

PHILIPPIANS

Introduction

Author. The testimony of the early church was unanimous that Paul was the author of this epistle (1:1). The many personal references in the book accord with what we know of Paul from his other epistles.

Date. The letter was probably penned late in Paul's first Roman imprisonment approximately 61 A. D. Several factors support this conclusion. The epistle demands several trips between Philippi and Rome, a distance of some 700 miles. That Paul's testimony had spread throughout Caesar's guard (1:13) would have required some time as well. Paul also seems confident that his case will be decided soon (2:20-22).

Occasion. When the Philippian church heard of Paul's incarceration in Rome, they sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, to carry a gift and minister to Paul's needs. While he was in Rome caring for Paul, Epaphroditus had fallen very sick to the point of death (2:26-28). After he had recovered and was preparing to return to Philippi, Paul took the opportunity to send this letter to the Church. The letter is filled with thanks for the support from the Church and exhortation concerning the unity which comes through others-centered living.

Message Statement. *Unity in the Church is accomplished by others-centered living and results in joy.*

Argument

- 1A INTRODUCTION 1:1-11
In his customary manner Paul identifies himself, greets his recipients, and offers a thanksgiving to God for them. Indicative of the theme of this epistle Paul's first words of thanks are offered for the partnership of the Philippians (1:5). Their support and unity with Paul is a point of particular gratefulness by the apostle. He is also thankful that God is the one who is sanctifying the people as well (1:6). His prayer for them reflects the apostle's desire for general progress in the Christian life. Their continued sanctification and particularly their unity which is achieved through selfless living are the major concerns of the apostle in this epistle.
- 1B UNITY THROUGH OTHERS-CENTERED LIVING 1:12--4:20
Paul's continuous mention of unity throughout this epistle is undeniable. Although joy and rejoicing are also concerns of Paul, they seem to be the result of the more basic goal of unity. The means of this unity, taught in various ways, seems to be considering the needs of others first. Paul develops this concept through his own example, the example of certain co-workers, the example of Christ, and finally pointed applications.
- 1B An Initial Exhortation 1:12-30
Paul begins the body of his letter by giving news of his own personal circumstances. This news, however, is theologically charged with both positive and negative examples which the apostle considers relevant for the congregation at Philippi.
- 1C A negative example 1:12-18
When Paul was put in prison other preachers began to preach the gospel fearlessly. The problem was not in their message, but in their motives for preaching. Paul records that some preached out of envy, rivalry and selfish ambition (1:15-17). Paul's response to the situation is to rejoice that Christ is preached. Unlike the situation in Galatians where a perverse message was preached, Paul

is able to commend at least the message of this group.

- 2C A positive example 1:19-26
In contrast to the selfish example of the other preachers, Paul is concerned about the needs of others more than his own. When faced with the choice of being with Christ or remaining with his converts on earth, Paul unreservedly chooses to remain with his people in order to stimulate their progress in the Christian life.
- 3C The application 1:27-30
In terms almost antithetical to the words which described the selfish preachers Paul exhorts the readers to remain united and to contend together for the faith of the gospel (cf. 1:15-17, *envy, rivalry* with 1:27, *united, firm in one spirit*). This unity is a key to their victory over, and testimony to, their opponents (1:28, 29).
- 2B The Divine Example 2:1-18
Although many have seen the Christology of this section as its primary focus, in the flow of the book, Paul's primary intention is clearly different. His reference to the work of Christ here highlights his selfless living which is Paul's message for his readers.
- 1C The descriptive statement 2:1-4
As an introduction to Paul's words about Christ he describes the behavior which he desires. His goal is clearly unity. His words used are: *like-minded, same love, and being one in spirit and purpose*. His method for accomplishing this goal is equally clear: *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves* (2:3)
- 2C The godly pattern 2:5-11
While the emptying of Christ is an attractive topic for the theologian, Paul's point in this topic involves the selflessness of Jesus' living. Although everything was his He gave it up for the benefit of others. His obviously proper attitude and actions resulted in the ultimate expression of divine favor. This attitude is what should be emulated by Paul's readers.
- 3C The personal application 2:12-18
Paul then outlines the general and specific ways in which this attitude should be applied by the Philippians. They are to accomplish this goal in dependence upon the enabling power of God for His glory.
- 3B The Human Examples 2:19-30
After citing the ultimate example of Jesus, Paul then lays before the readers two men who have successfully emulated the prescribed attitude. The first man is Timothy. Of him Paul records, *I have no one else like him, who take a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests not those of Jesus Christ* (2:20-21). The second example is Epaphroditus, the Philippians' representative to Paul. Paul's commendation of him is equally noble.
- 4B A Serious Warning 3:1--4:1
The contribution of this passage to the theme of the book is difficult to determine. Whether it was a topic so urgent and yet unrelated that Paul interrupted his thoughts to include it or whether it actually serves as a serious negative example of selfish living is a legitimate question. It may well be both.
- 1C The problem 3:1-11
The nature of the problem involves false teaching of a works orientate nature. Paul's basic attack against the heresy is that it involves human effort and self dependence (3:3). Paul initially answers the vanity of the system with an appeal to his own testimony, both past and present. He, of all people, had reason to put confidence in the flesh but chose to trust God instead.
- 2C The prescription 3:12-21
The basic prescription for the disease is to press on in sanctification by faith and to avoid those who advocate fleshly effort as a means of righteousness. Paul pointedly describes these people as *enemies of the cross* whose motivations are selfish, earthly appetites (3:18, 19).
- 3C The summary exhortation 4:1
Paul finishes this section with the same appeal found in 1:27 to *stand firm*. This is the best method to combat heresy in theory and in action.

