

## Paul's Letter to the Community at Philippi

### Chapter 1

From Paul and Timothy, servants<sup>a</sup> of Christ Jesus, to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi,<sup>b</sup> together with their pastors<sup>c</sup>

---

<sup>a</sup> Or, "slaves".

<sup>b</sup> Paul founded a Christian community in Philippi (see Acts 16:11-40). Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, in his letter to the Philippians, says that Paul wrote "letters" to them, not just one letter (Polycarp Phil. 3:2), and it appears to me that in canonical Philippians we probably have a complete letter with significant portions of two earlier ones tucked into the middle of it. I think that the complete letter, the last to be written, is made up of Phil. 1:1-3:1a + Phil. 4:21-23, and is a letter sent from prison in Rome by the hand of Epaphroditus. Paul is sending Epaphroditus home to Philippi, and he feels hopeful of being acquitted soon (1:22-26; 2:23-24), although he is preparing himself for any outcome to his trial (2:17-18, 23). I think that the first inserted partial letter comprises 3:1b-4:9, and seems to be written in the heat of a controversy around circumcision very similar to what we see evidence of in Galatians. There are a number of close parallels. It's probably the earliest of the three letter portions that we have from Paul to the Philippians, and it's probably roughly contemporary with Galatians. I think that the second inserted partial letter comprises 4:10-20, and is a quick thank you note for a generous gift of money the Philippians have sent to Paul during his imprisonment. Whether Paul is on his way to Rome or in Rome when Epaphroditus reaches him is unknown. Epaphroditus delivers the funds and plans to stay with Paul to be a practical help to him. Paul's thank you note is probably sent more or less immediately upon the arrival of Epaphroditus, and then anything from a couple of months to a year or more goes by before Paul's final letter (Phil. 1:1-3:1a; 4:21-23) is composed and sent. In the time between the thank you note and the last letter, Epaphroditus gets very ill, and word is sent to the Philippians about his illness (2:26). Presumably, enough time passes after that message that Epaphroditus fears that they will be badly worried if they don't hear any more (2:26).

and deacons.<sup>d</sup> <sup>2</sup>Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ!

<sup>3</sup>I thank my God every time I think of you. <sup>4</sup>I always pray for you all with joy, every time I say my prayers.<sup>e</sup> <sup>5</sup>Because you've been partners<sup>f</sup> in the good news from the first day right up to now. <sup>6</sup>And I'm convinced about *one* thing: that the One who started such a good work in you, is going to fully complete it, right up to the day of Christ Jesus. <sup>7</sup>After all, it's right for me to feel this way about you all. Because *you've* held *me* in *your* hearts.<sup>g</sup> <sup>8</sup>While I've been in chains, and while I've been making my defense, and proving the good news,<sup>h</sup> you've all been my partners in grace. <sup>9</sup>Because God is my witness—I miss you all so much, with the affection of Christ Jesus! <sup>10</sup>And this is my prayer:<sup>i</sup> that your love will overflow even more than ever, with deep knowledge and complete discernment.<sup>j</sup> <sup>11</sup>That way you'll value the things that are really important, and be open-hearted, with nothing offensive in you,<sup>k</sup> ready for the day of Christ. <sup>12</sup>You'll have produced the harvest of integrity<sup>l</sup> that comes

---

<sup>c</sup> Or, "overseers"; traditionally, "bishops". See Acts 20:28 for the metaphor of the shepherd being applied to this role, to bring out its combined responsibilities of leadership and protection.

<sup>d</sup> A deacon, or "server", is a person entrusted with arranging provision for the practical needs of the spiritual community and its members.

<sup>e</sup> Lit. "...I think of you, always in all my prayer for you all, making my prayer with joy.

<sup>f</sup> Lit. "...my prayers, over your partnership". Their partnership is what makes Paul so joyful.

<sup>g</sup> Or, less likely, "Because I have you in my heart".

<sup>h</sup> Lit. "in my bonds, and in my defense, and in the confirmation of the good news".

<sup>i</sup> Lit. "And I pray this".

<sup>j</sup> Lit. "all perceptiveness".

<sup>k</sup> Lit. "so that you'll be free from hidden motives and without offense".

<sup>l</sup> "The harvest of integrity": lit. "the fruit of righteousness". No single contemporary English word captures the sense of this multifaceted word. It

through Jesus Christ, and results in glory and praise for God.

<sup>12</sup>Now, I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what's happened to me has actually gone towards the advancement of the good news. <sup>13</sup>It's to the point where my imprisonment for Christ<sup>a</sup> has become known throughout the palace guard, and to everybody else. <sup>14</sup>And most of our brothers and sisters in the Lord have been convinced by my imprisonment<sup>b</sup> to speak God's<sup>c</sup> word all the more fearlessly.

<sup>15</sup>Now, some are also doing it out of envy and petty rivalry, but most are preaching Christ out of goodwill. <sup>16</sup>They're doing it out of love—they know that I'm destined<sup>d</sup> to defend the good news. <sup>17</sup>But the others are spreading the word about Christ<sup>e</sup> out of competitiveness, not sincerely. They think they can make trouble for me while I'm in chains. <sup>18</sup>So what? All I care is<sup>f</sup> that for whatever reason, whether for an excuse or for real, people are spreading the word about Christ.<sup>g</sup> And I'm glad about *that*. And I'm going to keep *on* being glad. <sup>19</sup>Because I know that this is going to turn out for my salvation, thanks to<sup>h</sup> your prayers and the support of the Spirit of Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup>That's what I'm

---

can mean justice, personal integrity, legal innocence, and moral goodness.

<sup>a</sup> Lit. "my bonds in Christ".

<sup>b</sup> Lit. "my bonds".

<sup>c</sup> Some mss have "the word", but "God's word" is implied in any case.

<sup>d</sup> Or, "appointed" (by God). Under the Roman Empire, it was illegal to belong to a new religion, and Christians were vulnerable to prosecution under it. Paul is in prison in Rome because he has been arrested and has appealed to Caesar. He hopes that his case will set a legal precedent that the Jesus movement is an organic outgrowth of the Jewish religious tradition, not an illegal "new religion" (see Acts 21:17–28:16).

<sup>e</sup> Lit. "publicizing Christ".

<sup>f</sup> "All I care is": lit. "But".

<sup>g</sup> Lit. "Christ is being publicized".

<sup>h</sup> Lit. "through".

yearning and hoping for: that I won't be ashamed in any way, but in complete openness, now as always, Christ will be glorified<sup>i</sup> in my body—whether through life or through death. <sup>21</sup>Because for me, living means Christ—and death is a bonus.<sup>j</sup> <sup>22</sup>But suppose I end up living on in the flesh. To me that just means fruitful work. So<sup>k</sup> I don't know what to choose. <sup>23</sup>I'm torn between the two: I have the desire to leave and be with Christ, because that's much better. <sup>24</sup>But staying here in the flesh is more necessary because of you. <sup>25</sup>And I'm sure of this: I am going to stay alive, and I'm going to spend time with you all, for your advancement and joy in the faith. <sup>26</sup>That way, you'll be able to brag all the more about Christ Jesus with me, thanks to my second visit to you.<sup>l</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Just live in a way that's worthy of the good news of Christ. That way, whether I come and see you, or whether I hear the news about you while I'm away, you're<sup>m</sup> standing in one spirit, in one soul, striving together for the faith of the good news. <sup>28</sup>And you're not frightened in any way by those who stand against you. That's a sign to them of their destruction and your salvation, which comes from God. <sup>29</sup>Because you've been given the gift not only of believing in Christ, but also of suffering for him. <sup>30</sup>You're facing the same struggle that you've seen me face, and now you're hearing that I'm facing it.<sup>n</sup>

## Chapter 2

So if you've experienced

some encouragement in Christ,

---

<sup>i</sup> Or, "praised".

<sup>j</sup> Lit. "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain".

<sup>k</sup> Lit. "And".

<sup>l</sup> As Paul writes this, he is facing a possible death sentence. He is prophesying that he will be found innocent and be released, that he will live to visit the Philippians again, so they can celebrate Christ's victory in his trial together.

<sup>m</sup> Lit. "that you're", implying, "I will find that you're".

<sup>n</sup> Lit. "...suffering for him, having the same struggle that you've seen in me and now hear in me".

some comfort from love,  
some community in the Spirit,  
some compassion and mercy,

<sup>2</sup>Make my joy complete, by having the same attitude, holding to the same love, being together in spirit, with one common attitude.

<sup>3</sup>Don't do anything out of competitiveness and petty status seeking, but humbly value one another more than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you shouldn't just be looking out for their own interests, but also for each other's. <sup>5</sup>Think like this with each other, which is also how Christ Jesus thinks.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>6</sup>He was in the form of God—  
Yet he didn't regard being equal with God as something to be grabbed onto.

<sup>7</sup>Just the opposite: he poured himself out.<sup>b</sup>  
He took the form of a servant, and became the same as a human being.<sup>c</sup>

And being found<sup>d</sup> in the shape of a human being, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself,  
And he was obedient all the way to death,  
even death on a cross.

<sup>9</sup>Because of that, God has lifted him up high.

And God has given him the name that's above every name,

<sup>10</sup>So that at the name of Jesus,  
Every knee is going to<sup>e</sup> bend,

<sup>11</sup>And every voice<sup>f</sup> is going to confess,  
That Jesus Christ is Lord,<sup>g</sup>

To the glory of God the Father.

<sup>12</sup>So then, my dear friends! Just as you've always listened to me<sup>h</sup>—not just like you did

<sup>a</sup> Or, more literally, "Have this attitude among you, which is also in Christ Jesus".

<sup>b</sup> For the imagery of "pouring himself out", see Isa. 53:12.

<sup>c</sup> Or, "was born in the same form as a human being"; lit. "having become [or: having been born] in the likeness of human beings".

<sup>d</sup> Or, "finding himself", or "being".

<sup>e</sup> "So that...every knee is going to bend": lit. "So that... every knee should bend" (subjunctive).

<sup>f</sup> Lit. "tongue".

<sup>g</sup> See Isa. 45:23.

when<sup>i</sup> I was with you, but now much more, while I'm away—let each of you be working, with fear and trembling, to achieve your own salvation. <sup>13</sup>Because God's the one who's in you, enabling you both to desire and to achieve, what pleases God.<sup>j</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Do everything without grumbling and arguing—<sup>15</sup>that way you'll be faultless and innocent, blameless children of God in the middle of a twisted and perverse culture.<sup>k</sup> You shine in front of them like stars in the world,<sup>l</sup>  
<sup>16</sup>as you hold onto the Word of Life.<sup>m</sup> You're going to make me proud on the day of Christ! Because I won't have run my race and done such hard work for nothing.<sup>n</sup>

<sup>17</sup>However, even if I get poured out on the sacrifice and offering of your faith, I am celebrating, and I'm celebrating with you all. <sup>18</sup>I want you to do the same: celebrate, and celebrate with me.<sup>o</sup>

<sup>19</sup>I'm hoping in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon: I'll feel better when I how things are going with you. <sup>20</sup>You know, I don't have anybody else who feels like I do, and who'll really care about your concerns.

<sup>21</sup>Because they're all looking out for them-

<sup>h</sup> Or, "obeyed".

<sup>i</sup> Some mss have, "—not just when".

<sup>j</sup> Lit. "For God is the one enabling/accomplishing in you the will and the accomplishment for the sake of the good will".

<sup>k</sup> Lit. "generation".

<sup>l</sup> Or, "You shine on them as stars shine on the world".

<sup>m</sup> That is, the good news.

<sup>n</sup> Lit. "...day of Christ, that I didn't run in vain nor labor in vain".

<sup>o</sup> Paul is convinced that he's going to be released, but even if he turns out to be wrong, and he does get condemned to death, he urges the Philippians to look on the giving of his life for Christ as a "drink offering", a kind of "topping" on top of the offering to God that they too are making by living as Christians in a hostile world (see Lev. 23:13, 18, 37; Rom. 15:16; 2 Tim. 4:6). He urges them to see it not as a tragedy, but as a gift joyfully given to God.

selves, not for the concerns of Jesus Christ.

<sup>22</sup>But you know how tried and true Timothy is. You know he's been a servant of the good news alongside me—how we've been like father and son. <sup>23</sup>So I'm hoping to send him, just as soon as I get a sense of how my case is going. <sup>24</sup>But I'm sure<sup>a</sup> in the Lord that I'm going to come to you soon myself.

<sup>25</sup>I also think I'd better send you our brother Epaphroditus, my coworker and fellow soldier. He's been your representative,<sup>b</sup> and a servant to me in my time of need. <sup>26</sup>I'm sending him because he's been missing you all, and he's been very upset because you've heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup>And actually he was ill, and nearly died.<sup>c</sup> But God was merciful to him—and not only him, but to me too. I was spared so much grief!<sup>d</sup> <sup>28</sup>So I'm sending him to you that much more urgently—so you'll get to celebrate seeing him again, and I'll be relieved too.<sup>e</sup> <sup>29</sup>So welcome him in the Lord with a big celebration.<sup>f</sup> Hold people like him in high esteem,<sup>g</sup> because he nearly died doing<sup>9</sup> Christ's work. He risked his life to fill in the rest of your service to me.<sup>h</sup>

---

<sup>a</sup> Or, "I'm persuaded".

<sup>b</sup> Or, "emissary"; lit. "apostle". The Philippians sent him to Paul.

<sup>c</sup> Lit. "almost to death".

<sup>d</sup> Lit. "...me too, that I might not have grief upon grief".

<sup>e</sup> Paul well knows the pain of being in anxious suspense about somebody's health. So in one sense his relief won't be complete until they get the in-person proof that Epaphroditus is all right.

<sup>f</sup> Lit. "with all joy".

<sup>9</sup> Lit. "For because of Christ's work he came near to death".

<sup>h</sup> Lit. "to fill up the lack of your service towards me". Paul doesn't at all mean that they were lacking in their service to him. He means that they sent him a gift of money (see 4:10-18), but, not feeling that money was enough, they also sent one of their members to give him practical help.

### Chapter 3

Well,<sup>i</sup> my brothers and sisters, be happy<sup>j</sup> in the Lord.

It's no trouble for me to repeat some things,<sup>k</sup> and it's a safeguard for you. <sup>2</sup>Watch out for the dogs, watch out for the evildoers, and watch out for the people who practice mutilation.<sup>l</sup> <sup>3</sup>After all, *we're* the circumcision.<sup>m</sup> We're the ones worshipping with the Spirit of God.<sup>n</sup> And we're proud of Christ Jesus, rather than putting confidence in our flesh—<sup>4</sup>even though I have a reason for confidence in my flesh.<sup>o</sup> If somebody else thinks they have a reason to be confident in flesh, I have more reason:

- ✓ <sup>5</sup>Circumcised on the eighth day
- ✓ From the people of Israel
- ✓ From the tribe of Benjamin
- ✓ A Hebrew born of Hebrew parents
- ✓ In relation to the Law, a Pharisee
- ✓ <sup>6</sup>In relation to zeal, a persecutor of the Christian community

---

<sup>i</sup> Lit. "Finally". He's beginning to wrap up the letter.

<sup>j</sup> Or, "goodbye". "Be happy" is a standard farewell greeting, like "be well". But Paul adds "in the Lord", making it a Christian parting blessing. Probably Phil. 4:21-23 once followed immediately on this sentence, and what starts at 3:1b is the main portion of a letter Paul wrote to them some years earlier. See the nt. on 1:1.

<sup>k</sup> Lit. "to write the same things".

<sup>l</sup> Paul is parodying his opponents here. Certain Jewish-Christian preachers are going from place to place insisting that one is not a true Christian, acceptable to God, unless one is circumcised and becomes a Jew. (His letter to the Galatians deals with the same issue.) "Dogs" and "evildoers" appear to be abusive names Jewish people typically used to refer to the "uncircumcised", i.e. the non-Jews, the Gentiles. But the epithets turn upside-down when he follows them not with "the uncircumcised", but with "people who practice mutilation", referring to unnecessary circumcision.

<sup>m</sup> By this he means both Gentile and Jewish Christians.

<sup>n</sup> A key ancient ms leaves out the words, "of God".

<sup>o</sup> Lit. "the flesh".

- ✓ In relation to the innocence that you get from the Law,<sup>a</sup> faultless

<sup>7</sup>But because of Christ, I regard everything that's to my credit as a loss.<sup>b</sup> <sup>8</sup>Absolutely:<sup>c</sup> I regard everything as a loss, because of the much greater value of knowing Christ my Lord. Because of him I've experienced the loss of everything. And I regard it all as trash,<sup>d</sup> so that I can gain Christ<sup>e</sup> and be found in him. I won't be getting my innocence<sup>e</sup> from the Law, but through faith in Christ. It's the innocence<sup>f</sup> that comes from God on the basis of faith. <sup>10</sup>It's about knowing Christ, and the power of his resurrection, and knowing what it is to share in his sufferings. It's about being molded into the pattern of his death,<sup>11</sup> so I can somehow make it<sup>g</sup> to the resurrection from among the dead.

<sup>12</sup>It's not that I've already gotten there, or already been made perfect. But I'm pursuing it, trying to take hold of it,<sup>h</sup> because I've been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.<sup>i</sup> <sup>13</sup>Brothers and sisters, I don't regard myself as having gotten there.<sup>j</sup> But I do know one thing: I'm forgetting what's behind me, and reaching out for what's in front of me. <sup>14</sup>I'm pressing on towards the goal, going for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup>So, those of us who are mature, let's agree on this. And if you think differently about some-

thing, God will reveal that to you too. <sup>16</sup>Just let's hold on to what we've already achieved.<sup>k</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Brothers and sisters, join together in following my example. And also look to those who live according to the model you have in us.

<sup>18</sup>After all, I've told you many times—and I'm crying as I'm telling you now—there are a lot of people who go around as enemies of the cross of Christ. <sup>19</sup>Their destination is destruction, their god is their own stomach, and what they're the most proud of is what shames them.<sup>l</sup> Their thinking is all about the earthly stuff. <sup>20</sup>But our citizenship is in heaven. And it's from there that we're expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>21</sup>He's going to transform this humble body of ours into the same form as his glorious body. He'll do it through<sup>m</sup> the active power that enables him to make literally everything<sup>n</sup> obey him.

#### Chapter 4

Well,<sup>o</sup> my dear brothers and sisters, that I miss so much—you're my joy and my crown.<sup>p</sup> Keep standing firm in the Lord, dear friends!

<sup>2</sup>I challenge Euodia, and I challenge Syntyche, to agree with each other in the Lord. <sup>3</sup>Yes, and I also ask *you*, my true partner,<sup>q</sup> to work with them. They've worked hard with me in spreading the good news, along with Clement and all my other coworkers. All their names are in the Book of Life.<sup>r</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Or, "the justification/righteousness that's gotten in the law".

<sup>b</sup> Lit. "But whatever things are gain to me, these I regard as loss because of Christ".

<sup>c</sup> Or, "Yes indeed".

<sup>d</sup> Or, "crap".

<sup>e</sup> Or, "righteousness", or "justification".

<sup>f</sup> Or, "righteousness", or "justification".

<sup>g</sup> Or, "...death, if I can somehow make it".

<sup>h</sup> "Trying to take hold of it": lit. "if I might also take hold of it".

<sup>i</sup> A number of mss leave out "Jesus".

<sup>j</sup> Some mss have, "gotten there yet".

<sup>k</sup> Lit. "attained".

<sup>l</sup> Lit. "and whose glory is in their shame". Paul thinks they ought to be ashamed of their bigotry and belief in their own superiority, not proud of it.

<sup>m</sup> Lit. "according to".

<sup>n</sup> Lit. "even everything".

<sup>o</sup> Lit. "So—" He's making a move to wrap up the letter yet again (see 3:1 and the note there).

<sup>p</sup> This is a crown of reward or recognition, rather like a medal, not a royal crown.

<sup>q</sup> Lit. "yokefellow". Nobody knows who Paul is talking about. Is it Epaphroditus? Timothy? It's even been suggested that he's addressing a person named Partner.

<sup>r</sup> See Exod. 32:32-33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 3:5; 21:27.

<sup>4</sup>Be happy<sup>a</sup> in the Lord, always. I'll say it again: be happy.<sup>b</sup> <sup>5</sup>Be known to everybody for your gentleness.<sup>c</sup> The Lord is nearly here! <sup>6</sup>Don't worry about anything.<sup>d</sup> Instead, in all your prayers and requests, be thanking God as you tell God your requests.<sup>e</sup> <sup>7</sup>And God's peace, that's beyond all understanding, will protect your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever's true, whatever's honorable, whatever's just, whatever's pure, whatever's pleasant, whatever's commendable, or if there's some virtue or something that deserves praise, think about those things. <sup>9</sup>And keep putting into practice the things that you've learned, received, heard, and seen in me. And the God of peace will be with you.

<sup>10</sup>I'm really pleased in the Lord that you've thought of me again!<sup>f</sup> Of course, you'd already been thinking of me, but you didn't have an opportunity to show it. <sup>11</sup>It's not that I'm talking out of need. Because I've learned to be self-sufficient in my circumstances. <sup>12</sup>I know how to be destitute, and I know how to have more than enough. Everywhere, and in all circumstances, I've learned the secret of being well fed and going hungry, of having more than enough and going without. <sup>13</sup>I have strength for all of it in the One who strengthens me. <sup>14</sup>Still, you've done well by standing with me in this trouble.

<sup>15</sup>You also know, Philippians, that back during the first preaching of the good news, when I came over from Macedonia, none of the Christian communities shared with me in this

business of giving and receiving—except for you. <sup>16</sup>Because even when I was in Thessalonica, there was a first and a second time when you sent something to me for my needs. <sup>17</sup>It's not that I am after the gift—far from it. I'm after the additional credit<sup>g</sup> that goes to your account. <sup>18</sup>Because you've paid me back everything, and more!<sup>h</sup> Now that I've received the gifts you sent with Epaphroditus, I'm totally provided for. Your gift is a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, that's pleasing to God. <sup>19</sup>And may God also fill all your needs, in line with the riches of God's glory in Christ Jesus. <sup>20</sup>And may God our Father get the glory, forever and ever.

<sup>21</sup>Say hello to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus.

<sup>22</sup>The Christian brothers and sisters say hello to you, especially those who work in Caesar's palace.<sup>i</sup> <sup>23</sup>The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

---

<sup>a</sup> Or, "goodbye". "Be happy" is a standard farewell greeting, like "be well". But Paul adds "in the Lord", making it a Christian parting blessing.

<sup>b</sup> Or, "goodbye".

<sup>c</sup> Or, "for your lack of legalism".

<sup>d</sup> Or, "Never worry".

<sup>e</sup> Lit. "with thanks let your requests be made known to God".

<sup>f</sup> Probably 4:10–20 is the main portion of a letter Paul wrote to the Philippians some months earlier than the main letter that starts at 1:1. See the nt. on Ph1:1.

---

<sup>g</sup> Or, "the profit that accrues".

<sup>h</sup> I think he's saying they've supported him out of gratitude for his work in bringing them the good news (see Acts 16:11-40), but they've more than paid him back for what he has done for them.

<sup>i</sup> Lit. "especially those of Caesar's household".