish men in Philippi to have a synagogue. Jewish women met by the river for prayer so Paul joined them. Lydia was a business woman – unusual in those days. Though she was not Jewish by birth she had been drawn to their faith by what she learned from the others. There was a lovely sequence of events. Paul opened his mouth to preach, the Lord opened her heart to understand and believe, and she opened her home to the travellers. So, at an early stage the church in Philippi was based in a home.

A spirit-possessed slave girl, able to tell fortunes, followed Paul and the others announcing that they preached 'a way of salvation'. Paul exercised his God-given authority over the Devil to remove the spirit and so silence her misleading message. This did not necessarily mean she came to know Jesus Christ but it did get Paul and Silas into big trouble with her owners who had seen their investment devalued.

Sitting in the top security section of the local jail, Paul and Silas demonstrated the message Paul was later to major on in his letter. We can rejoice in all that Christ in us is, in the toughest situation, without any idea of the outcome, other than heaven soon or eventually. The Lord provided a timely earthquake which levelled the jail and panicked the jailor who assumed his prisoners would have made a run for it. Paul, from the rubble of the former jail, stepped in just before the jailer fell on his sword; the man was by now waiting to meet Jesus Christ as were his whole household. Much more teaching took place to establish the second house church in Philippi. Paul used, as on other occasions, his Roman citizenship to demand an honest apology from the magistrates, not for the sake of his own pride but as a protection for other victims of the abuse of civil power.

Left behind as the first pastor to the young church, Luke probably supported himself by practising medicine. Paul and the others moved on. It would be more than four years before Paul returned on his third journey, as described in Acts 20, to collect Luke for the next stage of his training as a Christian writer.

Philippi was an ancient town named after Philip II of Macedon, founder of the Greek empire and father of Alexander the Great. It had been enlarged by the Romans who settled ex-soldiers there after the civil war of 42 BC to guard Rome's frontier. It was the site of a famous medical school where Luke may well have trained. If so in a sense he had returned home.

Philippi seems to have been a 'no-nonsense' kind of city, where people were hard working and passionate. This was reflected in the character of the church which grew up there. Consequently Paul's letter to the Philippians is also straightforward but with

deep emotion. He wrote from prison in Rome (1:7,13,17) around 62 AD, in the same period in which he also wrote Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. This was the toughest period so far in Paul's remarkable life.

Before looking in detail at chapter one, read the whole letter through several times, praying as you do that God will take you into the setting and mood of the book. List all the references you can find to the situation Paul was facing when he wrote. At the same time pick out any phrase which indicates Paul's feelings and responses to what was happening. One word dominates his advice to those in trouble. What is it?

1:1-2 Q.1 With whom was linked Paul in the writing of this letter? Why might he be a good choice to co-author the book? (2:19-23; Acts 16:1-3) Who was Paul's boss? What was his relationship with his boss? To whom would he therefore address his problems?

Q.2 How did Paul describe the Philippian Christians? Was he writing to the leadership or the whole church? Why? What two greetings did he give them? In what way were these greetings so appropriate for the situation he was going on to describe?

1:3-7 Q.3 When Paul spoke of praying for the Philippian Christians, what kind prayer did he use first? For what was he thankful? List each time he used the word 'all' or a similar term and note to what he was referring. What had been the Philippians involvement with Paul in the past?(4:14-18) What was his expectation of them in the future? What according to verse 7 did they and he have which gave Paul so much confidence about their future and his? When will God's work in our lives be finished?

1:8-11 Q.4 What motivated Paul to pray for the Philippians? Where do such deep feelings come from, for Paul and for us? What was Paul's prayer for them? How did he foresee it would be answered? Trace step by step what he saw to be the sequence of events when they were taught 'real knowledge'. Put each phrase he used into your own words.

1:12-18 Q.5 Just what were Paul's circumstances at the time he was writing? Make two lists, one of the good things which were happening and one of the bad. Against each item note Paul's response. What can we learn from his example for the times when people treat us badly? Why did Paul not deal with the wrong motives of some who were making life hard for him?(Matt.7:1; I Cor.2:10,11) How can his approach work?

1:19-26 Q.6 What possible outcomes of his present situation did Paul foresee? How was rejoicing in Christ going to change each of these outcomes? Did he expect that prayer would change his circumstances? What would prayer change? What did Paul mean by 'deliverance' in verse 19? Put 'for me to live is Christ, to die is gain' into your own words in a real life situation.

1:27-30 Q.7 What possible future circumstances did Paul foresee for the Philippians? How was following his example going to help them to handle the future whichever way it went? Are we to expect tough times as Christians? How will our rejoicing at such times enable us to cope and how will it speak to those who make life hard for us?

Q.8 Looking back now over this first chapter what impresses you most about Paul and his message? Just what does 'joy' and 'rejoicing in Christ' actually mean? Find everyday ways to explain these words to those who are struggling. What has been your experience of seeking to practise these principles in your own life?