

**STEVEN J. LAWSON**  
**PHILIPPIANS**  
**FOR YOU**



the goodbook  
COMPANY

## **Philippians For You**

© Steven J. Lawson, 2017

Published by:  
The Good Book Company

Tel (US): 866 244 2165

Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880

Email (US): [info@thegoodbook.com](mailto:info@thegoodbook.com)

Email (UK): [info@thegoodbook.co.uk](mailto:info@thegoodbook.co.uk)

### **Websites:**

North America: [www.thegoodbook.com](http://www.thegoodbook.com)

UK: [www.thegoodbook.co.uk](http://www.thegoodbook.co.uk)

Australia: [www.thegoodbook.com.au](http://www.thegoodbook.com.au)

New Zealand: [www.thegoodbook.co.nz](http://www.thegoodbook.co.nz)



Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible® (NASB), Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.  
[www.Lockman.org](http://www.Lockman.org)

(Hardcover) ISBN: 9781784981150

(Paperback) ISBN: 9781784981143

Design by André Parker

Printed in India

## CONTENTS

Series Preface	5
Foreword <i>by John MacArthur</i>	7
Introduction	11
<b>1.</b> A Personal Letter 1:1-2	15
<b>2.</b> Thick Skin, Tender Heart 1:3-11	29
<b>3.</b> The Indomitable Servant 1:12-20	45
<b>4.</b> Ready to Die, Able to Live 1:21-26	61
<b>5.</b> Gospel Commitment 1:27-30	75
<b>6.</b> A High Call to a Lowly Life 2:1-11	89
<b>7.</b> Sanctification 101 2:12-18	103
<b>8.</b> Case Studies in Humility 2:19-30	119
<b>9.</b> Unspeakable Joy 3:1-3	135
<b>10.</b> The Great Change 3:4-9	149
<b>11.</b> Running Hard for Home 3:10-21	163
<b>12.</b> Conflict Management 4:1-5	179
<b>13.</b> Peace of Mind 4:6-9	193
<b>14.</b> Content in Crisis 4:10-13	207
<b>15.</b> Gratitude, Glory, and Grace 4:14-23	219
Glossary	231
Bibliography	237



## SERIES PREFACE

Each volume of the *God's Word For You* series takes you to the heart of a book of the Bible, and applies its truths to your heart.

The central aim of each title is to be:

- Bible centered
- Christ glorifying
- Relevantly applied
- Easily readable

You can use *Philippians For You*:

**To read.** You can simply read from cover to cover, as a book that explains and explores the themes, encouragements and challenges of this part of Scripture.

**To feed.** You can work through this book as part of your own personal regular devotions, or use it alongside a sermon or Bible-study series at your church. Each chapter is divided into two (or occasionally three) shorter sections, with questions for reflection at the end of each.

**To lead.** You can use this as a resource to help you teach God's word to others, both in small-group and whole-church settings. You'll find tricky verses or concepts explained using ordinary language, and helpful themes and illustrations along with suggested applications.

These books are not commentaries. They assume no understanding of the original Bible languages, nor a high level of biblical knowledge. Verse references are marked in **bold** so that you can refer to them easily. Any words that are used rarely or differently in everyday language outside the church are marked in **gray** when they first appear, and are explained in a glossary towards the back. There, you'll also find details of resources you can use alongside this one, in both personal and church life.

Our prayer is that as you read, you'll be struck not by the contents of this book, but by the book it's helping you open up; and that you'll praise not the author of this book, but the One he is pointing you to.

*Carl Laferton, Series Editor*

**Bible translations used:**

- NASB: New American Standard Bible (this is the Bible version being quoted unless otherwise stated)
- ESV: English Standard Version

## **FOREWORD** BY JOHN MACARTHUR

Philippians is the sunniest of Paul's epistles. Its dominant theme is joy. Notes of joy sound through the epistle from beginning to end, and the theme reaches its pinnacle with a triumphant double imperative in Philippians 4:4: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

What makes this so remarkable is that Philippians is one of Paul's prison epistles. He wrote it while being held in chains, nearly forgotten in a sluggish legal system, awaiting a trial to determine whether he would live or die. He makes repeated mention of his imprisonment (1:7, 13, 14, 17). He speaks of the imperial guard who were assigned to keep him confined (v 13). He ponders what the life-or-death verdict might mean (v 21-24).

The biblical record itself strongly suggests that Philippians was written from Rome during the first of Paul's two imprisonments there. In his closing words, the apostle mentions fellow believers who were members of Caesar's household. That would be out of place anywhere besides Rome. And the details given in the epistle itself harmonize perfectly with Luke's words in the final verses of the book of Acts. There we learn that Paul was held in Rome under house arrest, most likely chained constantly to a Roman guard, for "two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31, ESV).

Although Paul was therefore able (on a diminished scale) to carry out the ministry he was called to, this arrangement was neither convenient nor pleasant for him. His arrival in Rome had come at the end of a four-and-a-half-year ordeal that started in Jerusalem with his arrest on false charges (Acts 21:27-36). On the journey to Rome, he was beaten, shipwrecked, snake-bitten, denied ample food and water, subjected to harsh conditions and cruel treatment, and otherwise inconvenienced in countless ways. The travelogue he gives in 2 Corinthians 11:24-28

is dominated by the various afflictions he suffered on that harrowing journey to Rome:

“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.” (ESV)

Hard as it is to conceive, there were Christians in and around Rome who became so jealous of Paul’s influence and his giftedness that they set themselves up as his rivals, hoping their preaching would add to his afflictions (Philippians 1:17).

This no doubt was mainly because Paul was a political hot potato. His notoriety, together with his undaunted boldness, made it costly to be perceived as his friend or companion. As a result, he began to lose the support of many friends and former companions. Some, like Demas, fell in love with this present world, and deserted the apostle because of the hardships that came with being his companion (2 Timothy 4:10). By the time he wrote Philippians, Paul could say, “I have no one like [Timothy], who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 2:20-21, ESV). A few years later, near the end of his life, Paul would write to his closest protégé, “You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me” (2 Timothy 1:15, ESV). No leading figure in all of church history has ever had more reason than the apostle Paul to be downcast and discouraged.

And yet, as he makes clear in this epistle to the church at Philippi, Paul’s mind and heart were full of rejoicing—a resounding joy that was utterly impervious to any circumstance. Therefore Paul’s gladness



simply overwhelms whatever pathos we might expect to dominate an epistle penned from prison. It's a joy that is real and heartfelt, deep and palpable.

Our age has given us a plethora of amenities and conveniences that Paul could never have even imagined. Yet our daily lives are fast-paced, hectic, and full of trouble and stress. Real joy is a rare commodity in civilized Western culture. Sadly, even most of the visible church is hardly a bastion of genuine joy. We desperately need the message Paul gave the church at Philippi.

I am constantly drawn to this epistle because every time I read it, Paul's passionate sense of joy stirs my heart. I love preaching from Philippians because its message is the perfect remedy for the somber mood that often dominates these troubled times in which we live.

There are, of course, notes of rebuke, correction, and urgent warning in Philippians, but Paul always returns to the message of joy. So the epistle runs the gamut of human passions, but always finds resolution by returning to the keynote of joy. It is both astonishing and personally inspiring that such indefatigable joy dominated the heart, mind, and teaching of the apostle Paul even after all those years of suffering. This attribute looms large in his character, and it helps explain his unflagging faithfulness, his far-reaching influence, and his remarkable resilience. That joy is infectious, too.

This commentary on Philippians is a real treasure. No one surpasses Steve Lawson's ability to distill rich truths from the text of Scripture and communicate them with eloquent clarity and warm affection. In fact, Steve's preaching, like Paul's epistles, is full of contagious passion. His writing is notable for its compelling readability. His insights are profound and eye-opening. You will be edified and encouraged. You'll gain much in your understanding of this wonderful epistle and the apostle who wrote it.

*John MacArthur, November 2016*

*To Eric Lindsay,*

*A servant and supporter of pastors and spiritual  
leaders around the world.*

*I am grateful to be one of those men. He is a true friend  
and "Barnabas" to me.*

## INTRODUCTION TO PHILIPPIANS

When a pastor preaches his last series for the church where he has served as pastor, the Scripture he chooses should be carefully selected, to leave a lasting impact with positive encouragement upon the lives of his precious flock. This is where I found myself recently as I came to the end of my twelve-year pastorate at Christ Fellowship Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, where I had been founding pastor.

I chose the book of Philippians.

This would be my final deposit in the hearts of those wonderful believers who had become very dear to me. For many of them, I had been their pastor for two decades, with many coming to faith in Christ under my pastorate.

So why did I select the book of Philippians to preach as my final pulpit series? And why should the book of Philippians be so important to your spiritual life? Here are seven reasons.

First, this is an *intensely personal* book. The relationship that the apostle Paul had developed with the believers in Philippi was a close bond marked by a deep affection. Paul was the founding pastor of this church, and had already invested much of his life in them. He warmly refers to them as “my joy and crown” (4:1). This book reveals the depth of authentic Christian fellowship between believers. This kind of love is what I sought to convey to my flock. Likewise, this is what you need to experience in your spiritual life. Your walk with the Lord will thrive to the extent that you are a part of the kind of community that the Philippian church and their founding pastor enjoyed together.

Second, the book of Philippians is a *joy-producing* book. It was written by Paul to encourage the hearts of believers and urge them to rejoice in the Lord (2:18; 3:1; 4:4). Joy is a spiritual grace that we all need to experience in our Christian lives. We live in a world of stress and anxiety that all too easily and subtly can steal the peace of God from our hearts. We need an abundant, overflowing joy to flood our

souls. The book of Philippians is written for that very purpose—to point us to that joy. Surely, there is not a one of us who does not need to know more of the supernatural joy of the Lord in our lives.

Third, the book of Philippians is a *gospel-focused* book. There is a repeated emphasis upon the good news of salvation that is in God's Son, Jesus Christ (1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27; 2:22; 4:3, 15). Paul places great stress upon the saving message of the gospel, as well as the need for us to live it out in our daily lives. This is what Paul continuously mentioned in order to encourage the believers in Philippi. They needed a gospel focus. We are no different.

Fourth, the book of Philippians is a *doctrinally-rich* book. It is an apostolic letter that contains great theological truth. Found in this book is the signature passage on the self-emptying of Christ in his incarnation. Here Paul teaches how the Son of God entered into this world to take upon himself human flesh and die for sins (2:6-8). Further, we see the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God the Father (2:9-11). We discover the eternal security of the believer (1:6). The list could go on. These are truths that must be ever at the forefront of the mind of each believer, including you and me, and they are doctrines taught in the letter to the Philippians.

Fifth, the book of Philippians is a *prayer-inclining* book. From the opening of this book, the apostle Paul expresses his sincere prayers offered on behalf of the Philippians (1:3-11). In the last chapter of this letter, Paul reminds the believers once again of the need to cast their burdens upon the Lord in order to experience his peace (4:6-7). In like manner, we should read the book of Philippians and allow it to deepen our own prayer life. Not a one of us is without need of further instruction and encouragement in regards to coming before the Lord in fervent, frequent, believing prayer.

Sixth, the book of Philippians is a *holiness-growing* book. This letter teaches us much about how to live the Christian life. Paul will tell us that we bear great responsibility to work out our salvation in fear and trembling (2:12-13). At the same time, he will instruct us that it is God

who is at work within us for his good pleasure. We will find ourselves challenged to forget what lies behind, and press forward to the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. This teaching on spiritual growth is applicable for the life of every Christian. Expect to grow in a desire for holiness and a life of holiness as we walk through this letter.

Seventh, the book of Philippians is an *eternity-gazing* book. Here we are given the eternal perspective we need as we are faced with life's difficulties (3:20-21). In the opening chapter, Paul expresses his confidence that the work of God is going forward despite the fact that there are other believers in Rome jealous of his ministry (1:12-14). This letter reminds us that we must rejoice whenever the gospel is advancing, regardless of the personal affliction we might have to suffer. Based on Paul's tone as he writes this letter, we would never guess that he is actually writing from a prison cell. The apostle personally models how to live triumphantly and joyfully in the midst of difficult circumstances.

So as we study the book of Philippians together in this expository guide, we should expect to experience a greater realization of the fullness of God in Jesus Christ for our lives. This is a remarkable book that, I trust, will leave a lasting effect upon your life. May the Lord use the pages that follow to lead you into a deeper realization of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.



# **1. A PERSONAL LETTER**

Can you imagine receiving a handwritten letter from the **apostle\*** Paul addressed to you personally? How excited you would be to receive a piece of inspired writing from the leading spiritual teacher of the day. That is precisely what the early believers in Philippi must have felt when this correspondence was delivered to them. There was Paul's name on the **epistle\***—and their name right beside it! We can count on both hands the number of churches in history that have been so privileged—and the Philippians church was one such body of believers.

Yet in a broader sense, every authentic church in every generation has been so privileged. Far more than this being merely an ancient letter, this letter is intended for every church and every Christian in every generation. In this letter, God himself is still speaking to each one of us today. Though this letter was written two thousand years ago to the church at Philippi, it finds itself in the Bible for our spiritual good and growth, preserved for you and me and our benefit as well. This epistle is for you and me even today. As we begin this study of the book of Philippians, it is my prayer that there will be ignited within your heart a growing closeness to the Lord, and a new joy in him. In this chapter, we will consider together the first two verses of this highly personal epistle, which form the opening section known as a salutation.

---

\* Words in **gray** are defined in the Glossary (page 231).

## The Servants

In the very first word of this letter, Paul begins by identifying himself as its author (**v 1a\***). It was typical in the first century for the writer of a piece of correspondence to record his name first rather than placing it at the end as is our custom today. In inscribing his name first, Paul is not being self-centered. Rather, he is simply letting the Philippians know that this letter is from him, a common practice of the day.

“Paul” is the Roman or Greek name of this towering figure, who was previously called by his Hebrew name, “Saul.” Many would insist that the apostle Paul was the greatest Christian who ever lived. He was so active for the Lord that it could well be said he lived the life of nine men. He was a dynamic missionary, church planter, powerful preacher, caring pastor, gifted **evangelist**, astute **theologian**, brilliant teacher, **itinerant** speaker, and prolific author—all merged into one extraordinary person. This is the same Paul who authored thirteen epistles in the New Testament. It was something special to receive this letter from the chief apostle in the church.

In **verse 1**, Paul states that he is accompanied by “Timothy,” his young co-worker, about whom we will discover more when we reach the second half of Philippians 2. Timothy served Paul on many levels as his travel assistant, trusted companion, and constant supporter. The apostle was the primary human instrument in the spiritual development of this younger man. Similarly, every one of us needs to have a Timothy in our life. We all need someone who is a partner with us in serving God. It may be a prayer partner or a personal encourager. It may be a spouse, an old friend, or an older mentor. It may be a teaching assistant. Whoever this person may be in your life, there is great blessing in pursuing this kind of relationship—a trusted associate like Timothy in serving the Lord. “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9).

Both Paul and Timothy are identified as “bond-servants of Christ Jesus” (Philippians **1:1**). At the outset of his other letters, Paul often

---

\* All Philippians verse references being looked at in each part of the chapter are in **bold**.



refers to himself as “an apostle” of Christ Jesus (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1). Paul certainly held such a position of spiritual authority in the early church. But with the Philippians, there appears to be no need for him to remind them of this elevated credential. Presumably, they are already mindful and respectful of his lofty spiritual responsibility. Instead, the emphasis he chooses to make is relational and personal. He humbles himself and stresses his commitment to serve them. This serves as a great reminder that all authentic leadership in the church must be servant-leadership.

The word Paul uses is “bond-servant” (*doulos* in the original Greek), which actually means “slave.” A slave is assigned an even lower position than a servant. In the first century, a servant would have owned a few possessions and have been protected by certain rights. He would have been hired for a certain project and then was able to return home to his normal life. But this was not the case with a slave. A slave actually belonged to his master like a piece of property. He did not have a life of his own. Further, a slave did not own anything. He was entirely dependent upon his master to meet all his needs. Neither could he travel anywhere without his master’s consent. His entire life existed to please his owner.

The point here is that “bond-servant” is precisely how Paul saw himself. And so, this is how he presented himself to the Philippians—as a slave-leader: a slave of Christ who had been bought by his master to be his possession. Of course, to serve such a master—the Master who died out of love for his “bond-servants”—is neither restrictive nor an imposition. It is a privilege and a joy, for the great **paradox** is that such slavery brings true freedom—freedom from fear, futility and death. The chief aim of Paul’s whole life was to please the Lord Jesus Christ. This humble-yet-wonderful position is not restricted to Paul and Timothy. Every believer in Christ is designated as his slave. In other passages, we are identified as joint heirs with Christ and children of the King. But here we are designated to be his slaves. As the slaves of Christ, we belong to him and exist to

serve and glorify him. To be sure, no slave ever had a more benevolent Master than do we. He freely provides every **grace** we need to live abundantly. But our Master he is.

This self-identification is how Paul humbly opens this letter. He reveals himself and his son in the faith, Timothy, as slaves. No author ever began his correspondence by assuming a more lowly posture. This is the **meekness** of mind which each one of us must assume. In being chosen to serve the Lord, we have a high calling to a lowly position.

## **The Saints**

Paul next designates to whom he is writing: “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi” (Philippians **1:1b**). This identifies all the believers as “saints in Christ Jesus.” Every genuine Christian is a “saint,” which means “a holy one.” The words “holy,” “hallowed,” “saint,” and “**sanctification**” all come from the same Greek root. These four words sound different in our English language, but they are similar in the Greek language. “Saint” is the most common word Paul uses to address believers in the early church. With this understanding, this phrase could be translated as “to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi.”

The word “saint” is drawn from the word “holy” (*hagios* in the Greek), which refers to one who is set apart from the moral pollution of this world and set apart unto God. To be a saint means that by the operation of grace, a Christian no longer lives a life of pursuing sin in the evil world system and, instead, is pursuing moral purity. This involves both a negative and a positive separation. This is the dramatic change that takes place in every believer’s life when they are converted to Christ. They are immediately set apart by God from their old life of sin, negatively, and are engaged to a new life of purity, positively.

As saints in their historical time and geographical place, these Christians stood out in the corrupt world of the Roman Empire like bright stars on a dark night (2:15-16). They were easily distinguished


as they lived in an unholy culture. These believers were traveling a different path and headed in a different direction than the immoral society around them. They had a radically different standard of morality that produced an entirely different lifestyle. Everything about them was different from the polluted world in which they lived. Their families were different, their businesses were different, and their conversations were different.

At the same time, Paul stresses that every believer in Philippi was, **positionally**, “in Christ Jesus.” Before their conversion, they belonged to the evil world system with its anti-God agenda. But they had been delivered out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into vital union and communion with Christ Jesus. They were washed in his blood and given a new standing in his grace. They were made citizens of the kingdom of God. This little **prepositional** phrase, “in Christ Jesus,” makes all the difference to everything.

The same is true for all believers in Jesus Christ. We, too, are vitally connected to Christ and have entered into a personal relationship with him. The fullness of his all-sufficient life is flowing into our lives.

Grace upon grace is being multiplied in our souls. All that Christ is and all that he possesses belongs to us. Being in Christ Jesus makes all the difference to everything. And so Paul begins this letter by reminding his first readers, and Christians through the ages, that they have this privileged position in Christ Jesus. As the late British theologian Alec Motyer wrote:

“The exclusive place which the Lord Jesus Christ occupies in relation to the Christian has three aspects, which Paul indicates here by the words in, of, and from: a saint in Christ Jesus, a servant of Christ Jesus, and grace and peace from ... the Lord Jesus Christ.” (*The Message of Philippians*, page 26)



Being in  
Christ Jesus  
makes all the  
difference to  
everything.

## The Setting

Paul next identifies the geographical location of these “saints” as being “in Philippi” (1:1b). In the first century, this ancient city was in eastern Macedonia, which is modern northeastern Greece. As a Roman colony, it enjoyed a different political status from the typical city in that day. Philippi had a close identification with Rome, so much so that it was called “Little Rome.”

“As such it was a Rome in miniature, a reproduction on a small scale of the imperial city.”

(William Hendriksen, *Philippians*, page 6)

The citizens enjoyed full Roman citizenship with many special privileges. They were exempt from paying the heavy taxes that citizens in other cities paid. They were excused from certain military service. They also received bolstered military protection because Philippi was an outpost for Roman soldiers.

As a thriving Roman city, Philippi enjoyed the stunning beauty of Roman architecture. The people proudly wore the Roman style of clothing. They spoke Latin, the language of educated cultured citizens, rather than Greek, which was so prevalent within the empire. Proud of its connection with Rome, Philippi boasted of its status as a colony of the empire.

Even so, when on his second missionary journey Paul had visited Philippi and preached the **gospel** (Acts 16:14-34), God opened the heart of a woman named Lydia, who was converted to Christ along with others. Paul’s powerful preaching, along with the liberation of the demon-possessed slave girl and the ensuing loss of income for her master, created a riot which caused him to be arrested, beaten and thrown into prison. But Paul kept preaching. At midnight, God sent a powerful earthquake that led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer and his entire household. In the aftermath, a church was spontaneously birthed, the church to which Paul now writes this letter. This dramatic beginning produced a tight bond between Paul and the Philippians.

Here we see the importance of the local church. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you should be an active member of a local church wherever you live. Christianity was never intended to be lived in isolation from other believers. God's design for healthy spiritual living is for us to be a functioning part of a church where the word is preached.

## Questions for reflection

1. "In this letter, God himself is still speaking to each one of us today." How does this affect how you will approach your time reading the letter to the Philippians?
2. Given who Christ is, why is it a privilege, rather than oppressive, to be one of his "bond-servants"?
3. How are you, as a "saint," living a set-apart life in your particular place and time, in what you pursue and what you refrain from?

## PART TWO

### The Shepherds

As Paul continues his introduction to his letter, he recognizes the leadership of the church. He singles out two groups who serve the needs of the congregation. These are “the overseers and deacons” of the church (Philippians **1:1c**). The “overseers” are identified elsewhere in Scripture as “elders” (e.g. Titus 1:5), who shepherd the flock of God. The word “overseer” indicates the spiritual oversight and management they are to give to the church. The term “elder” speaks of the spiritual maturity required to be a spiritual leader in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). In order for someone to be an effective overseer, there must be spiritual growth in his own personal walk with the Lord. This advancement in grace must be evident in his life if he is to serve in this capacity.

By mentioning the “overseers,” Paul intends to elevate the importance of these spiritual leaders in the church. At the outset of this epistle, he is intentionally drawing the focus of the whole congregation to these men. Paul desires that they be esteemed, supported, and followed in the direction they provide. He calls them “overseers” to remind the flock of the strategic responsibility they have. Concerning the role of overseers, John MacArthur explains:

“They mediate the rule of Christ in local churches by preaching, teaching, setting godly examples, and giving Spirit-guided leadership.” *(The MacArthur New Testament Commentary on Philippians, page 16)*

Serving alongside the overseers are the “deacons.” The word “deacon” means “servant.” In the first century, it was used of one who ministered meals at a table. As those called alongside the overseers, deacons are crucial to the spiritual health of any local church. While they do not have the same responsibility as the elders, they nevertheless are vital in the care of people and in implementing the ministries of the church. Those who served as deacons facilitated **ministry** behind the scenes. They

especially cared for the widows and met many physical needs (see Acts 6:1-7). These servants were involved in the lives of people at a practical level. They were special instruments who executed what the overseers perceived to be the ministry focuses of the church.

This passage reminds us of the enormous stewardship that the Lord has entrusted to the overseers and deacons. No church can rise any higher than the godliness of its leaders. Like produces like. Like pastor, like people. Spiritually mature overseers exert a spiritual influence upon those they lead. They are charged by God to chart the course for the church. Humble deacons are to help in carrying out this vision and in implementing its strategies. As the church is served by overseers and deacons, there is a sense of security for its members. You can never pray too much for those who serve your church as overseers and deacons.

## **The Salutations**

Paul continues his introduction with the familiar greeting, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians **1:2**). He could desire and request nothing greater for the church at Philippi than that they would enjoy “grace” and “peace.” Requesting grace and peace was a common way in the first century of greeting others upon entering a house. G. Walter Hansen explains:

“Grace is Paul’s adaptation of the ‘greetings’ at the beginning of Greek letters of his day. Peace echoes the common Jewish greeting (Shalom). Paul’s combination of the Greek and Jewish greetings reflections the intersection of Greek and Jewish cultures in Paul’s expressions.” (*The Letter to the Philippians*, page 43)

Here, though, Paul gives the greeting a distinctively Christian meaning by adding, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” In other words, all grace and all peace comes from the entire **Godhead**.

The first of these words, “grace,” is the very heart of the Christian message. Grace summarizes the gospel. When Paul asks for grace,

he is not asking that they would receive saving grace. He has stated in **verse 1** that they are “saints in Christ Jesus.” They are already reconciled to God through their faith in the saving work of Christ upon the cross. They have already been made spiritually alive by the Holy Spirit and brought into living union with Christ. There is nothing that could make them any more a saint than they already are. So “grace to you” is a request that they enter into a fuller experience of grace in their Christian lives. It is a request for daily grace that will enable them to live in a manner that honors God—that they would know the all-sufficient grace of God in their lives.

To put it another way, Paul is saying, *May the fullness of the Holy Spirit be upon you.* This **benediction** is echoed in the last verse of this epistle. Paul will conclude his letter, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit” (4:23). These two requests form bookends around the entire book. This epistle ends as it starts, with this request for grace in Christian living. When Paul requests that this grace be “with your spirit,” he is asking that it be operative in the very depth of their souls. He is asking that this God-given power be in the core of their innermost beings.

Paul also asks that the “peace” of God be with them (**1:2**). This is *not* referring to peace *with* God, which is **objective** peace with God given to those who trust in Christ because Jesus has borne our punishment of rebellion against God, in our place, once for all, in his death. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God” (Romans 5:1). At the moment of conversion, all believers in Christ enter into a state of peace with God. Previous to their **new birth**, the Philippians were enemies of God. But now they have become accepted friends, who are at peace with God.

The peace that Paul is talking about here in Philippians **1:2** is the **subjective** peace *of* God. Notice how he words this as “peace from God,” rather than peace with God. He means the personal experience of supernatural peace within their souls. Only God can give this inner tranquility. This is the quiet calm within the human spirit in



the midst of life's raging storms. This personal serenity comes from knowing that God is in control of all circumstances, and causes all things to work together for our good so that we might become more and more like Christ (Romans 8:28-30). No challenge that a believer can ever face will be independent of the sovereign control of God over their circumstances.

The relationship between grace and peace is important. There is no peace until there first is grace. That is why Paul mentions grace first. Wherever there is grace, peace inevitably results. The grace of God in a life prepares the way for the peace of God to flood a heart. Grace is the root, and peace is the fruit. Put another way, grace is the cause, and peace is the result. These two spiritual blessings are like twins. Wherever you see grace, there you will find peace.

### **The Source**

All grace and peace come "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians **1:2**). There is no grace apart from God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither is there any peace within the heart outside of knowing God through Jesus Christ. This is a theme Paul will return to through the letter, and especially in 4:6-9. We must know God by trusting Christ in order to experience grace and peace through the Spirit. The Bible says that God is the God of all peace (2 Corinthians 1:3). There is no grace or peace outside of knowing him.

Notice the dual source of grace and peace. These blessings come from both God the Father and God the Son. There is an ever-flowing fountain of grace and peace that comes streaming into every believer in fullest measure. It is, in essence, all-sufficient grace and all-sustaining peace that is flooding into our lives and swelling its banks.

Further, notice that Paul is teaching that the fullness of **deity** is shared equally by the Father and the Son. Grace and peace come from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact stresses the co-equality of God the Father and his Son. These two Persons within the Trinity possess the same divine essence and attributes. So this verse

makes a clear statement affirming the full deity of Jesus Christ. It places Jesus Christ on equal footing with God the Father. Currently, the Lord Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father and occupies the place of all authority in heaven and earth. Jesus is submissive to the Father in his role within the Godhead, but he yields as an equal.

Here is the all-sufficient grace of God for Christian living. Here is the abundance of divine peace for our often troubled souls. We will never face a trial beyond what the grace and peace of God enables us

Our greatest  
difficulties can  
never exhaust  
the unlimited  
resources  
of God.

to endure. Contained in this greeting is the promised abundant supply of God to meet all our needs in troubled times. Our greatest difficulties can never exhaust the unlimited resources of God. There is far more grace and abundant peace to sustain, strengthen, and secure us than we can ever need.

The experience of this grace and peace does not happen automatically.

It is incumbent upon every believer to avail themselves of the **means of grace**. That is to say, we must read and study the word of God. We must internalize and implement its truths. We must set our minds on things above, not on things of the earth. We must worship God before his throne of grace. We must pray and cast our burdens upon him. We must live in close fellowship with other believers. We must serve one another as we carry out our Christian duties. As we do, God abundantly supplies his grace and peace to our souls.

It is impossible to imagine a more positive beginning to any letter than the way this one begins. It is wonderful to know that its truths apply to us, if we are in Christ Jesus. And it prepares us to learn more and experience more of the fullness of what God has prepared for us as his people through the rest of this hope-filled, joy-soaked letter.

## Questions for reflection

1. "You can never pray too much for those who serve your church as overseers and deacons." Does this thought need to change the priorities in your prayers?
2. What difference will "grace to you" and "peace from God" make to your day today, and tomorrow?
3. Are there other places you are tempted to look to for your peace? How does the result of locating your sense of peace there compare to when you seek it in God?