

=THE EPISTLES=

Lesson 6

Paul's Epistle to the Philippians

AIM: to teach my pupils the general facts and teaching of the book of Philippians.

POINT OF CONTACT: Since Paul was in prison when he wrote this Epistle and was obviously bound or chained to his prison keeper, it might be interesting to bring some children's handcuffs to class. The teacher could handcuff himself to a pupil and have the class guess what he is doing. Explain that this may have been Paul's condition while in prison writing the letter to the church at Philippi.

INTRODUCTION: Philippians is one of Paul's four Epistles written from prison. Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon are the others. When Paul wrote this Epistle about A.D. 64, he was in Rome in prison under house arrest. Study here Acts 28:16-31. You will find that Paul had much liberty by this time. Notice Acts 28:30, 31. He was guarded by a Roman soldier and had liberty to witness, Acts 28:16.

The Philippians letter takes its name from the city, Philippi. The city was in Greece in Macedonia. It was captured by Philip II, who was the father of Alexander the Great, in the fourth century B.C. and was named after Philip, this conqueror. During the time of the writing of this letter, it was a Roman province. It was also on a highway between the Far East and Rome. This highway was a very important one. Let us notice some truths and facts about this Epistle.

- I. WE FIND IN THIS EPISTLE THAT PAUL HAD DONE SOME SOUL WINNING WHILE IN PRISON. We think that he had led some of the soldiers to Christ. Notice in Philippians 4:22 the words, "they that are of Cæsar's household." He is probably speaking here of some of his converts while in prison at Rome. In his prison Epistle to Philemon, he mentions a servant of Philemon whom he had won in Rome. His name was Onesimus. So, even though he was in prison, Paul was an active soul winner.
- II. PAUL'S OPTIMISTIC NATURE IS TAUGHT IN THIS BOOK. He did not yet know whether he would be set free or have to die, Philippians 2:23. He even said he was willing to die if needs be, Philippians 2:17. However, he wrote in Philippians 2:24 that he trusted to come to the Philippian church shortly. He was optimistic. This is the same Paul who sang praises at midnight while in jail at Philippi. He always had an optimistic spirit. This is shown also in I Thessalonians 4 concerning the rapture. Paul said, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord..." He fully expected the Lord to come in his time. How refreshing it is to be around an optimistic spirit!
- III. LET US NOTICE SOME OF THE MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI. First there was Lydia in Acts 16:14. Here is one of Paul's converts that probably helped him found the church. Then there was the young lady who had been possessed with the spirit of divination and who, in Acts 16, was converted. Probably she, too, helped in starting the church. In Acts 16:25-34 we find the story of the Philippian jailer who was saved because of the earthquake. He and his family, no doubt, helped to found the church. Look at Philippians 4:2, and you will find the names Euodias and Syntyche. They were also members of the church; in fact, they probably were at odds with each other. It seems there are always this type. Then the messenger, Epaphroditus, who is named in Philippians 4:18, was a faithful and wonderful Christian. He had been sent by the Philippians to take a gift to Paul, Philippians 4:10, 18. While with Paul he had become desperately ill, Philippians 2:25-30. He recuperated, however, and it was he who carried the Philippian Epistle back to the church at Philippi, Philippians 1:1. So, you can see that the church had a wonderful start and some very fine members.

You will recall on Paul's second missionary journey he had preached the Gospel in Philippi. He and Silas had been in prison for the Gospel's sake (Acts 16:22-24), but had been freed when the authorities learned that they were Roman citizens.

- IV. THE CHURCH IN PHILIPPI WAS ONE THAT SUFFERED GREATLY. (Philippians 1:28-30) Believers in Christ in Macedonia certainly had their share of opposition. They were despised as a minority group, and they were criticized as being against the best interests of the state. Maybe this is one reason Paul loved the church so much. He had suffered there himself; they were a suffering church; and they had borne many trials together. Trials often bring people closer together; in fact, our trials tend either to sever us or unite us. Let us see that they do the latter.
- V. THE THEME OF THIS EPISTLE IS SIMPLY THAT IT IS A THANK-YOU NOTE FROM PAUL. He thanked the people for their care of him and for providing for his needs. This church did exactly that! They cared for the needs of the Apostles. He spoke of their generosity when he wrote the second Epistle to the church at Corinth and set the Philippian people up as an example of caring for the preacher.
- VI. LET US LOOK AT SOME IMPORTANT VERSES OF THIS BLESSED BOOK. Some of the greatest verses in the Bible (in fact, some of the classic verses of the Bible) are found in Philippians. Let us notice them:
1. Contentment. (Philippians 4:11) Paul said that he had learned that lesson. This means that he had been a member of the Sanhedrin. He had been in prison. He had been exalted as a god. He had had to run for his life. He had been praised to the entire city. He had been stoned and left for dead. How wonderful that he could say he could be content!
 2. What a Scripture we find in Philippians 4:13! He said that there was nothing that he could not do through Christ. Somebody said the theme of Paul's life was, "I can do nothing alone; I can do anything with Christ."
 3. Paul is promising this church that God will supply all their needs. (Philippians 4:19) Let us bear in mind, these were generous people, these were giving people, these were tithing people. The promise is not that God will supply everybody's needs; the promise is that God will supply the needs of those who are generous. (Teacher, stress tithing here for a few moments.)