



PAUL'S LETTER TO THE

PHILIPPIANS



STUDY GUIDE



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed to help you grow in your relationship with God through his Word. It is a companion to our sermon series and is meant to be studied personally and discussed in groups. We believe that where these three elements (personal study, preaching, and community) combine, personal discipleship will flourish. We pray this guide helps you take your next step with Jesus.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

We have arranged this material with three basic elements in mind: personal study, preaching, and community. First, study each passage personally. Begin by familiarizing yourself with the introductory material, then, leading up to each Sunday, study the passage and read the reflection. On Sunday, use the "notes" section to take notes from the sermon. Throughout the following week, find time to discuss the questions with a few others. Lastly, we have included a glossary of biblical and theological terms in the back. If a word is in **bold**, you will find a short definition in the glossary. Happy studying!

ABOUT PHILIPPIANS

Philippians is one of the most popular books in the Bible and for good reason. For almost two millennia, it has encouraged, challenged, and equipped Christians from all over the world. It is known for its strong emphasis on joy in the midst of suffering, clear teaching on the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the passionate plea for unity in the church. It is also full of practical examples of how to follow Christ. But above all, Christians have cherished Philippians because of its centrality on the **gospel**.

QUICK FACTS

- Author: The Apostle Paul
- Recipient: The church in Philippi (Northern Greece)
- Date: AD 59-61
- Location: Imprisoned in Rome
- Main Theme: Progress and joy in the faith (1:25)

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-2

¹Paul and Timothy, **servants** of Christ Jesus, To all the **saints** in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **overseers** and **deacons**: ²**Grace** to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

REFLECTION

What does it mean to be a Christian? For Paul, the most basic definition is "in Christ."¹⁰ Also known as "union with Christ", this simple phrase contains the entire glory of salvation. In a mysterious way, when the Holy Spirit fills us, he unites us with Jesus so that we can be said to be in him and he in us (Rom. 8:9-11). Drawing from the metaphor of marriage, German reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546) captured it movingly: "If [Christ and the soul] are one flesh and there is between them a true marriage... everything they have they hold in common, the good as well as the evil... Christ is full of grace, life, and salvation. The soul is full of sins, death, and damnation. Now let faith come between them and sins, death, and damnation will be Christ's, while grace, life, and salvation will be the soul's; for if Christ is a bridegroom, he must take upon himself the things which are his bride's and bestow upon her the things that are his."¹¹

QUESTIONS

- How does the **gospel** reframe our understanding of freedom and serving others?
- How does being dual citizens of **heaven** and earth influence the way we operate in the world and the church?
- How can church leaders live out the gospel through humble service?
- What do the blessings of **grace** and peace reveal about God's character?
- How does Paul's greeting remind believers of their true identity in Christ?

PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the **gospel** from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion **at the day of Jesus Christ**. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of **grace**, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the **gospel**. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of **righteousness** that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

REFLECTION

The grand finale of salvation. The Bible speaks of a future glory that this world is only a shadow of—a glory we will nonetheless personally enjoy when Christ returns. In verses 6 and 10, Paul hints at this final stage of salvation, often called glorification. In short, if being in Christ is what it means to be a Christian, then glorification is the full and final enjoyment of all that is ours in him. On that day named after our glorious savior, we too will be made glorious—"pure and blameless"—because we will be "like him" (1 John 3:2).

QUESTIONS

- Why is thankfulness integral to a healthy prayer life?
- How does God's unchanging commitment to our spiritual growth encourage us to walk with Christ (1:6)?
- How should the **gospel** shape our church community? When was a time you experienced this personally, and how did it strengthen your faith?
- What can we learn from Paul's prayer in verses 9-11? What practical steps can we take to deepen our prayers for others?

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18A

¹² I want you to know, **brothers**, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the **gospel**, ¹³ so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. ¹⁴ And most of the **brothers**, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.

REFLECTION

Why you are where you are. A substantial difference between the Christian and secular worldview is the ability to say along with Paul "I am put here for..." (1:16). Either everything is random and meaningless, or it's all ordered and purposeful according to God's wisdom (Job 42:2; Rom. 11:33-36). This is called providence, and it's difficult to overstate how important it is to the Christian life. French reformer John Calvin (1509-1564) hit it on the head when he wrote, "Ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it."¹² This is why Paul can rejoice in prison of all places.

QUESTIONS

- When faced with times of trials, how can we reframe these situations as an opportunity to share the **gospel**?
- How has God used difficult situations as means to point you to Christ?
- Throughout history, the gospel message has expanded greatly during periods of suffering. Why does God use these times to work out his plan of **redemption**?
- Why is it important for Christians to distinguish between the **gospel** message and its messengers? How can we do this without becoming cynical?

PHILIPPIANS 1:18B-26

¹⁸ Yes, and I will rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and the help of the **Spirit** of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, ²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the **flesh**, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

REFLECTION

Christians and death. One of the earliest **martyrs** was Ignatius of Antioch (c. 50-108 AD).¹³ While on his way to be executed in Rome, he wrote a letter to the church there asking them not to interfere: "It is better for me to die in Christ Jesus than to be king over the ends of the earth. I seek him who died for our sake. I desire him who rose for us... Suffer me, my brethren; hinder me not from living, do not wish me to die."¹⁴ Both Ignatius and Paul understood that while death doesn't belong here and will one day be just a distant memory, today it's the servant of Christ who brings us to himself (Heb. 2:14-16). "Oh death, where is your victory? Oh death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55).

QUESTIONS

- Paul knows and expects everything to work in the end. How can we grow to trust God, even if it means death?
- How does Paul view death differently from most of us? How does our perspective on death impact our everyday lives?
- How was Paul able to rejoice in suffering, and how can we cultivate that same joy?
- Who has sacrificed to help you grow in your faith? What is one step you can take to do the same for others?

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

²⁷ Only let your manner of life be worthy of the **gospel** of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one **spirit**, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God. ²⁹ For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰ engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

REFLECTION

Destruction and salvation. Have you ever noticed how salvation and judgment run hand-in-hand through the Bible?¹⁵ In Exodus 34, God provides a rich self-description. Yet, inherent in it is an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, he is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger," "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness," and eager to forgive. On the other hand, he is severe and "will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. 34:6-7). These twin descriptions show up together throughout scripture. God promises salvation to Adam and Eve and destruction to the serpent (Gen. 3:15). He saves Noah and floods the earth. He redeems Israel even while he condemns Egypt. Then, in the climactic moment on the cross, God weaves this apparent contradiction into a tapestry as he brings judgment down on his Son for the salvation of the world. And at the end of days, God will judge the wicked and save those who trust in him once and for all.

QUESTIONS

- In what ways will living as a worthy citizen of the **gospel** cost you?
- How might difficult seasons foster disunity in a church? What can we do personally and corporately to withstand this?
- How have you seen the relationship between a church's unity and its mission displayed—either for bad or good?
- If Paul presents suffering for Christ as a privilege, why does this seem so foreign to us today? How can we change our perspective?

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4

¹So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the **Spirit**, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

REFLECTION

Participation in the Spirit. Without the work of the Holy Spirit, we have nothing. No, this isn't an overstatement. Think of any good gift from God and it comes to us by the Spirit. As "the Lord, the Giver of life," he bestows on us all that God desires to give.¹⁶ For this reason, everything hinges on whether one has, what Paul calls, "*participation*" in the Spirit (2:1). If so—if he abides in you—so does Christ himself, and if Christ, then also the Father (John 14:15-23). But that's not all. You also have fellowship with everyone else who has the Spirit of God. We mustn't downplay the Spirit, because if we have participation in him, then we have everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pt. 1:3).

QUESTIONS

- What might disunity in our interpersonal relationships reveal about our relationship with God?
- When faced with conflict, do you tend to run from it or work through it?
- How might the command to "count others more significant than yourselves" be applied poorly? What is one way we can apply it today?
- In a culture that champions personal achievement, what will humility and deference cost us? Why is unity worth it?

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

⁵Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a **servant**, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in **heaven** and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the **Father**.

REFLECTION

He did what? When the Son of God became man, he "emptied himself." This doesn't mean that he gave up aspects of his divinity, as some have thought. Notice, Paul didn't say that Jesus emptied something from himself but that he emptied *himself*.¹⁷ He humbled himself; he poured himself out. He gave up his rights by becoming a servant. While "he remained what he was (God); what he was not (human), he assumed."¹⁸ This is the greatest display of humility the world has ever seen: God became a baby. The Almighty became the servant of all. The Lord of life gave himself up to death. Self-emptying is at the heart of our faith because it is at the heart of our God. The question is, will we follow him in his humility?

QUESTIONS

- Do you tend to think of Jesus more in the form of God or in the form of man? How can you grow to see him as truly both?
- In what ways is Jesus a servant?
- How does the example of Christ equip us to pursue unity in the church?
- Why is the exaltation of Jesus good news for people tempted toward division?
- What is one relationship you need to approach with more humility?

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-18

¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. ¹⁴ Do all things without grumbling or disputing, ¹⁵ that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, ¹⁶ holding fast to the word of life, so that in the **day of Christ** I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain. ¹⁷ Even if I am to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. ¹⁸ Likewise you also should be glad and rejoice with me.

REFLECTION

A short theology of grumbling. In the beginning, there was no grumbling—no "I'm tired" or "Why are there so many bugs?" It was Satan who taught us this song. He entered the garden, pointed the finger at God, and called him stingy. Sadly we believed him. We traded our garden for a wilderness. And wilderness is what we've known since. The Israelites found themselves in this wilderness after passing through the Red Sea. In the howling desert wind, they heard the song of Satan, and once again "grumbled against Moses" (Ex. 15:24). But when Jesus came, he sang another song—the original song of gratitude. He also entered the wilderness after the waters of baptism, but for the first time, a son of man heard the song of Satan and didn't grumble (Matt. 4:1-11). Christians now live in a proverbial wilderness of their own between the waters of their baptism and the promised land. But now, we can hear Jesus' better song and join in his chorus—choosing gratitude over grumbling.

QUESTIONS

- How do we avoid the twin extremes of **legalism** and **lawlessness**?
- When are we most prone to grumble and dispute? Why is that?
- What are some practical ways to fight against grumbling and disputing?
- What does it look like for us to be poured out for the sake of others?

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the **gospel**. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. ²⁵ I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my **brother** and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had **mercy** on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

REFLECTION

Fathers and mothers. The heart of Christianity is familial. Jesus became our "brother" so that we could call God "Father." Among the most important relationships in the church are between spiritual fathers and sons, and mothers and daughters. Unlike sibling relationships, these are asymmetrical. One is ahead of the other in the faith and leads by love and example. Here, training (Titus 2:3-4), imitation (1 Cor. 4:16), care (1 Thess. 2:7), and encouragement (1 Thess. 2:11-12) all thrive as godly men and women help the next generation progress in the faith.

QUESTIONS

- How do relationships with other believers help us grow?
- Do you have a "Paul" (an older mentor) in your life? How has that person impacted you? If not, how can you find someone who can invest in you?
- Do you have a "Timothy" (a younger disciple) in your life? If not, who comes to mind that you could intentionally invest in?

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-11

¹ Finally, my **brothers**, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. ² Look out for the dogs, look out for the evil-doers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. ³ For we are the **circumcision**, who worship by the **Spirit** of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the **flesh**— ⁴ though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of **Benjamin**, a **Hebrew** of Hebrews; as to the **law**, a **Pharisee**; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to **righteousness** under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

REFLECTION

The Trinity and worship. Worship is authentic, but the **Trinity** seems dense and stuffy. Don't **doctrines** like this choke out heartfelt worship? Maybe, but only if you view the Trinity more like a bad math equation ($1+1+1=1?$) than the God who saves. When we encounter a Father who loves us so much that he sent his Son and Spirit to redeem us, how can we not sing his praises? And yet he's not just the object of our worship—he's the means by which we worship. Paul shows that all blessings flow from the Father (1:28; 3:9; 4:7) through Christ (1:11; 3:9; 4:19) by the Spirit (2:1) to us. And we have the joy of responding by the Spirit (3:3), in Christ (1:26; 2:10; 3:3), to the glory of the Father (1:11; 2:11; 4:20).

QUESTIONS

- Why do we have a natural inclination to place our confidence in the **flesh**?
- What are signs that some "gain" has too tight of a grip on our hearts?
- What is one thing you have a hard time "counting as loss?"
- How does placing our confidence in Christ lead to more joy?

PHILIPPIANS 3:12-16

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ **Brothers**, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

REFLECTION

Belonging to Christ. The first question in the New City Catechism¹⁹ asks, "What is our only hope in life and death?" To which it answers, "That we are not our own but belong, body and soul, both in life and death, to God and to our Savior Jesus Christ." The keyword is "only." There are many comforts in this life, but only one carries through both life and death. In a world infatuated with human ability, ingenuity, and potential, it's safely assumed we ultimately belong to ourselves. But it doesn't take long to see how deeply un-comforting this actually is. How sweet, then, are the words of God through Isaiah: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, *you are mine.*" (Is. 43:1).

QUESTIONS

- What characterizes maturity in this passage?
- How can we forget what lies behind? How have you seen the refusal to do so inhibit spiritual growth?
- What do you need to forget so that you can press on to maturity?
- How does community affect spiritual growth? Who in your life can you encourage to press on?

PHILIPPIANS 3:17-4:1

¹⁷ **Brothers**, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in **heaven**, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. ^{4:1} Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

REFLECTION

Already-not-yet. The figure below illustrates the "already-not-yet"—a term that describes the unique moment in history Christians currently live in. We stand in the overlap of two ages: "this age," from Creation to Christ's return, and "the age to come," which began with Jesus' resurrection. Through the Spirit, we now taste the first fruits of the new creation, even as we long to enjoy them in their fullness (Rom. 8:18-25).



QUESTIONS

- What role does imitation play in our spiritual lives – for good and bad?
- Who are people you seek to imitate? What about their way of life is compelling to you?
- How do you know if something other than the God of the Bible has become your god?
- How does the hope of the resurrection help us stand firm in the Lord?

PHILIPPIANS 4:2-9

² I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. ³ Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the **gospel** together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the **book of life**. ⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, **brothers**, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹ What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

REFLECTION

Don't you think? A common misconception about Christianity is that you have to check your brain at the door when you come in. This caricature couldn't be more untrue. Philippians is loaded with words related to the life of the mind: "think," "consider," "know," and more. In fact, it's other belief systems that advise you not to think too hard about ultimate things like meaning and death. But it's not so with Christianity. The Bible encourages us to consider these questions because it has satisfying and compelling answers for them. So, yes, think about these things. And to the degree that you do so, you will find both satisfaction for your mind and change in your heart (Rom. 12:2).

QUESTIONS

- How have you seen disunity in the church be reconciled?
- What might it look like to "let your reasonableness be known to everyone"?
- We are often quick to pray about big things, but how can we make our requests known to God in the small things of life?
- What thoughts have been occupying your mind recently? Take a minute and pray for these.

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

¹⁴ Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. ¹⁵ And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the **gospel**, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. ¹⁶ Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. ¹⁸ I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. ¹⁹ And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. ²⁰ To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

REFLECTION

The rare jewel of Christian contentment. Puritan pastor Jeremiah Burroughs (1600-1646) once called contentment a "rare jewel." He described it as "that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."²⁰ Rare indeed. The good news is that Paul says he "learned" it (4:11), which means you can too. How? By daily learning from Jesus in the school of grace. Discontentment lies in the gap between what we think we deserve and what we have. God's grace teaches us how little we actually deserve but how much we have in Jesus (Phil. 4:13).

QUESTIONS

- How is contentment a learned skill? How do we cultivate it in our own lives?
- How have you seen verse 13 misused? How should we actually apply it?
- If God promises to provide everything we need, why do we often not believe this?
- How can we grow in our generosity, both personally and as a church?

PHILIPPIANS 4:21-23

²¹ Greet every **saint** in Christ Jesus. The **brothers** who are with me greet you. ²² All the **saints** greet you, especially those of Caesar's household. ²³ The **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your **spirit**.

REFLECTION

Communion with God. With the first passage (1:1-2) we introduced union with Christ—which is the glorious reality that by the Holy Spirit we are bound to Jesus. Because of our position "in Christ," we are righteous, holy, and adopted. But this is only the beginning! From this union, flows communion. Puritan Pastor John Owen (1616-1683) described communion as God's "giving himself to us and our giving ourselves and all that he requires to him."²¹ Think in terms of marriage. The wedding and the promises made on that day are not the sum total of marriage. They're the infrastructure that allows the relationship to grow and flourish. So it is with union and communion. Because we are forever united to Christ, daily we must receive "the **grace** of the Lord Jesus Christ" and give ourselves wholly unto him.

QUESTIONS

- Are you ever hesitant to greet some **saints** and not others? Why is that? What does that reveal about your posture?
- What does the presence of believers in Caesar's household communicate about the nature of the church?
- Why is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ a fitting way to end this letter?

GLOSSARY

Benjamin – One of the twelve tribes of Israel named after the youngest of the sons of Jacob.

Book of Life – A symbol in the Bible that refers to the list of the names of God's people.

Brother – (Greek: *adelphos*) can mean both "brother" and "sister." It is Paul's favorite title for fellow believers.

Circumcision – A physical demonstration in the Old Testament that Hebrew people trusted him and belonged to his chosen people. It was the removal of the male foreskin.

Deacon – (Greek: *diakonos*) literally means "servant." Deacons serve the church by providing for physical and spiritual needs (Acts 6:1-7; 1 Tim. 3:8-13).

Doctrine – A statement about the truths of the Christian faith.

Flesh – (Greek: *sarx*) Paul often uses this word in three ways: (1) as a reference to the physical body; (2) the sinful component of each person; and (3) the works one does from their own abilities.

Gospel – (Greek: *euangelion*) The good news that God sent his Son, Jesus, to live a perfect life, die on the cross, and rise from the dead so that we can be reconciled to God through faith. For a more detailed description of the gospel, see the book *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert.

Grace – (Greek: *charis*) God giving us what we don't deserve (see also "Mercy").

Heaven – The current spiritual dwelling place of God.

Law – The biblical authors use this as a way of referring to the first five books of the Bible (Torah). Broadly speaking, it can refer to all of God's Word.

Lawlessness – A wrong way of relating to God that minimizes his commands and the need to obey them. Lawlessness ignores the fact that true faith always leads to obedience (James 2:14-26).

Legalism – A wrong way of relating to God that depends solely on obeying his commands in order to receive blessings. Legalism ignores the simplicity of faith (Romans 3:21-31).

Martyr - Originally means "witness." Over time, it became a way of referring to someone who lost their life because of their Christian faith.

Mercy - (Greek: *eleoō*) literally means "compassion" or "pity." Mercy is compassionate withholding of deserved judgment. (See also "Grace.")

Overseer - (Greek: *episkopos*) It is equivalent to "pastor" and "elder" in the New Testament. They serve the church by leading, teaching, caring, and setting an example (see 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-5).

Pharisee - Jewish religious leaders who took seriously obedience to God's law, oftentimes, out of the wrong motivation to earn their right standing before God (See also "Legalism").

Redemption - Another way of referring to salvation. It is a term that's usually associated with the marketplace: to redeem something is to buy it back. In terms of salvation, God has purchased his people by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Righteousness - Right standing before God. God is righteous and gives righteousness to those who trust in Jesus. Christians, are able to walk in this righteousness, not to earn God's favor, but because they already have it.

Saint - (Greek: *hagios*) literally means "holy one" and refers to any believer in Christ. It does not mean just a select few in the top echelon of the Christian faith, for example: *St. Paul, St. Francis, or St. Augustine.*

Servant - (Greek: *doulos*) literally means "bondservant" or "slave."

Spirit - (Greek: *pneuma*) The same word for breath or wind. Sometimes, it refers to a person's spirit, which is their life. Other times, it is a reference to the divine person of the Holy Spirit who is the third member of the Trinity (see "Trinity").

The Day of Christ - Also called "the Day of the Lord," this refers to the time at the end of history when God brings final judgment. The first coming of Jesus was the beginning of this "day," and it will be completed when he returns. For Christians, this is the moment of final salvation, but for unbelievers, final condemnation.

Trinity - The belief that the one God eternally exists as three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

ENDNOTES

¹Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 641-642.

²*ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008), "Introduction to Philippians".

³"Knowing the Bible: Philippians," The Gospel Coalition, accessed April 6, 2025, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/course/knowning-bible-philippians/>.

⁴See Philippians 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15. Miguel G. Echevarría, *Engaging the New Testament: A Short Introduction for Students and Ministers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2024), 126.

⁵ See Philippians 1:4, 18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10

⁶Köstenberger, Kellum, and Quarles, 655.

⁷G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament*, Illustrated ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 291-292.

⁸Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 32-33.

⁹John Calvin wrote "ambition is almost invariably the mother of dissensions" and "a means of fanning all strifes." in John Calvin, *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1999), 10, 31.

¹⁰Paul uses "in Christ," "in Christ Jesus," "in the Lord," "with Christ," and "in him," around 164 times!

¹¹Martin Luther, "The Freedom of A Christian," in *Three Treatises*, 2nd edition (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1990), 286.

¹²John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), I.17.11.

¹³ For a brief sketch of Ignatius, see Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

¹⁴ John Behr, *Becoming Human: Meditations on Christian Anthropology in Word and Image*, 8.2.2013 edition (St Vladimirs Seminary Pr, 2013), 3.

¹⁵ See James M. Hamilton Jr, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology*, Illustrated ed. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010).

¹⁶ The Nicene Creed (this phrase was added at the council of Constantinople in AD 381).

¹⁷ Michael Reeves, *Rejoicing in Christ*, Illustrated edition (IVP Academic, 2015), 33.

¹⁸ St Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, N.Y: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2002), 86.

¹⁹ You can view the entire *New City Catechism* online at newcitycatechism.com or download the app on your mobile device.

²⁰ Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, 2nd ed. (Banner of Truth Trust, 2022), 4.

²¹ John Owen, *Communion With God*, 2nd ed. (Banner of Truth Trust, 2022), 3.