

### 1. Author and Date:

- a. Both from internal and external evidence, the authorship of Paul is largely uncontested. Philippians has characteristic Pauline theology, with personal references to his known associates and historical background in conjunction with the Book of Acts that all support Paul's authorship.
- b. Paul identifies that he is a prisoner, presumably in Rome; and goes on to state his expectation in 1:19-26 that he is to be released soon. Date of writing around 60-62 AD is most probable.
- c. Epaphroditus – was likely the courier who carried the financial support gift from the Philippi church to Paul in Rome. Epaphroditus took ill while in Rome and nearly died. When he recovered, Paul sent him back to Philippi as the courier of this letter.
- d. Timothy – was with Paul in Rome but didn't accompany Epaphroditus. Paul promises to send Timothy to Philippi soon, and he establishes important components of Timothy's worth in anticipation of commissioning him to continue strengthening the church:
  - i. Paul says that he has "no one else like" Timothy and goes on to say that Timothy is a "kindred spirit" – meaning he is much like Paul and worthy of this church that is so special to Paul – 2:20.
  - ii. He is "concerned for your welfare" – meaning he is not concerned with his own self-interest – 2:21.
  - iii. He is a man of proven worth – served with me as a son with his father... even more intimate than an apprentice with his master – 2:22.
  - iv. Clearly Paul is sending his best representative to this church.

### 2. Introduction:

- a. Acts 16:12-40 indicates that Philippi was the first community impacted by Paul's preaching. The story indicates both great responses by the Jewish & Gentile community, as well as strong opposition from the local magician's guild which cut his stay short.
  - i. The Philippian church was the first church founded by Paul – Acts 16:9-10 is God's call for Paul to go to Macedonia. Acts 16:14-15 states that the Pagan Lydia and her household were the first to believe the Gospel there and be baptized. Acts 16:30-33 states that the Roman soldier who guarded the jail also came to faith as did his household. These initial encounters one with a wealthy Pagan woman and the other a Roman soldier helped set the tone of Paul's relationship with the city.
  - ii. The Philippian church was also the most supportive of Paul's ongoing ministry, they were happy to supply provisions for his local outreaches in Macedonia, as well as caring for his needs while under house arrest in Rome.
  - iii. Paul felt close to this church as reflected in this letter regarded as his most personal epistle.

- b. **Philippi the City was founded in 358 BC by Philip of Macedon. It grew into an important station along the overland route that connected Rome and the Mediterranean on the major trade route to the east.**
  - i. **It was improved and fortified by Octavian as a regional military outpost.**
  - ii. **It was populated by primarily by both active and retired Roman military who had earned their status as Roman citizens or “free persons” and it also had many Greeks and some Jews in the population. It was known to be a well off and well-defended city.**
  - iii. **It was a provincial municipality and also a “free city” exempt from Roman taxes and protected by Roman law.**
  - iv. **The importance of identity is clear in this letter... the Roman identity was crucial in understanding the Philippians in general, now Paul is making the case for their church identity as Christ followers along with Paul.**
- c. **Paul’s purpose in writing Philippians was at least threefold:**
  - i. **To thank the church for their steadfast and generous support of Paul.**
  - ii. **To return Epaphroditus to his home community after his journey to personally deliver support to Paul.**
  - iii. **To attempt to settle some sort of a squabble that had broken out between Euodia and Syntyche that was apparently causing much concern for the church.**
    - 1. **Paul’s primary message of proper “Christian thinking” and especially on how to respond to the various challenges that arise within the Christian community.**
    - 2. **I suppose you could think of this occasion as a “teachable moment” into which Paul was speaking.**
    - 3. **The emphasis on Joy and rejoicing are effective ways to get past our own petty views and differences, and keep focused on what God is doing personally and corporately in the church.**

### **3. General Structure and Basic Message of Contents:**

- a. **Paul’s attitude toward this church – 1:1-11**
  - i. **Paul reminds us that an attitude of a servant is appropriate for all Christ followers – 1:1.**
  - ii. **Paul’s introductory prayer expresses his attitude as being “joyful” based upon the Philippian’s commitment to God and to Paul, and their tangible involvement in proclaiming the gospel message – 1:3-5.**
  - iii. **Paul prays especially for the Philippian’s personal growth in love fueled by their knowing Christ in His righteousness leads to personal transformation and harmony with each other as well as with God – 1:6-11.**
- b. **Paul’s circumstances – 1:12-20**
  - i. **His original readers knew the historical and relational circumstances Paul is speaking of. To properly interpret Paul’s message we have to read into the letter and catch up with what these original readers would have understood in applying Paul’s message to their life.**

- ii. Paul is in prison, but even that is a blessing as the Gospel continues to spread and be preached.
- iii. Paul expresses his freedom in spite of his chains. In spite of his chains, the message of Christ is moving forward.
- iv. Even those who would seek to manipulate the message cannot prevail over the power of God working in and through the Gospel message.
- c. Paul's priorities – 1:21-26
  - i. To live means to serve Christ, however to die is to gain eternity – 1:21.
  - ii. Fruitful labor is occurring in spite of my circumstances... obedience is more important than my immediate circumstances -
  - iii. To depart this life is to be united with Christ – ultimate goal.
  - iv. Paul's concern is about the people in the church and he hopes to see them all soon.
- d. Paul's admonishment to live as Christ did – 1:27-2:18
  - i. The church must take responsibility to live in a manner worthy of Christ.
  - ii. Live in humility and harmony; be willing to imitate Jesus and even to suffer for the Gospel cause.
  - iii. Focus on being blameless and holy children of God.
- e. Paul's plan to strengthen the Church in his absence – 2:19-30
  - i. Timothy and Epaphroditus to come soon.
  - ii. Timothy is the best Paul has working with him, and this is a great honor for the Philippian church.
  - iii. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus" – 2:5
    - Key words are:
      - 1. Morphe – "form" - to be of the same form or substance – 2:6-7
      - 2. Scaima – "appearance" - to look like or to appear the same – 2:8
  - iv. The worldly perspective saw Jesus as a man, not as God.
  - v. We know that Jesus is more than a man because God spoke to our hearts and revealed His identity to us – much the same as how God revealed Jesus as the Messiah to Peter "who do YOU say I Am?" – Matt 16:15; Mark 8:29; Luke 9:20.
  - vi. Jesus is revealed as both God and King, to whom every knee will bow – 2:10
  - vii. Therefore we work out your salvation in fear and trembling – 2:12
    - 1. You already have salvation – now let it have its entire transforming effect upon you.
    - 2. You have a part to play – we need to cooperate with God and allow Him the freedom to move in us and through us to accomplish His purpose.
- f. Paul's strong warning against adversaries of the church – 3:1-21
  - i. Dogs – is what the Jews typically called the Gentiles. Now Paul is using this term of derision for the Jewish false teachers preying on the Philippian's in Paul's absence – 3:2. See the context in story in Matthew 15:26-27 where Jesus does not advocate taking the "children's bread and feeding it to the

dogs,” while a Gentile lady observes that even the “dogs eat the crumbs from their master’s table.”

- ii. In the world there are many who would subvert the Gospel and attempt to lead God’s children astray.
  1. “Sub-Christian” thinking and doctrine is unworthy of God’s children.
  2. God’s children are not so by physical birth [lineage to Abraham] or Law obedience [circumcision & customs]; but rather by Spiritual birth [adoption] and Grace [God’s free gift of life].
  3. There were those Paul called “Judaizers” who preached the Law of Moses [works] + the Gospel of Christ [grace]. Paul repeatedly contends throughout his writings that it Grace alone by which we are saved (John 1:16-17; Acts 15:11; Romans 4:16, 11:5-7; Galatians 5:4-6; Ephesians 2:8-9).
- iii. Paul’s antidote to the lure of dependence as the Judaizers insisted upon Jewish ritual and the Law, is to worship God and His gift of Grace... to Rejoice in the Lord – 3:1
  1. Is 8:6 “these people” have rejected Shiloh and “rejoiced in” the threatening Kings of Syria – meaning of trusting their greatness rather than trusting God’s greatness. In this context it is much like the original report of the 12 sent by Moses to scout out Canaan. The next time, some 40 years later, Joshua only sent 2 scouts – much like 2 prophets will be sent to herald Jesus 2<sup>nd</sup> coming in Revelation 11:3-12.
  2. Paul’s letter to the Philippians is very much about Christian focus – Godly dependence rather than worldly focus.
- iv. “Joy” and “think” are two key words in this letter:
  1. Joy is an attitude of the heart that is experienced apart from physical conditions.
    - a. Joy is qualitatively different from happiness – joy comes from knowing our identity and place in Christ; and of our heavenly home beyond this present world.
    - b. Joy is this transcendent unalterable condition of the heart through faith in Christ, while happiness is a response to physical conditions around us. In Christ we can always be joyful, even though we may not be happy in our situation or circumstances.
  2. Think is about the focus of the mind upon heavenly things and not merely upon our present feelings or circumstances.
    - a. Happiness and other feelings are more conditioned by the satisfaction of our appetites – they are about earthly things.
    - b. Our focus must be about heavenly things – over which earthly things have no hold.
- g. Exhortations about Christian thinking – 4:2-9

- i. To live in harmony – 4:2 means for the church to think alike, or being of the same mind.
- ii. To set your mind – 4:8 means to focus your thoughts in this particular manner... meaning that this is how you ought to think... as children of God we focus on heavenly things.
- iii. To Paul, true Christian faith is to consider yourself essentially a “dead man walking” to the flesh, and choosing to be alive to the spiritual things of heaven which are of surpassing greatness. If your mind set is that “I’m already dead in this world” then there is nothing this world can do to me. This is the crux of Paul’s argument. This is also the context of being a “Living Sacrifice” and being Spiritually alive.
- h. Paul’s grateful response to the Philippian’s gift – 4:10-20
- i. Paul’s closing thoughts and benediction – 4:21-23

#### 4. Theological Development:

- a. <sup>Phil 1:6</sup> For I am confident of this very thing, that **He** who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.  
**The “He” in this verse is God Himself... God begins the work of Grace and redemption in each individual, and He promises to complete what He started. I have a role to play certainly to hinder or encourage the sanctification process God has initiated, but my effort alone won’t accomplish it.**  
**This is where the Law fails... it has no transformational power; all it can do is convict me. Grace with the indwelling Spirit on the other hand, has the ability to transform me into something I was not before nor could ever become on my own... a perfect child of God.**
- b. <sup>Phil 2:1-8</sup> Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, *and* being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.  
**Our example is not merely another person we know; it is the example of Jesus... who is God Himself. It is not the expectation that I can do all of what Christ did, but rather that I can follow His example in humility and obedience.**
- c. <sup>Phil 2:12-13</sup> So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

- i. In considering this passage, there is a sort of spiritual formula emerging. We intuitively understand that we cannot reduce God to a formula or methodology; however we may see a difficult concept in a different light that allows a better understanding of how God operates in us. The formula goes like this...  $SV \approx ((O+WO) \times (WI+WP)) \times (A+W)^\infty$
1. SPIRITUAL VITALITY (SV) is approximately equal to my obedience (O) resulting with my intentional cooperation with God which is the outward working of my faith (WO).
  2. God is already at work within me (WI) in continuing the Spiritual Transformation process He began with the Spirit's indwelling in my heart, and He sustains it in accordance with His Will and Good Pleasure (WP).
  3. Fear & trembling – literally means “awe & wonder” (A+W) flows out of my close personal experience of God's Greatness and from my dependence on Him.
- ii. In the application of this insight, it is important to realize that the awe and wonder component is the transformational driver, accordingly it is given the power of infinity... meaning the greater God is in your life and experience, the greater the multiplier in the spiritual vitality formula.
- iii. The implications of this transformational component I believe to be of critical importance to individuals and to the church as it forms a conceptual framework from which discipleship and Christian maturity and equipping may be appraised.
1. Ravi Zacharias suggests... “the human heart desires wonder and magic.” He says that “technology is what we now use to supplant our desire for awe and wonder. What the human heart is really longing to do is to worship God, to stand in awe of a God we don't understand and we can't explain.”
  2. Donald Miller says much the same in his book Blue Like Jazz, he says... “We worship a Being our life experience does not give us tools with which to understand. If we could, God would not inspire awe. You cannot be a Christian without being a mystic. The little we do understand [of God] that grain of sand our minds are capable of grasping, those ideas such as God is Good, God Feels, God Loves, God Knows all, [these things] are enough to keep our hearts dwelling on His Majesty and otherness forever.”

3. **What they are both describing is entering into a “transcendent mystical experience” where our mind and heart are caught up in the awe and wonder of God.**
- iv. **This transcendent mystical experience is by nature a component of the transformational process, which is made evident in the next passage:**
- d. <sup>Phil 2:14-16a</sup> Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, ***in which you shine like stars in the universe*** as you hold out the word of life.
  - i. Zondervan’s Expository Encyclopedia states “The purpose of the exhortation to work out their salvation was that the readers might be pure and uncontaminated light givers in the world. By regeneration they had already become children of God in nature and position. Now as they progressed in sanctification, they would become “children of God without fault,” particularly as viewed by the world around them. By faithfully adhering to the word of God as contained in Scripture and taught by Paul, their lives would be free from anything blameworthy. Thus their witness would not be disfigured.”
  - ii. “The apostle is mindful of their location within a corrupt society. Using OT language (Dt 32:5) he depicts humankind generally as “a crooked and depraved generation.” Amid this moral blackness, the children of God should stand out as stars at midnight. Believers are the possessors of Christ, the Light of the world (Jn 8:12), and so are now light-givers to the world (Mt 5:14). “You shine” states the present fact. They are not told to shine, but are reminded that they already do. The challenge was to let the light shine out unhindered (cf. Mt 5:16).”
- e. <sup>Phil 2:19-24</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.
  - i. **Paul has finished speaking of what constitutes transformational Christian life, and he now discusses an example of Christian Leadership in Timothy.**
  - ii. **Timothy is the best Paul has in his arsenal of Spiritual leadership. Since Paul himself is unable to come at present being in jail, he is doing the next best thing in sending Timothy.**
  - iii. **Timothy is described as Paul’s spiritual son, which is also a model for Christian leaders to mentor and develop leaders to advance the Kingdom of God.**

**iv. Here Paul is modeling what all leaders need to do... to raise up new leaders to carry on their work. As an individual I can only do so much, but in multiplying myself through other leaders, much more can be accomplished.**

f. <sup>Philippians 2:25-30</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

**i. Epaphroditus is another man that Paul holds up as an example of a Christ like leader.**

**ii. Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippian church with some money from the church to help take care of Paul's needs during the time that he was locked up.**

**iii. Epaphroditus also hung around to provide moral support and other tangible forms of care. While he was there he got so sick he almost died in trying to serve Paul, and proved himself a strong and capable leader.**

**iv. Note Paul's thought on mercy – "God had mercy on him... but also on me." This is a wonderful view of Paul's inclusionary approach to ministry leadership. He is always inviting worthy people in, as well as differentiating those whose values are at odds with the cause of the Kingdom of God.**

g. <sup>Phil 3:12-16</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained. Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

**i. Salvation is secured when we are received by God through faith in Jesus. The Grace provided by God to restore humanity in fellowship is personally affirmed, and corporately confirmed as we are indwelt by the Spirit and increasingly reflect the nature and character of our Lord... this is Spiritual Transformation.**

- ii. **Sanctification is the life long process where Jesus’ nature, character, and values are formed within me in the “inner-man.”**
- iii. **Perfection does not occur now on fallen earth, but it will definitely in eternity with the new heaven and earth following Jesus return at the end of the age. Paul reiterates this, then speaks of straining toward the goal of doing the absolute best we can now in light of eternity that will follow...**
- iv. **It is interesting that Paul says he is “forgetting what is behind” him... meaning both the negative and the positive elements. So many people live in the past, where they recount things done in advancing the Kingdom of God; or alternatively beating themselves up because they failed to be the person they hoped to be. Paul is saying both of these can become a trap for us. What was done is part of our foundation, but it is not the end goal. Paul says he must “press on” in continual action toward the prize of eternity... like a runner straining for the finish line.**
- h. Phil 3:17-19 **Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.**
  - i. **Living as enemies of the Cross with our mind on earthly things relates to those who have received Grace, but have not desired to be transformed Spiritually.**
  - ii. **In essence, these folks want it both ways... to enjoy eternity later and the world now. Paul says you can’t have it both ways... Jesus is Savior – the means for reconciliation with God; and Lord – Jesus is our King whom we follow and obey.**
  - iii. **This paradox is a “both and” conundrum... we live in a fallen world as physical beings where we can be joyful and enjoy our life now; but we live also as Spiritual beings and the Spirit is always calling us heavenward.**
  - iv. **Living as enemies of the Cross indicates those who in enjoying the former, have sacrificed the later... and the Spirit will not allow us to continue on this way.**
- i. Phil 3:20-21 **But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.**
  - i. **Paul refocuses the church that their citizenship is not on earth... to either Rome or Jerusalem. But instead to God in Heaven.**

ii. **The earthly things so many seek are often a snare and a distraction, because the joys of life in a glorious new physical body in Heaven far surpass earthly pleasures.**

1. **Cross reference – Romans 8:5-11** – Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

2. **Cross reference – Romans 8:18-23** – I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

j. <sup>Phil 4:2-7</sup> I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

i. **Paul makes a personal appeal to two women who were Gospel partners with him, who are now at odds. The nature of the problem is not known.**

- ii. **However, there will always be conflict in worldly institutions and relationships... this is a byproduct of the Fallen condition. The way to get beyond this is to focus upon our eternal condition.**
  - iii. **In light of eternity and our eternal status now as God’s children being salt and light on Fallen earth, we can find peace now and get past the differences that would seek to divide us.**
  - k. <sup>Phil 4:8-9</sup> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
    - i. **The final piece in Paul’s argument, is to focus on the noble and excellent things now... to resist falling into conflicts based upon our Fallen nature.**
    - ii. **The goal of Sanctification and Christian discipleship is fundamental Spiritual transformation. It is not about trying to be better, or of behavioral modification. The Spirit within seeks to form Jesus’ nature and character in our innerman. We have a choice to cooperate with the Spirit or to frustrate Him in the short term, however the long term goal is the Spirit will accomplish His work.**
      - 1. **Cross reference Philippians 1:6** – being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.
      - 2. **Cross reference Philippians 2:1-4** – If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.
5. **Conclusion – the Epistle [letter] to the Philippians is an integrated work that ends reflecting the same ideas it began with. The type and manner of life we live is a choice... we can decide to live a life reflecting Jesus’ and by extension Paul’s nature and character, or we can fall into allowing our baser nature and Fallen character to emerge. For Christian disciples in the first century and in our century, the choice remains the same... partner with the Spirit in forwarding the Spiritual transformation He desires to bring about in each of our lives.**