

*I press on
toward the goal to
win the prize for
which God has
called me
heavenward
in Christ
Jesus.*

Philippians 3:14

Following the upward call through Philippians ...

Opening Comments

The letter to the congregation at Philippi is one of the most encouraging sections of the Bible. The saints in Philippi were, amazingly, behaving as saints are supposed to behave; the moral, relational, and doctrinal problems were minimal. The city itself was more of a Roman military town than others in the times of the New Testament writings. It was originally named after Alexander the Great's father, Philip of Macedon. It was also near the site of the comparatively recent battles for the control of the Roman Empire between Octavian (who won, and eventually changed his name to

Augustus Caesar), Marc Antony, and the assassins of Julius Caesar — Brutus and Cassius. When the apostle Paul arrived, there was no synagogue of the Jews in the city, so he had to begin with what contacts developed; first there was Lydia, a Gentile seller of purple fabrics from Thyratira across the narrows over in Asia, then the Philippian jailer. Very soon Paul had to leave town, entrusting the new congregation to the capable and beloved physician who had just joined them, Luke. And what a magnificent job he did! The congregation was solid doctrinally, it was fully established organizationally, it was functioning evangelistically, and it was contributing to the forward movement of the gospel financially. Established in 51 AD, the church in Philippi was commended in this letter in 62 AD, and still commended in 96 AD by Jesus Himself. This is a legacy worth imitating!

- ◆ **From Paul and Timothy** — Timothy had been converted on Paul's first missionary journey in the city of Lystra. On Paul's second journey, he invited Timothy to come labor with him. Upon receiving Timothy's acquiescence, Paul had him circumcised (Timothy's mom was Jewish) so that Timothy would have access to the Jewish synagogues in future missionary endeavors. So Timothy, along with Silas and Luke, was in the first team that arrived in Philippi with the gospel. The apostle incorporates Timothy into his greeting. "Paul," he says, "and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons" (Philippians 1:1). There are no particular issues Paul has to deal with in this letter; it is an encouraging letter, and he simply notes that he and Timothy are slaves of Jesus by their own choice, not stressing his apostleship and authority.

*This church was
commended by Paul
in 62 AD, and by
Jesus in 96 AD!*

- ◆ **Overseers and deacons** — The church in Philippi had developed, by God's grace, qualified men who could really do the work required of overseers (*bishops*, also known as elders, *older men*, and pastors, *shepherds*). There is no indication that the church at Corinth, for example, had developed elders to oversee and shepherd the flock, whereas Paul specifically greets the elders in Philippi. Similarly, he greets the special servants, *deacons*, who would be able to do all the things the elders needed them to do in order that the congregation might function effectively and carry out Jesus' work of seeking and saving the lost.
- ◆ **General greeting** — Paul opens with a greeting characteristic of his, and similar to the common greetings of others in the first century church: "Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:2). There is a continuing need for the blessings from God to shower down upon individuals in particular and the churches in general. The saints are continually battling through personal weaknesses, and need what God supplies to cover their sins and to give them strength to power on in their spiritual battle against the forces of darkness. Likewise, they need the inner peace that Paul will show how to obtain in the closing portions of this epistle.

The 27 books of the New Testament writings were carefully selected by the Holy Spirit for preservation and distribution to the modern saints. While other letters bring out some of the great doctrinal truths and practical dealings with sin and righteousness, the letter to the church at Philippi is powerful and positive, providing enlightenment and encouragement to God's people today!

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