

[Introduction to Philippians]

To Know Christ

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

Philippians is known as the 'Letter of Joy'. A total of 16 words related to 'joy' are used. The expression 'to rejoice' appears nine times, 'to rejoice together' appears twice, and the expression of 'joy' appears five times. Joy permeates deeply throughout the letter. The apostle Paul rejoiced even in prison and desired to share that joy with the Philippians.

[Author]¹

Paul

[Location]

Roman Prison (Traditional View)²

Initially, Paul appears to have been in house custody in Rome. There, he was free to meet people and teach the Bible to those who came. However, as Nero's attitude toward

¹ Some argue that it is a collection of two or three letters from Paul. To give one example, the connection from 3:1 to 4:4 appears natural, but 3:2-21 (or 4:3) appears to interrupt the natural flow. Se-yoon Kim's speculation is as follows: “While Paul was dictating this letter for several days amidst his difficult circumstances in prison, he seems to have heard the news about Jews appearing at the Philippian church and claiming that if they were circumcised, a sign of the Abrahamic covenant, and obeyed the Mosaic Law, they could be guaranteed complete salvation and about such claims throwing Christians in Philippi into confusion regarding their faith. Thus, hearing this news, Paul seems to have stopped dictating his admonition to build a community of unity, peace, and joy amid persecution (admonition beginning from 1:27-quotes added), and begun refuting the claims of the Jews, dictating content that explained the correct faith to the Christians in Philippi” (Kim Se-yoon, *Philippians*, p. 117-118). D.A. Carson says: “The Greek word used here ('to the end') served as a loosely used linking word in the late Greek era, like the word 'so then'. Paul continues the theme of joy introduced in 2:17-18” (Carson, *Christian Justice*, p.124).

² One difficulty encountered when asserting the traditional view is that Philippi and Rome are at a distance of 1,300 km. Some scholars (Köstenberger, p.674) view the distance between Philippi and Rome as about 1,200 miles (about 2,000 km). Based on the record of Philippians, it is clear that there have been at least four (some scholars guessed it as seven) trips between the Philippian church and Paul in prison. 1) News of Paul's imprisonment came to Philippi 2) Epaphroditus arrives in Rome (4:18) 3) News of Epaphroditus having a serious illness reaches the Philippians (2:26) 4) News that the Philippians are very worried reaches Paul and Epaphroditus (2:26). At that time, traveling 1,300 km (or 2,000 km) took from a month to two months. However, we should not underestimate the ancient travel conditions and abilities from a modern point of view (Kim Do-Hyun, *How to Read Philippians*, p.25). Even if we assume that there were seven trips between Paul and the Philippians, it does not take one year and six months. Considering that Paul had been in a Roman prison for at least two years, seven trips are not impossible. Caesarea (Acts 23:23-26:30), Ephesians (1 Corinthians 15:32, 2 Corinthians 1:8-9), and other places were suggested for the place where the letter was written. However, there is no reason to abandon the traditional view for theories claiming the place of writing to be somewhere other than Rome “because they are based on possibilities rather than convincing arguments” (Moises Silva, *Philippians*, p. 24).

Christianity changed, Paul was transferred from house arrest to a prison inside the protesters, which seems to have caused Paul to think that his death might be imminent.³ Some people in Philippi objected to what the Gospel requires because they viewed it to be anti-Roman (Acts 16:20-21). In view of this, the Roman authorities would have judged that the content of the Gospel preached by Paul was against the Roman Empire, and for this reason, they would have imprisoned Paul.

[Period]

A.D. 61-63⁴

[City of Philippi]

Philippi tried to do everything thoroughly in Roman style, so much so that it was called Little Rome.⁵ The “colonial” Philippians were actually “miniaturized Rome”.⁶ Considering this point, the apostle Paul uses many Roman-colored words in the book of Philippians.⁷ The citizens of Philippi were immensely proud of not only having a Greek heritage, but also because they had the privilege of Roman citizenship. Philippi is located near Thessalonica, northeast of Macedonia. Philippi was built in 360-358. B.C. by Philip II of Macedonia, father of Alexander the Great of Greece and thus got its name from that. Around 42 B.C., retired Roman soldiers moved to Philippi through Anthony and Octavian. Thus, it was not a Roman province, but a Roman colony to which Roman citizenship was granted. The Octavian emperor conferred on the city of Philippi a very honorable right to the provincial city of Rome, *ius italicum* (Law of Italy), which means Philippi received the 'legal character' of Rome). Put simply, there was no cap or land tax in Philippi, and people were free to buy, transfer, and sell property. Therefore, it was a city ruled by Roman ideology, Roman culture and law. Since the Roman occupation of Persia in 168 B.C., Philippi has become an important strategic point of the “Via Egnatia” (Egnatian Way⁸), a road connecting Rome and the East. It was even more important because there was a gold mine nearby, as well as the sea and fertile soil.⁹ Philippi's urban population is estimated at about 10,000.¹⁰

³ How to Preach in Philippians and Philemon, p.16

⁴ About 58-60 years for Caesarea and 54-56 years for Ephesus (Mark Allan Powell, Introduction to the New Testament for Modern People, p.384)

⁵ Philippians and Philemon How to Preach, p.19

⁶ Alec Motyer, Message of Philippians: Jesus Our Joy on Philippians, p.17

⁷ 'Protesters' (1:13), 'live (act as a citizen)' (1:27), 'cooperate (the soldier's position during the war, not moving even one step)' (1:27a), expressions related to rulership (2:10-11), 'citizenship' (3:20), 'Philippians' (4:15), 'people of Caesar's house' (4:22), etc. (Philippians and Philemon How to Preach, p.57)

⁸ This road is a Roman avenue that extends from the Bosphorus Strait (the strait near Istanbul connecting Asia and Europe) through today's Bulgaria, Greece and Albania to the Adriatic Sea. (Mark Allan Powell, Introducing the New Testament, p.381)

⁹ Song Young-mok, New Testament Commentary, p.906-907

¹⁰ Do-Hyun Kim, How to Read Philippians, p.18



[Philippi Church]

The Philippian Church was the first church in Europe to be established during Paul's second evangelistic journey. Acts 16 shows Paul's ministry in Philippi. During his second evangelistic journey, Paul saw a vision of the Macedonians at Troas and went to Philippi with Silas, Timothy, and Luke. They prayed by the river. Their first convert was Lydia, they exorcised demons from within a fortune-teller, and Paul and Silas were also put in prison. It seems there was no synagogue there¹¹, and Lydia's house became the home of the Philippian church (Acts 16:40). There must have been a large number of Gentile believers in the Philippian church.¹² Paul took his first steps into the city on the road of 'Via Egnatia', which was very important as a military road connecting the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire. In this sense, Paul's establishment of the church in Philippi can be seen as a backbone in Paul's mission strategy and plan. So, Philippians 4:15 evaluates the proclamation of the gospel in Philippi as the beginning of the gospel in Europe.¹³

[Relationship between Paul and the Members of the Philippian Church]

¹¹ The place Paul visited was not a synagogue, but a river. This is an indication that there were no synagogues in Philippi, and that there were very few Jews. For a synagogue to be established, there must be ten Jewish men. The absence of a synagogue means that even the minimum quorum required to establish a synagogue was not present in Philippi. (How to Preach in Philippians and Philemon, p.40.)

¹² Song Young-mok, New Testament Commentary, p.907 Also, "The absence of quotations from the Old Testament in this letter and the absence of Jewish names shows that the Philippian church was primarily a Gentile church" (Reformationist Study Bible, p.2133- 2134)

¹³ Various opinions were presented on the phrase "the beginning of the Gospel" in Philippians and Philemon How to Preach, p.40 / 4:15. Collange argues that Paul viewed Europe as a mission field entrusted to him, and viewed his missionary work in Philippi as a practical starting point for the proclamation of the gospel, and Gerald Hawthorne also defends his view. (Gerald Hawthorne, Philippians, p.379)

Paul calls the Philippians 'my beloved and longing brethren, my joy and my beloved ones' (Philippians 4:1), and he longs for the Philippians 'with the heart of Jesus Christ' and says that God is a witness (1:8). Paul puts in his best efforts to express his affection for them. Another example of the relationship between Paul and the Philippian church is that Paul received financial support from the Philippian church. Paul's missionary principle was "self-supporting mission," but he made an exception and received financial support only from the Philippian church. The Philippian church not only supported Paul and others financially, but also participated in preaching the gospel (4:3). While Paul left Philippi and worked in Thessalonica and Corinth, the Philippians continued to care for Paul and provided assistance, such as sending out many writings (Philippians 4:16, 2 Corinthians 11:9). Even after Paul left Philippi, he continued to show interest in the Philippian church. Paul sent Timothy to take care of the Macedonian churches (Phil 2:19, Acts 19:21-23), and he himself visited it more than once. During the third evangelistic trip, after completing his ministry in Ephesus, he visited Philippi again before going to Corinth to spend the winter (Acts 20:1-3, 2 Corinthians 2:13), and visited Philippi the following spring to spend the Passover feast there. (Acts 20:3-6). It can be seen that the relationship between Paul and the church in Philippi was a special relationship that constantly shared interest and love for each other (Acts 18:5, 19:22, 2 Corinthians 11:9, Philippians 2:25).¹⁴ So, some scholars say that Philippians fits well with the general form of a friendship letter.¹⁵

For this reason, Philippians is the most positive and most optimistic epistle. It is filled with the warmth of the precious relationship shared between the apostle Paul and the Saints in Philippi.¹⁶ Most scholars believe that the primary concern of this letter is not to point out the problem, but to strengthen and praise Paul's relationship with the Philippians in Christ.¹⁷ "The book of Philippians is 'a window into Paul's personal and pastoral character,'" said R.P. Martin, "a case study of the early Christian congregation in which Paul was affectionate and sustained." If the book of Romans has long captured people's hearts to know the wonderful gospel of salvation in Christ, then the book of Philippians has inspired courage in many who are facing suffering and persecution for the sake of the gospel, and thus has an immeasurable impact in people's lives.¹⁸

[Purpose of Writing the Letter]¹⁹

- 1) Paul wanted to express gratitude for the gifts the Philippian Saints sent him (4:10, 14-18). So, Philippians is a letter of appreciation with a characteristic of a receipt.²⁰
- 2) Paul wanted to convey his situation, and in particular, he wanted to convince the Philippians that even though he was imprisoned, there would be no obstacles to evangelism (1:12-26). He also wanted to tell them that he had plans to send Timothy to

¹⁴ Philippians and Philemon How to Preach, p.43~44

¹⁵ Mark Allan Powell, An Introducing the New Testament, p.385

¹⁶ Alec Motyer, Message of Philippians: Jesus Our Joy on Philippians, p.21

¹⁷ Mark Allan Powell, An Introducing the New Testament, p.379, 385

¹⁸ IVP Bible Commentary, p.1714

¹⁹ IVP Bible Commentary, p.1712

²⁰ Philippians and Philemon How to Preach, p.47

give more news, even though he himself had a desire to go as well (2:19-24).

3) Since the Philippians made sure that Epaphroditus stayed with Paul to do his best to help, Paul needed to give an explanation regarding sending Epaphroditus back to them (2:25-30).²¹

4) When the apostle heard of the fact that there was a partisan in the church in Philippi and there were signs of division, the apostle wanted to urge them to live, act, and testify in the unity of the Holy Spirit (1:27, 2:1-11, 4:2-3).

5) Knowing that the Philippians were in danger of falling into the Jewish legalistic tendencies, Paul wanted to make it clear to them that this was fundamentally completely different from the Gospel (3:1-11).

6) He tried to encourage the Philippians to face suffering boldly, to live with a constant heart, and to entrust their lives to the Lord in all matters and in all circumstances (1:27-30, 2:12-18, 3:17-21, 4:4-9).

[The Structure of the Letter]

I. Greetings 1:1-2

II. Prayer of thanksgiving 1:3-11

III. Paul's interest 1:12-30

A. Advancing the Gospel [1:12-18]

B. Honoring Christ [1:19-26]

C. Living life worthy of the Gospel [1:27-30]

IV. Paul's counsel 2:1-30

A. Build a community worthy of the Gospel [2:1-18]

a. Have One Heart and One Will (1-4)

b. Embrace the heart of Christ (5-11)

c. Achieve salvation (12-18)

B. Honor those of the Gospel like Timothy and Epaphroditus [2:19-30]

V. Paul's Aspiration 3:1-21

A. Vigilance of forces that hinder the knowledge of Christ [3:1-3]

B. Paul's confession concerning Christ [3:4-21]

a. When You Didn't Know Christ (4-6)

b. When you came to know Christ (7-9)

c. After knowing Christ (10-15)

d. Hope through Knowing Christ-Heavenly Citizenship (16-21)

VI. Paul's counsel and thanks 4:1-9

A. Recommendation [4:1-9]

²¹ It can be assumed that the Philippian church had some misunderstanding of Epaphroditus. This is the background behind which Epaphroditus went to Paul. When Paul was imprisoned, the Philippian church gathered the offerings and sent them through Epaphroditus, asking him to take care of Paul who was imprisoned. However, considering the content of Paul's advocacy for Epaphroditus now, it may be that Epaphroditus did not do that enough, or because there was not much news from him, a misunderstanding of Epaphroditus may have arisen. Or maybe the church had criticized him. So, Paul deliberately referred to that part quite verbally, saying, "Not only did Epaphroditus exceptionally fulfill the demands of the Philippian church (2:30), but he himself also fell ill and was on the verge of death (2:27). Now that he is healed and the Philippian church is worried about his illness, Paul explains that he will send Epaphroditus back to them (2:28)." (Philippians and Philemon How to Preach, p.45)

- a. Encourages unity (4:1-3)
- b. Encourages joy, tolerance, and prayer (4:4-7)
- c. The last counsel (4:8-9)
- B. Thanks 4:10-20
 - a. Needs and Satisfaction in Christ (10-14)
 - b. Philippian Saints Who Provided Financial Help (15-20)
- VII. Paul's final greetings 4:21-24

[Topic]

1) Joy

Joy resounds throughout Philippians. Paul uses the word joy in prayer (1:4), in the fruit of his ministry (4:1), in the face of suffering and even death (2:17). He also rejoices in Christ and rejoices to know that others are preaching Christ (1:18). Not only he, but he rejoices when there is unity and fellowship through Christ (2:2), and rejoices over the gifts of the congregation (4:10). He also urges the saints to rejoice in the Lord (1:25, 3:1, 4:4) and to welcome a brother in Christ with joy (2:28-29). “The book of Philippians is an ongoing attempt to persuade Philippian believers to rejoice in what is important (gospel advancement).”²² This joy is more than just emotion. Paul's joy is the joy of knowing Christ (1:20-22, 2:5-11, 3:3, 7-14, 4:11-13), and the joy that comes from the preaching of Christ (1:4-5, 12, 14-18, 27-28; Chapter 2:5-11; Chapter 3:15-17; Chapter 4:3-9, 17).

After all, this joy comes from a relationship with Christ. The joy in Christ should not be thought of as the “golden crown” of Christianity, but should be understood as the “essential result” of unity with Christ in the Gospel. Joy is inevitably overflowing in the process of gradually recognizing the “transcendental value” of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord through faith in the gospel of Christ.²³

2) The yearning to know Christ

Nowhere is this aspiration of Paul as prominent as in this epistle. In this letter, we can see Paul's one-sided desire of wanting to know only Christ. Paul wants Christ to be honored in his body, whether he lives or dies (1:20). Paul is fully committed to Jesus Christ, hoping to know only Christ Jesus. He wants to know the power of Jesus' cross and resurrection (3:7-14). Paul says he is satisfied as long as Christ is glorified through the empowerment he gives him to endure any circumstances, in any need and in any hardship (4:11,13).²⁴

Although the situation of Paul and the Philippians occupies the core of the book, ultimately everything is focused on Christ.²⁵ After the word joy, the word Christ appears the most. It is not too much to say that it is a letter that is all filled with Christ. In the midst of many hardships, Paul teaches by way of example how the soul of a person who believes in Christ and thinks in a Christ-centered way can enjoy calm peace and joy in

²² Frank Thielman, *New Testament Theology*, p.507

²³ Köstenberger et al., *Introduction to New Testament*, p.688

²⁴ IVP Bible Commentary, p.1713

the midst of crises through the book of Philippians.²⁶ Christ, which Paul specifically mentioned in Philippians, is the source that brings forth the fruit of righteousness (1:11), the core content of evangelism (1:18), the purpose of life (1:20,29), the organizer of life (1:21), demeanor and exaltation (2:6-11), complete knowledge (3:8), saints' ultimate desire (3:20), source of joy (4:4), saints' power (4:13), and the one who fills all needs (4:19).²⁷

3) The desire to know Christ (the desire for the advancement of the Gospel)

Paul valued the advancement of the gospel amidst his own circumstances (1:12) and the difficulties of the Philippians (1:25). Even if there were envy, strife, good will, quarrels, and pretense, he rejoiced in preaching Christ (1:14-18). Paul tells the Philippians that they should not be concerned about Paul's imprisonment, Epaphroditus' sickness, and their own persecution, because God promoted the gospel in spite of or through these three difficulties. Paul also says that by uniting them with one another, their witnesses of the Gospel should be made effective (2:14-16).²⁸ Paul's concern about the advancement of the gospel among the members of the Philippian church dominates the atmosphere throughout the letter.²⁹

An interesting word to think about in connection with evangelism is "citizenship" (3:20). The book of Philippians is the only epistle that Paul used the word group of 'citizen' ["live (be a citizen)" in 1:27, citizenship in 3:20].³⁰ The word 'citizenship' translated in Greek is 'politeuomai,' which was often used to refer to a colony of foreigners or veterans.³¹ At the time, the Philippians had a pride of having Roman citizenship. Citizenship motivated them to show the spirit, ethics, values, view of happiness, and view of life of Roman citizens, living a distinct life like a Roman citizen among the surrounding barbarians. The apostle Paul says that our citizenship is in heaven. Then, with pride and excitement for having citizenship of the kingdom of heaven, we live a distinct life as a citizen of the kingdom of God, which is eternal and does not fade. You will have to show them in your life.³² Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon said, "The church is a colony and an island in the middle of other cultures."³³ Gerald Hawthorne also said, "Each local church is a colony of heaven, and while the members enjoy full citizenship of the heavenly city (cf. Gal. 4:26, Ephesians 2:19), they have the responsibility to make the world acknowledge the sovereignty of Christ."³⁴

For example, in A.D. 596, Augustine of Canterbury³⁵ came to England from Rome, and introduced Christianity, the Roman religion in that period, Latin as the Roman

language, Roman architecture and engineering techniques. He came far from his hometown and transplanted it as it was in his hometown. Rome was replanted on British soil.³⁶ In a similar way, believers are the people who transplant the heavens to this earth.

4) Suffering

Suffering is one of the important theological themes in Philippians, but it is often overlooked. What is revealed in the book of Philippians in connection with joy is the message of suffering. You can see the paradoxical relationship between joy and suffering. Paul, who was in a Roman prison, may have experienced physical and mental suffering. However, the circumstances of Paul's suffering brought progress in preaching the gospel (1:12-13). Paul faced death during imprisonment (1:20-22), and Epaphroditus almost died for the sake of the gospel (2:27). The Philippians must also face suffering (1:27) as they struggle for the faith of the Gospel (1:28). They needed to think of suffering as a gracious gift from God as well as faith (1:29).³⁷ Paul referred to Christ's suffering on the cross (2:8), and believed that the purpose of his suffering was to be part of Christ's suffering and to imitate His death (3:11). Moreover, Paul was able to endure suffering such as hunger and poverty (4:12) with the strength given by Christ (4:13). The joy of suffering in particular highlights the story of Paul and Silas, who rejoiced in Philippi prison after being beaten (Acts 16:16-25).³⁸

5) Maturity, fellowship, and oneness

For maturity, Paul presents Jesus as a model (2:6-11). Additionally, Paul himself (3:17), Timothy (2:22) and Epaphroditus (2:25) who embraced the heart of Jesus are mentioned as examples of maturity. He also recommends maturity to Euodia and Syntyche (4:2). Furthermore, he urges all the Saints in Philippi to be mature (4:8). Paul also urges the Philippians to “stand with one heart and cooperate for the faith of the gospel with one will” (1:27). If they “join together, have the same love, unit their wills, and have one heart” (2:2), the joy of the apostle will be complete. He wanted to make sure that the church in Philippi would not break the fellowship between the saints due to selfishness, pride, or partisanship (2:1-4). Paul wants the Philippian church to become a community in which the heart of Christ (2:6-11) is embodied. When believers become Christlike and mature, they will have a beautiful fellowship and will be able to form a united community.

6) Justified by faith alone

Philippians 3:9 is one of the texts where the emphasis on justification is the most prominent in the entire New Testament. Philippians 3:3-6 summarizes Paul's efforts to seek salvation prior to the Damascus road experience. Paul's history as a flawless Jew (3:3-5) led to his trust in the flesh (3:4). However, Paul's conversion caused a radical reevaluation. The previous history (3:7) and everything else (3:8) was nothing but vain compared to knowing and gaining Christ. After Paul experienced the risen Christ, he found two conflicting forms of righteousness. It is righteousness from the law and righteousness from God (3:9). Paul sharply contrasts the righteousness obtained by

keeping the law with the righteousness that God gives through faith in Christ. The only hope for an unrighteous man to be accepted according to God's judgment is the gift of righteousness that comes from God and receiving of this gift through faith.³⁹ This justification is the solid foundation for Paul's joy.

[Application] (Check your goal, mission, and attitude toward suffering)

1) Our goal: To know Christ.

Joy echoes all throughout the letter of Philippians, and the root of that joy is Christ. As you study Philippians, you need to ask yourself the following questions: "What do I aspire to?", "Am I delighted in getting to know Christ, and seeing people come to know Christ?", "Are all activities evaluated in the light of the purpose of knowing Christ and making Christ known?"

2) Our mission: To know Christ.

The preaching of Christ and the establishment of churches is how the knowledge and joy of knowing Christ is spread throughout all people. Our citizenship is in heaven thus, we are the people who transplant heaven on earth. That can best be done when we rejoice in Christ. John Piper described missions as "the cry of a Christian joyists."⁴⁰

In order to transplant Heaven in this world, we must form a Christ-centered mindset. So, in Philippians, there are many words related to 'mindfulness' or 'Christian way of thinking'. The word 'phroneo' (to pay attention and immerse yourself with thought, interest and affection) appears ten times.⁴¹ Paul told Philippian believers to work with one heart for the Gospel (1:27), have one heart (2:2), have the heart of Christ (2:5), and be wary of those with worldly mindsets (3:19), I advise you to keep your mind on moral things (4:8).⁴² In this way, Paul emphasizes the Philippians to form a Christ-centered way of thinking ("Proneo") while living in this world.

3) The ability to overcome suffering: Joy through Christ

Nehemiah says. "It is your strength to rejoice in Jehovah" (Nehemiah 8:10). This can be translated into the words of the apostle Paul. "It is your strength to rejoice in knowing Christ." This joy, which can be experienced in Christ, makes it possible to overcome any difficult situation. The apostle Paul gives us a new perspective on suffering. Paul sees Christian suffering as a gift from God for the advancement of the gospel (1:14-18, 29-30, 2:16-17). In Philippians, Paul sees his sufferings from a unique perspective "in Christ," and presents a new understanding of suffering. Paul wanted the Philippians to share this view. When looking at suffering from the point of view "in Christ," a Christian does not take away the joy given to him by suffering, but rather increases joy in suffering. That is why Paul says suffering in Christ is a "privilege" (1:29).⁴³

[Prayer]

1) Arouse the desire to know Christ and the desire to know Christ. 2) Help us overcome the hardships caused by the Corona 19 pandemic with the joy of knowing Christ and make progress in the Gospel. 3) Help us reach maturity by knowing Christ.

One word: Let us know Christ.

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