

Press on together in the gospel
Paul's letter to Philippians

Introduction

As the apostle to the Gentiles Paul visited and wrote to many of the churches scattered around the Mediterranean. Many of these churches had been planted as a direct result of a visit by the apostle on one of his missionary journeys. Writing and sending a messenger with a letter for a church was what Paul did when he couldn't get there to care for and encourage these churches in person.

The evidence suggests that Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Philippi from prison in Rome probably sometimes between AD 60 and 62. It was now about 10 years since Paul had first brought the gospel to Philippi (a Roman colony in Macedonia) while on his second missionary journey (see Acts 16:11-40). Paul and the believers in Philippi were remarkably close to one another. He had visited and written to them on several occasions and in this letter, he describes his deep affection for them (see 1:7). The affection was also reciprocated by the Philippians. They had supported and encouraged Paul over the years (see Philippians 4:14-19) and more recently had sent Epaphroditus to Rome to take care of Paul and his needs while in prison (see Philippians 2:25).

Paul was not sending Epaphroditus back with this letter because he was concerned for them. They too were going through the same sort of struggle he was going through, suffering for the sake of the gospel in Philippi in a similar way as Paul was going through in Rome. Paul wrote to encourage them to press on in the gospel living manner worthy of it no matter what happened to him (see Phil. 1:27-30).

1. The fellowship of the gospel

Philippians 1:1-11

Introduction

If you had to describe yourself to someone to introduce yourself to them what would you tell them?

The opening of a letter was all about introductions. In the personal letters that people wrote in the first century they usually followed a format of introducing themselves and their readers in a greeting with a short prayer for the wellbeing of those that they were writing to. Paul's letters followed a similar shape, but his open words filled out this form with what was important for his readers to understand about who they were in Christ. Please verses 1 to 11, the opening verses of Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Identity

The initial introductions were made in the first few verses of the letter. Please read verses 1 to 2 where Paul tells us about his reads and himself.

1. What does Paul tell us about himself, Timothy and his readers and why do you think this is significant?

2. What do you like about Paul's way of starting his letter and what have learnt about the way that you need to think about yourself?

Thanksgiving

Paul often would begin his letters telling his readers how he prayed for them. Please read verses 3 to 6 where he tells them what he was thanking God for.

3. Why was Paul always thanking God for the Philippians and praying for them with joy?

4. Why was Paul confident and why do you think it was important for everyone to understand this?

5. What is fellowship or partnership in the gospel and why is it important and how might be a good partner (see also Phil 1:27-28)?

Affection

In verses 7 to 8 Paul tells them of his affections for them. Please read these verses.

6. How was Paul feeling and why was it right for him to feel the way that he did?

7. How are such strong affections for other believers generated and encouraged (4:1-3)?

Prayer

Paul completes the introductory verses by telling the Philippians what he was praying for them. Please read verse 9 to 11.

8. What exactly was he asking for on behalf of the Philippians and why do you think these things were important?

9. When God answers such prayers for people what is the result?

Conclusion

Paul has brought out what we need to understand about ourselves in the greetings and those things that are important for us to understand in his prayer.

10. Who are we, what things are important and what things need to change in our lives because you we now better understand the importance of them?