

# THE BACKGROUND AND SUBJECT OF PHILIPPIANS<sup>1</sup>

**Scripture Reading: Phil. 1:1-18, 27-30; 2:1-5, 12-16; 3:2-11; 4:2-3, 14-19**

## **INTRODUCTION (1:20-21)**

1. The book of Philippians is not particularly concerned with doctrine; it is concerned with the experience of Christ.
2. In this book, we are charged to magnify Christ and to live Him. To magnify Christ is to express Christ by causing Him to be enlarged. We should magnify Christ by living Him in a practical way day by day.
3. Our daily living should be a living that lives Christ. We are not charged to live according to ethics or virtues, but according to Christ. Christ must be everything in our daily living. He must be even such virtues as humility and kindness.
4. Before Paul was saved, his life was centered around the law, and he lived the law. But after he was converted to Christ and was regenerated, he began to live Christ. Christ became not only Paul's life, but also his living. Eventually, according to his experience, Paul could declare that to him to live was Christ.

## **THE BACKGROUND**

### The Judaizers Exercising Their Influence over the Believers in Christ (3:1-4)

1. The Judaizers, who practiced, promoted and even fought for their Jewish religion, exercised great influence over the believers in Christ (3:2-4). Wherever Jews were found, over the Mediterranean region, there would always be some Judaizers. No other group of people could match the zeal with which the Judaizers promoted their religion. Even in Philippi, a city in Macedonia, they were exercising their influence over the believers.
2. Certain believers in Philippi needed encouragement in the Lord because they were being troubled or distracted by some people Paul called, the dogs, the evil workers, and the concision. (3:2) According to the construction of 3:2, the dogs, the evil workers, and the concision all refer to the same people, i.e., the Judaizers.
3. As they zealously promoted circumcision, they were like barking and biting dogs. Wherever the gospel was preached and churches were established, the Judaizers came as barking, biting, religious "dogs" to trouble the saints. The influence of these "dogs" was an important part of the background of the book of Philippians.

### The Judaistic Believers Preaching Christ because of Envy and Strife in Rivalry with the Apostle Paul (1:15-18)

1. The Judaizers (who were not believers) sufficiently influenced some genuine believers into becoming Judaistic believers, believers in Christ who held to the Jewish religion and who were bringing certain aspects of Judaism into the church life.
2. Their holding on to the things of Judaism caused them to preach Christ in rivalry with Paul, who renounced Judaism with its law, rituals, traditions, and practice of circumcision. Thus, there were two different ways of preaching Christ.
  - a. Paul preached Christ with God's economy, others preached Christ with Judaism. The Judaistic believers, on the contrary, were perverting the gospel and distorting it.
  - b. The gospel is not for Judaism, and it should not be preached for the purpose of bringing unbelievers under the law and to the practice of circumcision. To preach the gospel in this way is a perversion and distortion of the gospel.
3. In Paul's time, the Judaistic believers preached Christ out of a concern for Judaism, not out of a concern for the church. In a sense, they even preached Christ for Judaism. Paul, however, preached Christ for the church, the Body of Christ. Paul was persecuted not mainly for simply preaching the gospel, but in particular for defending the gospel and confirming it.

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<sup>1</sup> This outline is excerpted from the Life Study of Philippians, by Witness Lee. Copy or editorial errors are the sole responsibility of the adapter.

## The Philippian Believers Participating with the Apostle Paul in the Furtherance of the Gospel (1:5-7; 4:14-19)

1. Paul preached a gospel that included more than the fact that Christ is our Savior and that by believing in Him we shall have forgiveness of sins, salvation from hell to heaven, and regeneration.
2. The gospel is the proclamation of the move of God on earth according to His economy. This means that the gospel is the preaching of God's economy. Thus, the gospel includes every aspect of the experience of Christ covered in the book of Philippians. The gospel includes the economy of God in its entirety. We need to consider the whole book of Philippians with all the major points. If we put these points together, we shall have the totality of the gospel, and we shall see that the gospel involves God's move according to His economy
3. For the Philippian believers to participate with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel meant that they were partaking in the move of God's economy on earth. Consequently, another aspect of the background of this book concerns a matter that is very positive, the participation of the Philippian believers with the apostle Paul in the furtherance of this gospel. How blessed were the Philippian believers to participate in the furtherance of such a gospel! The gospel in which they had a share was not a low, narrow, superficial gospel. The Philippian believers had the privilege of sharing in the spread and furtherance of the gospel that is according to God's economy.

## Dissension Existing among the Philippian Believers (1:27; 2:1-4; 4:2-3)

1. Even though the Philippian believers participated with Paul in the furtherance of the gospel, there was still at least some amount of dissension among them. As we shall see, the reason for this dissension lay in the fact that they were not one in soul.
2. They had been regenerated in the spirit, but they had not yet been transformed in soul. They had no problem in the spirit, but there were at least some problems in the soul, particularly in the mind. Some among them had different concepts, and these different concepts were causing dissension.

## **THE SUBJECT—THE EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST**

### The Positive Side of the Experience of Christ

Concerning the experience of Christ, each chapter of Philippians covers a major point.

- Chapter 1 - Christ magnified
- Chapter 2 - Christ our pattern.
- Chapter 3 - Christ our goal
- Chapter 4 - Christ our strength.

### The Impact of Experiencing Christ on Negative Things

1. Experiencing Christ enables us to overcome the influence of the Judaizers. We need to experience Christ in such a way that we live Him, and take Him as our pattern, goal and power. Such an experience of Christ will enable us to overcome all opposition. The more we are opposed, the more we should live Christ. As we experience Christ, we shall overcome the negative influence of today's religionists.
2. Through the experience of Christ, Christ Himself will become our discernment concerning the different ways of preaching Christ, in particular concerning the preaching of Christ in rivalry (1:9-11). The more we experience Christ, the more discernment we shall have.
3. We also need to experience Christ so that we may participate in the furtherance of the gospel (1:27-30). Through the experience of Christ, we are able to share in God's move in His economy.
4. Finally, the experience of Christ is for the abolishing of dissension (2:5,12-16). Dissension can be abolished only through the experience of Christ. The more experience of Christ we have, the less dissension there will be.