

J. KYLE PAISLEY MEMORIAL FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Adult Bible Class Studies

11th March 2007

Read: Philippians 1: 1-11

An Introduction to the New Testament

No.17, Philippians

PHILIPPI – named after the Greek ruler Philip II, father of Alexander the Great. Philip took the throne in 359 B.C. & shortly afterwards he enlarged & developed a town originally named *Krenides*, eventually naming it after himself; hence *Philippi*. Two centuries later, Rome conquered the part of Macedonia where Philippi was situated; and about another century later *Philippi* was made a Roman colony; see Acts 16: 12 – “*Philippi...the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a colony.*” For this reason Philippi was governed under Roman law by Roman magistrates – and at the time of Paul’s visit to Philippi these magistrates found that they had overstepped the line with regard to how they treated two Roman citizens, namely Paul & Silas, see Acts 16: 36-38.

PAUL’S INITIAL VISIT TO PHILIPPI – took place during the 2nd missionary journey. On the first part of that journey Paul & his company went again throughout places already visited on the 1st journey, Acts 16: 1-16. Their intention was to continue labouring in places such as Asia and Bithynia but the Holy Spirit did not permit them to do so, vs. 6 & 7; but then they were eventually guided to Macedonia in a most clear manner by the vision that was given to Paul.

CONVERTS IN PHILIPPI – the first converts in Philippi are all identified in Acts 16; Lydia, the seller of purple, the damsel delivered from demon possession, and then the jailor and his family. Lydia’s home became the centre of things for the fledgling congregation, vs. 15 & 40 – thus the church at Philippi was born and housed initially in Lydia’s premises. It should be understood that this entrance of the Gospel into Philippi was a most historic occasion in that it marked the beginning of the work of the Gospel in a new continent – namely our continent of Europe. Hence, the Gospel was truly going into the entire world.

THE WRITING OF THE PHILIPPIAN EPISTLE – it was written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome, ch.1: 13. It was occasioned by a visit to Paul by Epaphroditus, the messenger or minister of the Philippian church; who visited Paul in his imprisonment in Rome, bringing with him a generous gift from the Philippian church, ch.4: 18. Epaphroditus would then have carried this epistle back with him to Philippi, ch.2: 25.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS EPISTLE – As well as bringing a gift to Paul, Epaphroditus would have brought Paul a report of the state of the church in Philippi. Certainly, the Philippian church was in a very strong & healthy state as is evident from Paul’s comments in this letter. This epistle has often been described as “a love-letter” in that it is the out-pouring of the Apostle’s heart to a people who had a genuine love for him. The sending of their gifts to him was the indication of spiritual fruitfulness and growth among them, ch 4: 16 & 17.

However, study of this epistle also reveals that there were matters that were troubling the Philippian church, issues that Paul sought to address. Thus, the great purpose of this epistle was that of dealing with the dangers that threatened the life and witness of this congregation. Note these dangers –

First, there was the constant danger of *division* – inferred in various ways in chs 2 & 4. See 2: 3 where he refers to *strife & vainglory*; and in 2: 14 he warns against *murmurings and disputings*. Then in 4: 2 he openly names two women in the church who were divided & in strife, *Euodias & Syntche*.

Second, there was the danger of *legalism* from those who sought to bring the Philippians into bondage to the ceremonial law. This is plainly in view in ch 3: 1-14. As always, those who posed this threat to the Philippian church were the Judaizers, who always sought to have Gentile converts feel that they were not real Christians until they had submitted to the observance of Jewish ceremonialism. Hence, their attack was on the doctrine of justification – they sought to undermine the true Gospel of grace and have the Philippians seek for their righteousness before God on the basis of their own works. This is *legalism* in the true sense of that term.

Third, there was the danger of *worldliness*. See ch 3: 18 & 19 – the terms here describe the threat of worldliness in the life of the Church. As the terms show, worldliness is really the giving of oneself to the gratifying of the sensual appetites of the flesh. The terms speak of the ancient error of *antinomianism* – literally meaning “no law” and teaching that the believer is not under the law of God as a way of life and behaviour.

These three dangers still confront Christ’s Church. The devil never invents new tactics for disturbing the Lord’s work. He simply recycles the same old methods under new guises, and he always finds enough people gullible enough to entertain his ploys and help him in his work. But such dangers need to be faced and overcome in every generation, including our own. Moreover, the way of doing so has not changed either – in this epistle Paul deals with each potential problem by bringing the Gospel of Christ continually before his readers. Thus, his method of counteracting the difficulties in view was the Gospel understood and enjoyed. In ch 1 six times we read of *the gospel*. But the Gospel must be understood, thus in this epistle ten times Paul refers explicitly to the mind of the believer, with implied references in other places. A study of these verses will indicate the idea of the believer’s ability to think through the Gospel and apply it to life’s problems. In that way the believer is shown that he is to enjoy the Gospel – he is to enjoy who he is and what he has in Christ. Thus, in Philippians Paul writes of *joy* five times and employs the word *rejoice* seven times in the context and sense of living the Christian life. Therefore, as the Gospel is understood, enjoyed and applied the believer individually and the Church collectively is enabled to deal with those things that threaten the soul. Note in this epistle how Paul applies this great truth.

1. **Carping division overcome by the Gospel.** As noted strife & division was beginning to trouble this church. We must not be surprised at such a potential due to the many differences that we all bring with us into the Church – background, culture, education, opinion, etc. Note Paul’s method of dealing with strife – see chs 2: 2, 3: 16 & 4: 2. In each case his words are the same in the original Greek language. Literally – “*mind the one thing.*” Paul is not scolding, telling them to get on together. Rather, he exhorts them to get their minds focused on the Gospel. See 2: 2, 5 and then the tremendous exposition of the person and work of Christ. Focus on Christ and His work for us and His utter selflessness will be seen, inspiring us to be like Him and forget our squabbles.

2. **Corrupt doctrine overcome by the Gospel.** Note again ch 3 in which the Apostle is countering the Judaizers; and he does so by stressing the blessed position of being in Christ and covered by His righteousness, vs. 8-10. When the believer sees his or her position in Christ, then the worthlessness of dead religion is vividly seen and will be repudiated.

3. **Carnal delusion overcome by the Gospel.** That is, the carnal delusion that a believer can live like the world & indulge in the gratifying of the flesh with impunity. See how the warning of such in ch 3: 18 & 19 is immediately followed by a powerful presentation of the great end of the Gospel – the future redemption of the body and its transformation into the likeness of Christ’s body.

Rev. John Greer