

# Philippians: An Introduction and 1:1-3

## *Introduction...*

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written in 61AD during his house arrest in Rome. For two years Paul lived in a rented house where he was free to preach the Gospel to all who came to him, all the time being chained between two soldiers.

This letter is written to the church at Philippi, the first church Paul founded in Macedonia. Paul travelled there in response to a dream, where a man from Macedonia pleaded with him to "Come over to Macedonia and help us" Acts 16:9. Philippi was a strategic city, it was a Roman colony and it was the gateway to all of Europe.

The church started with a women's prayer group that met at the riverside on the Sabbath. There Paul met Lydia, a seller of purple who worshiped God. After hearing Paul, she and her whole household were baptised. The story of Paul's time in Philippi is recorded in Acts 16:6-40.

The purpose of the letter was to thank the Philippians for their help in his hour of need. The Philippian church was the only one who supported Paul financially, and they sent Epaphroditus to come and serve Paul during his arrest. He uses this letter to instruct them with this simple truth: "Only in Christ are real unity and joy possible." Paul speaks of what it means to be in Christ, about unity and how to establish and maintain it, and the joy that comes from being in Christ.

## *Philippians 1:1-3...*

**1** Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,  
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:  
**2** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.  
**3** I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

Let's look now at the text of Philippians.

**1** Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ Jesus,  
To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the bishops and deacons:

This familiar pattern for the beginning of a letter is seen in Paul's letters and in James, Peter and Jude in the New Testament. It begins by identifying the author, then addressing the recipients of the letter and finally declaring a blessing over them.

It begins with Paul acknowledging that Timothy is with him. To learn more about Timothy and how he came to be with Paul on this journey, have a read of Acts 16:1-5.

Paul goes on to declare that he and Timothy are bondservants of Christ Jesus. Some translations use servants (NIV) or slaves (NLT), but irrespective of the slight variation in meaning, Paul understands that he chose to be a servant because of his love for Christ. Paul is indebted to Christ for His sacrifice for his sins and the gift of eternal life.

The letter is addressed “to all God’s holy people in Christ Jesus.” Paul is saying that the Philippians are in a covenantal relationship with those who have received the Gospel truths and are being transformed into Christ’s likeness. They are growing in holiness as they see their lives in Christ Jesus. He specifically mentions the bishops and deacons, those who oversee and serve God’s people, so that they may help the body to grow in Christ’s likeness.

**2** Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

You may have noticed that I have started using this at the beginning of the things I write. Is it just a form that might be used at the beginning of a letter, much like “Dear” and the persons name? If we understand it as a blessing it takes on greater significance.

A blessing is to bestow good upon a person. So what is Paul trying to bestow upon the Philippians? Have you ever thought about those words and why in that order?

Philip Yancey’s book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?* was a best seller in 1997. Although it doesn’t give a concise definition, who can forget the most talked about statement in the whole book, “There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less.” Grace is the love of God that draws us to Him. It is His gift to those who respond in faith. Remember Ephesians 2:8, “For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

Grace has to come first, because it is only when we come into a relationship with Christ where He is both Saviour and Lord that we will discover real peace. The Hebrew for peace, “Shalom” is really wholeness found fully in the will of God.

Paul wants to bestow grace, the love of God expressed through Jesus Christ, and peace, wholeness in a world of turmoil, fear and confusion, as we look to Him.

Who can you bless this week with grace and peace?

**3** I thank my God every time I remember you.

When Paul thinks of the Philippians, he does so with thanks. What follows is Paul’s prayer for them, and it is with thanks for their support financially, physically and in prayer. What a great way to begin prayer for others, with a heart of thanksgiving.

Do you pray with thankfulness to God for how He has worked in your life?

Are you thankful for those you pray for?

Make it a point to give thanks, not only to God, but thanks for those who have touched your life.

I hope this speaks into your life and I look forward to sharing with you again next week.

Blessings, Don