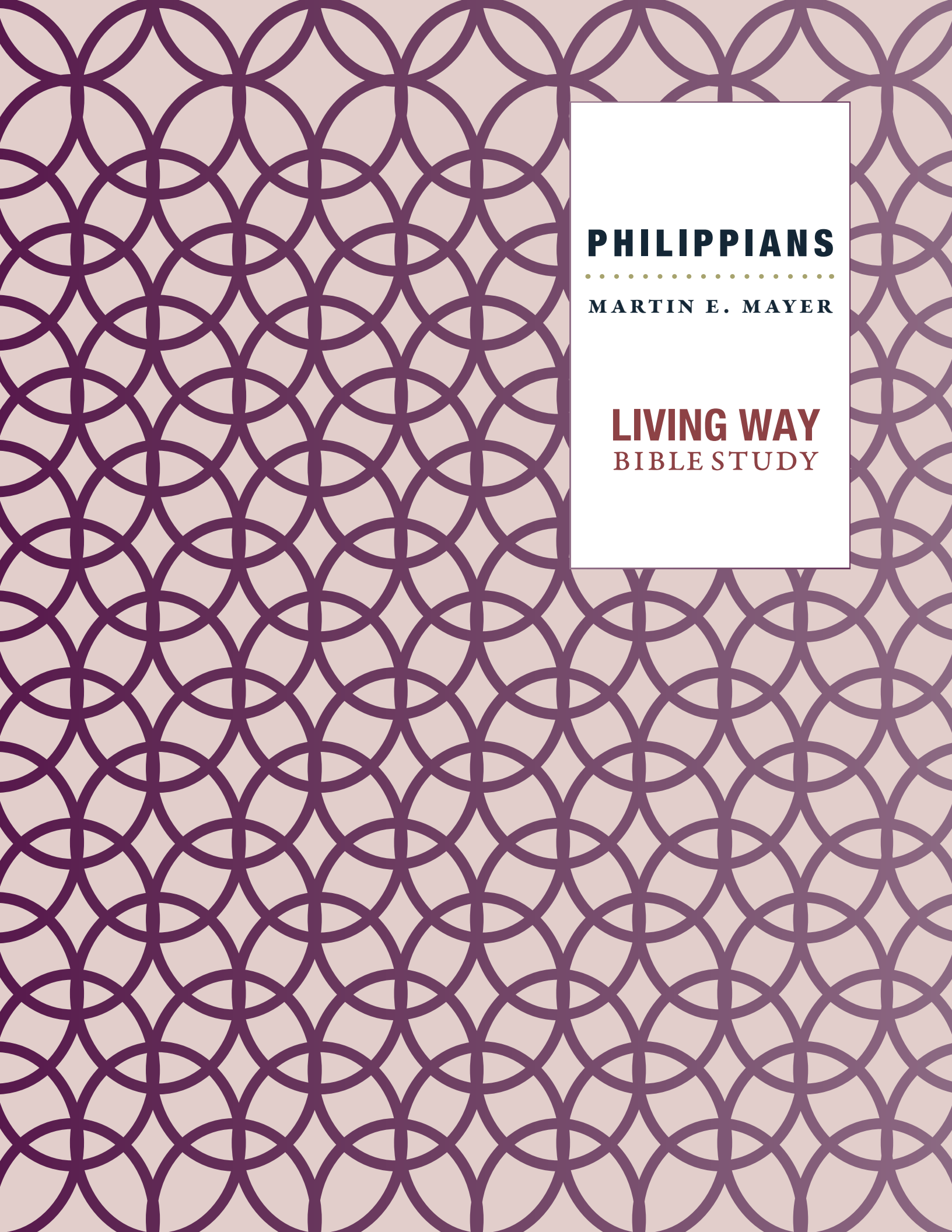




PHILIPPIANS

.....

MARTIN E. MAYER

LIVING WAY
BIBLE STUDY

Living Way Bible Study, Inc. is an auxiliary of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS). All studies are written and/or edited by LCMS pastors. We have been providing studies to churches throughout the U.S. and Canada since 1982.

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• • • • •

*May God bless you as you
walk in His Living Way!*

• • • • •

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Living Way Bible Study suggests this four-step method:

1. **PERSONAL** – The student prays for guidance from the Holy Spirit and answers the Personal Application (P.A.) questions at home using only the Bible (no commentaries).
2. **SMALL GROUPS** – The class meets for an opening and divides into small groups of 8–10 people. The small group leader guides the group through the P.A. questions, encouraging each to share their answers and discuss further as time allows.
3. **THE MESSAGE** – The lecture or message is given by a pastor or layperson who has researched the material and presents the study, giving personal insight and augmenting, but not duplicating, the author's comments.
4. **THE NARRATIVE** – The author's comments or narrative, along with the P.A. questions for the next lesson, are given out at the end of the class. At the next class meeting, before answering the P.A. questions, the small groups may choose to review the author's comments of the last lesson, and share what each has highlighted as meaningful or important.

Each lesson should be stapled together according to the number of the lesson in the right-hand corner of the page. The P.A. questions for the next week should be attached after the author's narrative for the current week, as they will be the home study for the next class session.

The first meeting of the class is an introduction to the study. Since the members of the small groups have no P.A. questions to discuss at the first meeting, they may use the time to get acquainted or to tell what they hope to receive by studying this course. At the first meeting, the lecturer presents background information about the course, using the Introduction lesson as a guide.

With this four-step method the student has the opportunity to study the particular section of Scripture covered by the lesson from four different approaches. This emphasizes the Bible text and gives the student an understanding and ownership for each section studied.

*“We hope and pray that
Living Way will continue
to provide excellent lessons
for us in the years to come.
God Bless You All.”*

.....

*“Thank you again for the
wonderful ministry. We
find it to have in-depth and
soul searching studies.”*

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Called to glory June 2008

PAUL'S FIRST AND SECOND JOURNEYS

Philippians

“If you had the joy of all the world heaped together, you would thereby not be enabled to resist any temptation or misfortune. For the joy of the world rests only on uncertain, temporal possessions, honor and pleasure. It cannot last any longer than these but vanishes and disappears if only an evil wind blows upon it and it must suffer a little trouble. But the joy of the Christian endures forever, remains firm and increases in the midst of external sorrow and misfortune.”

(Martin Luther from the exposition of John 17:13)



PERSONAL APPLICATION – BACKGROUND

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Paul had to mature spiritually, for the Lord could not use a novice in this great task he had for Paul.

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Perhaps no book of the Bible is more closely associated with the personality of its author than the epistle to the Philippians is with the great apostle Paul. We do well then to become a little better acquainted with the apostle as we launch into this study.

It is interesting how the Lord always carefully prepared those for whom He had a special assignment. Think of how He prepared Moses for the tremendous task that would be his when he led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. The Lord allowed him to grow up in the court of Pharaoh and then to spend years of meditation in the land of Midian. He also prepared Joshua for the time when he would lead His chosen people over the Jordan River to conquer the Land of Promise. Joshua had been one of the twelve spies that had inspected this Promised Land and the captain of Israel's army. He had attended Moses on Mount Sinai, and had been very active in the development of Israel's worship.

In like manner, God prepared King David for the huge task of solidifying His people and drawing the twelve tribes together into one unit. Finally, the Hebrew nation was fully established. As you read the whole story of David, you can see how God led this young man and prepared him for the time when he would have to be a bold leader.

It was in the same way that the Lord also prepared the apostle Paul for the important work that He had for him to do. Paul had been chosen by God to lead the movement of bringing the Gospel of salvation to the Gentile world, and to break down the barrier that had existed between Jew and Gentile.

Paul was a full-fledged Jew with all the restrictive feelings that had been

deeply ingrained in him. He tells us that he was of the Tribe of Benjamin (Romans 11:1). This was the tribe from whom Saul, the first king of Israel had come, and that was probably the reason why Paul's parents gave him the name of Saul, for they were very proud of their king.

Paul grew up in the non-Jewish world of Asia Minor, in the city of Tarsus, which was quite isolated from Jewish culture. However, his parents, no doubt, were very active in the Jewish community in Tarsus and so Paul from childhood received a solid training in the Jewish religion. His parents could sense that he was a very intelligent young man. To make sure that he would remain loyal to his religion they sent him to Jerusalem, where he was able to attend the finest school of the Jewish religion under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

With the influence that Paul received from this school, it was not long before he drifted into the sect of the Pharisees. This group was most intent on observing and living according to all the requirements of the law and, as a result, had set up a moral code that was much more severe than the Law of Moses. We have no indication that Paul ever confronted Jesus during this period of his life. But we know well what the attitude of the Pharisees was toward Jesus. They hated Him because His whole approach to life was in complete conflict with what they believed. So, it was only natural that Paul, when he learned about the tremendous impact the teachings of Jesus were having upon the people of Jerusalem, should oppose these followers of Jesus in a forceful way. Thus, he became very much involved in the first persecutions, not only in Jerusalem, but throughout the area. He was determined to root out this religion.

It is well that we realize that Paul was not some religious fanatic plucked off the street. He was a well-educated theologian, schooled in the Old Testament Scriptures. At the same time, he was well versed in both Greek and Roman philosophies. As a result, he was able to engage in arguments with almost anyone and could hold his own. Paul became a brilliant orator. He was a very talented writer and always displayed a keen intellect. Surely, also from a human viewpoint, this man was well endowed for the huge task for which God had chosen him.

There was only one thing wrong. He was not a Christian. He did not believe that Jesus Christ was the Son of God and the long-promised Messiah. He did not accept the joyful facts of the Gospel. He was on the road to hell. Paul certainly must have included himself in what he wrote in the epistle to the Romans (Romans 3:19-20, 3:28, 7:15-19).

It is obvious that some special confrontation was necessary in Paul's case, and the Lord provided that on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9). Instantly, a complete change took place in this man. By the miracle of God's grace, Paul saw himself for what he was, a lost and condemned sinner who needed God's grace to be saved. He showed his faith in his question, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" After God's messenger, Ananias, ministered to him, assured him of God's forgiveness, and administered Holy Baptism, Paul became even more dedicated to the cause of Jesus than he had been to the ruthless opposition of Jesus. We all know his statement, "For to me to live is Christ."

Paul was not yet ready for the huge assignment that God had for him. He had to be more fully enlightened so that he could take up the cudgels in behalf of the Gentiles to insist on their rights of freedom under the Gospel. He was the leader of the discussion of this subject later in a conference in Jerusalem after his first missionary journey, which resulted in an open door for the Gentiles (Acts 15:19-20).

Paul had to mature spiritually, for the Lord could not use a novice in this great task he had for Paul. By now, we can see that Paul had much to overcome in his own thinking because of the background in which he was trained. Imagine what it must have meant to him to turn from a complete work-righteous life to absolute faith and trust in Jesus alone as the only hope of salvation.

Also, it was necessary, if Paul was to be effective in his work, to regain the confidence of the Christian fellowship, for after all he had been a ruthless persecutor of the church. This was not something that could happen overnight (Acts 9:20-21). It took a few scars on Paul's body before everyone was convinced that he was God's chosen Apostle to the Gentiles.

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*Now the time had come and Paul was ready.
Now he needed to step out in faith. From that
day forth Paul never thought of turning back.
It was always forward in order that the Gospel
could be brought to as many people as possible.*

• • • • •

Paul also needed to overcome the belligerency which he had demonstrated so often during his days of persecuting the Christians. Thus, when his time came to suffer abuse, he could do it in a calm way in order to further his Gospel ministry. He had to learn to endure hardship, which was not easy for him because he had lived in rather comfortable circumstances.

The Lord arranged a period of quiet reflection for Paul in Arabia (Galatians 1:15-17). There, through private study and meditation, the Lord was able to communicate with Paul. This was a very valuable time for Paul.

Then, the Lord arranged for him to serve an internship, just like our young pastors do today. Barnabas, who had become Paul's sponsor, was in Antioch and was working very hard in this fast growing congregation. Barnabas remembered Paul and sent for him so that he might assist him in Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). This, again, was a wonderful training period for Paul because Antioch was a melting pot for many nations, and Paul could see that people, other than Jews, were receptive to the Gospel.

Now the time had come and Paul was ready. Now he needed to step out in faith. From that day forth Paul never thought of turning back. It was always forward in order that the Gospel could be brought to as many people as possible. He states this for us in Philippians 1:18.

Knowing this much about the author of this epistle should certainly help us in our understanding of it. May the Lord richly bless our study.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – BACKGROUND

Pray that the Holy Spirit may guide you as you look at the last verses of Acts 15 and all of Acts 16 to discover the background of the congregation at Philippi.

.....
Acts 15:40-41, 16:1-5

1. Paul is starting his second missionary journey. Who was his partner on this journey and into what area did he first go?

2. Why do you suppose Paul would want to return to this area?

3. It appears that Jesus often went into an area because He knew there was one person there who needed Him (the woman at the well in Samaria; the Syrophoenician woman), so Paul seemed to have one person in mind. Give this person's name and description.

4. What rite did Paul perform on this young man and why?

5. What would Paul particularly want to explain to these people? (Acts 15:1-21).

Acts 16:6-11

6. From a map in your Bible, tell in which direction Paul and Silas were minded to travel with the Gospel.

Why did they not do it?

7. All the while, they were moving straight west until they came to Troas, which was a seaport on the Aegean Sea. They could go no further. How did God solve the problem for them?

What request was made to Paul?

8. Where was Macedonia?

9. This meant they were now in Europe. Why would their presence in Europe be important for us?

Acts 16:12-15

10. They landed in Neapolis but did not stay there because Paul always sought out the major cities. Which one did he choose here?

11. Paul always sought out the Jewish synagogue, but finding none here, where did they go?

What did they discover about the Jewish gathering?

12. Tell about the woman who was their first convert in Europe, her baptism, and how she showed her appreciation for the blessing she received.

Acts 16:16-24

13. As the missionary group went to the place of prayer, describe their meeting with a slave girl and the events that followed (16:16-18).

14. How did her masters react and what were the consequences to Paul and Silas?

15. What is plainly taught in 2 Timothy 3:12?

Acts 16:25-34

16. Describe Paul and Silas in prison.

17. Describe the catastrophe that took place.

18. Why was the Roman prison-keeper about to commit suicide?

What stopped him?

What was his soul-searching question?

19. State Paul's beautiful answer.

20. What was the result of this event?

Acts 16:35-40

21. Describe how the feisty Paul reacted to the order of the magistrates.

22. Why was Paul able to speak in that way and what was the outcome?

23. List once again the converts Paul and Silas left in this place.

24. What has God's grace done for you?

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“While Paul was confined because of his imprisonment, Epaphroditus was free and so could be a messenger for Paul in bringing the Gospel to people.”

• • • • •

Last week we became acquainted with the apostle Paul, the author of the epistle. Now we need to know a little more about the people to whom he wrote, and the reason why he wrote what he did. This will help us to understand the many wonderful things that Paul says.

WHAT BROUGHT PAUL TO PHILIPPI?

ACTS 15:40-16:7

Paul and Silas were on the second mission journey of the apostle in carrying out his commission to bring the Gospel to the Gentile world. They decided to first visit the congregations that had been started on the first journey in Lycaonia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, that they might strengthen these congregations.

Once they had accomplished this, the missionaries were minded to move north into a very rugged and highly uncultured area which would eventually become a part of modern Russia. Just think of what a difference this might have made if the Gospel of our Lord Jesus had come to this area so very early. However, the Lord did not want them to work in this area, and indicated that to them by the Holy Spirit (16:6).

In Lystra, they picked up a valuable assistant for their mission company, a young man by the name of Timothy. His mother was a Jewess by the name of Eunice, and he was also influenced by his Jewish grandmother, Lois (2 Timothy 1:5). His father was of Greek origin. However, it appears that it was the religion of his mother that he accepted. Very likely, they were a comfortably situated family.

When Paul and Barnabas first came to Lystra, perhaps Timothy was in the audience that heard Paul preach. The Holy Spirit touched the heart of this young man, and he was determined to become a co-worker of Paul. This is all the more remarkable when we remember that immediately after he found Jesus, young Timothy probably witnessed how Paul was stoned and left for dead in the streets of Lystra (Acts 14:19). Very likely, because of his age, Paul had advised him to wait awhile to make this big step of becoming a co-worker. Now the time had come.

The missionary party moved constantly to the west, but evidently did not stop anywhere to carry on their missionary effort.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

ACTS 16:8-11

They finally came to Troas, which was a seaport on the Aegean Sea. They were a very puzzled group, for they knew not what the Lord had in mind for them. Where should they go from here? But, “the Lord moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.”

While at Troas, in the night, Paul had a vision. He saw before him a man from Macedonia who stood and begged of him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” Paul, no doubt, recognized the clothing of this man from the Greek province of Macedonia. Their culture and clothing was completely different from the Asians. It was apparent to Paul, and the others, that it was the will of the Lord, who had forbidden them to go north, that they now go to Greece and bring the Gospel of salvation to these people. Just think of what an important step that was! Early in history the precious Gospel of Jesus Christ came to Europe and from there spread into this continent. Thus, our nation heard about God’s wonderful plan of salvation. The Lord does indeed arrange for His elect to be brought into the Kingdom. He had chosen some wonderful people in Philippi for Himself.

LAUNCHING THE WORK IN PHILIPPI

ACTS 16:12-13

From Troas, the hearty missionary company was able to engage a ship that took them across the Aegean Sea to Neapolis, the seaport of Macedonia. This very probably was just a small fishing village, and it was never Paul’s

strategy to undertake a big mission effort in a small town. He wisely went where the people were, and so he moved on to Philippi, a very important city. The reason for this strategy was that these people would then move out into the area, take the Gospel with them, and would help in starting other churches. That is exactly what happened. It is still a wise plan to follow today, but we must also be ready to start churches in small towns when the people beckon.

Another of the things that Paul customarily did when he started a mission was to make his first approach through the Jewish synagogue. In most instances, he was not well received there, and so he would move on. At Philippi, he inquired about such a synagogue only to discover that there was none. But there was a group of Jewish people who gathered for prayer at a place outside the city along the river. So, the missionary group started out for this place.

It was on the Sabbath, but instead of finding a Jewish congregation, they found only a group of women. This might have been somewhat disappointing to the missionaries because this was the launching of a whole new mission effort. However, a big circle was formed and the missionaries sat among the women and spoke to them. You can rest assured that Paul used the occasion to preach a fine sermon. He was there to bring Christ to these people.

THE FIRST CONVERT

ACTS 16:14-15

We have no way of knowing how many of the women present that day received the Lord Jesus, but we should keep in mind that some of these women, no doubt, were the beginning nucleus of the congregation that would be formed in Philippi. We definitely know of one woman who was won for the Lord. Her name was Lydia.

Lydia, no doubt, was a Jewess, otherwise why would she have been at this place? She also was a woman of means, for she is described as a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira. The purple dye that came from this place was considered to be especially valuable because the Greek people loved this color.

She sold material which had been dyed with this purple. Nothing is said of her husband, however, her children are mentioned; so she might have been a widow. She

evidently had a substantial home for she invited the missionaries to stay with her, and we conclude that her household included servants.

This woman immediately became a missionary, for she brought all in her household to the Lord. In this case, the adults surely were instructed by Paul and the others, so that they knew and received Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They were then baptized and they knew that this was the public acknowledgement that they accepted the Christian faith. Very likely, in the household there were small children who were also brought to Baptism, and through Baptism, faith in Jesus was generated in them by the Holy Spirit. Surely, Lydia became a wonderful example for others, and so, very likely, it was not long before a larger group of Christians gathered at this place of prayer.

TROUBLE IN THE STREET

ACTS 16:16-24

As the missionaries moved from Lydia's home to the place of prayer, they passed by where some men had set up a small shop. These men kept a slave girl who was possessed by an evil spirit which gave her the ability to tell fortunes. They were using the ability of this girl to make money.

As Paul and the others walked by, this girl followed them and shouted at them. Through her, the devil proclaimed that the missionaries were servants of the most high God who provides the way of salvation. We know, of course, that this was not unusual because on other occasions the devil witnessed to the truth. We have such an example in Mark 5:1 ff.

As this went on day after day, Paul finally could resist no longer because of his love for people. It disturbed him that this poor girl was thus afflicted. In the name of Jesus Christ, he cast out the evil spirit from her in order that all might know the power of the Savior whom he proclaimed. The evil spirit left her and so did her ability to tell fortunes. This meant that the source of her owner's income dried up and they seized Paul and Silas and brought them before the city officials. They were charged with stirring up trouble by teaching new ideas that were not proper for Romans to observe. The manner of their arrest and accusations reminds us of how our Lord was accused before the Roman authorities.

It might be well at this point to learn a bit about the very important city of Philippi. It was on the highway which the Romans had established between the East and the West. It was noted for its gold mines. On the plains of Philippi in 42 B.C., a mighty battle was fought and the victors became the Caesars that established the Roman Empire. Caesar Augustus made Philippi a Roman colony and this is why the people of this Greek city were Roman citizens.

A SONG AT MIDNIGHT

ACTS 16:25-34

Paul and Silas were beaten for their work of love which teaches us an important

lesson. Jesus said in John 15:20: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." The world is never going to like the kindnesses we do for other people because this shames them, and so we can expect that we will be made to suffer. But we always remember that we are doing it for Jesus, and the joy is our reward.

Not only were these men beaten, but they were imprisoned in such a way that they were made to appear as the worst possible criminals. They were put into the inner prison and placed in stocks, in spite of all the wounds they had suffered in being beaten. Think of being in prison in a new country with no influential friends. What a predicament! What a way to launch this new mission!

But do we find Paul and Silas discouraged? No. "At midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God." This was followed shortly by a terrible earthquake which rocked the prison and made possible an escape for all the prisoners. Perhaps they were so frightened by the experience that none of them tried to escape. After all the excitement, Paul and Silas may have still been singing. Certainly they were praising God for protecting them.

The jailer rushed into the rubble of the prison thinking that surely all his prisoners were gone and that he would be held responsible. He was at the point of committing suicide when Paul called out to him not to harm himself for they were all there. The man then rushed in and fell down before Paul and Silas, and this was his request: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" He had heard the songs of the missionaries and could now sense how perfectly calm they were even after such a harrowing experience. He knew that these men had something that he did not have, and this he wanted.

The answer that Paul gave, of course, is known to all of us: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household." Paul and Silas were ever ready to give an answer to the faith that was in them, and this was certainly an opportunity to do so. What a lesson for us! We let too many of these opportunities slip by us when we could so easily give a witness to our Lord Jesus.

"You will be saved, you and your household." It is obvious that Paul went into a fine explanation of what he meant

by these words. The jailer took Paul and Silas into his home and cared for them. His entire family was involved in this act of love for before the night was over they all confessed their faith in Jesus and were baptized. Thus, they were added to the group of those in Philippi who had become Christians.

ACTS 16:35-40

The next day, the officials of Philippi requested that Paul and Silas leave their city. After demanding a proper release they went to Lydia's house. A tearful farewell followed and the missionaries were on their way. It must have been obvious to both Paul and Silas that they could not effectively work there anymore because of the uproar that had been made against them.

THE OCCASION FOR THE WRITING OF THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS

About ten years after Paul and Silas had founded this church, Paul was in Rome as a prisoner (A.D. 61-63). He had not seen these dear people for at least four years and probably had heard nothing from them. He was concerned about their spiritual welfare and about those natural things that are of interest to friends. As always, Paul's chief concern was that no false prophet had come to them to rob them of their faith.

At this time, Epaphroditus, a member of the Philippian congregation, arrived with a gift from these people to support the apostle in his dire need. He also brought a report that all was well with the Christians in Philippi. Paul was deeply moved by this show of love and very thankful, because he was much in need of their gifts.

Epaphroditus stayed on with Paul. While Paul was confined because of his imprisonment, Epaphroditus was free and so could be a messenger for Paul in bringing the Gospel to people. He was such a conscientious young man and worked so hard that he became gravely ill and almost died. When he recovered, Paul decided to send him back to Philippi with an epistle which Epaphroditus would carry to the people there.

With this background information, you can see that the epistle of Paul to the Philippians is going to be very exciting and helpful to us in our Christian growth. May God bless our study!

PERSONAL APPLICATION – PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your understanding as you study Philippians 1:1-11.

Philippians 1:1-2

1. How does Paul describe himself and Timothy? What does this imply?

2. To whom does Paul address the epistle?

By contrast, how does he describe these people?

Why could Paul name them so? (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 2:19-20)

3. When we say the Apostles' Creed and speak of the "holy Christian Church" what phrase do we associate with it?

4. What two very important gifts does Paul ask for these people?

Philippians 1:3-8

5. When Paul thinks of the Philippian Christians, what is his immediate feeling?

6. Recall circumstances that would make Paul feel this way about the Philippians.

7. How did Paul show his gratitude?

8. Discuss the contrast of praying only for ourselves and praying for others.

9. What phrase does Paul use which gave him joy? (v.5)

How would you define this phrase?

10. For what does Paul express his confidence in verse 6?

11. Why can we be sure of our salvation? (Ephesians 1:3-6)

12. What was the good work of which Paul speaks? (John 6:29; 1 Thessalonians 1:3)

13. What is meant by the day of Jesus Christ? (2 Corinthians 5:10)

14. In your own words, express the feeling Paul has for the Philippian Christians as found in verses 7 and 8.

Philippians 1:9-11

15. Explain what Paul desires for these people (v.9).

16. What do you understand by knowledge?

What do you understand by discernment?

17. Give practical steps you might take to increase your knowledge and discernment.

18. Using several translations, re-phrase verse 10 in your own words.

19. What is Paul's main concern for Christians in verse 11?

20. Being pure and blameless would, of course, mean being holy. Explain how that is possible for a mortal being. (1 John 1:7-9)

21. What are ways we obtain the fruit of righteousness according to John 15:5 and Hebrews 12:10-11?

22. For what purposes are we to be filled with the fruit of righteousness? (Matthew 5:16; Ephesians 1:12-14)

23. Having been sealed with the promise of the Holy Spirit, we should be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. According to Galatians 5:22-25, what is the fruit of the Spirit?

How then will we be able to live and walk?

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“After the Holy Spirit has gone through all the effort to bring us to faith, He will use His power to see to it that we remain in that faith until the day our Lord Jesus Christ will say to us: ‘Enter into the joy of your Lord.’”



Like with all his epistles, Paul at the very outset names himself as the author and as we examine the epistle the similarity of style convinces us that he is. Very likely, Timothy was his scribe, and so he speaks as though there was a co-authorship.

THE GREETING

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

Paul begins his letter by establishing a beautiful yet unusual contrast, naming himself and Timothy as slaves, and the Christians at Philippi as saints. Both Paul and Timothy were bound by their service to the Lord Jesus. This was not something that you could either take or leave. Paul's life belonged to Jesus, just as the life of a slave belonged to his master. He calls himself a debtor to God (Romans 1:14), and states in 1 Corinthians 9:16 that he simply cannot do anything else but preach the Gospel. As a slave, Paul was bound to obey every command that he was given by Jesus. He felt like Jesus did, "I must work the works of Him who sent me" (John 9:4).

On the other hand, Paul speaks of the Christians at Philippi as saints. But note he calls them saints in Christ Jesus. They are not saints in themselves, for each one of them belongs to the community of mankind, of whom the Bible says, "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Yet, Paul dares to call them saints because, in Jesus, all of their sins are forgiven, so that when God looks upon them, He sees them not as sinners but as His redeemed children through the blood of Jesus. You see why in the Apostles' Creed we confess, "I believe in the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints." This is the fellowship of those whose sins are forgiven because of their faith in their Savior. As saints, too, they are separated from those who follow after the world, and this separation has been wrought by God. As the slave is bound to do the master's will, so also is the saint.

While Paul addresses his words to all the Christians in Philippi, he makes sure that his words will be accepted and understood by the bishops and deacons. There was a difference between these two offices. Bishops were those who devoted their full time to ministry as pastors do today; while deacons were those who, on a voluntary basis, served the Lord as dedicated lay people do today. While no mention is made in the Scriptures of women bishops, we do know that there were women deaconesses.

Behind both of these titles is the concept of an “overseer” (Acts 20:28). The position of the bishop in the church indicated that he should be dealt with in dignity as he oversees the activity of the deacons. The role of the pastor was not to be that of a super-head, but rather as a leader and concerned caretaker. He was to work alongside his people, show them by example what to do, and give them the necessary instruction (2 Timothy 2:2).

We must observe the two blessings that Paul wishes for these Christians: grace and peace. Grace is a gift which only God can give. It is His undeserved favor which is in no way earned; His full acceptance of the person who has sinned and thus cut himself off from God’s favor. Peace results when the grace of God reaches into the sinful heart and restores the sinner to favor with God. It is a very special peace of heart, mind, and conscience. It is also a gift that only God can give. That is why Paul says that it comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is not mentioned because He is that person of the Holy Trinity who is always at work behind the scenes. But it is He who actually gives the peace, for it is He who teaches us that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, and that this Son came to save all men from their sins.

A SINCERE THANK YOU

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-4

Paul begins his epistle very well with a word of appreciation, which we would do well to remember. A good way to start all of our prayers is with a sincere word of gratitude for the blessings we have already received. This immediately puts us in a far better frame of mind for the request we are about to make. It may make our request seem not that tremendously necessary, because we have already received so much from the hand of God.

The apostle is grateful for these people in Philippi. We can appreciate why that is true when we think of Lydia and those women by the river, or the damsel from whom he expelled the evil spirit, or the jailer who ministered to him after the terrible earthquake. A pastor should always be grateful when he sees how the Holy Spirit is able to use the words he speaks to change hearts of people so that they become faithful supporters of his work.

Paul had a special way of showing that gratitude. He regularly prayed for these people, and we can well imagine that he did it by name. What greater thing could he do for them than to commend them into the hands of their loving Father in Heaven?

We are very much inclined to pray for ourselves. Very few of our personal needs ever fail to be brought to the attention of the Lord. Could this be the reason why our prayer-life has such a tendency to depress us? The more we emphasize our own personal needs to the Lord, the greater they seem to become, and perhaps we feel the less the Lord can help us. We should follow the example of Paul and spend more of our time in praying for others. In this way, we will become more concerned for those for whom we pray, and the result will be that we will forget about our own personal needs. The prayers we speak for others, and the resulting answers which we so often see, have a tendency to fill our hearts, too, with joy.

FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL

PHILIPPIANS 1:5

As Paul remembered his work in Philippi, even though he was not there very long, it was always with the realization that much of his success there was due to the great willingness of the people to assist him. Paul and Silas were not out there on a limb all by themselves. Sad to say, some of our pastors feel they pretty much have to wage the battle all by themselves before a group of spectators who are not always applauding.

We think at once of Lydia who brought her family and all her servants to the Lord, and no doubt played a big role in convincing other women to do the same. She then opened her home to Paul and Silas. Also, we think of the jailer, who persuaded all in his household to come to the Lord Jesus, and then ministered to the painful needs of the

missionaries. This was truly a fellowship in the Gospel.

This is an activity that is so needed in the church today. We are told that more people in our country believe in Jesus Christ than ever before, and yet fewer are active members of a church. This means, in most cases, that they are not engaged in the fellowship of the Gospel.

But, again, it is this fellowship in the Gospel which makes for the joy that is so much a part of Christianity. What greater joy can there be than to share with another person what your faith in Jesus has done for you, especially when that person is going through a crisis and really needs the comfort that Jesus can bring. And what greater joy than to gather with a group of your fellow Christians, pray for God's guidance, and then go out two by two to speak to people about the most important thing there is, their soul's salvation. We need that kind of joy to make our Christian life a warm and satisfying experience. Fellowship in the Gospel — what a beautiful expression!

ELECTED BY GOD'S GRACE

PHILIPPIANS 1:6-11

As Paul thought about these Philippian Christians, there was yet one more thing that filled him with joy and gratitude. He knew that God had chosen these fine people for His everlasting Kingdom. As he prayed for them he was certain that the Lord would see to it that they would finally reach their heavenly goal.

In speaking on this subject, Paul says that he is "confident." What a wonderful word that is! He was absolutely sure God would continue the work of salvation in them. We need to realize that it is the will of the Holy Spirit to work in us such confidence, which we can call "a conviction." A conviction is when the Holy Spirit makes us so absolutely sure of what we believe that no one can shake us in our faith.

Can we be sure of our salvation? Yes, we can. God sent His Son to be our Savior, and He then allowed us to hear about that Savior in some way, and as we heard the story of the Savior, the Holy Spirit worked on our hearts so that we believed in Him. God has promised that if we believe in Jesus then we shall be saved. What is more, God has given us the opportunity to learn more and more about

His great salvation as He strengthens us in our faith through His Word and Sacraments. In the meantime, He encourages us to follow Jesus' example of doing works of love to others, and thereby exercise and strengthen our faith. Paul here assures these Christians that, "he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." In other words, we have the promise of God that He will keep us in our faith until we stand before Jesus for our judgment.

Even more consoling to us is the fact that we have been elected by God for eternal salvation. Please look up Ephesians 1:3-6. Long before we were ever born, God already chose us for salvation. God did not look at us when He made that choice; He looked at Jesus and because of Him and what He would do for us, He chose us to be with Him in Heaven. But how do we know that we are one of the chosen? Go back to the things mentioned in the previous paragraph. Remember, that all of this rests upon the grace of God and His promise which is sure.

But what about those who are not elected? We must never speak that way because the Bible does not speak that way. When we think about the election of grace, we think only of those who were elected, for this is revealed for the comfort of the believer. "[God] who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). Christ Jesus died for all and the Holy Spirit wants to work faith in all people (2 Corinthians 5:15; 2 Peter 3:9).

Does this give me free license to do anything I want to do, because I know that I am going to go to Heaven? Of course not. The moment I take that attitude I show that I do not really believe and trust in Jesus as my Savior, for then I would not do things which I know offend Him but would devote myself to doing those things that please Him.

In these verses, Paul assures us and the Philippian Christians that God has brought us to faith, that He will keep us blameless and fill us with the "fruit of righteousness" that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." Certainly, after the Holy Spirit has gone through all the effort to bring us to faith, He will use His power to see to it that we remain in that faith until the day our Lord Jesus Christ will say to us: "Enter into the joy of your Lord."