

I wrote up the following summary and a shortened paraphrase of Philippians in order to be able to do four things:

- See the connections between the various parts of Paul's letter to the Philippians
- See how the situation of Paul and the Philippians affects the different parts of the letter
- See how Paul uses his theology in the letter.
- Write out Philippians more or less in my own style of speaking, in order to bring out more clearly the meaning of some of the lengthier passages and those filled with pious metaphors.

I thought my little exercise was helpful for me, so I offer it for your consideration. At the end I share some observations.

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## Summary of Philippians

Dave Gifford, July 2010

1.1-2

Paul and Timothy to the church in Philippi and its leaders: Grace and peace to you.

1.3-11

I thank God for the way you have partnered with me on behalf of the gospel.

1.12-26

Don't get discouraged that I am in prison. Lots of great things are happening here, and I think I will be released. But if I get executed, I will be with Jesus, so that's okay by me.

1.27-30

Whether I get released or not, you all need to stand together in facing opposition, knowing that the opposition is a sign of your election – God has chosen you to suffer, just as I do.

2.1-11

Seek unity, and let go of rivalries. Do so by humbly putting others first. Be like Jesus, who humbled himself in his incarnation and humiliation – for which God exalted him.

2.12-18

Whether I get released or not, work out your salvation, knowing that God himself is at work in you. Shine without defect in this dark world so that I may stand proud when Christ comes. I rejoice even if I do end up getting executed, and so should you.

2.19-24

I will be sending Timothy soon, and depending on what happens to me, I hope to visit you myself.

2.25-30

I am sending Epaphroditus back to you. He almost died to bring your gift to me.

3.1

Rejoice! *[Paul interrupts this thought and picks it back up at 4.4]*

3.2-11

Beware the circumcision group, so preoccupied with the 'flesh'. If anyone ought to be proud of the flesh it's me. But now my preoccupation is to know Christ, to be justified by faith in Christ, and to suffer like Christ so that I will one day be raised like Christ.

3.12-16

I'm not there yet, but I press on toward it like a runner toward a prize.

3.17-4.1

So imitate me. There are many enemies of the cross, but we are citizens of heaven, and when Christ comes he will raise our bodies from the dead, so stand firm!

4.2-3

Help Euodia and Syntyche work out their differences.

4.4-9

Rejoice! Let the world see how calm you are in the face of persecution as you set aside anxiety and present your prayers to God. His peace will guard you.

4.10-20

I have learned how to be content in my situation. I have what I need. But thank you so much for the gift you sent me. My God will provide for your needs.

4.21-23

Greetings all around. Grace to you.

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## **Longer summary-paraphrase of Philippians**

1.1-2

Paul and Timothy, to the church in Philippi and its leaders: Grace and peace to you.

1.3-11

I thank God for you in my prayers, because you have partnered with me in my ministry from the beginning, including my present imprisonment. I pray that your love and your wisdom will always increase, so that you may choose the best path, and thus be defect-free and fruit-bearing when Christ comes, and by doing so bring glory to God.

1.12-26

Be encouraged - my imprisonment has advanced the spread of the Christian message:

- the imperial guard has heard the message
- my imprisonment has given many of the Christians here a new boldness to witness (*granted, some witness with the intention of causing me harm, but who cares? I am just happy that the gospel is being preached*)
- I am also happy because I expect to be released from prison rather than be executed. My desire is to honor Christ whether by my living or my dying. In fact, I'm not sure which to choose – I would love to die and be with Christ, but I am convinced that for your sake I will live and have the opportunity to visit you again.

1.27-30

Whether I am freed to visit you or not, it would be an encouragement to me to hear that you live in a way that is worthy of the gospel of Christ, all of you standing side by side in unison, standing firmly against the attacks of your opponents. The opposition is a sign from God that they will be destroyed and you will be saved – God has called you to suffer, not only to believe. Welcome to the club! You saw the conflicts I endured before, and you know of my current situation, too.

2.1-11

If you guys get anything out of being Christians, show your gratitude to God by doing me a favor: become fully united rather than acting out of rivalry. Count others as more important than yourselves and look after their welfare. Adopt the attitude of Jesus, the image of God, who, unlike Adam, didn't try to become like God, but humbled himself in his incarnation and his death on the cross. For this, God exalted him and placed him over the whole universe, and every creature will acknowledge his authority over them. This will bring glory to God.

2.12-18

Beloved, whether I am with you or not, work out your salvation with trembling, for it is God who works in you, to cause you to work for his pleasure. Do it without complaining, so that you may be defect-free children of God, shining like lights in a dark world. Stand firm, so that when Christ comes I can be proud that my labor among you was not in vain. Even if I do get condemned to die, and get poured out like a drink offering, I rejoice, and so should you.

2.19-24

I hope to send Timothy to you soon, so he can cheer me with news about you. You yourselves know Timothy's selfless concern (a rare commodity of late), and how he has ministered by my side as if he were my son. I hope to be able to visit you myself soon, once I find out what is going to happen to me.

2.25-30

I am sending my fellow trooper Epaphroditus back to you. He was deathly sick for a while, and now he is worried because you heard he was ill. God spared him – and in doing so spared me much sorrow, too. My sending him back to you will bring you joy and will reduce the stress I am

going through, too. Honor him and people like him – he risked his life for the Lord’s sake, in order to bring your gift to me.

3.1

Finally, brothers, it doesn’t hurt to repeat what I told you before: Don’t forget to rejoice!

3.2-11

Oh wait, before I go, a couple more things. Be on guard against the evil circumcision group. It is we who are truly circumcised in God’s eyes because we worship God in ‘spirit’ (in the Spirit) and don’t place our confidence on ‘flesh’ (physical circumcision). If anyone should boast of such things, it’s me: I am a circumcised Jew, a zealous Pharisee - I even persecuted the church for God’s sake before my conversion. But all those supposed ‘gains’ in my favor I now count as ‘losses’ (garbage, even) in comparison to knowing Christ. My desire is not to receive a righteous verdict based on my own observance of the law, but the righteous verdict that comes from God and is based on faith in the Messiah. I want to suffer just as he suffered and died, so that one day I may be raised from the dead just as he was so powerfully raised.

3.12-16

I haven’t arrived yet, but I am pressing forward and upward towards it as towards a prize. May all who are mature have the same attitude, and if any disagree, God will make things clear. Just be true to what you currently know.

3.17-4.1

Brothers, imitate me, and imitate those who live according to the model we taught you. The cross has many enemies, and they will one day be destroyed. But our citizenship is in heaven, and one day Christ will come from there and by his power will transform our bodies to be like his. So stand firm, my beloved brothers!

4.2-3

I beg Euodia and Syntyche to work out their differences in the Lord. And you, friend, help these women do so, because they assisted me in ministry and their names are written in the book of life.

4.4-9

Now back to the conclusion I started in 3.1 – Rejoice, my brothers! May everyone see your gentleness. Don’t be anxious about anything [i.e. persecution]; instead, pray about everything and be thankful. And the incomprehensible peace that God grants you will guard your hearts and minds in Christ. Set your minds on praiseworthy things, and practice what you saw in me and what you learned from me.

4.10-20

Thank you for sending another support gift to me after not being able to do so for some time. From experience I have learned how to be content no matter what happens to me. God gives me the strength I need. But I do thank you for your kindness. You were the only church that helped me way back when I was in Macedonia and then later in Thessalonica. I’m not hinting to send more – I have what I need, thanks to the gift you sent with Epaphroditus – I only want that which

brings you credit. God will provide for you. May he be glorified.

4.21-23

Greetings all around. People here send greetings. May the grace of Christ be with you.

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## Observations

- The letter is hard to comprehend if we read the commands and other statements as if addressed to an individual. He is writing to the church as a church, and calling them to be united and stand together against the opposition they face. Also, the ‘doctrinal’ or ‘devotional’ verses get distorted if we read them out of context of the situation that Paul and the Philippians were in.
- Paul starts to conclude the letter at 3.1 and interrupts himself to share the material in chapter 3. Then in 4.4 he resumes his conclusion.
- Quite a few times in the letter Paul refers to his uncertainty about his being executed or released. He is pretty certain he will be released, but he writes several times about how the Philippians should rejoice and stand firm against *their* opposition, even if Paul doesn’t survive his own encounter with opposition.
- Things bringing glory to God or people glorying in Jesus come up several times (1.11, 1.26, 2.11, 3.3, 4.20)
- 3.2-11 has a flesh and spirit play on words. The circumcision group is focused on the ‘flesh’ in two ways – the physical cutting of flesh in circumcision for Gentiles, and determining the physical lineage for Jews. Paul says that the largely Gentile Philippian Christians are the true circumcision, not the Judaizers, ironically enough because as Christians they focus not on flesh but on spirit – they worship God in the Spirit. Paul says the ‘fleshly’ advantages he had he now counts as garbage compared to knowing the Messiah.
- Paul uses financial language of a balance sheet in 3.2-11 – gains and losses – when talking about himself, and then uses the same image in 4.10-20 when talking about the Philippians.
- 4.9 mentions peace because it is an adaptation of the peace benediction he uses to begin his letter conclusions. He always starts his letters wishing grace and peace, and he finishes his letters with a peace benediction and a grace benediction. Grace, peace, peace, grace. He even starts to mention peace already in 4.7.

- The resurrection comes up twice as the motivating factor in accepting suffering. Paul says in 3.10-11 that the resurrection is what propels him to suffer like Jesus, and he calls on the Philippians to have the same attitude in 3.21.
- Paul tells the Philippians in ch. 2 to imitate Jesus in that Jesus humbled himself, didn't lean on his own advantages, and was exalted by God because of his humility. In ch. 3 Paul tells the Philippians to imitate him, because he humbles himself, doesn't lean on his own advantages, and hopes to be exalted by God because he suffers like Jesus.
- Paul calls them 'brothers' and 'beloved' quite frequently. He clearly loves them quite a bit.
- The emphasis on rejoicing and being encouraged is understandable because of the situation. The Philippians are facing persecution themselves, and they are discouraged because their apostle is in prison facing execution, and they heard that Epaphroditus, the man whom they sent to Paul with financial relief, has fallen deathly ill. Paul doesn't want them to fall prey to discouragement or fear.
- God's election and providence come up in 1.27-30 and in 2.13.
- The second coming turns up several times. 1.6, 1.10, 2.11, 2.16, 3.20. The book of life in 4.3.
- The cross of Christ comes up at 2.8 and 3.18. His suffering is also mentioned at 3.10.
- Blamelessness and purity come up in 1.10, 2.15, 3.6, and 4.8. Both are sacrificial ideas referring to the same idea. Animal sacrifices had to be pure, with no blemishes or defects. Blamelessness also has to do with being above any potential criticism from the outsiders that are attacking the Philippians.
- Paul basically says, "I'm sending Epaphroditus back to you because I have more than enough things stressing me out right now. First he was sick, and now he is better, but he is stressed out because you heard he was sick. But I don't want to neglect the fact that he risked his life for me and for the Lord. He was a real trooper, and you should honor people like him."
- In 2.5-11 Jesus is a new Adam. Like Adam he is in the form (image) of God. But unlike Adam, he doesn't fall for the temptation to 'be like God'.
- The logic of Philippians
  - The individual Philippians need to imitate the attitude of Jesus and Paul
  - If so, they will set aside their rivalries and egos and start treating others as more important than themselves
  - This humility will be a catalyst for a much-needed unity among them
  - By being united they can together face opposition with steadfastness

- Results
  - If they suffer like Christ, God will raise and exalt them like he raised and exalted Christ. They will be vindicated and will bring glory to God, but their enemies will be destroyed.
  - If they remain pure and blameless, they will make Paul proud that his efforts among them weren't in vain