



The Letter to the Philippians – Lesson 1

Philippians 1:1-11

After the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus' victory over sin and death spread by word of mouth throughout the population centers of the Roman empire. The apostle Paul was the chief trailblazer in the spread of this gospel message. Paul traveled thousands of miles and visited dozens of cities. The message of the gospel was

compelling, and as people responded in faith, churches were formed.



In the early decades of the spread of Christianity, there was written correspondence between the apostles and the newly-established churches. The churches had questions, and the apostles' letters provided God's response to their questions. These first-century

letters (epistles) provide specific instruction regarding Christian faith and practice in the challenging cultural setting of that day.

Each of these letters differs in tone, emphasis, and specific topic. In order to correctly understand a New Testament epistle, we need to understand the situation that prompted the writing of the letter.

1. In preparation for your study of the letter to the Philippians, please begin by reading the entire letter; it's quite short. Pay attention to the general tone of the letter. Observe Paul's account of his general circumstances as he is writing. Jot down your notes here.

2. What would you consider to be the main themes that Paul wants to communicate by this letter? See if you can identify 3-5 themes that Paul highlights in this letter. Describe each theme as a complete sentence, not as a single word. For example, you may notice several references to *joy* in the letter. Instead of naming “*joy*” as a theme of the letter, express it as a complete sentence: *Paul has joy even in the midst of difficult circumstances*. What major themes do you find in the book of Philippians?

3. Given what you now know about Paul’s circumstances and the conditions on the ground in Philippi, what is your understanding of why Paul felt the need to write this letter? What is this letter intended to accomplish? You may identify several valid reasons for writing this letter.

In Philippians 1:3-5, Paul expresses his thankfulness for the Philippians’ *partnership* with him in the *gospel*. We understand the term *gospel* to refer to the *good news* of the saving work of Christ. The glorious result of Christ’s life, death, and resurrection is the opportunity for any who choose to trust in Christ for salvation to enjoy astounding benefits: forgiveness of sins, the promise of eternal life, and the presence of God in the Person of the Holy Spirit.

4. Read Philippians 1:1-11 carefully. The Christians at Philippi are being **transformed** by their faith in this good news. Consider how this transformation of their lives serves to advance the work of the gospel—the work that Paul is so passionately pursuing.
 - a. Consider their lifestyle: in what way will their lifestyle as Christians promote the spread of the gospel?
 - b. Consider their message: in what way will their understanding of the work of Christ provide a resource for the spread of the gospel in their community?
 - c. Consider their practical contribution: how have these Christians contributed to the impact of Paul's ministry? (See Phil. 4:15-16)
5. **For personal reflection:** Think about your own life. How is God using your lifestyle, your knowledge of the gospel, and your practical contributions to advance the work of the gospel in your city? Are there opportunities for advancing the gospel that you have not yet taken?
6. In the first chapter of Philippians, Paul is eager to assure the Philippians that the work of the gospel has not been hindered as a result of his imprisonment. What is the summary conclusion that Paul is eager to convey to this church? (see Philippians 1:6)

7. How does this reassure you regarding the completion of God's good plan for the transformation of His people and the building of His Kingdom?

8. Read carefully Paul's prayer for the Philippian in Phil. 1:9-11.
 - a. What characteristics does Paul desire for these Christians at Philippi?

 - b. How does this prayer differ from the requests we usually make in our prayers?

 - c. As you consider this contrast, what does it say about our expectations of God and our priorities in life?

A personal reflection: Apply Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9-11 to yourself. Ask God to accomplish the results in you that Paul prayed for the Philippians.