

The Year of St. Paul

The Letter to the Philippi-



CHAPTER FOUR — This final chapter begins with a series of exhortations to unity, joy, and peace. With great affection, Paul pleads with his beloved Philippians to stand fast in the Lord (4:1). With great diplomacy and a call for assistance from others, he implores Euodia and Syntyche to be of one mind in the Lord (4:3-4). He then follows with a call for them to rejoice always in the Lord, letting their gentleness be known to all, and through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving to allow the peace of God remove any anxiety (4:5-7). His final exhortations include a call to meditate on things of virtue and worthy of praise, and to imitate his example in order to ensure that God will be with them (4:8-9).

At last he comes to the matter which occasioned this letter, expressing joy and gratitude for the gift they had sent to him by way of Epaphroditus. As they had done before on several occasions, so now they had provided for his necessities. He is thankful, even though he was quite content, for he knows that this gift really abounds to their account, serving as a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is well pleasing to God (4:10-19).

OVERVIEW OF PHILIPPIANS

Opening (1:1-2)

Paul's prison letter (1:3-2:1a; 4:2-9)

Thanksgiving and prayer (1:3-11)

Paul's present and future situation
(1:12-26)

Exhortation in unity (1:27-2:5)

The Hymn about Christ (2:6-11)

Further instruction (2:12-18)

Travel Plans (2:19-3:1)

Paul's argument against false teaching
(3:1b-4:1)

Paul's transformation (3:1b-11)

His present struggle and future hope
*3:12-4:1)

Exhortation to unity (4:2-9)

Paul's thank-you note (4:10-20)

Closing 4:21-23)

His closing remarks include praise to God, and greetings from those with him, especially members of Caesar's household. As was his custom, he closes with a final prayer that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with them all (4:20-23).

THE THEMES TO REMEMBER...

Paul develops several themes in Philippians — joy and fellowship among them.

Throughout this short and rather personal epistle, one keynote resounds again and again.

GOD FIRST

Year Three, Part 22

December 28, 2008

That keynote is joy. Five times the word "joy" (Grk., *charra*) is found (1:4, 25; 2:2,29; 4:1), and the verb "to rejoice: (Grk., *chairein*) occurs eleven times (twice in 1:18; 2:17-18; 4:4; once in 2:28; 3:1; 4:10). For this reason the epistle to the Philippians has often been called Paul's "hymn of joy" in which the theme is:

"REJOICE IN THE LORD!"
(Key verse: 4:4)

Koinonia is another keyword in Philippians. "Partnership", "sharing", and "fellowship", is the Greek noun *koinonia*, "close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship." It is used often to describe relationships with God and with others in the Christian community, as it does here. It sometimes edges into the meaning of "participation, sharing" as in 3:10 "sharing his sufferings" and in the Lord's, supper (1 Corinthians 10:16).

IN CONCLUSION...

This letter embodies the secret of a man who ran the full course, who fought the good fight, who kept the faith. This is his explanation of how he did it. We who live in this 21st century — with its perils and problems, its frustrations, its anxieties, its pressures — need to discover and understand

this because we have the same One indwelling us who indwelt the Apostle Paul. Christ is our life; Christ is our example; Christ is our confidence; and Christ is our strength.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS:

1. In reading Paul's letter to the Philippians, believers can easily identify two times in the Church's liturgical year when this would be most appropriately used during mass and at other times. When are these times, and why?
2. As Paul exhorts the Philippians to "Rejoice always", there is a purpose. As his words speak to us, we must examine our own lives and ask ourselves, "What is it that I rejoice in?" And, "How and when do I rejoice in the Lord?" An honest evaluation may be reason for pause about what we profess and what we live.

PRAYER:

And now our Father, we ask you to grant that these words will take root in our hearts and lives. May we be not merely hearers of the word, but doers also. Keep us from deceiving ourselves and going away from here having heard these great truths but not willing to do them. Grant to us that we may begin at whatever level we find ourselves, whether we be young or old, in school, at home, at work, or wherever we are. Make us ready to test these promises, to step out on these mighty truths, and discover with the Apostle Paul the joy that floods the heart of someone who experiences Christ as a living Lord, and the One who can help us to live a daily adventure of new discovery with Him. For we ask it in his name. Amen.

Where We've Been To Date In This "Year of St. Paul"

In this "Year of St. Paul" which began in July, we're journeyed a long way, with many adventures yet to be discovered.

July — An Understanding of Paul and an Overview of his life, conversion, journeys and writings.

August — Understanding Paul through the Acts of the Apostles

September — St. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians

October — St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians

November — St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

— St. Paul's Letter to Philemon

December — St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians

We've presented his letters (epistles) in a chronological order as scholars tend to place them. In this way, we can see a development in Paul's writing, but more importantly, in the message of salvation he is preaching while building up the Church in its infancy.

We often think of the early Church Fathers, such as the Apostles, having "their act together" from the beginning. Paul shows us in his writings that his is one that is ongoing, developing. We'll begin to see this change as what we will hear in future letters attributed to Paul, but believed by scholars to come from another's hand, continues to show the growth of the Church.

Where We're Going

January — St. Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians

February — St. Paul's Letter to the Romans

March — St. Paul's Second Letter to the Thessalonians

April — St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians

*May — St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians
— St. Paul's Letter to Titus*

June — St. Paul's Letter (1&2) to Timothy

Enjoy!