



# THE LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS – STUDY GUIDE

## LESSON 3    OPENING GREETINGS    CHAPTER 1:1-2

It was normal practice when Paul was writing, to start off a letter with an elaborate greeting, saying who was writing and to whom. But normal practice takes on a new dimension when brethren in Christ write to each other!

### **1: Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ:**

Acts 16:1-5 reveals how Timothy came to join Paul on his missionary journey. He was clearly a young man in whom Paul saw great potential. We learn elsewhere that Timothy had been given an excellent education in the Old Testament by his grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15). They were Jews, but his father was a Greek, a Gentile. Timothy was circumcised so that the many Jews he and Paul were likely to meet would not reject him out of hand. They wanted to be able to preach the Gospel to Jews as well as Gentiles, even though that very Gospel meant circumcision was no longer necessary.

Timothy had been with Paul when the Philippian ecclesia was founded (Acts 16:6-40), and Paul planned to send him to them again (2:19). Timothy was like a son to Paul (2:22).

There are important lessons for us in this relationship. In the family of Christ all ages must learn from each other and help each other. The young can benefit so much from the experience and knowledge of the older ones because we learn more quickly by being shown than simply by being told. The older ones should seek to involve the young, teaching not just by telling but by involving them in the work of the Lord. We learn by trying to do things ourselves, even if we make mistakes.

### **To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi:**

This certainly does not mean special people singled out for honour by the church because of their outstanding lives, and now able to receive our prayers in heaven. This is an example of thoroughly un-Scriptural teaching. In the Bible saints are those who have been separated or made holy (sanctified) by Christ. In other words, they are all true believers who have been baptised. So Paul is writing to all the brethren and sisters in the ecclesia at Philippi.

### **with the bishops and deacons:**

Bishop means an overseer. Overseers are elders of the meeting or arranging brethren, who have responsibility for managing the affairs of each ecclesia (see Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; 1 Timothy 3:1-11). In those days, before the New Testament was written and available for ecclesial guidance, the elders had gifts of the Holy Spirit to help them in their work. Deacons are those who serve the ecclesias in various practical ways, like looking after those in need (compare Acts 6:3). There are all kinds of jobs in the ecclesias for people who want to help. Are we willing to serve? (See 1 Timothy 3:13).

### **2: Grace to you, and peace:**

Grace is said to be a Gentile greeting and peace a Jewish one. Grace is God's mercy and loving gift to us when, as sinners, we deserve only death (Romans 6:23). Peace means wholeness, the bringing together of God and man through the grace of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:14-18). Grace and peace thus sum up the means and the end of salvation.

**from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Notice the two are distinct and separate beings, though of course they are united in purpose. When Paul later wrote to Timothy, he emphasised "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

## **PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE ECCLESIA      CHAPTER 1:3-11**

Paul thanks God for the fellowship with the Philippians which began at their conversion and has continued ever since. They have been constantly interested in his missionary work and have given financial support to him. They have been real sharers in his experiences. He prays that they will continue their spiritual growth "unto the glory and praise of God".

### **3: I thank my God in all my remembrance of you:**

All the time that I think of you I am thankful to God.

### **4,5: Always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now:**

Although Paul and Silas had a rough time in Philippi from the authorities, there was great satisfaction in the baptisms of Lydia and the Jailer, along with their families (Acts 16:11-40). We are reminded there is joy in heaven "over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7,10). The new converts rejoiced too and opened up their homes to the apostle and his companions (Acts 16:34,40).

## **Understanding Fellowship**

Fellowship begins when we have something in common with each other. Once Lydia and the Jailer's families had learnt and understood the essentials of the Gospel which Paul taught them, they were ready to commit themselves in faith to the new life in Christ. If, for example, they had not believed that the Bible taught that "the wages of sin is death", and that Jesus died so that believers "should not perish", fellowship would have been impossible. If they had accepted the hope of the resurrection, but rejected the Bible's teaching about marriage then Paul could not have baptised them into a common, shared faith.

The first requirement of fellowship therefore is to be "of one mind" (2:2) on the essential teachings, or doctrines, of the word of God.

But this common mind is not just something to hold in our heads. When we are baptised we enter into a partnership with God, the Lord Jesus and the members of the ecclesia. Just as a good family supports its members with practical acts of love and loyalty, so the ecclesial family requires regular contact, loving support and loyal commitment.

The Greek word Paul uses for fellowship (koinonia) means all this, and the Philippian believers were wonderful examples of practical fellowship. They had:

1. A common basis of belief
2. A common life together, showing forth the qualities of Christ's
3. character.
4. An appreciation that this meant giving of themselves and their possessions in the service of others.

The gifts they had sent to Paul to help his missionary work (4:14-18) were real tokens of true fellowship.

**6: And I am sure that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.**

Paul sees that God and the Lord Jesus are at work in the lives of believers through this fellowship. If we work and live together in fellowship, then “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”. God will continue to work through us until the day of Christ’s second coming, when loyal members of his family will be made like Jesus forever (3:20,21; 1 John 3:2)!

**7: It is right for me to feel thus 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 defence and confirmation of the gospel.**

It is right for me to think like this about you, because you are so dear to me. For both in the chains of my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the Gospel (standing up for the Truth against attackers and showing just how true it is) you are all sharers with me of grace.

The word “partakers” has the word for fellowship at its root. They haven’t abandoned Paul because he is in prison and facing trial. A ‘friend in need is a friend indeed.’

The meaning of grace is ‘undeserved favour’.

When we are most aware of our need, we are open to receive God’s grace. Paul learnt, through much hardship, the meaning of the phrase “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). We are all much more ready to turn to God in desperation than when we feel very satisfied with life. When we are up against a problem we cannot solve, we are more likely to get on our knees. If we are honest with ourselves, every day and every hour we shall realise we need God’s help. In the gift of Christ we see just how far God’s grace can go.

Paul says that we receive God’s grace, the blessing of His strength in fellowship, as we prayerfully seek Him on behalf of ourselves, and when we fellowship the sufferings of others. As the Philippians had shared in Paul’s experiences, then they had shared the grace he was receiving to make him strong in his trials.

**8: For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ:**

God is my witness that I really do long for you all with the deepest Christian love and feeling (‘bowels’ indicates the seat of the affections). Notice that the strength and quality of this feeling is because of their fellowship in Christ. The emotion comes from the fellowship; it does not create it.

**9: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment:**

Paul’s prayers have involved thankful remembrance of the Philippians. He also asks God for further blessings for them so that their love may develop further, “with knowledge and all discernment”. We have seen that our love of God and the Lord Jesus Christ must involve obedience to His word and its demands. We need right thinking and judgement to guide us.

**10: so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ:**

Then we shall be able to “approve what is excellent” or “learn by experience the things that are most worthwhile” (see 4:8). This in turn leads to being “pure and blameless” “for the day of Christ” (the day when Christ returns) as in 1:6; 2:16.

**11: Filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God:**

The fruits of righteousness have their origin in Christ. He is the perfect example of spiritual fruit which comes about by faith (Genesis 15:6) and in a pure and righteous life - one in harmony with God. See Galatians 5:22.

## **Understanding Prayer**

We can learn much about prayer in this section. Prayer should begin with praise and thanksgiving for all the blessings we have from God. When we come to make requests, we should try to see how they fit in with what

God wants for us. What is His will in our life (James 4:3)? So the best we can ask for ourselves or for anyone else is that we can develop those right attitudes which enable us to turn every situation to spiritual advantage and be better prepared for "the day of Christ". Paul's prayer in vv. 9-11 can be seen in five stages:

1. Love - positive response to God and His Word
2. Knowledge and discernment - right thinking and judgement
3. Proving this knowledge - in the testing ground of daily experience
4. Sincerity - the development of pure, wholesome minds
5. Fruit - the product: balanced, healthy characters, directed by Christ and giving glory to God

Five in Scripture is often associated with grace. These five stages are a good summary of ***grace in action***.

#### **Questions**

1. Why did Paul choose Timothy to help him in the work of preaching?
2. What does the Bible mean by the word "saint"?
3. How can you help with the work of your own ecclesia?
4. Find three other Letters written by Paul which begin with a greeting of 'Grace and Peace'
5. Why does Paul thank God for the Philippians?
6. Write down three things which are important parts of fellowship.
7. What is the 'Day of Jesus Christ'?
8. How did the Philippians and Paul share in the grace of God?
9. How should we begin our prayers?
10. What things should we give thanks for in our prayers to God?