



Welcome to St. Paul AME Church Winter Garden, Florida

Where we are changing lives and perspectives through the
love and knowledge of Jesus Christ!

Sunday, August 17, 2025

Notes: The Prison Epistles – Getting to Know Christ



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The Prison Epistles – Getting to Know Christ

The Prison Epistles

- Philippians – Joy in Christ
- Colossians – Fullness in Christ
- Ephesians – Unity in Christ
- Philemon – Reconciliation in Christ

The Prison Epistles – Getting to Know Christ				
New Testament Books	Philippians	Colossians	Ephesians	Philemon
Demonstration of Christ	Christ as the model of humility and obedience (2:5–11).	Christ as the preeminent Lord , Creator, and Sustainer of all (1:15–20).	Christ as the head of the Church, uniting all believers (1:22–23; 2:14–16).	Christ as the basis of reconciliation , transforming relationships.
Application to Our Christian Walk	Encourages believers to find joy in Christ regardless of circumstances, to live humbly, and to pursue unity.	Grounds believers in the truth of Christ's supremacy , warning against false influences, and calling them to live out their new identity – to be COMPLETE in Christ .	Shows believers their new identity in Christ , calling them to unity, maturity, and spiritual strength.	Models how the gospel transforms relationships —calling believers to forgiveness, equality, and brotherhood in Christ.

Background

Author – The apostle Paul, probably written from prison in Rome, about AD 60-62

Recipients – The Church of Philippi

The Church at Philippi – How the Church was Started

- Started by Paul and was the first church started in Europe
- Paul receives a vision to go into Asia Minor
- Since there were no synagogues, Paul and Silas went to pray by the river and met Lydia, a businesswoman who was their first convert in the city.
- She welcomes them into her home.
- They Minister throughout the city.
- A girl possessed by the devil began following them and declaring they were men of God.
- Paul casts out the Spirit, the owners are angry because the woman isn't telling fortunes anymore, and they lose their revenue.
- Paul and Silas are cast in jail and begin to praise.
- An earthquake strikes, and the jail shakes the doors open, and the chains fall off
- Paul and Silas end up preaching the gospel to the jailer and the jailer's family who become saved, sanctified, and filled with the Holy Spirit.
- This is the beginning of the Church of Philippi (Acts 16)

Characteristics of the Church of Philippi

- **Supportive:** They support the gospel of Jesus Christ by supporting Paul's ministry
- **Givers:** They were a giving church and true partners in ministry. (4:16 and 1:5)
- **Minor/Typical Conflicts & Disunity:** There were some conflicts and disunity in the church, and Paul calls them to come together. (2:2-4; 4:2-3)
- **Right Pathway:** The church was on the good/right pathway, but Paul recognized the need to warn them against legalistic salvation and salvation by works.

Background

Disunity in the Church

Scripture Passage - Philippians 2:2-4

2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. **3** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

1. Unity in Christ (v. 2)

- Paul urges believers to be **like-minded**, not meaning identical opinions on everything, but having a shared Christ-centered perspective.
- “Same love”: love that reflects Christ’s love for us.
- “One in spirit and of one mind” → spiritual harmony and a common purpose in the gospel.
- Unity is Paul’s **joy completed** — the fruit of a healthy church.

2. Rejecting Selfishness (v. 3)

- Paul warns against “*selfish ambition*” (rivalry, competition) and “*vain conceit*” (pride, empty glory).
- Instead of self-promotion, Christians are called to **humility**.
- True humility is not self-hatred but rightly valuing others above self — lifting them up.

3. Living for Others (v. 4)

- Paul calls for a shift in focus: not just “*me and mine*” but looking to the needs of others.
- This echoes Jesus’ teaching about servanthood (Mark 10:43–45).
- It doesn’t mean neglecting your own well-being, but refusing to make self the center.

Philippians 2:2–4 calls the church to **complete unity, radical humility, and selfless love**. These verses prepare us for Paul’s example of Christ in 2:5–11 — the ultimate model of humility leading to exaltation.

Key Takeaways:

- **Unity flows from humility.** Selfishness divides; humility unites.
- **The mindset of Christ** (expanded in vv. 5–11) begins with considering others first.
- The church’s witness depends on believers living not for their own glory, but for Christ’s and each other’s good.

Background

Disunity in the Church

Scripture Passage - Philippians 4:2-3

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. **3** Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

1. Two Women Leaders in the Church

Euodia and Syntyche were not fringe members — Paul says they “*contended at my side in the gospel.*” This suggests they were active leaders, co-laborers with Paul (possibly deaconesses, missionaries, or women of influence in Philippi).

2. The Dispute

The disagreement isn’t specified, but it was serious enough that Paul addresses it publicly. It was likely personal or relational rather than doctrinal — otherwise Paul would have corrected false teaching directly. Their conflict threatened church unity, which is a central theme of Philippians.

3. Paul’s Plea for Unity

Notice the double phrase: “*I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche.*” Paul treats them equally, showing impartiality. He urges them to “*be of the same mind in the Lord,*” echoing Philippians 2:2 — unity grounded in Christ, not personal preference.

4. Community Involvement

Paul calls on a “true companion” (possibly Epaphroditus, Luke, or a respected leader) to help mediate reconciliation. This shows that church conflicts are not just private matters — the community has a role in peacemaking.

5. Gospel Perspective

Despite their conflict, Paul honors Euodia and Syntyche: their names are “*in the book of life.*” They are sisters in Christ, saved, and valued. The call is not to cancel or diminish them but to restore fellowship for the sake of the gospel witness.

Paul’s plea to Euodia and Syntyche reminds us that **conflict in the church is real but must be resolved in Christ**. Leaders and members alike are called to pursue unity so the church’s witness remains strong.

The Prison Epistles – Getting to Know Christ

Major Themes in Philippians

1. Joy in Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joy is the heartbeat of Philippians. Paul mentions “joy” or “rejoice” over a dozen times.• His joy is not tied to circumstances but to knowing Christ (Phil. 4:4).• Even in prison, Paul rejoices in the progress of the gospel (Phil. 1:18).
2. Unity in the Body of Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paul urges believers to be “of the same mind” and to live in harmony (Phil. 2:2).• Division weakens the church’s witness, but unity magnifies Christ’s glory.• He appeals directly for reconciliation (Phil. 4:2–3, Euodia & Syntyche).
3. Humility and the Example of Christ	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christ’s humility (Phil. 2:5–11) is the model for believers.• True greatness is seen in servanthood, not status.• Believers are called to put others above themselves (Phil. 2:3–4).
4. The Gospel Above All	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paul views everything in light of advancing the gospel (Phil. 1:12–18).• Even suffering and imprisonment are opportunities for Christ to be preached.• Believers are called to live “worthy of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27).
5. Christ as the Goal of Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For Paul, “to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).• Knowing Christ is the highest pursuit, above status or achievements (Phil. 3:7–10).• Believers press on toward the upward call of God in Christ (Phil. 3:12–14).
6. Contentment in All Circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paul learned to be content whether in need or abundance (Phil. 4:11–12).• True strength comes from Christ: “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).• This shows that joy and peace are rooted in Christ, not external conditions.
7. Partnership in the Gospel	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Philippians supported Paul financially and spiritually (Phil. 1:5; 4:14–16).• Paul thanks them and assures them of God’s provision: “My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19).• Gospel ministry is a shared work between Paul and the church.

The Old Testament is the New Testament concealed...The New Testament is the Old Testament revealed.

The Prison Epistles – Getting to Know Christ

The Prison Epistles				
Category	Philippians	Colossians	Ephesians	Philemon
Audience	Church at Philippi (Macedonia, Roman colony). Loyal supporters of Paul's ministry.	Church at Colossae (Asia Minor, small city). Threatened by false teachings (legalism, mysticism, philosophy).	Churches in Ephesus and surrounding region (Asia Minor). Circular letter to strengthen the whole region.	Written to Philemon , a believer in Colossae, about his runaway slave Onesimus.
Tone	Warm, affectionate, joyful, personal.	Formal, instructional, corrective, doctrinal.	Majestic, theological, prayerful, unifying.	Personal, pastoral, persuasive, brotherly.
Occasion	Thank-you letter from prison; encouragement to persevere and live with unity.	Response to heretical teachings undermining Christ's supremacy.	Strengthen believers in their identity in Christ and unity in the body.	Plea for forgiveness and reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus.
Date Written	AD 60–62 (from prison, likely Rome or possibly Ephesus).	AD 60–62 (same imprisonment period).	AD 60–62 (same imprisonment period).	AD 60–62 (same imprisonment period, sent with Colossians).
Main Themes	- Joy in Christ despite suffering (1:18–21; 4:4) - Unity and humility (2:1–11) - Pressing toward the goal (3:12–21) - Partnership in the gospel (1:5; 4:14–19)	- Supremacy of Christ (1:15–20) - Completeness in Christ (2:9–10) - Warnings against false teaching (2:8–23) - New life in Christ (3:1–17) - Household order (3:18–4:1)	- Spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3–14) - Unity of Jews & Gentiles in Christ (2:11–22) - Mystery of the gospel revealed (3:1–12) - New life and spiritual armor (4:17–6:20)	- Christian forgiveness and reconciliation (vv. 10–20) - The power of love over social barriers - Christian brotherhood transcending slavery
Demonstration of Christ	Christ as the model of humility and obedience (2:5–11).	Christ as the preeminent Lord , Creator, and Sustainer of all (1:15–20).	Christ as the head of the Church , uniting all believers (1:22–23; 2:14–16).	Christ as the basis of reconciliation , transforming relationships.
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Key Words	Joy, rejoice, mindset, humility, contentment.	Fullness, mystery, supremacy, complete.	Unity, mystery, grace, power, inheritance.	Love, forgiveness, reconciliation, brotherhood.
Key Verse(s)	Philippians 1:21 – “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” Philippians 2:5–11 – “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”	Colossians 2:9–10 – “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.” Colossians 1:15–20 – “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”	Ephesians 2:8–10 – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Ephesians 4:4–6 – “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”	Philemon 1:15–16 – “Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.”
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