

An Epistle of Joy, a Reminder of Humility – Philippians 1: 1-2

Introduction and Outline

- Scripture reading: Philippians 1: 1-11.
- The first two verses of this epistle will be used as an introduction to the background and overall summary of the letter.
- Outline:
 1. Introduction to the epistle to the Philippians
 2. An epistle of joy
 3. A reminder of humility

Introduction to the epistle to the Philippians

- Author: Paul (1: 1). Timothy was also mentioned because of the close relationship he had with the Philippian church, but Paul wrote the letter.
- Date: 60-62 AD, Paul's imprisonment in Rome (1: 13, cf. Acts 28: 16, 30-31)
- Recipients: Philippian church, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi." (1: 1)

The identity of saints —— All Christians. Positional holiness vs practical holiness —— Positional holiness based on the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore "in Christ"; Practical holiness is progressive sanctification in our whole life (cf. Ephesians 1: 4; John 17: 17).

- Background of Philippian church: The first stop of gospel spreading to Europe, with details recorded in Acts 16.

Philippi as a "colony" of Rome (Acts 16: 12), had honorable privileges and the citizens generally were very proud.

The first fruits of gospel in Philippi: the whole household of Lydia and the whole household of the jailer. The church was born amidst the enemy's prosecution.

- Introduction to the epistle: the theme of joy, practical exhortations, and personal notes. There is little direct theological instruction (only 2: 5-11), and no correction for theological error, indicating the Philippian church is firmly rooted in truth and Paul rejoiced greatly for them.

An Epistle of Joy

- About Joy: 1. From God (Psalm 16: 11); 2. Only given to the disciples of Jesus (John 15: 11); 3. Produced by the Holy Spirit (Romans 14: 17); 4. Received through the Word of God (1 John 1: 4; Jeremiah 15: 16); 5. Manifested through trials (1 Thessalonians 1: 6); 6. Fixed on the eternal hope of Jesus (1 Peter 1: 8, 4: 13)

Summary: "Joy is a gift from God to those who believe the gospel, being produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey the Scripture, being mixed with trials, and set their hope and their heart on future glory."

“Joy is a happiness based on unchanging divine promises and eternal spiritual realities. It is the sense of well-being experienced by one who knows that all is well between oneself and the Lord. Joy is not the result of favorable circumstances but occurs even when those circumstances are the most painful and severe. ... Joy is a deep, abiding inner thankfulness to God for His goodness that is not diminished or interrupted when less-than-desirable circumstances intrude on one’s life.”

- Joy is a main theme throughout the entire epistle (1:3,18,25; 2:2,17-18,28-29; 3:1; 4:1,4,10).
- Why such emphasis on joy: The Philippians lack joy. They worry about Paul (cf. 1: 12-18) and Epaphroditus (cf. 2: 25-28) due to their love for them on one hand; But on the other hand, their pride is destroying their joy (cf. 2: 1-4).

A Reminder of Humility

- Pride is the great enemy of joy. Humility is an important element of Christian joy.
- Paul gives a reminder of humility at the beginning of the letter —— “*bond-servants* of Christ Jesus.” (1: 1). In most of Paul’s epistles, he uses “apostle” to introduce himself. Here is the only time that Paul only mentions bond-servant, not apostle. Paul wants to set an example of humility for his readers from the beginning.

- “bond-servant” literally means “slave”, the lowest-ranked servant. Slaves belong to their master with no freedom or personal possession. All they have belongs to their master. Their only job is to faithfully do whatever their master asks —— A Christian’s life belongs to Christ; his only job is to be faithful to Jesus. He has no free rights or personal interests.

This identity is amazing grace. If you are not a slave of Christ, you are a slave of sin; If you do not serve Christ, you serve your own sinful desires; If you do not belong to Christ, you belong to Satan. (cf. Romans 6: 16-18; John 8: 33) The fact that we have become Christ’s slaves by grace alone should make us all the humbler.

- “the overseers and deacons” (1: 1): The leaders of the church are first of all slaves of Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus says to the disciples “whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave” (Matthew 20: 27). Church leaders are servant leaders. They set an example of faithful service and lead all servants to serve Christ together.
- “Grace, peace.....” (1: 2): Salvation is by God’s free grace, and the result of receiving His grace is our peace, which includes peace with God and peace with brothers/sisters. All these blessings are from God “and the Lord Jesus Christ,” whose name is mentioned three times in these two verses. We are *His* slaves, saints in *Him*, and receive grace and peace from *Him*. How can we not humble ourselves and rejoice before such precious truths?