

Philippians

Chapters 3 & 4
HPC Trinity Class
November 16, 2025



The Egnatian Way, 450 miles long, was a major highway. Built by Rome, it connected Macedonia's east and west coasts. Paul traveled this road with the message of Jesus Christ.

Review: The City of Philippi

- This was likely Paul's favorite city during his missionary travels. The tone of his letter to these new Christian converts in Philippi reflects his love and admiration.¹ This was probably the first Christian church established in all of Europe.²

- The town was not large,³ but it was a major stop on the famous Egnatian Way (see map above).



- Apparently there were no Jewish synagogues in the city.⁴

▪ *Why do we think this???* [READ Acts 16:13-15]

A synagogue could have been founded by as few as ten men per Jewish law. But Paul found none here! {Was there that little interest in Philippi?}

- The Empire's government in Rome encouraged its military retirees to live here.

Caesar Augustus gave privileges of any Roman for common citizens. These perks helped emperor. Both the



architecture reflected that of the empire's capital--so much so, that Philippi was

deemed a "mini-Rome."

Philippi's citizens the highest province: land ownership, civil law exemptions from taxes, and more. insure the region's loyalty to the governance and the town's

¹ By the time of Paul's letter (approx. 60 A.D.) this church had existed for about 10 years and was predominantly Gentile. (Zondervan, *Intro to Philippians*, pgs. 2412, 2415)

² Key Word, intro to Philippians, pg. 1375.

³ Population estimates of Philippi vary from 2,000 (Key Word) to 10,000 (NIB).

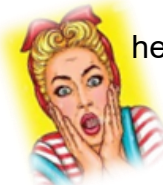
⁴ Philippian citizens who believed in Christ would be scorned.

Chapter 3—Paul Changes Course

Remember that Paul is writing this letter-- maybe from Rome-- as a prisoner, which often meant being hackled by chains and kept in dark, dingy conditions. Poor hygiene and poor quality food were typical.

With this as Paul's setting, we are surprised when this letter begins on a very upbeat note. Chapters 1 and 2 are very cheerful, especially when compared with his letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians. So, as we start Chapter 3 and we see the word "finally" (*to loipon*), we await Paul's concluding remarks (and compliments).

---but **SURPRISE-** he's only half way through this letter⁵, and his mood has changed quickly!⁶



[READ PHIL 3:1-4a]

3:2 "Watch out for those dogs...." **{To whom is Paul referring?}**

Unlike today's image of a dog being man's best friend, ancient Jews and Christians thought of dogs as filthy and disgusting, "like the proverbial dog that 'returns to its own vomit' (*Prov 26:11*)."⁷

...and then he calls them "mutilators of the flesh." The Greek word used here is *katatomê*, which means "cutting and mangling." Paul warns his new converts to avoid those legalistic Jews who insist that mangling the body is required for salvation.



It's no coincidence that Paul chose this nasty Greek word, because it is very similar in sound to *peritomê*. This also means cutting, but more precisely it means "circumcision." Thus, Paul gives his letter a touch of sarcasm. He's implying that regardless of what the Jewish leaders say, those who believe in Jesus as the Christ—whether Jew or Gentile-- are not required to be circumcised. In other words:

**Righteousness by ceremony is dead;
True circumcision is a spiritual work.⁸**

Paul's goal: **[READ PHIL. 3:7-11]**

⁵ some translations replace "finally" with "further" (NIV), or "whatever happens" (New Living), or "in addition" (Christian Standard).

⁶ **Many scholars believe Paul wrote at least two letters to the church at Philippi, and that our Bibles reflect a weaving together of these into one letter, thus the abrupt change in tone. Adding strength to this argument, decades later Bishop Polycarp also mentioned that Paul did indeed write several letters to the Philippians.**

⁷ Zondervan, fn on Php. 3:2, pg. 2419. **Here it's a metaphor for "evildoers."**

⁸ Martin, pg. 142.

Remember this??



“Stop it!” says Packer.

Those who truly know God “never brood on “might-have-beens” and missed opportunities. Instead, they focus only on what they have gained.⁹

That’s exactly what Paul is telling his Philippian converts in 3:12-14.

- Paul makes no claim to being perfect, but he presses on toward Christ.

Chapter 4—Trouble in Paradise--- But Be Steadfast

4:2-3 It’s rare that Paul addresses individuals by name, especially when rebuking them. Plus, we do not know exactly what Euodia and Syntyche were doing to cause problems,

- In vs. 3 Paul request that “yokefellow” work with these two women as an arbitrator. Most scholars believe this little-used Greek word (*suzygus*) was understood to simply mean “companion,” not someone’s name.¹⁰

4:4-7 A confirmation of joy and comfort: “Rejoice in the Lord always.” Don’t be anxious. The Lord is near. Stay focused and be joyful because true joy does not depend on circumstances but on the presence of the Lord with us.

4:8-9 Here Paul summarizes the walk of life required of all who would follow Christ. Most importantly, “put it into practice.”

4:10-21 Paul thanks the Philippians for their continued concern for his well-being. This flock contributed to Paul’s cause even when churches did not.

v. 22— “All the saints send you greetings, especially those who belong to Caesar’s household.” Paul is referring not so much to the Emperor’s family, but to his court of servants and officials.

← ...and “Caesar”????

At this time the Emperor (aka “Caesar”) was Nero. His reign ended with his death in 68 A.D. Power was then assumed by the Flavian dynasty, which inherited the many workers of Nero’s court.

Within a couple of decades an entire branch of the Flavian household converted to Christianity, possibly due to the influence of their household servants!

⁹ Packer, pg. 25.

¹⁰ “**Suzygus**” (masculine) actually is a proper name in Greek, though there has been no evidence of its use during this time. (NIB, pg. 540)

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