

St. Therese Catholic Church

St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians *Chapter 1*

April 18, 2023

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Pauline Letters Overview

- Paul wrote 13 letters in the New Testament, though some modern authors dispute the authorship of some (24% of New Testament).
- **Pastoral Letters**
 - Paul viewed himself as the parent to the communities he founded and to certain individuals in those communities.
 - His letters were an aspect of his parental oversight.
- **Authoritative Letters**
 - Paul's letters were elevated to a scripture-like status by being read in a worship setting, though it is likely they were not universally accepted.
 - Since Paul expected his letters to be treated in this manner (worship setting), it is an expression of his authority and pastoral nature of apostleship.
 - He speaks, like a prophet, the "word of the Lord."
 - Paul calls them to obey and to be imitators of him.

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When

- Founded in 6th century B.C. because of its abundant water sources.
- In 356 B.C., Philip II, King of Macedon and father of Alexander the Great, seized the city and named it Philippi after himself.
- The Romans defeated the Persians in 168 B.C. wherein Philippi became part the Roman Empire.
- Philippi became world prominent in 42 B.C. as the place where Mark Antony and Octavian conquered the forces of the assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius.

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When

- Octavian (Caesar Augustus) rebuilt Philippi in 31 BC and established a military outpost there.
- He filled it with Roman soldiers and veterans of wars. It became a Roman colony – sister city of Rome. It is a “little Rome” of the Macedonian province. Citizens were given tax and legal protection, rights of property, and pollical offices.
- **Key:** Citizens of Philippi are sensitive to Roman honor, culture, and law. Roman citizenship is key to their identity. Paul will have incorporate their pride in the Roman empire and remind Christians that their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:2).

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Where

- **Philippi:** Leading city in Macedonia in Northeastern Greece.
- Two provinces:
 - **Macedonia:** Northern
 - **Achaia:** Southern
- Philippi was on the Via Egnatia – major travel route connecting Italy, Asia Minor, and the east.



<https://www.biblestudy.org/maps/new-testament-churches/philippi.html>

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Who

- In Paul's day, the city of Philippi had between 10,000 – 15,000 people: Thracians, Romans, Greeks – very diverse. 20% of Philippians were slaves, while 20-30% are Roman citizens (privileges, rights, and honors of Roman citizens).
- The people regularly participated in the many religious cults. There was a temple in Philippi dedicated to Caesar Augustus, whose name meant "one worthy of worship."
- Acts 16:13 says that Paul went to a "place of prayer" and not a synagogue, suggested it Jewish presence was minimal.
- In short, Paul's converts would have been almost entirely Gentile.

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Church at Philippi

- Luke records in the Acts of the Apostles that Paul, along with Silas, Timothy, and Luke journeyed over to Macedonia given the night vision given to Paul (Acts 16:9). Paul and Silas spent some time in Philippi (Acts 16:12) on their second missionary journey. Paul established the first Christian Church in Europe at Philippi (50 A.D).
- Commentators have noted the important role that women played in the Church at Philippi:
 - Lydia is baptized and invites Paul and his companions to stay at her home (Acts 16:15).
 - Women work side by side with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel (Phil. 4:3).

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Church at Philippi

- Additionally, Paul suffered terribly at Philippi (Phil. 1:29-30; 1 Thess. 2:1-2).
- After freeing a slave girl from an oracular spirit, he was dragged before magistrates and attacked by crowds, beaten with rods, and thrown into prison (Acts 16:16 – 24).
- The Christians at Philippi suffered as well (Phil. 1:27-29). Paul and the Philippian Christians, then, shared a common suffering.
- The Church at Philippi was generous in supporting Paul's labors (Phil. 4:15-18). They were, in short, Paul's "joy and crown" (Phil. 4:1).

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Church at Philippi

- Paul had a great relationship with the Philippians. Whereas he had a rocky relationship with the Galatians and Corinthians, he held the Philippian church near to his heart. The Galatians and Corinthians had many doctrinal and pastoral problems.
- The Philippians were like Paul's favored child. They behaved and did things right. In reading the letter, you get the sense there is a warm relationship. It is sometimes called the "letter of joy."
- Generally speaking, the letter is characterized by joy and gratitude. Paul has a particular love for the Philippians. They pride themselves on being a Greek city, and a Roman colony – have lots of rights and privileges in the Roman Empire.

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Church at Philippi

- Paul's Letter to the Philippians is marked by gratitude.
- The Philippians have supported Paul:
 - Their constant prayers (1:19);
 - Sent him financial assistance by the hand of Epaphroditus (4:18);
- Paul sends this letter to the Philippians thanking them for their gift, updates them on personal matters, and to assure them of God's rich blessings in return (2:25-30).
- The reader can feel the joyful and personal tone throughout the letter. He thanks and encourages them.

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Letter to Philippians Overview

- In his letter, Paul writes that he is in prison as he writes the letter (Phil. 1:7, 13-14, 17). We don't know which prison it was.
- Paul was in prison in Caesarea for two years (Acts 23:23ff) and Rome for another two years (Acts 28:11ff). The tradition belief is that Paul wrote this letter from a prison in Rome.
- When Paul was in prison, the Philippian Church sent Epaphroditus bearing gifts for Paul in his imprisonment (2:25; 4:18).
- Epaphroditus becomes seriously ill during his visit, recovers, and Paul sends him back to Philippi with this letter.

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Ancient Letter Structure

- The structure of Greco-Roman letters:
 - Opening (identification and greeting)
 - Thanksgiving or prayer
 - Body
 - Final wishes / exhortations / greetings
 - Closing

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Letter to Philippians Structure

The principal divisions of the Letter to the Philippians:

- I. Address ([1:1-11](#))
- II. Progress of the Gospel ([1:12-26](#))
- III. Instructions for the Community ([1:27-2:18](#))
- IV. Travel Plans of Paul and His Assistants ([2:19-3:1](#))
- V. Polemic: Righteousness and the Goal in Christ ([3:2-21](#))
- VI. Instructions for the Community ([4:1-9](#))
- VII. Gratitude for the Philippians' Generosity ([4:10-20](#))
- VIII. Farewell ([4:21-23](#))

Source: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/philippians/0>

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Opening Address

- **Paul and Timothy:** In a Greco-Roman letter, the writer of the letter identified himself right away. Notice that Timothy is also a co-writer of the letter.
 - **Note:** Paul never takes credit for himself. He shares the credit and mission. He reminds us that faith is a team sport!
- **Salves** (Gk: *douloi*): Given that 20-30% of Philippians were slaves, this would have caught their attention.
 - **Note:** In our American culture, slave has a very negative meaning given our history. In Roman culture, slaves could be powerful, dressed finely, and own things. Slave had the honor of master.

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Opening Address

- **Holy Ones:** Could also be translated as “saints.” The goal of the Christian life is becoming a saint! If you are in Christ, you have the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who makes you holy.
 - **1 Cor. 6:19:** Your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.
- **Bishops** (Gk *episkopoi*): These are “overseers” that described general leadership, but eventually became a term describing the office of bishop.
- **Deacons** (Gk *diakono*): These are the “servants” – another office in the early church.

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Opening Address



Wuv – Two Wuv



HDE – Holiest Deacon Ever

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Opening Address

- **Grace to you and peace:** Paul offers a traditional Jewish blessing of peace (Shalom) or total well-being. Filled with God's blessing, they will have peace.
- The Greeks and Romans wished people health and well-being. Paul adapts health to grace (*charis*) and peace.
 - **Key:** Paul adopts Jewish peace (shalom) and Roman (health and wealth) and super-naturalizes them.
- After Paul's introduction, he will move into thanksgiving. He does this for all of his letters except for Galatians.

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Thanksgiving

- **I thank:** There is a spirituality of thanksgiving in this letter. He thanks God for all the blessings, grace, and peace.
 - Paul is also grateful to the Philippians for their financial generosity to him (Acts 16:15, 16:32-34).
- **My God:** Notice that Paul has a personal relationship with God.
- **Praying always with joy:** Joy will be a major theme in this letter. Joy or rejoice is used over 10 times! For Paul, prayer and joy are a regular part of his life. Remember, Paul is writing from prison!

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Thanksgiving

- Paul lists joy as one of the fruits produced in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22; CCC 1832).
- **Tielhard de Chardin:** Joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.
- **John 16:33:** Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.



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Thanksgiving

- **Partnership:** (Gk: *koinōnia*) can be translated as fellowship, joint participation, or partnership. It is related to the Latin *communio* or communion (“share in common”).
 - **1 Cor. 10:16:** The cup of blessing which we bless, isn't it a *koinonia* (sharing or participation) in the blood of Christ?
 - **Note:** Paul acknowledges that Philippians' generosity is a partnership in advancing the gospel. They are true partners through their friendship and financial support (shared mission).
 - **Key:** Paul and the Philippians have a shared vision and mission. For the Church to thrive, we must have a shared mission.

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Thanksgiving

- **Began a good work:** God began a good work in the Philippians and He will bring it to completion when Christ comes again.
 - **1 Cor. 3:6:** I planted, Apollos watered, but God caused the growth.
 - **Key:** God began a good work in you at your baptism wherein you received sanctifying grace, and cooperating with the Holy Spirit, you strive for growth in holiness unto eternal life.
- **Day of Christ Jesus:** The day of judgement when the Lord will come again in glory to reward or punish our thoughts, words, and deeds (CCC 1021 – 1022).

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Thanksgiving

- **Partnership:** A literal translation from the Greek is “with partnership.” It has like a joint venture in a business – Paul and the Philippians will sink or swim together. They share in the risk together.
 - **Key:** For Paul, the Church is not run by clergy – “It’s up to them for the Church to grow.” Instead, the Church is lay faithful and clergy working together – a joint venture (sink or swim together).
- **Affection:** Paul has a towering intellect, but has great affection for the Philippians.
- **Discern:** Paul’s prayer is that they *discern* or “think through” what is of value. By thinking through, they may become pure and blameless. Notice Paul’s integration - affection (heart) and discern (mind).

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Thanksgiving

- **Prayer:** Paul reveals the content of his prayer, i.e., He asks God that they may increase in charity. In other words, charity has degrees –
- **Discern what is of value:** The Philippians are full of love, but it's critical that their love is *ordered* – to love the right things (God, family, friends, job, etc.). Paul exhorts them to love the right things in the right way.
 - **Note:** In pagan cultures, passions and feelings trumped thinking. The mind is denigrated to act with their feelings and against reason. For Paul, however, *thinking* and acting in accord with reason is critically important.

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Intercession

- **My prayer:** Paul tells the Philippians the content of his prayer, i.e., they love and knowledge may increase.
 - **Note:** For Paul, it's not speculative knowledge, but practical knowledge – *how to live in Christ*. One is judged on what one knows, but on what one does (Hamm, 78).
 - Paul will present the Christ hymn as a model humility and obedience as the model of Christian life and love (Phil. 2:6-11).
- **Glory and Praise of God:** The Philippian community will glorify God through their sacrificial love and service to another as they imitate the self-emptying and self-humbling love of Jesus.

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Intercession

- **Practically**, you can pray for:
 - **Individuals**: Both inside and outside of the Church, including their natural and supernatural needs.
 - **Local church**: The parish or the Archdiocese, including their unity and growth in love, knowledge, growth, and service to one another
 - **Universal Church**: The Body of Christ united under the Holy Father, including its unity and faithfulness to Jesus Christ, our Bridegroom.

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Intercession

- The way Paul begins his letter is instructive:
 - **Thanksgiving**: He begins with gratitude. Thanksgiving is the default in his prayer. He focuses immediately on God, the One who initiated our relationship. He then moves to intercession (what others need).
 - **Pray for Wisdom**: Paul prays for wisdom and understanding. He asks that the Philippians grow in personal knowledge of God, which leads to right behavior.
 - **Growth of the Church**: Paul wants the Church to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

~Hamm, 79 - 80

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Progress of the Gospel

- After Paul's thanksgiving and intercession, he turns to his current situation, i.e., he is in prison.
- Naturally, Philippian Christians may be wondering, "Why is Paul in prison?"
 - He is an enemy of the Roman Empire (bad citizen);
 - He did something wrong.
- **Key:** Paul will help them see things from God's perspective, i.e., he is sharing in the sufferings of Christ and his sufferings are advancing the gospel.

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Progress of the Gospel

- **Easter Exultet:** O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completed by the death of Christ. *O Happy fault* earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!



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Progress of the Gospel

- Because Paul is a man of deep prayer, he is able to see the hand of God in everything. Setbacks and tribulations may be a way of bringing God's plan forward.
 - **Luke 21:12:** They will seize and persecute you, they will hand you over to the synagogues and to prisons, and they will have you led before kings and governors because of my name.
 - **Praetorium:** The place where the governor resided, or as in Jerusalem, did business when he was in town. In the context of Rome, the word could also mean Praetorium Guard or the emperor's bodyguard, which in Rome consisted of nine thousand men (Hamm, 82).

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Progress of the Gospel

- **Taken encouragement:** Fellow Christians, seeing Paul's imprisonment, are given courage and proclaim the word fearlessly.
- **John Stuart Mill:** The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.
- **Gaudium et Spes:** For the future of the world stands in peril unless wiser men are forthcoming (GS 15).
- **Note:** Martin Luther King's *Letter from Birmingham Jail* encouraged those in the civil rights movement. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

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Progress of the Gospel

- **Preach Christ:** Paul turns to the motives for preaching Christ.
 - **Envy and rivalry:** Resentful over Paul's personal influence over the Christian community of Rome; they seek to exploit his imprisonment to gain their own influence. They take pleasure in that their success will cause Paul some grief (Hamm, 83).
 - **Good will:** Approval, support, or concern for Christ and his servant, the Apostle Paul.
- **Key:** Notice that Paul is not concerned with motivation, but rather with the advancement of the gospel. God can use even bad motivation (O happy fault!) in proclaiming Christ.

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Progress of the Gospel

- **Deliverance:** The Greek *sōtēria* is literally salvation. I know this will turn out for my salvation. Paul is confident not only in God, but in the prayers and support that the Philippians are offering him.
 - **Job 13:16:** Be silent! Let me alone that I may speak, no matter what happens to me. In the Greek, this verse is quoted verbatim.
- Job defends himself against the false accusation of his friends. Job is innocent and suffers. God will vindicate him. Job will eventually say, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (Job 19:25).
- **Key:** Paul places himself in God's hands. He has abandoned himself to divine providence and therefore, he has peace. His ultimate security is in God, whatever the earthly outcome.

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Progress of the Gospel

- **Christ will be magnified:** In the Greek, “magnify” can mean “to cause to be held in greater esteem” (Hamm, 85). Paul’s life is sacramental, i.e., he reflects the glory and goodness of Christ through his willingness to suffer for Him.
 - **Whether by life:** Christ is esteemed in Paul’s ministry – his preaching, celebration of the Eucharist, his suffering, etc.
 - **Or by death:** His martyrdom, the total gift of his life through the shedding of his blood (he will eventually be beheaded in Rome).
- **Life is Christ, and death is gain:** Notice Paul’s detachment from this world – everything is about Jesus; death is union with Him.

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Community Instruction

- **Conduct yourselves:** For the Greeks, the city is the heart of civilization. “City life” is civilized life. The country bumpkin was a barbarian, an uncultured way of living.
- Notice that Paul picks up on this Greek way of thinking and uses it for the gospel. Conduct yourselves not in a manner worthy of “city life,” but rather the “gospel of Christ,” or “gospel life.”
- **Key:** Paul takes concepts from the world and baptizes them! Their lives should reflect their “citizenship in heaven” (3:20).
- **One spirit, one mind:** Throughout Paul’s letters, one can see how often he urges unity in Christians churches (e.g. Phil. 2:1-4).

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Community Instruction

- **Struggling:** Paul uses language of sports and later military conflict, a crucial element of citizenship. The Greek can mean “contend together” or “strive side-by-side” (Hamm, 90 - 91).
 - **Key:** As in our culture, sports were very important for the Greeks. They had the marathon and Olympic games. Paul uses an athletic metaphor for the struggle that he and the Christians are in.
- **Opponents:** The identity of these opponents is unclear. They may possibly be Roman veterans fiercely loyal to Caesar and thus Philippi. They would thus be critical to Christians who proclaim that Jesus is Lord.
- **God's doing:** They are on God's side and will emerge victorious.

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Community Instruction

- **Same struggle:** Paul again uses athletic imagery with the word “struggle” (*agnōn*), meaning a contest, like a wrestling match (Hamm, 91).
- **Key:** Imprisoned and suffering, Paul reminds the Philippian Christians that they “share the same lot.”
 - **2 Timothy 2:3, 5:** Bear your share of hardship along with me like a good soldier of Jesus Christ. An athlete cannot receive the winner's crown except by competing according to the rules.
- In the first chapter, Paul expresses thanksgiving, offers his prayers, and helps Philippian Christians see his situation from God's perspective, i.e., he is fighting the good fight for Christ!

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Two Ways of Living



Cat on the Couch
"My life is about me."



Soldier for Christ
"Life is Christ, and death is gain."

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Next Time

- Tuesday, May 2nd

Philippians 2	
Plea for unity and humility	VV. 1- 5
Christ Hymn	VV. 6 – 11
Obedience and service to the World	VV. 12 – 18
Timothy and Paul	VV. 19 – 24
Epaphroditus	VV. 25 – 30

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