

~ Joy in Christian Fellowship ~

Text: Phil 1:1-11

Theme: Thankfulness for Christian fellowship & prayer for spiritual growth.

Intro:

1. Tonight we are looking at the opening verses of the book of Philippians. Paul's letter begins with the theme of thankfulness and quickly moves into a prayer for ongoing spiritual growth for the church at Philippi.
2. We will look at the first 11 verses of this chapter under three headings this evening.
 - I. Paul's Joy in Christian Fellowship (Vs 1-5)
 - II. Paul's Confidence of Spiritual Growth (Vs 6-8)
 - III. Paul's Prayer for Abounding Love (Vs 9-11)

Main:

- I. **Paul's Joy in Christian Fellowship** (Vs 1-5)
 - A. Paul's Joyful Greeting (Vs 1-2)
 1. Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter. (Vs 1)
 - a. Paul was the great Apostle to the gentiles and yet he expresses great humility in his greeting.
 - i. **Servants** "This is an expression of humility. Paul identified himself as a servant of Christ. He did not exalt himself as a great anything."¹
 - ii. Although he was the great Apostle Paul, a giant of a Christian, a bold proclaimer of the gospel, and a warrior for the faith yet he still referred to himself as being just a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - Everybody wants to be a somebody, but a wise Christian is one who has learned that he is a nobody and Jesus Christ is everything.
 - b. Paul wrote to the saints in the church at Philippi.
 - i. "The word **"saint"** is the Greek *hagios*, which is the same word from which we get "holy" (Ro. 1:2) and "sanctify" (Ro. 15:16). The basic meaning is to be *set apart* for God's possession and purpose."²

¹ Paul's Prison epistles, Pg 294; David W. Cloud 2021; Way of Life Literature

² Paul's Prison epistles, Pg 295; David W. Cloud 2021; Way of Life Literature

- These were born again Christians who were separated unto the work of God and were serving in the local church at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.
- ii. This verse shows us the error of the Roman Catholic idea that only special super-Christians are saints. In Christ, we have all been set apart unto God.
- iii. “The two aspects of holiness are called *standing* and *walk*. The believer’s standing in Christ is accomplished, sure, eternal, and unchanging, but his walk is determined by how he lives.”³
- c. Among these saints were the bishops and deacons of the local church.
 - i. I mentioned last week that the church at Philippi was planted by the Apostle Paul some 10 years prior to the writing of this epistle. In those ten years the church had developed a proper order for the work and oversight of the ministry, and so we see that *bishops* and *deacons* had been elected.
 - The word *bishop* comes from the Greek *Episkopos* which means, and overseer; a superintendent.
 - The word *deacon* comes from the Greek word *diakonos* which means, “a servant, a minister, an attendant.”

By the way, that means a church should not be run by a board of deacons who control everything, including the pastor. A deacon is to be committed to the role of a servant, ministering to the needs of the church.
- 2. Grace and peace refer to the believers standing before God in Christ. (Vs 2)
 - a. It is our standing in Christ that has brought us peace with God and through which we have become recipients of the grace of God.
 - i. **Romans 5:1** “*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*”
 - ii. It is our new standing in Christ which has made us children of God, so that we can call him “God our Father.”

³ Paul’s Prison epistles, Pg 295; David W. Cloud 2021; Way of Life Literature

- iii. This grace and peace comes directly from the hand of our heavenly Father as a result of our relationship with his dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Paul's Joyful Prayers (Vs 3-5)

1. Paul's prayers for the saints were characterised by thankfulness.
 - a. Most Christians view prayer merely as asking and receiving but every single prayer of the Apostle Paul contained a spirit of thankfulness to God.
 - i. Think of all the difficulties Paul went through from beatings to shipwreck, to his current imprisonment, and then remind yourself that if Paul could be thankful through trials, if Paul could know the joy of the Lord despite difficulties, then so can we. *"I thank my God."*
 - ii. **Philippians 4:6** *"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God."*
 - b. Paul was thankful for their salvation. (From the very first day – Vs 5b)
 - i. From the very first day of their salvation, they had been a blessing to the Apostle Paul.
 - ii. It is always a blessing to see a soul saved and then, from there, to go on growing in their faith and in their desire to see the work of the gospel advanced.
 - c. Paul was thankful for their fellowship. (For your fellowship in the gospel Vs 5a)
 - i. Paul was thankful that, after their salvation, they had continued in the fellowship of the gospel and had not forsaken him, as others had.
 - ii. By this point in the Apostle Paul's life many of his co-workers had abandoned him either because of personal disagreements, as with Barnabas, or because of the love of the world, as with Demas.
 - It is a blessing for a man of God to find like-minded Christians who are willing to stand with him for the truth of God's Word, even when the going gets tough and the heat turned up.

II. Paul's Confidence of Spiritual Growth (Vs 6-8)

A. Paul's Confidence in Christ (Vs 6)

1. Paul's confidence in verse 6 is predicated on the salvation mentioned in verse 5.

- a. Paul points to their salvation as that good work which was begun in them, not by their own works, but by the saving power of God.
 - i. “Salvation is 100% the work of God. It is of grace, which means it is an undeserved, unmerited, unearned gift of God. It was 100% purchased by Christ’s blood atonement. The believer’s works are the product of salvation and do not add anything whatsoever to it.”⁴
 - ii. Because Paul knows that the Philippian converts are true fruits of the gospel, they are really saved and have their standing in Christ, that gives Paul confidence that they will go on to spiritual maturity, because the one who produce new life in them in the first place will be faithful to continue that spiritual work in them through sanctification.
 - b. Paul’s confidence was not in the Philippians, but in God.
 - Confident: From the Greek *peithō*, which means, “to be convinced, persuaded; to trust.”
 - i. There was no doubt in Paul’s mind that the spiritual work once begun in the heart of the Christian would continue to be performed in them until the day when they would be with the Lord.
 - ii. The work of sanctification is an ongoing work that continues through our whole lives. Hopefully, the older we get the less work there is for the Holy Spirit to do, but there will always be some area of growth that is still needed until the day when “*we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*” (1 John 3:2b)
- B. Paul’s Confidence in the Gospel (Vs 7-8)
1. Paul now comments on the reason why it is fitting for him to be thankful for the saints at Philippi and to have confidence in their spiritual growth.
 - a. Paul says it is meet, or fitting, for me to think these things of you because you are dear to my heart. Why? Because both in my imprisonment and in the defence and establishment of the gospel, you are all partners with me and recipients of the same grace.
 - i. We will see later in this epistle how the church at Philippi had sent financial aid to the Apostle Paul as well as sending Epaphroditus to be a help and a blessing to him. Paul is effectively saying, through your financial assistance, the work of Epaphroditus, and your

⁴ Paul’s Prison epistles, Pg 309; David W. Cloud 2021; Way of Life Literature

faithfulness in standing for the gospel you have been my partners in the work of the gospel and will, therefore, be co-recipients with me of God's grace.

- ii. These Philippian Christians were dear to the heart of the Apostle Paul for so many reasons, including the fact that they were the fruits of his ministry, but also because he saw them as being right there with him in the work.
- b. We noted earlier that Paul expressed thankfulness for their fellowship in the gospel. Fellowship has been described as "two fellows in one ship."
 - i. In other words, we are in this together. Although you are back there in Philippi and I am in prison in Rome, through your support of the work of the gospel we are fellows, partners, co-labourers in the work.
 - ii. This is the same principle we speak of today when we say that, by supporting a missionary on the mission field, we are partners with them in the work of the gospel in that place. And since we are partners in the work, we are partners in the reward.
- 2. In verse 8 Paul gives record of his strong desire to be able to personally go to the church at Philippi and be with them, longing for closer fellowship with these believers who had been such a blessing to him in the work of the gospel.
 - a. I guess the question to ask ourselves is, what is the attitude of our missionaries toward us?
 - i. Do they long for fellowship with us or would they rather stay on the field and keep their distance because the fellowship back here just isn't that sweet?
 - ii. Do our missionaries see us as genuine partners in the work who are interested in their spiritual and physical well-being, or do we send the check and forget.

III. Paul's Prayer for Abounding Love (Vs 9-11)

A. Paul Prayed for Growth in Love (Vs 9)

- 1. Paul now expresses his prayer for the future of the church at Philippi.
 - a. He has already been thankful in his prayers for this church's fellowship in the past, now he looks to what he desires for them in the future.
 - i. Notice that, while the church at Philippi was struggling due to the opposition to Christianity that had been coming from Rome, Paul didn't emphasise physical wellbeing or

deliverance from persecution in his prayer. Rather, Paul's emphasis was on their spiritual wellbeing and growth.

- i. Many churches have prayer meetings that have become a who's who of the hospitalised. They have become expert at praying for physical well-being but rarely pray for each other's spiritual health and growth. This should not be the case.
- b. Paul prayed that their love, *agape* - the love of God, would "*abound... more and more*" in them. "Paul prayed that the Philippians would love without limit."⁵
 - i. This abounding in love was to occur within the sphere of spiritual knowledge and judgement, wisdom and discernment.
 - ii. The word "knowledge" comes from the Greek *epignosis* and means, "a precise knowledge acquired by further experience; the result of learning."
 - The idea is that this knowledge has come from applying what was known from study and making it experiential. It is spiritual wisdom put into practice.
 - iii. The word "judgement" is from the Greek *Aithēsis* which means "perception or discernment."
 - The idea then is that their growth in love should be a cycle. As they applied their knowledge of this love and put it into practice in their lives they would grow in their understanding of that love and would be better able to put it into practice in the future.

B. Paul Prayed for Purity in Faith (Vs 10)

1. Paul wanted the believers to put new ideas and practices to the test.
 - a. To approve means, "to examine, or put to the test."
 - i. We are to examine or test all things in the light of scripture and see if they pass the test of excellence.
 - b. The word "excellent" means, "to bear through, transport, surpass, be of value."
 - i. In other words, does this thing carry any weight when measured against the word of God or is it empty and of no real value?
 - ii. We ought to be the sort of Christians who have weighed what we believe against the scriptures and discovered for ourselves the things that hold weight and the things that are empty traditions.

⁵ Exploring Philippians Pg 40; John Phillips, 1995; Kregel Publications

2. Paul prayed that they would be sincere and without offence.
 - a. The word sincere means, “judged by sunlight.”
 - i. It pictures something that is held up to the sunlight and, under close inspection, is found to be genuine. It was used to describe a marble statue that had no wax in it.
 - ii. If a man carving in marble accidentally carved a chunk out that he didn’t mean to, he might be tempted to fill it in with wax, which would look like it was part of the sculpture. The problem being that, once it sat in the sun for a while, the wax would melt and the buyer would be left with a ruined marble statue. This led to the practice of stipulating “No Wax” in the contract.
 - iii. Paul was effectively saying, I’m praying that you will be genuine Christians without any fake bits that will melt under the heat of scrutiny.
 - b. Without offence means, “to be actively inoffensive, that is, not led into sin.” John Phillips writes, “We are to live without offence, without stumbling. If we want to walk without stumbling, we must pay attention to where we are going, where we put our feet.”⁶
 - i. Paul’s desire was that the Philippians would not be tripped up by sin until the day of Christ.
- C. Paul Prayed for Fruitfulness in Christ (Vs 11)
 1. Being abundantly supplied with the fruits of the righteousness which is ours in Christ Jesus, unto the praise and glory of God.
 - a. The fruit of righteousness is produced by those Christians who are abiding in Christ.
 - i. They are by Christ Jesus and are therefore not unto our own glory but to the glory of God.
 - ii. Paul’s desire was that they would not just be fruit bearing Christians but that they would be filled to over-flowing with the fruits of righteousness.
 - b. I can hear Paul saying the same to us today, “Be so filled with Christ that you overflow with the fruits of righteousness for God’s glory.”

Conclusion:

1. We’ve seen Paul’s joy in Christian fellowship, Paul’s confidence of spiritual growth, and Paul’s prayer for abounding love.
2. Next week we will see Paul’s Joy in Difficult Circumstances. (Vs 12-30)

⁶ Exploring Philippians Pg 40; John Phillips, 1995; Kregel Publications