



## Philippians Masterclass

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The purpose of our final section is to briefly bring together what we have learned about the characters featured in the letter, the author and his recipients – with the purpose of summarising how all this impacts on us.

### 7.1 Paul and the Philippians

Hopefully we have learned much of Paul during our journey through this letter. A look at the rear of most Bibles today will uncover maps of Paul’s “missionary journeys”. It is often overlooked that Paul did not embark upon these for some years after his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. To help us put all this into the historical context of Paul’s life therefore here is a potted history of some of the landmarks: -

#### 7.1.1 Paul’s Timeline

<b>EVENT<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Est. Date</b>
Death, resurrection and ascension of Christ	<b>AD 30</b>
Conversion of Paul	<b>AD 35</b>
Paul’s First Missionary Journey	<b>AD 46-48?</b>
Paul’s Second Missionary Journey	<b>AD 51-53</b>
Wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians	<b>AD 52-53</b>
Paul’s Third Missionary Journey	<b>AD 54-58</b>

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<sup>1</sup>Endnotes

Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms, McKim Donald K; © 1996 Westminster John Knox Press

Wrote the epistles to the Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans	<b>AD 55-58</b>
First Roman imprisonment	<b>AD 61-63</b>
Wrote epistles to the Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians	<b>AD 62-63</b>
Release from first Roman imprisonment	<b>AD 63-64</b>
Wrote 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy	<b>AD 64-67</b>
Death of Paul	<b>AD 67-68</b>

### 7.1.2 Paul's Heart for the Philippians

Paul's bond with the Philippians seemed unique and therefore gave us a glimpse into this man's heart and how he worked it out in the Philippians: -

- He had planted them
- He had watched over them as a proud father
- He carried them to God in prayer
- He shared in their persecution and suffering
- He was ready to go to Jesus but prepared to stay for their sake
- He always sought to make their joy complete
- He encouraged them to stand firm in all they were going through
- He encouraged them to die to self and be united
- He laid out the heavenly pattern, modelled in God's servants starting with Christ himself
- He taught them to honour and respect the servants of God
- He warned them about the worldly pattern being set in their midst
- He wanted them to continue in all that he had begun in them

- He wanted them to be overflowing with blessing, guaranteed by their generous spirits

### 7.1.3 Paul's Example

As we have seen, Paul's chief statements regarding himself, are those we looked at earlier (Section 6.1), where Paul lays out his ultimate goal of a life laid down worthy of comparison with Christ's own life and self-sacrifice. In this respect there is something that marks Paul out as different from all but one of the heroes of the faith recorded in the WORD of God.

Interestingly, as the apostle to the gentiles, Paul made his most amazing statement about his fellow Jews. Observe what he says in his letter to the Romans: -

*"I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel."*<sup>2</sup>

Just for a moment consider what Paul is saying here. If it could redeem an unrepentant Israel, Paul would be willing to be cut off from God. Could we say something like that? Are we that consumed with our passion for his people that it blinds us to self-preservation? Apart from Jesus himself, there is only one other man in history who has displayed such a humble heart and willingness to lay down his own life for his brothers – Moses (to save the people from judgement at their worship of the golden calf): -

*"The next day Moses said to the people, 'You have committed a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD ; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.' So Moses went back to the LORD and said, 'Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin-but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.' The LORD replied to Moses, 'Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.'"*<sup>3</sup>

Paul summed it up in his great statement about knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection and fellowship of his sufferings ... his message was in essence the CROSS OF CHRIST ...

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<sup>2</sup> Romans 9<sup>2-4A</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 32<sup>30-34</sup>

## † The Cross

The Cross was a place of total abandonment, for Christ; a place where he who had known only light and sweet fellowship of the Divine Trinity, knew for the first time utter darkness and loneliness.

In that place, Jesus did not turn away but instead stood before God to receive the full force of his wrath – everything that the Father could throw at him.

For us the Cross represents the place where we find ourselves alone, without the comfort of the saints' support, without the thrill of the Holy Spirit up our spines and perhaps even feeling isolated from God ... **AND YET WE LAY OURSELVES DOWN IN THAT MOMENT AND ARE FOUND FAITHFUL TO HIM - THIS IS WHEN SELF ( -PRESERVATION) HAS TRULY DIED!**

## 7.2 Us

We started this letter looking at Paul's hope and prayer for the Philippians. It was his father's heart that challenged us – are we fathering others and being fathered in this way? Are we challenged by Paul's belief in the Philippians, or rather what God was doing in them? The secret that Paul had learned was loving with the very heart of Christ – do we feel that we are doing that? If not we shall soon run out of steam, or indeed patience with others. We simply cannot run on our own battery power!

Paul's whole approach was marked by judging everything he was building, under the scrutiny of the light which emanates from the very throne of God. It reminds us that we must weigh everything against eternity rather than being dictated by the here and now. As those seeking to fulfil all God has for us, we should ensure that those we support in the body are presented before God as sacrifices with a pleasing aroma to him. This will determine how much we lay down our own lives to help them achieve this.

We were inspired by Paul's confidence in the uncontainable power of the message of the gospel and all of us who believe in it. Opposition should not throw us off our game for we should expect it and be confident in the power of the gospel to prevail (remember the "power" means to overcome resistance! 6.1.3).

Our strategy in this should be to lay down our lives for each other, taking our lead from Christ, who showed us the principle of victory through death, the pinnacle of which was the genius of the Cross itself.

For those who lead amongst us – which we saw meant all of us – Paul laid out the qualities of God's servant leaders.



This letter also teaches us that although we are not to feel threatened by the enemy (for God has already won the victory) - we need to be wise regarding his schemes, noting how throughout history he has tried every line of attack to get at us - the seed of God. However, we are destined to crush his head and Jesus came to give us his peace which will stand guard against the attacks of the enemy.

Paul urges us not to stand still, not to even walk fast, but instead to sprint full pelt for the finishing line with this being our measure of maturity amongst the believers. There is much revelation we have gained along the way, but so much more to yet discover - holding on to what we have, we should stretch out for more, which will enable us to live in this world according to the heavenly pattern, governed by its rules and not the limitations of this world.

Finally the Philippians self-giving spirit is evident throughout and a challenge, especially when we see how they gave *beyond* their ability! The windows of heaven burst open and blessings poured out in response.

In all we have seen, we have been privileged, by the Spirit of God, to share in the life of a man of God and his beloved friends who stand out in history as those who lived basking in the light of a coming dawn. They were living not according to what they *saw* around them but: what they saw around them with the eye of *faith*. The darkness of the night presses in upon this world and they knew this full well, but like all the heroes of the faith before them they stood on tiptoes to see the light creeping over the horizon heralding the *Day of the Lord*, when all the saints of God shall stand together and worship Jesus the King forever and forever! Amen.

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