

## Paul's Letter to the Philippians

Paul's Letter to the Philippians is one of the finest thank you letters in recorded scripture. Paul's primary purpose is to thank the Christians at Philippi for sending him a gift that allowed him to maintain a household while under house arrest in Rome. Paul had been arrested in Jerusalem and instead of undergoing trial there he had appealed his case to Rome, as was the right of a Roman citizen.

As Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he wanted to encourage them in two ways. First, he wanted them to be united with each other. Paul understood that in a small community in a foreign land, group cohesion was vitally important. The Spirit of God wanted them to know that they were not to think of themselves any longer as disparate individuals. They now belonged to the Body of Christ and they belonged to each other. It was important that they set aside all differences and work together.

Second, Paul wanted them to approach one another humbly. These two attitudes are connected with one another. When people are united with one another, they will approach one another humbly. Humility softens the differences between people. To be humble is to not think too highly of yourself in relationship to other people.

In order to learn this humility, Paul reminded the Philippians that humility was also the attitude of Christ Jesus when He emptied Himself and took the form of a servant. Even though He was equal with God, Jesus set aside all privilege and was obedient even unto death on the cross. And God exalted Him to the highest of stations in the heaven because of that obedience. If Jesus, who was divine, could do this for the sake of unity of the Church, then the Philippians should be of the same mind and treat one another humbly as well.

In every situation it would be well for them to follow the example of Christ. For Paul there was nothing more important than knowing Christ. Paul had all the advantages in history and education that a religious Jew could have. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. He had been born to the right family and had gone to the right schools. But, he considered all of that to be worthless compared to knowing Jesus Christ and the power of His resurrection. There was nothing that could compare with the joy of knowing Christ.

In fact, the joy of the Christian life runs all the way through this letter. Paul considers the Philippians to be his joy and his crown. He encourages them to rejoice in the Lord and even to rejoice in their sufferings. We can find joy in all of our circumstances because of what the Lord has already done for us. Our hope is secure because Christ has been raised and now sits at the right hand of God the Father.

So, this letter written from prison becomes the epistle of joy from the Apostle to the Gentiles to one of the first churches that he helped to found. Even from prison, Paul could encourage the Philippians to find joy in everything they did.

Be united with other Christians. Live a humble life with them. Find joy in the life that God has called you to. And in all things, seek to know Christ.