

I & II THESSALONIANS AND PHILIPPIANS

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SYLLABUS

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1	2012-04-04	I Thessalonians 1	Remembrance and Examples
2	2012-04-11	I Thessalonians 2	Reinforcing the Persecuted
3	2012-04-18	I Thessalonians 3	Mutual Encouragement
4	2012-04-25	I Thessalonians 4	Abound More and More
5	2012-05-02	I Thessalonians 5	Watch and Be Sober
6	2012-05-09	II Thessalonians 1	The Lord's Righteous Return
7	2012-05-16	II Thessalonians 2	Sincere Love of the Truth
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9	2012-05-30	Philippians 1	Magnifying Christ in Life or Death
10	2012-06-06	Philippians 2	Humble Service for Others
11	2012-06-13	Philippians 3	Pressing Toward the Goal
12	2012-06-20	Philippians 4	"Rejoice In the Lord Always"
13	2012-06-27	Review	Make-up and Review

OUTLINE OF I THESSALONIANS

- I. Salutation (1:1).
- II. Section One: Comfort and Encouragement to Persevere in Adversity (Chapters 1-3):
 - A. Remembrance: The Thessalonians' conversion was worth remembering, and they should be encouraged by it, as was Paul (1:2-10).
 - i. Paul remembered them and the proof of their conversion in his prayers (1:2-4).
 - ii. Their conversion amidst persecution provided a remarkable example that was broadcast along with their support of the gospel (1:5-10).
 - iii. Paul's persecution and humble, selfless preaching testified to his integrity (2:1-12).
 - iv. In spite of persecution, they accepted Paul's message as the word of God, not men (2:13-16).
 - B. Comfort: The Thessalonians' spiritual well-being and persistence was once a cause of great concern to Paul, but it is now a source of great strength and comfort (2:17-3:13).
 - i. Paul's concern and joy was the Thessalonians, despite his absence (2:17-20).
 - ii. Timothy was sent to instruct and encourage the Thessalonians (3:1-5).
 - iii. Timothy brought an encouraging report of the Thessalonians' (3:6-8).
 - iv. Paul personally drew strength from their success and prayed for their further spiritual growth and maturity (3:9-13).
- III. Section Two: Doctrinal Explanations and Moral Admonitions (Chapters 4-5):
 - A. General encouragement, "*abound more and more*" (4:1-2).
 - B. Maintain sexual purity and holiness (4:3-8).
 - C. Abound in love toward brethren and quiet, diligent labor (4:9-12).
 - D. Take comfort in knowing the certainty of Jesus' audible return and the saints' resurrection (4:13-18).
 - E. Be always working, comforted, and prepared for the Lord's return, which will occur at an unknowable time (5:1-11).
 - F. Distinguish and treat others based on their works and their needed good (5:12-15).
 - G. Cling to God's revelation and reject that which is not (5:16-22).
- IV. Closing and Benediction (5:23-28).

LESSON 1 – REMEMBRANCE AND EXAMPLES

I Thessalonians 1:1-10

Brief History and Background

On Paul's second missionary journey, in about 51-52 AD, Paul travelled to Macedonia, after receiving a vision (**Acts 16:1-11**). There in Philippi, Lydia, her household, the Philippian jailer, and his household were converted (**Acts 16:12-34**). After being wrongfully punished and imprisoned, Paul and Silas were released and eventually travelled from Philippi to Thessalonica (**Acts 16:35-17:1**). After a short time preaching there with some success, the Jews stirred up a mob and began a persecution against the infant Thessalonian Christians, which resulted in Paul and Silas having to leave Thessalonica immediately (**Acts 17:1-10**). These persecuting Jews were so intent on stopping Paul's preaching that they journeyed to Berea to stir up a crowd there also (**Acts 17:10-14**). From Berea, Paul travelled to Athens (**Acts 17:15-34**), and from Athens, Paul travelled to Corinth, where Silas and Timothy rejoined him (**Acts 18:1-5**). While in Corinth, in about 51-52 AD, Paul wrote this first epistle to the Thessalonians.

Themes

Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians can be divided into 2 sections. Given the short time that Paul was able to spend with the newly converted Thessalonians, the first section of the epistle (chapters 1-3) is understandably encouraging, reinforcing, and personal. They are admonished to cling to their faith in the face of adversity and persecution, which had undoubtedly continued given their locale. The second section (chapters 4-5) deals with questions and issues on various topics, including holiness, sexual purity, dead saints, the end of the world, and various other applications. Concern for the dead in Christ receives the most attention in this second section of the epistle, and it is a subtle theme throughout.

Bible Reading With Questions – Also Read Acts 16-17 for background:

Greeting and Remembrance – I Thessalonians 1:1-5

1. How and why did Paul remember the Thessalonians? Do we have the same impact?
2. How did Paul know that the Thessalonians were elected by God? Can the same be said of us?
3. What benefit and purpose would have been accomplished by Paul recounting how the gospel came to them? How can we benefit from this same technique?

A City Set on a Hill – I Thessalonians 1:6-10

4. What 3 examples are mentioned in verses 6-7? Please describe how they are connected.
5. What 2 messages or statements were broadcasted by the Thessalonians? Applications to us?
6. What was the religious background of the Thessalonians? What does this suggest about their ethnic background? Were these Thessalonians most likely Gentiles or Jews?

LESSON 2 – REINFORCING THE PERSECUTED

I Thessalonians 2:1-20

Summary

Paul continues to reinforce the Thessalonian's conviction by reminding them of the blameless manner in which he and his fellow workers came to them with the gospel. They spoke boldly, even though they had been persecuted and were facing more persecution. They did not seek glory or compensation from the Thessalonians, even though that was their right. Instead, they demonstrated selfless concern and love for the Thessalonians. As a consequence, in part, the Thessalonians realized and accepted Paul's message as being from God, and it provided great strength to them, as they endured persecution from their own countrymen, much like the Judean Christians, who suffered persecution from their Jewish brethren. However, the wickedness of the Jews has not gone unnoticed or forgotten, while Paul expresses the Thessalonians' persistence and ultimate salvation as his "*crown of rejoicing*".

Bible Reading With Questions

Blameless Exhortation – I Thessalonians 2:1-12

1. How could Paul's preaching to the Thessalonians have been "*in vain*" (see **3:5**; **Galatians 4:11**)?
2. Provide at least 2 lessons or applications to be gleaned from the Thessalonians remembering Paul's boldness in preaching the gospel to them "*in much conflict*"?
3. What false judgments against Paul does he attempt to prevent here?
4. What evidence does Paul call to their remembrance to demonstrate his concern for God's approval and not man's?
5. How did Paul and his companions show their personal love and concern for the Thessalonians?
6. How does Paul summarize his behavior and manner of teaching among the Thessalonians? What lessons can we learn from this text to help us better reach and persuade the lost?
7. What important exhortation did Paul deliver to the Thessalonians, which was worthy of their recollection?

Blessed Imitation and Avenged Persecution – I Thessalonians 2:13-20

8. Based on Paul's previous observations, why might the Thessalonians have received their message "*not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*"?
9. How is that the Word of God "*effectively works*" in us? What is required from us?
10. In what way did the Thessalonians become "*imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus*"? Does this mean we should today imitate the Judean churches?
11. For the Jews, how was it that "*wrath has come upon them to the uttermost*" (notice the past tense)? Keep in mind that this letter was written almost 20 years before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.
12. Why was Paul unable to personally visit the Thessalonians according to his desire? Explain.
13. How were the Thessalonians Paul's hope, joy, glory, and crown of rejoicing? What does that say about Paul's priorities? How does this reflect upon our own priorities?

LESSON 3 – MUTUAL ENCOURAGEMENT

I Thessalonians 3:1-13

Summary

Paul's, Timothy's, and Silas' great spiritual affection for the Thessalonians is most evident in this third and final chapter of the epistle's first half. Although Paul's company's love for the Thessalonians can be seen in the preceding chapters, the dependency and almost symbiotic relationship is clearly visible here. Paul's concern for their spiritual well-being prompts Timothy's encouraging visit to the Thessalonians, which results in a good report to Paul, which increases his joy, thanksgiving, and prayers for them, which only serves to strengthen the Thessalonians. Cynically, this could be viewed as a vulnerable, cyclical dependency; when in reality, we are observing the realization of brethren's great opportunity to mutually encourage and uplift each other.

Bible Reading With Questions

Timothy's Message from Paul – I Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. Why did Paul send Timothy to Thessalonica?
2. How could the Thessalonians have been “shaken”? What does that mean? Why should they have not been “shaken”?
3. How could the “tempter” have rendered Paul's labor to be vain?

Timothy's Report to Paul – I Thessalonians 3:6-8

4. What report did Timothy bring back to Paul?
5. What was Paul's reaction to Timothy's report?
6. How would Paul's life be dependent upon the Thessalonians' steadfastness? (Explain verse 8.)

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians – I Thessalonians 3:9-13

7. Why was Paul thankful for the Thessalonians?
8. Did Paul's prayer arise *merely* from an emotional attachment to the Thessalonians? Explain.
9. What 3 things did Paul wish or pray for the Thessalonians, and how are they related?
10. Who was an example of love to the Thessalonians? How can he serve as an example for us?

LESSON 4 – ABOUND MORE AND MORE

I Thessalonians 4:1-18

Summary

This fourth chapter begins the second half of the book, which explains more about the resurrection and the Lord's return, and which provides gentle encouragement to continue growing in keeping God's commands. The first admonition is for sexual purity and holiness. The second command is to work diligently and continue abounding in love toward each other, saints beyond Thessalonica, and even outsiders. The third topic explains what will happen to the dead in Christ. They will rise and ascend first at the Lord's visible return, and then the living will ascend to be all together with Jesus forever. This hope – eternal life with Jesus beyond death – would have brought great comfort and peace to the Christians of the first century, as it continues to comfort saints even today.

Bible Reading With Questions

Abstain From Sexual Immorality – I Thessalonians 4:1-8

1. Was Paul critical of the Thessalonians' behavior in verses 1-2? What can we learn about "people skills" from his opening admonition?
2. What is the first basic command that Paul brings to their remembrance? How would they "*abound more and more*" in keeping this command?
3. How does one "*possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor*"? Does this refer to ourselves, our spouses, or someone else?
4. What virtue should characterize the Christian's purpose, manner of life, or mission, as identified by Paul here (verse 7)?
5. Was Paul's instruction on these topics born out of his own opinion, culture, or times? Explain.

Diligent Work and Generous Love – I Thessalonians 4:9-12

6. How were the Thessalonians "*taught by God*"? Can we receive the same today? If so, how?
7. How might the Thessalonians have demonstrated love "*toward all the brethren who are in Macedonia*"?
8. What would happen if the Thessalonians failed to keep the commands of verse 11?

Resurrection of the Dead in Christ – I Thessalonians 4:13-18

9. Previous to Paul's writing, what hope did the Thessalonians have for their brethren, who had died in Christ?

10. Whose resurrection is bound to Jesus' own resurrection?

11. Will the Lord's return be silent or go unnoticed? How does this fact impact the doctrine of Premillennialism?

12. To where will the Lord return and gather His saints? Impact on Premillennialism?

13. How can "*these words*" comfort?

14. Why would they need to "*comfort one another*", if they all received the same words? Lessons?

LESSON 5 – WATCH AND BE SOBER

I Thessalonians 5:1-28

Summary

In chapter 5, Paul continues his explanation of the Lord's return from the close of chapter 4; however, he focuses on the unexpected timing and suddenness of His coming, which will bring destruction to those who are unprepared. Naturally, Paul's exhortation for the Thessalonians and us is to be always prepared and spiritually vigilant. We should be comforted by the certainty of the Lord's return and reunion of His saints – both dead and alive, but we are to be edified unto sobriety and vigilance, because of the unknowable timing of these events. Closing admonitions to appropriately recognize both the strong and the weak are provided. Loosely grouped exhortations to take advantage of God's revelation, cling to it, and discard what is not good are also given. The letter closes with a prayerful blessing and benediction for the Thessalonians complete preservation and related instructions.

Bible Reading With Questions

Watching for the Lord's Return – I Thessalonians 5:1-11

1. How is the Lord's return like a thief and a pregnant woman?
2. What does it mean to be a "son of light" or "son of day"? Contrast this with being a "son of night" or "son of darkness".
3. When does the Christian take off his spiritual armor?
4. How did God "appoint us ... to obtain salvation ...not wrath"? Does this verse support Calvinism?
5. How do we "live together with Him" with those who "sleep" (verse 10)?
6. Was Paul's instruction on this point supposed to merely produce a sense of comfort and peace? Explain.

Recognize and Pursue the Appropriate Good for All – I Thessalonians 5:12-15

7. Who are "those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you"? Could this refer to evangelists?
8. Why and how do we "esteem them highly"?

9. How do we distinguish among the “*unruly, ... fainthearted, ... weak*”? How do we know who fits in what category?
10. What should be the overarching principle for all of our interactions with others? Why does revenge not comply with this principle?

Clinging to God’s Word – I Thessalonians 5:16-22

11. How would the Thessalonians have “*quenched the Spirit*” or “*despised prophecies*”? How would this apply to us today?
12. Are Christians to be simple, naïve, gullible people, who believe everyone who claims to speak for God? Explain. Providing supporting Scriptures. Is this limited to testing false prophets?
13. What is a “*form of evil*”? How do we “*abstain from it*”?

Closing Commands and Benediction – I Thessalonians 5:23-28

14. What is the distinction and significance among “*spirit, soul, and body*” (verse 23)?
15. How is God “*faithful*”? Is not faith a requirement for us to believe in Him, not the other way around?
16. Should we observe the “*holy kiss*” today? Are we inconsistent or selective in our rigid observation of New Testament commands?
17. Was this letter to be hid? How would this practice affect the Bible’s compilation?

OUTLINE OF II THESSALONIANS

- I. Greeting – A request for grace extended (1:1-2).
- II. Perseverance: Reckoning of the Thessalonians' persecution at the Lord's return (1:3-12)
 - A. Thessalonians' remarkable endurance of persecution (1:3-4).
 - B. God's justice in vengeance and reward at Christ's return (1:5-10).
 - C. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians' ultimate salvation (1:11-12).
- III. Consolation: Quieting erroneous fears that the Lord's return had been missed (2:1-17).
 - A. Admonition to not be troubled by error that the Lord had already returned (2:1-2)
 - B. Return preceded by coming of the lawless man of sin and perdition (2:3-8).
 - C. Successful deception of unrighteous pleasure seekers by the lawless one (2:9-12).
 - D. Thanks for salvation and prayer to stand fast in apostolic tradition and consolation of the Lord (2:13-17).
- IV. Adherence: Command to follow apostolic tradition and withdraw from disobedient (3:1-15).
 - A. Prayer desired for the spread of the gospel and safety of Paul's company (3:1-2).
 - B. Confidence in the Lord's trustworthiness and the Thessalonians' continued growth (3:3-5).
 - C. Command to withdraw fellowship and support from those disorderly, who refused to work (3:6-15).
- V. Benediction and Salutation (3:16-18).

LESSON 6 – THE LORD’S RIGHTEOUS RETURN

II Thessalonians 1:1-12

Brief History and Background

Given the elaboration and continued development of themes established in the first epistle to the Thessalonians, it appears that Paul’s first epistle brought several issues to the surface that required additional definition and guidance in this second letter. Since the first letter was most likely written in AD 51-53, during Paul’s second missionary journey, while he was preaching in Corinth, the second letter was also most likely written about the same time. This letter may have been written almost immediately after the return and report of the first epistle’s courier.

Themes

Although it was a prominent issue in the writing of the first letter to the Thessalonians, the final coming of the Lord has evidently become the most critical matter troubling this young church. More details are provided concerning the related judgment and timeline of the Lord’s return. Although the church had already shown remarkable resilience toward enduring persecution, Paul calls upon further perseverance in maintaining the commands and traditions delivered to them. This required rejection of error and withdrawal from the obstinate. Specifically, some had refused to work and willingly relied upon the financial support of others. Possibly connected with misunderstandings about a possibly imminent or overlooked second coming, this willful indolence was not to be tolerated. Encouraging prayers for the Thessalonians’ ongoing spiritual growth and ultimate salvation are confidently offered, while prayers are requested for the further success of the gospel’s spread and glorification.

Chapter 1 Summary

Paul continued to exalt the Thessalonians’ tremendous endurance of persecution and troubles. However, they are reminded of the significance of this trial’s outcome and the Lord’s promised return, which will result in the reckoning of this persecution: fiery judgment upon the unbelieving and disobedient, and ultimate peace for those who believed and persevered. Paul prays for the final realization of God’s goodness and glory in them, which should have been encouraging for them, as well as for us.

Bible Reading With Questions

Greeting and Exaltation – II Thessalonians 1:1-5

1. What was the object of Paul’s “*boast*”? Is boasting not wrong? How can Paul be vindicated of his “*boast*” in this verse?
2. How might our endurance of “*persecutions and tribulations*” give proof to the “*righteous judgment of God*”?

Christ’s Return and Judgment – II Thessalonians 1:6-12

3. On Christ’s return, why will God “*repay with tribulation those who trouble you*”? How does this reflect upon God’s character?
4. Give some other Scriptures that exemplify how “*mighty*” angels can be.

5. What will be the fate of those who are ignorant of the gospel and those who merely believed it? How does this affect the faith-only doctrine?
6. Does verse 9 suggest that the condemned will be annihilated or spend eternity in hell? Will they suffer forever in hell, or will the Lord simply terminate their existence all together?
7. Based on this passage, why are saints separated from those who will be destroyed? How are they different?
8. What will be different in “*that Day*” so that we may then “*admire*” the Lord Jesus Christ? Can we not admire Him now?
9. Atheists accuse our God of being a sort of ego-maniac. Does verse 10 indicate that the Lord seeks our admiration and glory of Him?
10. What would be the fulfillment of all of God’s good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith and power?
11. How could our name ever be glorified in Christ? And, by what means will it be achieved?

LESSON 7 – SINCERE LOVE OF THE TRUTH

II Thessalonians 2:1-17

Summary

In chapter 2, Paul continues his discussion of the events surrounding the Lord's return; however, he turns from His just and mighty judgment to the timing of this second coming. He warns them to not be easily deceived into believing that the Lord's return had been missed. Instead, they should remember the previously delivered explanation that the "lawless one", the "man of sin", and "son of perdition" must come first, which was currently being restrained. Jesus would not return and destroy this one destined for perdition, until this Satanic deceiver was first revealed. Subtle warnings are offered against apostasy among those who first loved unrighteousness instead of truth, which should produce a zealous love for truth in all who desire salvation. Paul's confidence in their salvation because of their belief in truth would have juxtaposed their character and encouraged them, while consoling them. However, this promise brought a responsibility of steadfastness, which is further defined in the final chapter.

Bible Reading With Questions

Revelation and Destruction of the Lawless One – II Thessalonians 2:1-8

1. The Bible refers to many different "days of the Lord". In fact, the destruction of Jerusalem is described as a "coming of Jesus" (Luke 21:20-38). Which "day of the Lord" is discussed here in chapter 2? How do you know?
2. What possible sources of misleading influence does Paul anticipate and cut off?
3. What events will precede that great day, when the Lord returns?
4. Can Bible "mysteries" be understood? Or, are they practically impossible to comprehend?
5. What is the "mystery of lawlessness"?

Chosen for Delusion and Destruction – II Thessalonians 2:9-12

6. Describe the "coming of the lawless one". To whom is he likened?
7. Whom will he persuade, and why will he have success?
8. How does one have and exhibit a "love of truth"?

9. Why will God “*send them strong delusion*”? How is God not morally responsible for their resultant sin? (Compare to **I Kings 22:1-36; Isaiah 66:3-4; Ezekiel 14:4-5.**)

Chosen for Salvation and Good Works – II Thessalonians 2:13-17

10. Verse 13 says that “*God from the beginning chose*” the Thessalonians “*for salvation*”? Does that mean that Calvin’s doctrine of election was correct? Explain.
11. How can one be “*sanctified by the Spirit*”, as were the Thessalonians?
12. How were the Thessalonians “*called*”?
13. Why is the Lord’s comfort and consolation “*everlasting*”, as opposed to the fleeting comfort of men?
14. What were the Thessalonians to do with that comfort? What was to be the result of that consolation?

LESSON 8 – WALKING ORDERLY IN OBEDIENCE

II Thessalonians 3:1-18

Summary

Paul's preceding prayer for the Thessalonians is followed by a request for prayers in behalf of the gospel's swift and free course, that it may be glorified in others, as it had been glorified in them. Although he is confident in the Thessalonians' character, Paul's ultimate confidence and trust lies with the Lord, Who grants success to their effort and draws all men to Himself. The Thessalonians' steadfastness is further tested by the command to securely hold the apostolic traditions by withdrawing from those who will not obey it. Specifically, the failure to work and produce income for their own food is addressed. Such people are not only to be marked and disfellowshipped, but they are also not to be enabled. Nevertheless, such admonition is to be delivered as to a brother, not an enemy. Final exhortation to remain steadfast and strong in doing good, while praying for the Thessalonians' peace in the Lord's grace closes this last epistle from Paul to the Thessalonians.

Bible Reading With Questions

Confident Prayers – II Thessalonians 3:1-5

1. Why did Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray for them (Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy)?
2. To what lofty standard of love and patience (endurance or steadfastness) were the Thessalonians to aspire? How might they (and us) accomplish such a goal?

Withdrawing From The Disorderly – II Thessalonians 3:6-15

3. Are not "*traditions*" of human origin and therefore optional? What are our options, if someone refuses to "*walk according to*" apostolic "*tradition*"?
4. Do Paul's instructions for withdrawal apply only to the apostolic tradition regarding labor? Explain.
5. Describe Paul's "*work ethic*"?
6. Is it not cruel to deny food to our fellow man? How do we reconcile this command to withhold food with other requirements for love, compassion, and benevolence?
7. What did "*idle hands*" produce in this case? What other verses warn against a similar danger?

8. How can people become “*weary in doing good*”? How can we avoid it? Related passages?
9. If we refuse to “*keep company*” with a disobedient brother, are we not treating him like an enemy? How do you reconcile verses 14 and 15?

Closing Admonition and Benediction – I Thessalonians 3:16-18

10. Name at least one counterfeit prevention measure that Paul employed? How does this help us?
11. Paul’s life would eventually fade, but what did he give the Thessalonians and leave with them that would never fade?

OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS

- I. Greeting and Remembrance (1:1-11)
 - A. A blessing of grace upon the saints, bishops, and deacons at Philippi (1:1-2)
 - B. Thankfulness and Prayer for the Philippians' Continued Growth (1:3-11)
- II. Effect and Outcome of Paul's Current Imprisonment (1:12-26)
 - A. Effect of Paul's imprisonment on Roman guard and local saints (1:12-19)
 - B. Paul's outlook on the possible outcomes of his imprisonment (1:20-26)
- III. Instructions for Further Spiritual Development in Paul's Absence: (1:27-2:30)
 - A. Be Bold and Steadfast in the Face of Persecution (1:27-30)
 - B. Esteem Others Better Than Oneself (2:1-4)
 - C. Have the Humble Mind of Jesus (2:5-11)
 - D. Work Out Your Own Salvation (2:12-18)
 - E. Esteem Selfless, Trustworthy Workers for the Lord and Companions of Paul (2:19-30)
 - i. Timothy, A Proven Loyal Servant of Christ, Messenger, and Coworker (2:19-24)
 - ii. Epaphroditus, Selfless Messenger From Philippi and Coworker (2:25-30)
- IV. Rejoice in the Lord – Developing a Heavenly-Minded Attitude (3:1-4:19)
(Could also be organized to emphasize following Paul's example)
 - A. Beware of and Silencing False Teachers (3:1-6)
 - B. Forsaking Carnal Confidence to Gain Christ (3:7-11)
 - C. Pressing On and Reaching Forward to the Goal (3:12-15)
 - D. Following the Example of Paul and Sharing a Common, Heavenly Mindset (3:16-4:3)
 - E. Developing and Adopting the Heavenly Mindset (4:4-9)
 - F. Spiritual Support: Thanks, Contentment, and Strength (4:10-19)
- V. Closing and Benediction (4:20-23)

Theme: *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4 NKJV)*

LESSON 9 – MAGNIFYING CHRIST IN LIFE OR DEATH

Philippians 1:1-30

Brief History and Background

The Philippian church was the first church established in AD 51-52 by Paul, Silas, and Timothy as they entered into Macedonia, the northern province of Greece, on Paul's second missionary journey. It was established in the midst of Jewish persecution, which had no doubt continued to afflict the church. After his departure, Paul completed his second and third missionary journeys, which resulted in his wrongful capture and imprisonment in Jerusalem by the Romans. His Palestinian imprisonment climaxed in Paul's appeal to Caesar, journey to Rome, and imprisonment there while awaiting trial. During this Roman imprisonment, probably in early AD 63, shortly before Paul's appearance before Nero, Epaphroditus brought some financial support and expression of concern to Paul from the Philippian church. After spending some time laboring with Paul, falling very ill, and finally, graciously recovering, Epaphroditus is returned home by Paul with this joyful epistle in hand.

Themes

Paul's own persecution and imprisonment was clearly a paramount concern, so the theme of rejoicing in the Lord – no matter what – is the primary theme in response. Paul's remarkable example of trust, bravery, selflessness, heavenly mindedness, and sacrifice is another primary theme that demonstrates the way to accomplish the first theme, to always rejoice in the Lord. With the outcome of Paul's trial not being entirely certain, he also admonishes them to – possibly without him – continue growing in love, preference, and service for each other, just as Christ exemplified supremely for us. Unity and steadfastness are also repeatedly emphasized, which is understandable considering the discouraging persecution they were facing, crystallized in the wrongful imprisonment of their beloved apostle. False teachers, the enemies and antagonists of this heavenly mindset, are both silenced and called out in warning. However, the Philippians are to overcome this all with the joy and rejoicing that they have in the Lord, which is the central touchstone of the letter.

Chapter 1 Summary

As in other epistles, after greeting the brethren, Paul immediately expresses his joy and thankfulness for his faithful brethren, the Philippians. He is confident in their continued growth based on the Lord's faithfulness and their demonstrated character. However, continue to grow they must. Next, Paul shifts quickly to what must have been a great concern for them, his imprisonment and related persecution. He explains how his suffering has actually led to the advancement of the gospel, which is a source of joy for him. Concerned about his looming trial, Paul expresses his torn feelings for both staying and leaving, yet he ultimately expects to stay, despite his personal preference. Likewise, the Philippians must continue to strengthen themselves to face the same persecution, while exhibiting steadfast, unified conduct "*worthy of the gospel of Christ*".

Bible Reading With Questions

Greeting – Philippians 1:1-2

1. Do the works of elder and deacon represent offices, or is it a common work than any Christian can fulfill? How would you answer those who deny that there is an office of elder or deacon?

Thankfulness and Prayer for the Philippians' Continued Growth – Philippians 1:3-11

2. What “*fellowship*” did Paul and the Philippians share?

3. Assuming Paul’s prayer for the Philippians (1:9-11) extends to us, what can we do to see it realized? What is our part in its fulfillment?

Effect and Outcome of Paul’s Current Imprisonment – Philippians 1:12-26

4. What two parties had been affected by Paul’s endurance of his imprisonment, and how had they been affected? Can we expect the same effect from our trials?

5. Should we be pleased when people successfully advocate and convert others to a flawed, erroneous gospel, since Paul rejoiced whenever Christ was preached?

6. What “*deliverance*” is Paul seeking, for which the Philippians were also praying for Paul?

7. How could Jesus be magnified in either Paul’s execution or release from imprisonment?

8. What was Paul’s personal preference at this time? Lessons?

9. Based on Paul’s anticipated outcome, what can we surmise about the purpose and significance of our own lives?

Be Bold and Steadfast in the Face of Persecution – Philippians 1:27-30

10. How would the Philippians’ bravery under persecution offer “*proof of perdition*” for their adversaries, while simultaneously offering proof of their own “*salvation*”?

11. How can persecution be considered a “*grant*”, parallel to salvation’s opportunity to believe (1:29)? How could persecution ever be seen as a gift or something favorable?

LESSON 10 – HUMBLE SERVICE FOR OTHERS

Philippians 2:1-30

Summary

Paul was apparently not absolutely certain of his trial's outcome. He wants them to rejoice with him, if he is martyred. He promises to send Timothy to them as soon as the result of his sentence and judgment are known, but he hopes to personally come and greet them himself. Nevertheless, the chapter opens with vital instruction for how they should humbly serve and esteem each other, just as Christ humbled Himself and served us, even to the point of dying on the cross. Paul begins preparing them for the inevitable day that they must continue to pursue their own salvation without his direct intervention. In light of this looming absence, Paul's instruction to seek each other's best interests – because soon that will be the only intervening influence they will have – becomes all the more pointed. Epaphroditus, who served as a messenger for the church, carrying their financial support for Paul, is sent home and commended as further example of selfless sacrifice for the Lord. Faithful workers in the Lord could be expected to continue in selfless service in Paul's absence, and should have therefore been appreciated.

Bible Reading With Questions

Esteem Others Better Than Oneself – Philippians 2:1-4

1. How does the beginning of chapter 2 connect logically to the end of chapter 1? Why does Paul begin chapter 2 with the logical connection word, “*therefore*”?
2. How can Christians *use* church to advance their own “*selfish ambition or conceit*”? How can we detect this problem in ourselves and cut it off?

Have the Humble Mind of the Exalted Jesus– Philippians 2:5-11

3. Was Jesus divine before coming to earth? If so, did He give up that deity by coming to earth?
4. Why did God exalt Jesus?
5. Since every tongue will confess Jesus, and since every knee will bow before Jesus, can we expect a universal salvation – that everyone will be saved?

Work Out Your Own Salvation – Philippians 2:12-18

6. Why was it critical for the Philippians to continue to seek their own salvation?
7. Does God's working in us change our will? If so, does this eliminate our free moral agency? Please explain.

8. What is essential to us becoming “*blameless and harmless, children of God without fault*”?
9. How could the Philippians have been glad and rejoiced with Paul as he was “*poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith*”?

Esteem Selfless, Trustworthy Workers in the Lord and Companions of Paul – Philippians 2:19-30

10. What high honor did Paul pay to Timothy, and how did Timothy acquire such recognition?
11. What was Epaphroditus’ relationship between the Philippian church and Paul?
12. Why was Epaphroditus’ life spared? What can we learn about prayer from this example?
13. Why did Epaphroditus almost die? Lessons?

LESSON 11 – PRESSING TOWARD THE GOAL

Philippians 3:1-21

Summary

After comforting the Philippians' concern for Paul and encouraging them to humbly seek each other's welfare, as Christ sought our own, Paul turns our attention to the matter of false teachers, which were a threat to their joy, unity, spiritual focus, and eternal salvation. Based on Paul's response, it seems these were Judaizing false teachers boasting in their physical circumcision, Jewish lineage, and religious training by men. Paul compares that with his own superior pedigree, and he contrasts their fleshly confidence with his own eagerness to forsake his ancestry and accomplishments to gain Christ. Paul exemplified and requires a tremendous spiritually-focused mindset that is ever reaching forward toward our heavenly goal and reward. After again encouraging the Philippians toward unity in Christ, he commands them to follow his pattern of spiritual mindedness, while warning against those whose mindset is fleshly and doom is destruction. Finally, he reminds the Philippians of their heavenly citizenship and glorious resurrected body, which will far surpass any glory the Judaizers could falsely offer them.

Bible Reading With Questions

Beware of and Silencing False Teachers – Philippians 3:1-6

1. Why does Paul keep mentioning joy and admonishing the Philippians to rejoice?
2. What attitude were the Philippians to have toward false teachers? Why?
3. How were these Gentile Christians to be considered the “*circumcision*”?

Forsaking Carnal Confidence to Gain Christ – Philippians 3:7-11

4. Why did Paul turn his back on his pedigree? What was Paul willing to sacrifice to achieve his goal? Can we say the same? Do our lives reflect that?
5. How can we reconcile passages that require obedience with passages, such as **Philippians 3:9**, which teach that our righteousness comes from God?

Pressing On and Reaching Forward to the Goal – Philippians 3:12-15

6. Should Christians be discouraged by their past sins, or should they revel in the past accomplishments in the Lord? Explain.
7. What has Paul promised that God will reveal to us, and how will He do it? Provide supporting Scriptures.

Sharing a Common, Heavenly Mindset and Citizenship – Philippians 3:16-21

8. How does the above attitude and promise affect our ability to “*walk by the same rule*” and to “*be of the same mind*”?

9. Are we given the ***option*** of following apostolic example? Do we have to remain unmarried, shave our head, make tents, and travel the country preaching, like Paul? Explain.

10. When was the last time you were moved to the sorrow of tears by thought of the “*enemies of the cross of Christ*”? What would it take for us to have such a heart of concern?

11. What will happen to the body that these false teachers are serving? How does this relate to their doctrine and practice?

LESSON 12 – “REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS”

Philippians 4:1-23

Summary

Chapter 4 continues Paul’s plea for the Philippians to be united and stand firm in the Lord, sharing a common mindset that was focused heavenly. Two women, Eudoia and Syntyche, are specifically encouraged, who along with the help of Paul’s “*true companion*” are to develop this common mind between themselves. Paul then turns toward the further description and development of this attitude, telling the Philippians how to change their thinking, so that they may not be distracted from their goal. Rejoicing is again stressed, in addition to putting anxiety out of their mind through prayer. Instead, noble, spiritual thoughts are to take the place of these carnal concerns. After Paul again encourages them to follow his example, he thanks them for their financial support, but he also explains how he has learned how to be content during times of need. Finally, he closes the letter with a prayerful benediction that their need be supplied spiritually by God as they have supplied his financial need for God. Greetings are extended and requested as the letter ends with one last prayerful blessing for their grace from the Lord.

Bible Reading With Questions

Sharing a Heavenly, Common Mind, Continued ... – Philippians 4:1-3

1. How were the Philippians to “*stand fast in the Lord*”? Use the logical connector words, “*therefore*” and “*so*” to help answer.
2. *Review:* Based on what we have studied thus far in this epistle, how would Eudoia and Syntyche have become “*of the same mind in the Lord*”? How would Paul’s “*true companion*” have helped them?

Developing and Adopting the Heavenly Mindset – Philippians 4:4-9

3. *Review:* Thus far, how many times has Paul either mentioned joy or admonished the Philippians to rejoice? Lessons.
4. How does knowledge of the Lord’s nearness promote development and manifestation of “*gentleness*”, “*forbearance*”, or “*reasonableness*” (depending on your translation)?
5. How can prayer soothe our anxiety?
6. According to verse 8, with what kind of things should we be filling our hearts and minds? With what are we *actually* filling our hearts and minds? If there is a conflict, what should give way?

Spiritual Support: Thanks, Contentment, and Strength – Philippians 4:10-19

7. Are some people *naturally* more content than others? Does that give anyone an excuse for material restlessness?
8. What are the “*things*” through which Paul could overcome through Christ’s strength? What are the limitations of this promise for us today?
9. Was the Philippian church a “sponsoring church” for Paul, collecting funds from other churches sending them on to Paul? After all, they were the only church to communicate with Paul about financial support?
10. What pattern is established here for the support of preachers? Was Epaphroditus a one-man missionary society?

Closing and Benediction – Philippians 4:20-23

11. What kind of surprising in-roads had the gospel made, while Paul was imprisoned at Rome? Is there any irony here?