

# *Philippians*

## WELCOME

## OPENING

Philippi, in northern Greece, was the first place Europe that heard the news that there was a new king, namely the crucified and risen Jesus of Nazareth. You can read the story of Paul's first visit there in Acts 16. This letter makes it clear that as Paul looked at all the churches he had founded, the people of Philippi were the ones who gave him most joy. To be sure, he loved them all; but this letter breathes a confident trust and enjoyment which we don't always find elsewhere. Now, in prison – almost certainly in Ephesus – the Philippian church have sent him a gift of money. One of the reasons he's writing is to say a heartfelt "Thank you."

**Opening Discussion: Can you think of a moment that a thank you note was a blessing to you? Are words of thanks easier/harder to give in today's communication channels—facebook, twitter, email?**

## PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Read Philippians 1:1-11. When people were put in prison in Paul's world, they were not normally given food by their captors; they had to rely on friends helping them. Philippians is all about 'partnership.' This word is sometimes translated as 'fellowship', but it clearly has a practical, even financial, implication which our word 'fellowship' doesn't always carry. Paul is talking about a partnership in which those involved would share in doing the work on the hand and in the financial responsibilities on the other. The Philippians, then, are 'partners in the gospel' (verse 5), 'partners in grace' (verse 7); they are in the gospel business, the grace business, along with Paul.

To appreciate the full meaning of the word-group in the New Testament that conveys the nature and reality of Christian fellowship (i.e., the noun koinonia [[koinwniva](#)], the verb, koinonein [[koinwnevw](#)], and the noun koinonos [[koinwnov](#)"]) as used in the New Testament, it is necessary to be aware of the original definition and intent of the word. It is particularly significant to understand this word as it related to Paul's epistles to the various churches in his travels; and what it meant in his letter to the congregation at Philippi specifically.

General Background. In the colloquial Greek of the New Testament period, koinonia [[koinwniva](#)] was used in several ways. It was used of a business **partnership**, where two or more persons share the same business (**financially linked**) and are thus closely connected in work. Also it was used of marriage, of the shared life of two persons together. Additionally, it was used to refer to the spirit of **generous sharing** in contrast to the spirit of selfish acquiring.

- 1. How is the idea of Biblical 'partnership' attacked in today's culture?**
- 2. How can the church/we better practice partnership? Fellowship is a comfy word that we use today to speak about coffee and connection. How can we deepen the understanding of fellowship to be more about purposive action—partnership in the Gospel?**

## **PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18**

Read Philippians 1:12-18. Paul seems to have something of the same robust confidence in God's overruling power, even when everything seems to be going wrong. He is faced with two problems, one on top of the other, and in both cases he declares that what looks like a major difficulty is being turned by God into an opportunity for the gospel. It isn't, of course, an opportunity for his own advancement; as we shall see, he doesn't much care what happens to him, if only the gospel itself can go forward.

- 1. Paul's first problem is, of course, that he's in prison! For a travelling apostle to be put in prison must have seemed like a concert pianist having his hands tied behind his back. How does Paul turn this situation around in order to be an opportunity to advance the gospel?**
- 2. There are some people going around talking about King Jesus who, Paul knows, don't really mean it. They don't believe the message; they merely want to make more trouble for him in his imprisonment. Talk like this would be guaranteed to make people feel that Paul was a dangerous lunatic who should be kept locked up. How does Paul turn this situation around in order to be an opportunity to advance the gospel?**

### **Final Thought/Reflection**

**Here is some encouragement. How often are we tempted to feel discouraged because the plans we had were badly thwarted, or because malicious people were trying to make life difficult. We need to learn from Paul the art of seeing God's purposes working out through problems and difficulties. How are you doing with this in your life today? Share.**