

BIBLE STUDY ON PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The letter for our consideration in this conference is Paul's epistle to the Church in Philippi. The letter was written by Paul and his spiritual son Timothy. Timothy perhaps scripted the letter, or is mentioned as a way to get the church to accept his authority the same way they do of Paul the Apostle. Paul did not introduce himself as an apostle in this letter, this is probably because his apostleship is not in doubt to the Philippians, and the letter was more of a friendly felicitation rather than instructions on doctrinal issues or church ordinances.

The city of Philippi was named after the father of Alexander the Great. It was a city of Macedonia, and is very significant for at least three reasons:

1. It was here that a great victory which decided the faith of the Roman Empire was won by Octavianus (Augustus Caesar) and Antony over the forces of Brutus and Cassius.
2. It was the first European city to receive the gospel, and hence an inroad to the entire Europe.
3. As at the time the Apostle evangelized the city there was very little Jewish influence, therefore the church planted did not have much issues with Jewish syncretism.

The Gospel came to the Philippians under great spiritual conflict. Paul had separated from Barnabas, and was going into the mission with a new team. He had some struggles discerning the will of God on the direction to go. Finally he was assured they should go into Macedonia (Acts 16:1-10). Philippi was the first city before them. As for Timothy it was his first mission outing. They went to the place of prayer and shared the gospel with one of the women, they made their first convert. On another occasion they had to cast out a demon from a slave girl. This landed them in prison. Paul later wrote; "we had suffered before and were shamefully entreated at Philippi" (1Thess.2:2). Out of all these struggle and travail, the church in Philippi, like a dear child was born. The Church became his trusted ally in the proclamation of the gospel. More than any other church, they supported him again and again.

This letter was written to appreciate the church for the gifts they sent through Epaphroditus, and to acquaint the church of his state in the prison. He also used the opportunity to assure them of his love and care, and to encourage them to continue living true to the Gospel which they were all defending. No other letter do we see the apostle opening up his heart as he did to the Philippians. He expressed his singular goal for living: Christ, and all that he meant! We see his one desire to see Christ magnified in his body; to experience more of Christ, to live for the service of the church, to defend and confirm the Gospel. He invites the church to join him in this pursuit, and warns them against being distracted by the intimidation of their adversary, selfish ambitions, false teachers or even the care of this life.

Scholars generally agree that this letter was written towards the end of Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (about AD 61/62). By this time he was in a stricter custody under the Praetorian Guard instead of his earlier rented apartment.

This letter is very relevant to today's church as we face very many battles and distraction from a complex society that mounts more and more cares of this life, the deception of false preachers who have turned the gospel to a merely socio-economic insurance scheme and persecutions and real sufferings in some

part of the world. We will find the mild and comforting tune of the letter appealing, and at the same time we will find Paul's soldierly defense of the Gospel challenging.

BIBLE STUDY OUTLINE

Study 1 (Chapter 1:1-11):	Partnership in the Gospel.
Study 2 (Chapter 1:12-30):	Defending and Confirming the Gospel; Standing Together in Adversity
Study 3: (Chapter 2:1-18):	Defending and Confirming the Gospel; Having the Mind of Christ.
Study 4 (Chapter 3:1-21):	Defending and Confirming the Gospel; A singular pursuit of Christ
Study 5 (Chapter 4:1-23):	Defending and Confirming the Gospel; doing all things through Christ

STUDY 1 (CHAPTER 1:1-11): PARTNERSHIP IN THE GOSPEL.

1. Address and Greetings (1:1-2)
 - a. This letter was written by Paul and Timothy. What does this tell us of Timothy's discipleship and growth
 - b. Compare Paul's address to other churches (See Rom.1:7, 1Cor.1:2, 2 Cor 1:1, etc.) with the address to the Philippians (1:1). What is the significant difference and what does it tell us of the letter?
 - c. Discuss the significant of the prayers in v.2
2. Thanksgiving (1:3-4)
 - a. What does the remembrance or mention of the Philippians provoke in Paul's heart? (v.3-4)
 - b. "Always in every prayers of mine for you all..." What does this tell us of Paul's attitude in prayer for the Churches.
 - c. Discuss the basis of Paul's thanksgiving and joy (v.5)
3. Partnership in the Gospel (1:5-6)
 - a. (i) What does the apostle mean by "fellowship in the gospel" (Read v. 5 from various versions)
(ii) Discuss the basis for fellowship in the gospel
(iii) What is the relationship between "fellowship in the gospel" and a progressive work of God in a life (v.5-6)
 - b. Unto what end (purpose) is the work of God in any life (v.6, See also 2Thess.1:7,10-12, c/f Eph.2:7,10, 1Pet.2:9)
 - c. What gave the Apostle such confidence that God's work in the Church will be brought to perfection?
4. The Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel (1:7-8)
 - a. What do you understand by the phrase "The Defense and confirmation of the gospel"? Read v.7 from various versions.
 - b. Compare v.7-8 with 2Cor.11:27-29, Col. 2;1-2, 2Tim.2:10 and discuss Paul's passion and concern for the churches as he sought to defend and confirm the gospel.

- c. Discuss the place of the partaking in the “apostolic grace” in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. v.7 (See also 1Cor.15:10)
5. Approving the Excellent (1:9-11)
- a. The following are highlighted from Paul’s prayers (v.9-11) and are very necessary for the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Please Discuss exhaustively:
 - i. The place of abounding love 9v. 9, See also 1Cor.13)
 - ii. The importance of knowledge and spiritual discernment
 - iii. The need to approve the excellent (Read v.10 from various versions)
 - iv. The need for sincerity and being without offense (v.10, see also 2cor.4:1-2, 2Thess.2:3-6)
 - v. The importance of being filled with the fruit of righteousness (v.11, See also Eph.5:9-11)

SUMMARY

This letter though written to the entire Church, was particularly addressed to the bishops and deacons. It holds a lot for leaders in the body of Christ. We see the need for consistency in the labour for the gospel, both as a means and an evidence of God’s work in the life. The apostle saw the church not just as partners, but as being in his heart (or as the margin puts it, as having him in their heart), they were in a figurative sense with him in prison, defending and confirming the gospel. The Apostle desired that their love will grow beyond a “sentimental gush” (MSG Bible) to one of solid conviction based on knowledge and spiritual discernment. This way they will learn to practical defend the gospel in the best way which is through a life of sincerity, without offense (not leading to sin), and filled with the fruit of righteousness.

STUDY 2 (CHAPTER 1:12-30): DEFENDING AND CONFIRMING THE GOSPEL; STANDING TOGETHER IN ADVERSITY

1. The Furtherance of the Gospel (1:12-13)
 - a. What was the reason for Paul’s writing according to v.12. Why is it important to communicate our state and our work to those in fellowship with us in the gospel.
 - b. What were the things that happened (See v.12-13, Refer to scholarly commentaries on Paul’s imprisonment). Are these things ordinarily meant to lead to the furtherance of the gospel?
 - c. Discuss Paul’s attitude that made even his adversity lead to the furtherance of the gospel (v.13-17)
2. Set for the Defense of the Gospel(1:14-19)
 - a. What does it imply to be set for the defense of the gospel? (v.17; see also Rom.1:14-17)
 - b. What does it mean to preach Christ out of envy and strife? (Read v. 15 from various versions) What should be our attitude to those who preach Christ out of envy and strive? (v.18, see also 2Tim 2:23-26)

- c. What does Paul consider as his most important need for the defense and confirmation of the gospel, and how does he hope to secure it? (v.19, See also Eph.6:18-20, Acts4:23-31)

3. Christ Magnified in my Body (1:20-26)
 - a. What was Paul's earnest expectations and hope according to v.20? What is the basis of such expectation? V.21
 - b. Discuss the Phrase "Christ shall be magnified in my body" v.20 (See 2Cor.4:5-11). What is the importance of this in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel?
 - c. Read v.21-22 from various versions. What is Paul's singular purpose for living? How does this help him in the face of imminent death? How does this purpose weigh on Paul's choices and service to the body of Christ? (v.22-26). To what extent is he willing to go in the service of their faith (See Phil.2:17)

4. Conduct Worthy of the Gospel (1:27)
 - a. Read v. 27 from various versions. Why is it important we conduct ourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel (See Eph.4:1-3, Col.1:10, 1Thess.2:4-12)
 - b. Explain the phrase "The faith of the gospel" as used in v.27. Discuss the necessity of striving for the faith of the gospel (See Jud.3-4,11-13,17-19) What practical ways can this be done"? (1Tim.6:11-14, 2Tim.4:2-7, Jud.20-23)
 - c. Discuss the place of unity of heart in striving for the faith of the gospel? (v. 27, Acts 4:32-34)

5. Facing the Adversaries
 - a. What/Who does "adversary" refer to? (See 2cor.10:4-6, Eph.6:12, 1Pet.5:8-9, Acts 4:18,21&29, 2Tim.3:8,13)
 - b. What should be our attitude to the terrors of the adversaries of the gospel? (v.28)
 - c. Suffering is part of the Christian life (v.29-30, See Mark 10:30). How does arming our mind with this help us as we defend and confirm the gospel? What does our suffering indicate for our adversaries and for ourselves? (v.28, see also 2Thess.1:5-9, Rom.8:17-18)

SUMMARY

Ordinarily, the situation of Paul could have put a great hindrance to the gospel, but his preparedness and eagerness to always defend the gospel changed the narrative. His chief concern was not his liberty nor safety, but to defend the Gospel, hence to have Christ magnified in his body whether it be by life or death. For him, the meaning of living is CHRIST, and death was only a means to come into Christ in a fuller measure. Such is the life that can defend and confirm the gospel. To such a life the apostle invites the church, calling them to live in a manner worthy of the gospel, standing in unity and pushing the frontiers of the gospel forward. They must not retreat in cowardice, but face the bloody battle as they have seen the apostle himself fighting.

What revolution we shall have if the church today raise to this challenge, if we accept the words of Paul in v. 30: "Having the same conflict (fight, battle) which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me"? We cannot have apostolic results while shying away from apostolic battles.

STUDY 3: (CHAPTER 2:1-18): DEFENDING AND CONFIRMING THE GOSPEL; HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST

1. Oneness of mind (2:1-4)
 - a. Paul highlighted the need for unity of spirit in striving for the faith of the gospel (1:27). What is the springhead for this oneness according to v.1
 - b. Highlight and discuss the attitude that promote or hinder this oneness (v.2-4, See also Rom 12:3,9,10,16; 15:2-7; 1Cor.1:10; 12:22-27; 1Pet.3:8-9)
 - c. What will be the effect of this oneness according to v.2 c/f 1:18, 27
2. The Example of Christ (2:5-11)
 - a. What mindset do we see in Christ according to v.5-8?
 - b. What was the result of this mindset for Christ? V.9-11
 - c. Jesus gained victory through the cross (See) What does the cross imply? Discuss the place of caring the cross, and following the example of Jesus as stated in this passage, in the defense and confirmation of the bible.
3. Work out your salvation (2:12-14)
 - a. Compare 1:6 and 2:12-13. To what purpose is God's work in us? How does He carry out this work? (See 1Tim.4:16;6:11-12;1cor.9:25-27)
 - b. What response is expected of us as the Lord works in us? (v.12, compare v.8 and Heb.5:8)
 - c. From v.14, point out wrong ways to responds to God's dealings in our lives. (See also 1Cor.10:10, Heb. 12:5-11)
4. Holding Forth the Word of Life (2:15-16)
 - a. What is the result of responding rightly to God's dealings? (v.15-16)
 - b. Read v.16 from various versions and discuss the phrase "Holding forth the word of life" in relation to our theme. Under what atmosphere are we expected to hold forth the word of life? v.15
 - c. What is the implication of failing to "Hold forth the word of life"? v.16-18 (Compare 2Cor.6:1, Gal.4:9-11, 1thess.3:1-5)
5. Timothy: a testimony in the Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel (2:19-24)
 - a. What was Paul's purpose for sending Timothy? (v.19,23,24) What lesson does this teach concerning caring and follow-up in the church? (See also Col.4:7-9, 1Thess 3:1-2, 1Cor.4:17)
 - b. What was Paul's testimony concerning Timothy? (v.20-21) What was the basis for such testimony? (v.22, see also 2Tim.3:10)
 - c. Discuss the necessity for such a testimony (the heart and character of Timothy) for anyone who aspire for usefulness in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel.
6. Fellow Solder in the Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel (2:25-30)
 - a. How did Paul describe Epaphroditus? v.25

- b. How does the life of Epaphroditus challenge us in our labour in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel? (25-30) What should be our attitude toward such leaders?(v.29, See also 1Cor.16:15-18, 1Thess.5:12-13, 1Tim.5:17)
- c. Discuss the importance of having “fellow soldiers such as Timothy and Epaphroditus in our defense and confirmation of the gospel.

SUMMARY

The gospel has never been much hindered by opposition without as it has been by infighting within. And the cause of this in-fighting the apostle named as selfish ambition, vain glory and pride. The solution is simply; “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ”. If truly we consider Christ, we will have no reason to murmur and dispute, ours will be a life of complete obedience. It is only such a life that can hold out the light of God’s word in a perverse and crooked age. For such a church, the apostle sees it as gain to spill his blood. To buttress this the apostle gave two examples of persons who have lived this way: Timothy, who cared nothing else but for the church; Paul could boast that he have none of such kindred spirit as he. The second was Epaphroditus, a man who staked his life for the gospel. Of such the apostle urge us to hold in high esteem. Are your celebrities such as these?

STUDY 4 (CHAPTER 3:1-21): DEFENDING AND CONFIRMING THE GOSPEL; A SINGULAR PURSUIT OF CHRIST

1. Safeguarding the Church (3:1-2)
 - a. What did the Apostle warn the people against and why was this warning necessary? v.1-2
 - b. Discuss the place of watchfulness against false teaching and practice in the church in defending the gospel. Suggest practical ways this can be done.
 - c. How does helping believers realize the value of Christ, and who they are in Christ safeguard them from false teachings? (See Gal.5:1-4, Col2.10-11,16-23)
2. No Confidence in the flesh (3:3-6)
 - a. Circumcision is a sign for a covenant relationship with God (See Gen. 17:7-11). What defines believers as the true “circumcision”? (v.3, see also Rom. 2:26-29, Gal. 5:6; 6:15)
 - b. What does having confidence in the flesh imply? (v.3-4, See also Gal 6:12-14)
 - c. Highlight some of the ground on which Paul was boasting before his conversion (v.4-6). What are some ground people hold falsely and boast about today?
3. The Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ (3:7-11)
 - a. How does Paul’s view of Christ compare with the things he once pursued? (Read V.7-8 from various versions. See also Gal.6:14, John 17:3, 1Cor.1:24,30; 2:1-2)
 - b. Discuss Paul’s new pursuit and ambitions as seen in v.9-11.
 - c. Compare v.9-11 with Matt.13:44-46, 19:21, Mark 8:34-37 Luke 14:26-27. What are the pre-condition for gaining Christ?
4. The Pursuit of Christ (3:12-17)
 - a. Discuss the importance of the following in our pursuit of Christ:

- i. Realizing one has not yet attained v.12
 - ii. Recognizing the reason for which Christ took hold of one v.12
 - iii. Forgetting those things which are behind. v.13 What are those things which are behind?
 - iv. Focusing on the goal. v.14 What does “the high calling of God in Christ” refer to?
 - b. What did Paul expect of those who are spiritually mature, and who are in pursuit of Christ according to v.15-16. See also Gal.6:14-16
 - c. Why is it necessary to hold onto the progress we have made? (See 1Cor.10:1-12, Heb.2:1, 4:1-3, 6:4-6). Suggest Practical Ways we can be safeguarded from losing our spiritual attainment (See v.17, See also 1Cor.4:16; 11:1)
5. Enemies of the Cross
- a. How did Paul describe those leaders who pursue other ambitions other than the high calling of God in Christ? (v.18-19 See also 1Tim.6:3-6)
 - b. How does the consciousness that our citizenship is in heaven help us in the defense and confirmation of the gospel? v.20
 - c. What is our hope in the according to v.21 (See Rom. 8:18-23, 28-30, 1Cor.15:39-49, 2Cor.4:16-5:5, 1John.3:2)

SUMMARY

Though the influence of the Judaizers have not yet infiltrated the Church in Philippi, yet the apostle thought it necessary to forewarn them. It is import the church is equipped to identify and avoid false teachings. This by helping them to realize who they are in Christ, and bringing them to a realization of the infinite value of Christ. As our heart is set on pursuing after the highest possible attainment in Christ, all the earth bound fancies of false teachers will lose their grip on us. For us, everything that the world can offer will be but rubbish. We will live in consciousness of our heavenly citizenship, with our eyes set only on the prize of God’s high calling in Christ.

STUDY 5 (CHAPTER 4:1-23): DEFENDING AND CONFIRMING THE GOSPEL; DOING ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST

1. True yokefellows (4:1-3)
 - a. What can we see in Paul’s heart towards the Church? (v.1 See also 1:8, 1Thess.2:19-20). Discuss the need for such heart-disposition in effectively ministering to the church.
 - b. Read v.3 from various versions. What does the phrase “true yokefellow” tells of the need for harmony in co-labouring for the gospel? How can this be achieved? What practical steps can we take to help those like Euodias and Synteché?
 - c. Paul did not mention all the “other fellow labourers”. What is the assurance that their labour is not forgotten according to v.3? (See also Heb.6:10)
2. Rejoice in the Lord (4:4-7)
 - a. Why is it important we maintain an attitude of joy as we serve in the gospel? What should be our source of joy? (v.4, see also 1Pet.4:13-14)

- b. What will be the effect of living in expectation of the Lord's return especially as it has to do with our joy, and moderation? (v.5 See also 1Thess.2:1-2, James 5:7-9, 2Pet.3:10-15)
 - c. Many times our joys and moderations are affected by the cares of this life. What should be our attitude towards the cares of this life? (v.6, See also Matt.6:25-34, 1pet.5:7, Ps.55:22, Prov.16:3)
 - d. Discuss each of the terms used to describe the right attitude in prayer according to v.7. Prayer may not necessary meet all our wants and cares, but what sure results will come as a result of prayers? v.7
- 3. Think on these things (4:8-9)
 - a. Rather than give our thoughts to the cares of this life, what should pre-occupy our mind according to v.8? Why is it important to deliberately cultivate our thought life? (See Prov.4:23, Matt.12:34-35; 13:22; 15:18-20, Eph.4:17-24)
 - b. What are the sources of those things we are to fix our mind on? (v.9, See also Eph.5:18-20, Col.3:1-2,16-17) Suggest practical ways we can cultivate our thought life.
 - c. What will be the effect on feeding our mind with the right things? (v.9, See also 2Cor.13:11, 1Thess.5:23, Heb.13:20-21)
- 4. Thank You (4:10-20)
 - a. What does the apostle imply by the phrase "ye lacked opportunity" v.10? (See 1Cor.8:1-2) Why is it important to show understanding as ministers/missionaries when our partners/supporters are not able to meet up their obligation to us?
 - b. What do you observe from Paul's attitude towards receiving gifts? (v.11-13, 17, See also 1tim.6:6-8). What should be our responds as ministers/missionaries when we receive gifts from brethren? (v.14,19,20)
 - c. What can we say of the Philippians concern for Paul's welfare? (v.15-16 See also 1Cor.8:1-5) Why is it important to care for ministers/missionaries? (v.17-19, see also 3Jn.1:5-8). Discuss practical ways we can support/partner with ministers/missionaries.
- 5. Farewell (4:21-23)
 - a. "Salute every saints..." What does this tell us of the value of each on in the church to Paul?
 - b. Why do you think the apostle specifically emphasized the greetings of those from ceasers' household? v.22 (See 1:12-13)
 - c. The Apostle started with a prayer of grace in (1:2) and ended with a prayer of grace (4:3). What does this tell us of our need for grace?

SUMMARY

One major distraction to our defense and confirmation of the gospel is the cares of this life. We must by prayer secure the peace of God. Rather than give our heart to worries, v.8 tells us the things that should pre-occupy our mind. This can only be possible by a deliberate cultivating of the mind through study of the word of God, maintaining unbroken fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and learning from those in whose lives the gospel is confirmed. The Apostle gave himself as an example, telling them how he has learnt to maintain his composure in all situations; not blaming anyone for not sending support, and warmly appreciating those who did remember him.