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*The Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle
to the*

PHILIPPIANS

“Our Joyful Life in Christ”

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PREFACE

This epistle is the sweetest of all Paul's letters. It is addressed to the contemporary believer to rejoice unceasingly, regardless of any circumstance, and to examine the dynamic life in Christ.

In his first imprisonment in Rome [under house arrest, while being chained to a Roman guard for 2 years], St. Paul was prevented from traveling to countries, cities and houses to preach the Gospel of Christ. However, he says that even his imprisonment, serves to advance the gospel, did not deprive him from his witnessing to the Gospel and practicing the joyful life in Jesus Christ.

1. St. Paul found his imprisonment an opportunity to speak to the Roman guards and statesmen about Jesus Christ. It was a very unique chance for him to preach among them. The pagan guard acknowledged that his imprisonment was for Christ, and they were so interested in the gospel that they spread it around.

So powerful is the word of God that even the evil powers of this world serve to confess God's greatness (e.g. the Pharaoh of Egypt, King Herod at the birth of Christ, the mockers at the crucifixion, the guards at the tomb).

2. His imprisonment also gave him the opportunity to write to his beloved people about the unceasing joyful life in Christ

3. In opposition to those who preach from rivalry and personal ambition are those who preach Christ out of good will and love. His friends, his disciple, and the majority of believers have been strengthened in faith and are more courageous in their own preaching without fear to share St. Paul in his honor as a prisoner for Christ.

4. His enemies worked hard to convert the pagans so that the rulers would not free him from jail. However, even though these people

preached the gospel out of envy and strife to add affliction to his chains, he was happy for the sake of the service. (1:16-18)

INTRODUCTION

PHILIPPI

The city of Philippi was known originally as Krenides, meaning “wells” or “springs.” It was named after King Philip II of Macedonia, the father of Alexander the Great. After the Romans captured this city, it became a part of the Roman province of Macedonia.

St. Paul visited Philippi in A.D. 50-51 (Acts 16:11-40), on his second missionary journey; the church founded by St. Paul in Philippi was the first church in Europe. Upon arriving at Philippi, Paul and Silas went to the outskirts of the city, by the riverside, on the Sabbath, where prayer for the Jews was customarily made. At this gathering, Paul and Silas talked to the women about God. A certain God worshipping businesswoman named Lydia, who sold purple, heard the witnessing of the Apostles Paul and Silas, and became the first Christian convert in all of Europe (Acts 16:12-15, 40).

According to St. Luke’s account in Acts (16:16-40), St. Paul’s exorcism of a young, fortune-telling slave girl promoted her owner to instigate legal action against the apostle and his companion St. Silas. The girl’s owners took them to the magistrates, who ordered that they be beaten and jailed. However, by midnight Paul and Silas were joyfully singing and praying to God, and all the prisoners were listening to them in astonishment. “Suddenly, there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone’s chains were loosed.” (Acts 16:26) The prison-keeper, seeing the doors open, thought that the prisoners all escaped was about to kill himself. However Paul and Silas stopped him and reassured him that all of the prisoners were present. They proceeded to talk to him about Jesus and converted him and his family to Christianity. On the following day, the magistrates discovered that

they were Roman citizens, and they were placed in a dangerous predicament because they had beaten and imprisoned Roman citizens without a trial.

St. Paul briefly visited the Philippians again twice on his third missionary journey, about A.D. 57-58 (Acts 20:1,6). Later, when the Philippians heard of his Roman imprisonment (A.D. 61-63), they sent Epaphroditus to him with financial assistance (4:10). While staying with Paul and serving him, Epaphroditus almost died of an illness. When the Philippians heard of his grave illness, they became very sorrowful. However, after his recovery, St. Paul sent him back to the Philippians, who were eager to see him.

DATE OF THE EPISTLE

This epistle, along with the epistles to the Ephesians, Philemon and Colossians, are known as “the prison epistles”, since St. Paul wrote them while imprisoned in Rome (A.D. 61-63). Philippians was the last “prison epistle” written by him and it was sent to them with Epaphroditus.

ITS FEATURES

1. This epistle is free from arguments. St. Paul’s mind was absorbed in the heavenly joy; he reveals *our dynamic heavenly and joyful life in Christ*. Joy is a characteristic term for this epistle. The form of joy is fellowship “in the Lord” (4:1). Joy is an essential characteristic of the relationship between the apostle and the community. Joy enables the believers to bear suffering and even to face the possibility of martyrdom.

- Christ is our life and death is a profit (1:21): here on earth, we practice the joyful life since Christ is our life. Death is a profit and a gain since we would see Christ face to face when we depart from this world.

- Our desire is to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. (1:23)
- We press towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (3:14).
- Our citizen is in heaven (3:20). Nevertheless, St. Paul was not thinking of receiving a reward after death but his own preoccupying thought was the promotion of the gospel. He conceived his whole life as a glorification of Christ. If by dying he glorifies Christ, this is “gain” in so far as the glorification of Christ is the purpose of Paul’s entire existence.
- We wait for Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly bodies to be conformed to His glorious body. We respect our bodies because they will share our souls in their glorifications.
- St. Paul considers the joy of his people and their crowns as his own joy and crown (4:1). The good minister participates in the experiences of his communities. When they are joyous, he rejoices. When they have difficulties, he agonizes. In the words of Paul himself, he is in labor pains until Christ is formed in them (cf. Gal 4:19). In the world to come he finds them his own crown.
- He considers his ministry as a call of joy: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (4:4)
- We count all things as rubbish that we may gain Christ (3:8), for he is our satisfaction and treasure.
- St. Paul repeats the expression “the Day of Christ” (1:6,10) as a joyful day!

2. St. Paul explains the concept of incarnation and salvation (2:6-11).

3. He declares his trust in God’s work: *‘I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly’* (2:24). He was sure that God will release him from the jail.

4. St. Paul was proud of God's work with the statesmen, for their corruption and wickedness was severe!

5. *Sanctification of emotions*. Not only does St. Paul lift up our minds to see that our bodies will be glorified and become in the likeness of the risen body of Jesus Christ, but he indirectly incites us not to destroy our emotions, but rather sanctify them.

- "I have you in my heart." 1:17
- "*How greatly I long for you all* with the affection of Jesus Christ." 1:8
- "Since he (Epaphroditus) *was longing* for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death." 2:26,27
- "If any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." 2:1,2

6. *Cooperation between Divine Grace and man's will*. It is God's pleasure to work in us, to strengthen and sanctify our wills and to help us work, if we submit unto Him. He wants us to be positive about our salvation: "work out your salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." (2:12,13) St. Paul also wants us to struggle unceasingly "for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (3:13,14)

7. Not only did St. Paul diligently practice the joyful life in Christ, but he also became a source of joy for those who suffer. He was like a drink offering being poured out for the sacrifice of their faith. (2:17,18) In Exodus 29:40, the drink offering refers to the joy through suffering. The wine is a symbol of spiritual joy; this wine is poured on the sacrifice (suffering) to change it into inner joy.

8. St. Paul refers to the importance of tradition (4:9).

9. *The positive role of the laymen.* He calls them saints and refers to them as bishops and deacons (1:1). Since the major theme of this epistle is the dynamic and joyful life in Christ, or the saintly and heavenly life, it is addressed to the entire church, especially the laymen, who are called to be saints. It is the duty of the bishops and deacons to do their best in serving the children of God to be true saints.

10. St. Paul lived to intercede for others. Even in prison, he could pray for his friends. *“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy...”* (1:3-4).

ITS DIVISIONS

1. Life in Christ.
2. Divine price for this life.
3. Cost of this life in Christ
4. Features of this life

Chapter 1

LIFE IN CHRIST

“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” [21].

1. CHRIST IS LIFE

As we became dead by sin, we are not in need of commandments, but rather we need to risen from the dead first. *Christ is the Life and Resurrection*, and he who attains Him, enjoys life ! He came to present Himself to us; we see Him repeating the words: “I am.....”

- He is the *Heavenly Bread* Who furnish our souls.
- *He is the Way*, and through Him we can never stray away.
- *He is the Heavenly Groom*, Who unites with us so that we may not feel lonely, but rather practice the unceasing wedding celebrations.
- *He is the Savior*; when we feel that sin overcomes us, we ask Him to reveal Himself in our inner man, and thus we would be victorious over sin and be glorified with Him.
- Christ is our Educator, Treasure, Light, Joy, Satisfaction; *He is our everything. Receive Him!*
- To the successful businessman it is, “To me to live is wealth.” To the scholar it is, “To me to live is knowledge.” To the soldier it is, “To me to live is victory.” To the young man, “To me to live is pleasure.” To the man desirous of recognition, “To me to live is fame.” To the high school student, “To me to live is not wealth nor knowledge nor fame nor glory but Christ. Christ first, last, midst all, and always Christ.”¹

¹ *Henritta C. Mears: What the Bible is All About, , 1983, p. 493.*

2. SIGNS OF THE LIFE IN CHRIST

St. Paul gives us certain signs of this new life:

a. Holy or *saintly* view of others. Through it he calls the laity “saints.” He says the truth

b. Holy or *saintly* emotions [7,8]. When St. Augustine repented, his emotions did not perish, but rather changed. Instead of the carnal desires which consumes all his energy, he obtained divine desires, and all his emotions were inflamed with the love of God and mankind.

c. *Growth in love* [9], *knowledge* [10], *good deeds* [10] and *righteousness* [11]. Life means continuous growth and progress in Christ. It is a daily renewal, aiming to be in the likeness of God, Who is love, wisdom and righteousness.

d. *Absorption in man’s salvation joyfully* [12-26]. St. Paul was not thinking of his imprisonment or sufferings, but rather he found his jail sentence as a good chance to witness to Christ in a new area: among the guards and statesmen. He was also rejoicing because his imprisonment caused a living and bold movement of preaching among his disciple and friends, and even among his enemies.

e. *Rejoicing for the gift of suffering* [27-30]. Suffering for Christ’s sake is a repeated theme in this epistle. Suffering bears witness to others by the transfiguration of the crucified Christ in us, as the chains of St. Paul have done [7,13]. It also can serve to increase our faith. Suffering is a gift from Christ, just as faith is. Through suffering, we participate with Christ in His grace. It is evident that the soul of this great apostle is free! There is an atmosphere of joy even from prison.

Paul tells us of his joyful triumph over agony because of his trust in Christ. He mentions the Savior’s name forty times in this short epistle.

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It is said that after Howard Hughes (one of the most famous men in America) died in a plane crash, someone asked, “Where is the life he lost in the living ?” At his funeral, there was no one by his side, no relatives or friends, no one ! Even though he had great possessions, he never really lived.

Take a moment to evaluate you life to see if the following is true: “I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but **you are dead.**” (Rev. 3:1)

Chapter 2

THE DIVINE PRICE FOR THE LIFE IN CHRIST

“Emptied Himself”

From God’s perspective, the Son emptied Himself. Not only did He take on Himself the form of man but the form of a servant. Then He humbled Himself more. He who was author of life became obedient unto death. But even more than this, He faced an ignominious death, even the death of the cross, as a divine price for our new life in Him. This must be our spirit, we must imitate Him, for although He is Lord of all He became servant to all! St. Paul quotes a church hymn on the incarnation [5-11] to declare that the humility of Christ was the royal way of glorification. *The Royal Way: Christ----> emptied Himself from all His glory----> obeyed to the point of death----> glorified above all.* Here we notice:

- St. Paul assures us that the Son’s full sharing in the divine nature is not a kind of robbery; i.e. it was not stolen from the Father, but He shared with the Father from eternity, as one with Him in the same essence.
- Emptying Himself does not mean there is any change in the divine nature of the Son of God when He took flesh for our salvation. He emptied Himself, not by laying down His divine nature or by setting it aside, but by voluntarily taking on our human nature. Incarnation deals

with the Son's will, not His nature. He became fully man, being truly incarnate, sharing our human condition without changing His divinity.

- The Son emptied Himself so that He might fill our emptiness. He became man so that we may become gods. We ask Him to fill our emptiness by His own presence in our lives, so that we may always hear Him saying, "I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly." (John 10:10)
- The term "slave" contrasts drastically with being in "the form of God" and with the kyrios (Lord) title that Jesus receives at the end of the passage.
- St. Paul is practical as well as profound. He never leaves us in the clouds, He never separates knowledge from action. Christianity is both life and creed. The creed without the life amounts to little. After Paul has scaled the heights in Christ's exaltation, he has no idea of leaving us there².
- ***The cross is the royal way of glorification.*** If Christ is our Example then we see that there is no cross without a crown. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.

St. Paul quotes a church hymn (1-11). He interrupts his exhortations to the Philippians with a Christological hymn (verses 5-11) that probably predates the apostle himself. This is a hymn he found especially apt to communicate his message.

There are primarily three elements that point to a baptismal liturgy as the original setting for this hymn: 1) the confession of faith based on the resurrection, 2) the prominence of the name of Jesus who is Lord and 3) conformity to the likeness of Jesus who himself was in the form of God. Freedom is conceived as liberation from a hostile and alien world, from evil spirits, from death, the law, sin. The hymn is

² *Ibid*, 494.

complete. With it, Paul has given his ethics a Christological underpinning³.

Just as Christ emptied Himself for us, we must also empty ourselves. Here we list some individuals who have emptied themselves for the sake of Christ:

I. *St. Paul*: He realizes very well that people need a model, they need an in-the-flesh interpreter to show them how to live the gospel. He poured himself as a *drink offering* on the sacrifice of men's faith. Thus he was glad and rejoiced with them [17]. In the Old Testament, priest used to pour out wine on the sacrifice as a drink offering (Exod. 29:40). Wine refers to spiritual joy. St. Paul in his daily sufferings, almost unto death, considered himself to be the wine which is poured out by Christ (the High Priest) in the lives of the suffering people. He rejoices and grants them joy in Christ. Through Christ, St. Paul became a source of joy. He, together with the people, participated in Christ's sacrifice through faith.

II. *Timothy* [19-23]: emptied himself through *obedience* and sharing in St. Paul's ministry.

Paul has begotten Timothy as a parent gives birth to a child; now the "child" is sustaining the life of the parent.

Paul indicates how rare it is to find the remarkable combination of qualities Timothy possesses. Despite his frail health (cf. 1 Tim 5:23), his youth (cf. 1 Tim 4:12), and his naturally diffident temperament (cf. 1 Cor 16:10), Timothy has demonstrated the strength of insight, tact, compassion and success in confronting unruly communities⁴.

Within the New Testament, "obedience" is a markedly Pauline word (Rom 6:17; 16:19; 2 Cor 7:15; 10:6; 2 Thess 3:4; Philemon 21), occurring only five times in all the gospels (Mark 1:27; 4:41 ; Matt. 8:27; Luke 8:25; 17:6). The word obedience has its root in the term

³ Mary Ann Getty: *Philippians and Philemon*, 1980, p. 35.

⁴ Mary Ann Getty: *Philippians and Philemon*, 1980, p. 42.

“hearing”, Paul coins the phrase the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5; 16:26; cf. “hearing of faith,” Gal 3:2,5) by which he expresses the openness to God’s will that faith requires⁵.

III. *Epaphroditus* [25-30]: was an example of *saintly emotions*, which is the way to grow in divine grace. Epaphroditus became bishop of Philippi and later died as a martyr.

Epaphroditus is a “fellow-worker” (synergos) and “fellow soldier” (systratiote) with Paul [26]. To believe is to commit oneself with others to its preaching. The designation “fellow soldier” (cf. Philemon 2) connotes the companionship of Paul and Epaphroditus in conflict, probably not only in Philippi as they struggled against hostile forces in the preaching of the gospel, but also in the present circumstances where imprisonment and serious illness are their foes⁶.

The Cross (emptying oneself) is the way of the new life in Christ. We must

- I. Share in Christ’s sacrifice joyfully (St. Paul).
- II. Obey and serve others (Timothy).
- III. Have saintly love and emotions (Epaphroditus).

⁵ Mary Ann Getty: *Philippians and Philemon*, 1980, p. 37.

⁶ Mary Ann Getty: *Philippians and Philemon*, 1980, p. 44.

Chapter 3

THE COST OF THE LIFE IN CHRIST

In Philippians 3:12-14, St. Paul tells us that every man's life is a plan of God! The one thing I do should be to carry out this plan, which is the life in Christ. It has its negative and positive costs.

NEGATIVE COSTS

1. Beware of literal worship [2,3], or getting rid of the formalities which are without Spirit. The Judaizers were teaching that Christians needed to submit themselves to Mosaic Law in a literal way, especially the rite of circumcision. St. Paul tags these Judaizers with the same name they gave the Gentiles: dogs, and compared their circumcision to the self-inflicted mutilation of some pagan cults. St. Paul could have boasted about his literal observance of the Mosaic Law, but he voluntarily put it aside because he wanted to express to them that the true Israel, the Church of Christ, worships God in Spirit.
2. Have no confidence in the flesh, but rather in the Spirit.
3. Everything in this world is rubbish in comparison with Christ [7-9].
4. Forgetting those things of the past [13].
5. The glory of this world is a shame !

POSITIVE COSTS:

1. Worship God in Spirit [3]

2. Hope in *the transformation of our lowly bodies, that it may conform to Christ's glorious body* [21]. Although we have no confidence in the flesh, we do not despise our lowly bodies. Its substance will not change, but it will have the experience of the resurrection Christ, His glorious body. It will pass from humiliation to exaltation, and will receive incorruption.

3. Receive Christ as our satisfaction [8] and righteousness [9].

4. Grow in the knowledge of the crucified and risen Christ [10,11]. We share in His sufferings joyfully, conforming to His death, and having the power of His resurrection. Thus we become like Him ! Faith [10] is the name of the relationship which gives us full participation in the life of Christ and His resurrection; it is our openness to God's actions in our lives, receiving Christ as our righteousness. Also, we have to strive forward to the things which are ahead [13]. We have to continuously struggle to attain the heavenly prize through the upward call of God in Christ Jesus [12-16]. We have to press on because we are not yet perfect.

5. Our citizenship is in heaven [20]. We should've as citizens of the best country, the heavenly kingdom. Our Lord dwells on earth for more than thirty-three years, but this residence did not naturalize Him as a citizen of earth. We became the members of His Body, therefore we must not forget that we got His own citizenship.

“Be not conformed to this world, but be you transformed by the rewind of your mind” (Rom. 12:2).

NEGATIVE COSTS	POSITIVE COSTS
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Beware of literal worship. 2. Have no confidence in the flesh. 3. Consider everything as rubbish. 4. Forget the past. 5. The world's glory is a shame. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Worship in the Spirit. 2. Hope in the glorious body. 3. Christ is our satisfaction. 4. Look towards the future 5. Our citizenship is in heaven

CHRIST IS MY SATISFACTION

I must have the same ambitions of St. Paul's heart.

- That *I may win Christ* (3:8): Christ has won me, I wish to win Him as a daily prize.
- That *I may know Him* (3:10).
- That *I may found in Him* (3:9), that is to be blameless and complete in Christ.
- That *I may know... the power of His resurrection* (3:10), for the power of the gospel is in a risen Christ
- That *I may know... the fellowship of His sufferings* (3:10), that is a life consecrated to Him, conformable unto His death.
- That *I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended* (3:12), so that I may know Christ's purpose for seizing me to be His own..
- *I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus* (3:14).

Chapter 4

FEATURES OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

1. *Supernatural Unity [1-3]*: St. Paul considers other's joy and crowning as his own joy and crowning. Therefore he calls them, "my crown and joy." He also asks them to work in unity together for the progress of spreading the gospel.

2. *Unceasing Joy [4]*: St. Paul cries out, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!" (4:4). This is joy in the midst of trouble and problems. The joy of the Lord is our strength.

The word *joy*, or *rejoice*, occurs in this epistle sixteen times. St. Paul and St. Silas sang in the jail there at Philippi at midnight when their backs were bleeding and sore! He is rejoicing now as he writes this letter, chained to a Roman soldier, for he knows that his very chains are helping him to spread the gospel. He could reach some in Caesar's household that he never otherwise could have brought to Christ. He urged his Philippian converts to rejoice because they were allowed to suffer for Christ (1:29).

St. Paul often uses the word *always* in relation to prayer. Rejoicing always is a fruit of perseverance in daily prayers (1 Thess. 5:16-18). The way to be anxious about nothing is to be prayerful about everything.

3. *Gentleness [5]*

4. ***Waiting for the last advent of Christ [5]***: The Lord is at hand; He is present in our lives and dwells in our hearts !

5. ***Freedom from worry [6,7]***: prayers and thanksgiving is the way of the heavenly peace.

6. ***Growing in virtues [8,9]***

It is a characteristic of Paul to say, “We glory (i.e., boast, exult) in Jesus” (cf. Rom 1:26; 5:2; 1 Cor 1:31; 2 Cor 10:17). The verb “boasting” appears about thirty- \five times in Paul’s writings and only two other times elsewhere in the New Testament. There are two radically different kinds of boasting: one is pride which is sin (cf. Gal 6:13); the second is Christian boasting, i.e., acknowledgment that all comes from God. This second requires the humility that identifies one as subject to God’s grace as it is revealed in the cross of Jesus (e.g. Gal 6:14)⁷.

7. ***Being content [10-12]***

8. ***Being strong in Christ [13]***

9. ***Sharing in other’s sufferings and needs [14-19]***

⁷ Mary Ann Getty: *Philippians and Philemon*, 1980, p. 49-50.