

## **New Saints - 01 Living in Jesus**

### **How to read Philippians:**

The letter to the Philippians is one piece of the puzzle of the books in the Bible. They all fit together and form one coherent story.

Because this is a letter, we shouldn't expect it to give us all the detail we might expect from a historical-narrative book. A letter is a text written by a person to specific people at a specific time and place for a specific purpose. It's very personal. So, in one sense, this is the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Philippi almost 2000 years ago. But in another important sense, this is written for us, for the church throughout all centuries.

If you look at Philippians 1:1 it says: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons".

One of the things this tells us is this: The bible did not fall from heaven. It was written by humans with actual hands with pencils and ink. Yet the Bible claims to be God's word, unfailing and completely true.

This tells us something about how God works in this world: He doesn't have to overcome or overwrite our humanness to achieve his purposes. He wonderfully speaks to us in words we can understand. He is perfectly capable of achieving his purposes through humans in the way he has created us. And so, with the Bible God used these human authors and human words to communicate to us what he wants to say. It is the word of God in the word of man. We also don't have to go and dissect which words are "human" and which are "divine". God speaks to us unfailingly through human words. And so, even though Philippians was written 2000 years ago to people in the city of Philippi, God speaks to us in 2025 in Newport through this book.

As we study the letter to the Philippians, we want to be sensible to the fact that this was written to people who once lived in a different time, place and culture to us. But we also want to be attentive to God's voice who is speaking to us in the same way he spoke to the Christians in Philippi.

There is an old saying: “The Scriptures are shallow enough for a babe to come and drink without fear of drowning and deep enough for a theologian to swim in without ever touching the bottom.”<sup>1</sup>

I believe that’s true. Think of the ocean. At the shore it is shallow enough for a toddler to wade through the small swash of the waves that reach the beach. Yet the ocean is deeper and greater than anyone of us could ever explore. Part of what we’re going to do in this course is wade through the shallow waters and learning to swim.

For now, it will be helpful to remember that Paul wrote this letter. And he did so while he was in prison because he preached the gospel of Jesus. And he wrote this letter at least 5 years after he planted the church in Philippi. So, we can imagine Lydia, the slave girl and the jailor with his household to be there but also more people who came to believe in Jesus in the following years.

Paul wrote this letter to them because the Philippians had sent Epaphroditus, who probably was one of their pastors, to bring Paul provisions and look after him. But Epaphroditus got sick himself and almost died. Thank God, he got better and now Paul was sending him back to Philippi because the church there was really worried about Epaphroditus and Paul wanted to comfort them. From the get-go of this letter, we see the affection that Paul and the Philippians have for each other.

## **Philippians 1: Living in Jesus**

### **Question for chapter 1: What does life in Jesus look like?**

#### **1. Slaves of Christ and saints in Christ (1-2)**

##### **1.1. What does it mean to be a slave of Christ?**

- Slavery in the first century meant you were owned by your master and had basically no rights. You depended on your master for everything.
- Ownership, belonging, identity. I am not my own but Christ’s.

##### **1.2. What does it mean to be a saint in Christ?**

- To belong to him exclusively. I belong to Jesus and not to the world.
- To be cleansed and purified. To be given a new status “holy”.
- To be devoted to God and the other saints.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerome (347-420).

- The church in Christ

## 2. Thankfulness, joy and mutual affection in the fellowship of the gospel (3-8)

2.1. What is Paul thankful for and what does he rejoice over?

- The Philippians and their partnership with him in the gospel.

2.2. What does that partnership look like?

- V.5: “*Koinonia*” means Close fellowship, Partnership. In Greek literature it was commonly used for business partners. It communicates Interdependence. Paul’s and the Philippian’s *koinonia* is in the gospel. That is: **Through** the gospel and **for the sake of advancing** the gospel by supporting Paul on his mission.
- This close fellowship and partnership is also reflected by their prayer for another and by the Philippians sending Epaphroditus to care for Paul.
- Then there is **mutual affection**: Paul carries them in his heart, and longs for them with the affections of Christ. V.7-8. That is, his love for them mirrors something of the immense love that Jesus has for Paul and the Philippians.
- And they are partakers of grace (v. 7b). They have all received the same grace from God in that he has forgiven them their sins and restored them into relationship with him.

**V.6:** God saved you. He will finish what he began. It is his good work.

- What is the “day of Christ”?<sup>2</sup>

It’s the day when Jesus will return to earth to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new. He will judge those who do not belong to him and forever save those who do. Our salvation now means we have already received the final verdict because we belong to Jesus. Our salvation will be fully realized once Jesus comes again to make all things new.

On that day when Jesus will judge the world, believers will be counted righteous because we are joined to Jesus. And here is Paul’s confidence: Because our salvation in Jesus is God’s doing, he is convinced that God will finish his good work until Christ comes. He won’t un-save those he saved. But he will bring us fully into that salvation by making us new.

Salvation does not just mean to be counted righteous but also to be made new, so we resemble Jesus. Since it was God’s work when we first believed in Jesus, it is also his work in us that we

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<sup>2</sup> Joel 3:11-16; Matthew 24-25; 1Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess 1:5-2:17.

keep believing and become more and more like Jesus. Once we come to believe in Jesus we are in that process, and God will complete that work in us on the day Jesus comes.

Here is a promise to us: God does not abandon the work of his hands. He brings to an end what he begins. If you believe in Jesus, take heart. God will finish his good work in you as he will with the whole church.

### **3. Paul's prayer for the church (9-11)**

#### **3.1. What does Paul pray for?**

- Love overflowing into knowledge and discernment.

Loving God and knowing him can't be separated. Love is not merely a feeling, but it always expresses itself in how we live. Paul connects love with knowledge and discernment to clarify that our growth in love of God and another results in deeper knowledge of God and knowing what is right and wrong. That in turn brings forth deeper love for God. **It is guided love.** It's love that has an aim or a goal. This is really important to grasp: Christian love is not a warm feeling that you get to express in any form you like. Love is not arbitrary and aimless but always directed toward fellowship with God and guided by his will. Herman Bavinck said the following: "God is known to the extent that he is loved".<sup>3</sup>

In verses 10-11 this becomes clearer: The growth of love into knowledge and discernment has to do with developing a character that is able to love what is "excellent" so that we are "pure and blameless" on the day of Christ.

Remember what we said about the day of Christ and how God will finish his good work in us until that day? This is how: He works in us so that we grow in our love for him. That means we know him deeper and understand his will better. This leads to us living in accord with his will.

God slowly but surely forms us into people who learn to love what is good instead of what is evil. And we will bear the fruit of righteousness. That is: God saves us from the guilt of our sin but also from our sinful behaviour: The "fruit of righteousness" is the way of life that comes out of the righteousness God gives us in Jesus. It's Jesus-like behaviour. By faith in Jesus, we receive the righteousness of Jesus. And that righteousness works its way into our heart and changes how we think and act.

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<sup>3</sup> Bavinck, the wonderful works of God.

Both is through Jesus. It's the gospel's effect on us, changing us from the inside out

#### **4. All that matters is that Christ is preached (12-18)**

- Even as Paul is in prison because he preaches the gospel of Jesus, he doesn't seem to mind the suffering too much. He sees it as just another opportunity to share the gospel with prison guards who literally can't get rid of him.
- If he is free, he will tell people about Jesus. If he is in prison, he will tell people about Jesus. If loyalty to Jesus means that he must suffer and die, that's worth it.

##### **4.1. How can someone preach Christ with bad intentions?**

- Since they also preach Christ and Paul is rejoicing in that, they can't be false teachers who proclaim a false gospel.
- It seems that people had different stances towards Paul's imprisonment. One group saw that it was because of the gospel and so that Paul would speak of Jesus to those in the prison and that encouraged them to speak more boldly of Christ themselves.
- Others seem to have taken offense and thought that Paul's imprisonment harmed the church and that Paul wasn't that great a guy after all. So, they tried to take his position by preaching the gospel themselves.
- Whether people liked Paul or not, what mattered to him was that the gospel of Jesus is made known.

#### **5. Christ is my life, dying is gain (19-26)**

##### **5.1. Why is Paul "going to rejoice"?**

- **V.19:** If we are in Christ, God works all things for our final salvation. One way he does that is through other Christians who pray for one another and specifically through the Holy Spirit, who is present with us and strengthens us. Paul is confident that God will use his suffering to bring about final salvation because God the Spirit is with him.
- Whether he dies or continues to live for another while, he will exalt Jesus.
- **V. 21:** To live is Christ, to die is gain: Paul is saying that his life is bound up with Jesus. He has received new life from Jesus, and his one goal is to be with him. It's all about him. If he lives, he will preach the gospel and serve the church. If he dies, he is finally with him.
- There is reason for joy even in the darkness of a prison cell if we have Jesus. This is all it's about: To have Jesus as one's greatest joy. To advance the gospel. To be with Jesus is the highest aim that gives all of life its direction.

- **V.23:** Paul is not suicidal or has a dying wish. He's just really excited to finally be with Jesus. He knows who awaits him when he dies, that is why he says "dying is gain". Because he gets to be with Jesus.
- Donald Carson: "The Christian life embraces every facet of our existence. All of our living and doing and thinking and speaking is to be discharged in joyful submission to God and to his Son, our Saviour."<sup>4</sup>
- -> If Christ is our life, then dying is gain. If Christ remains a stranger to us, then dying is ultimate pain, darkness and hopelessness. If Christ is ours, the only thing death does is bring us to him.

## **6. Exhortation: Live worthy of the gospel of Christ (27-30)**

Now we are exhorted to let our "manner of life be worthy of the gospel".

- One effect the gospel has on the church is that we strive side by side in our mission to advance the gospel. Living worthy of the gospel has to do with how we treat fellow believers. We are to be of "one spirit" that is, be unified by the fact that we've all been redeemed by Jesus. And we are to help each other to share the gospel.
- Live your life in a way that reflects the beauty of Jesus. One aspect of that is to keep peace and unity with your fellow believers.
- If Christ is my life, I can bear with my sister or brother that really grinds my gears.
- Paul is unafraid of opposition. That doesn't mean reckless. It means that our loyalty to Jesus is more important than anything else. If my belief in Jesus and sharing the gospel costs me, so be it.

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<sup>4</sup> Carson, Basics for Believers, 19.