



## Summary of Philippians

### Introduction

Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians during a time of imprisonment, most probably in Rome circa AD62. Located along the famous Egnatian Way, Philippi was the site of a key military victory by Augustus Cæsar, and as a result it was declared a Roman colony, ensuring its immunity from taxation and drawing many veterans to settle there. Philippi was the first city in present-day Europe where Paul established a church.

Paul wrote to the Philippians to thank them for their continued prayer and financial support for his work. He also wanted to encourage them to persevere in their faith despite the persecution they would face from a world hostile to the Gospel. Paul explains what spiritual progress will look like. Christian maturity does not come through special mystical insights available to only a few, but rather through the patient practice of the familiar virtues of love and service to others.

### Chapter One

The first part of the letter is a long, flowing greeting of thanksgiving as Paul shows how much he values the Philippians and that he knows how much they value and love him as well, even though he is a prisoner. His prayer is that they will continue to remain faithful and steadfast in their witness to Christ, and indeed that they will grow in love, wisdom and knowledge in a way that will overflow into the lives of others. He reassures them that the work of grace that God has started in them will continue right until the end.

Paul then goes on to state that his imprisonment is actually something that is benefitting the advancement of the Gospel, for he has reached an audience within Cæsar's guard and household, and this has encouraged other believers to continue the work despite the fear of their own arrest and imprisonment. Paul writes of two distinct groups who are spreading the Gospel: those who do so genuinely out of love and those who do so selfishly and to spite Paul. This is not something that concerns Paul providing it is the authentic good news Gospel that is being spread.

Paul speaks clearly that he knew he would be rescued from his imprisonment, either by release to continue his work, or through death to be with his Lord. He had no particular preference, for to be with Christ would be better but he also knew that to continue living would enable him to visit the Philippians and to strengthen further their faith.

Paul concludes the chapter with a reminder that their public behaviour must match the Gospel message for they are not to be intimidated by their opponents but are to remain resolute in their faith, being prepared to suffer if necessary just as Paul was.

## Chapter Two

Paul's opening call for church unity is described from the perspective of practical application, with the focus being on Christ and offered as a service to others. It almost describes the unity of a well maintained and highly tuned piece of machinery; that is, the church working as a healthy body. How can this work? Paul sets that out in poetic form describing the person and character of Jesus whose love conquers all and is the perfect pattern.

Paul returns to his present concern – obedience expressed through a common mindset, for the sake of Christ and the Gospel – by applying what he has just written to the Philippians' situation. Paul reminds them they are called to serve as guiding lights in a dark world. He also reminds them of his own ministry among them, which leads to the theme of his suffering, their faith, and his and their mutual joy.

Paul was hoping to send Timothy to them just as soon as his trial before Nero had been concluded and his own future known. He extols the virtues and faithfulness of Timothy as a man to be emulated. In the meantime, Epaphroditus, himself a Philippian, will bring the letter to them and will remain with them. When Timothy does come, he will subsequently return to Paul with news of them, bringing joy to Paul who, when released, will come himself.

## Chapter Three

Paul opens with a warning against the Judaisers, yet he does so from the perspective of an insider. The Jews prided themselves on their ancestry back to the Patriarchs through the twelve sons of Jacob that distinguished their tribal heritage. Paul's pedigree and zealous nature were a match for anyone. However, Paul argues strongly that all that has changed because of the Cross. To revert to national pride, identified through the rite of circumcision, was no better than the old pagan ways, for those who follow Christ are to be spiritual people and not those identified by their ethnicity.

In fact, Paul describes everything that had gone before to be worthless in comparison to knowing Jesus as the Christ and to following him by faith, knowing the power of his resurrection and waiting for the day when all will join him in righteousness through their own resurrection.

Paul acknowledges that he is far from being the finished article but that he is determined to press on towards the end, giving no regard for what has gone

before, i.e. his heritage. His focus is on completing the work God has set before him, while holding on to what he has already been given through the Gospel. His exhortation is that his readers will do likewise.

Paul concludes the chapter by calling the Philippians to follow his example and that of people like him, and to avoid those who are enemies of the Cross, whose future judgement will lead them to destruction. Believers are citizens of heaven and are awaiting the return of their King, who has the power to restore everything to the way it was intended to be. They are to live in a way that reflects the culture and values of heaven.

#### Chapter Four

Paul commences this final chapter with further appeals calling for perseverance and unity, naming two individuals in particular who, like the rest of the church, need to be of one mind in the Lord. This means humbling, sacrificial giving of oneself for the sake of others; but then that is what the Gospel is all about.

Paul begins his concluding matters with a series of exhortations, including an acknowledgement of their partnership in spreading the Gospel, before thanking the Philippians for their gift, which Paul clearly received as a sacrificial offering pleasing to God. Above all, Paul calls upon the community of faith to celebrate God's goodness in their lives through prayer and praise. There is the familiar Pauline doxology.

Paul finishes this letter with his greetings, including those of his unnamed co-workers, the local community of faith and those in Cæsar's household. Paul's final word is a benediction.