

EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Greeting and a Prayer of Thanksgiving, Philippians 1:1-8

A. Greeting (1-2)

1. From Paul and Timothy (1a), *Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,*

- a. Paul founded the church in Philippi with the conversion of Lydia and her family, Acts 16:13-15, *And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*
- b. Paul and Timothy revisited Philippi two more times, Acts 20:3-6, *There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. Sopater the Berean, son of Pyrrhus, accompanied him; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timothy; and the Asians, Tychicus and Trophimus. These went on ahead and were waiting for us at Troas, but we sailed away from Philippi after the days of Unleavened Bread, and in five days we came to them at Troas, where we stayed for seven days.*

2. Paul described Timothy and himself as *servants*.

- a. The word was the common word for *slave*, those owned by and subservient to others.
- b. Other places the word was used in the New Testament.
 - 1) Philippians 2:7, *but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.*
 - 2) Romans 6:19, *I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.*
- c. Paul's heart of a pastor is evident as he described himself as a servant not as the apostle to the Gentiles.
 - 1) This was a personal letter of encouragement not correction, Matt Chandler, *Philippians is the only letter that we have in the Scriptures in which Paul is not trying to correct bad teaching or rebuke bad behavior. Instead, the letter highlights Paul's personal affection for the Philippian church and his commendation of (and exhortation toward) their Christian maturity.*
 - 2) He was writing to them as one committed to them as he was committed to the Lord Jesus. He was sold to Jesus Christ as His Master even as a slave is sold to the master who bought him. His agenda was God's agenda.
 - 3) D. A. Carson, *I would like to buy about three dollars worth of gospel, please. Not too much—just enough to make me happy, but not so much that I get addicted. I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I start to love my enemies, cherish self-denial, and contemplate missionary service in some alien culture. I want ecstasy, not repentance; I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some nice, forgiving, broad-minded people, but I myself don't want to love those from different races—especially if they smell. I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved, but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving too greatly enlarged. I would like about three dollars worth of gospel, please.*

2. To Christians at Philippi (1b), *To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:*

a. *saints in Christ*

- 1) Saints, a customary word for Christians in the New Testament, used over 60 times, it means *to be set apart*.
- 2) Paul emphasizes that Christians are set apart by and to Christ Jesus.
- 3) Thomas Constable, *This title reflects the Christian's present justified standing before God though not necessarily his or her present sanctified standing in the sight of other people.*
- 4) Marvin Vincent, *The conception is that of a sphere or environment or element in which a Christian lives, as a bird in the air, a fish in the water, or the roots of a tree in the soil.*
- 5) *all* is used repeatedly throughout this epistle with probably an emphasis on unity.

b. Church leadership

1) *Overseers*, bishops or elders

- a) The word, translated as overseer or bishop was originally a secular title, designating commissioners appointed to regulate a newly-acquired territory or a colony.
- b) Another term used by Paul is *elder*, Titus 1:5, 7, *This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,*
- c) The responsibilities of an elder are spiritual as noted in Acts 20:28, *Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

2) *Deacons*

- a) It literally means *servant*.
- b) These are church leaders who minister to the physical needs of those in the assembly, Acts 6:1-4, *Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."*
- c) Ignatius on deacons, "They are not ministers of food and drink, but servants of the Church of God."

3) Note the plurality of leadership at this early stage, G. Fee, *No evidence exists for a single leader as the 'head' of the local assembly in the Pauline churches.*

3. Words of blessing on the Philippians (2), *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

a. Paul's desire for the Philippians was grace and peace.

- 1) In the 17 times in the New Testament, grace always precedes peace.
- 2) Grace expresses God's love to man.
 - a) It is unmerited favor from God.
 - b) It is neither earned nor deserved.

3) Peace is the resulting condition of God's grace.

- a) Thomas Constable, *Peace is the cessation of hostilities and the inner tranquillity that are the result of God's grace.*
- b) H. D. M. Spence, (peace) *which is, first, reconciliation with God; and, secondly, the childlike confidence and trustful hope which result from faith in Christ's atonement.*
- c) Charles Hodge, *Grace and peace therefore include everything that we can desire or need, the favor of God, and all the blessings that favor secures.*

b. Grace resulting in peace comes from the Father and the Son.

- 1) God the Father ordained grace.
- 2) God the Son, Jesus, secured it at the cross.
- 3) Paul will emphasize the equality of nature between Father and Son in Philippians 2.

B. Paul's prayer for Philippian believers (3-11)

1. Prayer of Thanksgiving (3-8)

a. For every joyful remembrance of them (3-4), *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,*

1) Paul was always thankful for memories of Philippian believers.

- a) He couldn't say that for every church, especially in Galatia where there was doctrinal error, Galatians 3:1, *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?*
- b) Robert Lightner, *Here was a letter of commendation from one who was in Roman chains some 800 miles away. About 10 years had passed since Paul had first worked among them. But the passing of*

time had not diminished his love or his interest in them.

- 2) His memories of them brought him joy as he prayed.
 - a) Joy is a recurring theme in Philippians with joy mentioned 16 times.
 - 1] Philippians 1:18, *What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,*
 - 2] Philippians 2:2, *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*
 - 3] Philippians 4:4, *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.*
 - b) The word for *prayed* refers to requests.
 - 1] Paul's time in Philippi had been brief but he continued to pray for their needs.
 - 2] Max Anders, *Someone has said to be "thankful" is to be "thankful."*
 - 3] Charles Spurgeon, *His was not the cry of anguish, but the request of delight.*
- b. For their continuing partnership in the Gospel (5), ***because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.***
 - 1) *partnership*
 - a) It is the same word translated elsewhere as *fellowship*.
 - b) Their partnership was with Paul in the reception and spread of the Gospel.
 - c) They responded by faith when they first heard the message from Paul.
 - 1] Acts 16:15, *And after she was baptized, and her household as well, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.*
 - 2] Acts 16:33-34, *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. Then he brought them up into his house and set food before them. And he rejoiced along with his entire household that he had believed in God.*
 - 2) *until now*
 - a) They financially supported Paul's missionary efforts
 - 1] Philippians 4:15-16, *And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.*
 - 2] 2 Corinthians 11:9, *And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.*
 - b) They renewed their financial support as Paul was in a Roman prison, Philippians 4:10, *I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.*
 - 3) Paul's passion was the Gospel in which the Philippians partnered with him.
 - a) Gordon Fee, *It does not take much reading of Paul's letters to recognize that the gospel is the singular passion of his life; that passion is the glue that in particular holds this letter together.*
 - b) D. A. Carson, *...he (Paul) perceives that their interest in him is a reflection of their continued commitment to the gospel, and that is why he thanks God for them...They continued their witness in Philippi, they persevered in their prayers for Paul, they sent money to support him in his ministry—all testifying to their shared vision of the importance and priority of the gospel. That is more than enough reason for thanking God.*
- c. That God would complete the good work He began in their lives (6), ***And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.***
 - 1) This verse is a wonderful confirmation of perseverance.
 - a) God keeps those He saves, note also John 10:27-29, *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*
 - b) Paul's assurance is based on God's perseverance with those He called to Himself through the finished

work of Jesus Christ.

- c) Perseverance does not mean that everyone will continue in faith and good works but that God will persevere in bringing every Christian to glory.
- 2) The *good work* is salvation
 - a) *He* refers to God the Father.
 - b) *began*
 - 1] This is used only here and in Galatians 3:3, *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*
 - 2] The word means to *inaugurate* as a deliberate not an impulsive act.
 - c) *in you*
 - 1] Specifically, Paul is speaking to Philippian Christians.
 - 2] In general, it is an important message to all Christians.
- 3) The *good work* also refers to the Philippians' partnership with Paul in the Gospel. T. Constable, *He was confident that God would continue His sanctifying work in them so they might become even more effective partners with him in this great task.*
- 4) The work of salvation will be completed at the return of Jesus Christ.
 - a) God will finish what He started in the lives of every person who places faith in Jesus Christ alone.
 - b) The three parts of salvation are in view.
 - 1] Justification - when a person places faith in Christ alone, God sees him as if He were looking at Jesus, Romans 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - 2] Sanctification - when a person who has been justified participates with the Holy Spirit in living what he believes, Romans 6:22, *But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*
 - 3] Glorification - when a person dies or Christ returns and his position and practice are identical, Romans 8:29, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...*
- 4) Quotes on perseverance
 - a) Thomas Constable, *This is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible for Christians. Our getting to heaven safely does not depend on us, on our ability to hold on and to persevere faithfully to the end of our lives. The Lord will see to it that we reach heaven safely in spite of our failures and shortcomings. Salvation is God's work, not man's (Jonah 2:9). As surely as He has already delivered us from the penalty of sin (Rom. 5:1), He will one day deliver us from the presence of sin (cf. Rom. 8:31–39).*
 - b) Charles Spurgeon, *A good old minister was once asked whether he believed in the final perseverance of the saints. "Well," said he, "I do not know much about that matter, but I firmly believe in the final perseverance of God, that where He has begun a good work He will carry it on until it is complete." To my mind, that truth includes the final perseverance of the saints. They persevere in the way of salvation because God keeps them in it.*
- d. For their support of him through difficult circumstances (7), ***It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.***
 - 1) Paul's emotional ties to the Philippians are based on their partnership with him in the Gospel.
 - 2) He underscores his three-fold thanksgiving for them which was expressed in verse 5.
 - a) Their unity was based on grace received from faith in Christ.
 - b) Their ministry to him personally while he was imprisoned.
 - c) Their ministry of the Gospel in word and deed.
 - 3) Gordon Fee sees the bond between Paul and the Philippians strengthened by suffering, *While suffering is not the dominant motif in Philippians, it constitutes the church's primary historical context in Philippi and thus underlies much of the letter...*
 - 4) D. A. Carson, *...the fellowship of the gospel, the partnership of the gospel, must be put at the center of our*

- relationships with other believers...what must tie us together as Christians is this passion for the gospel...*
- e. That God was Paul's witness of his deep appreciation for them (8), ***For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.***
 - 1) Paul made a solemn oath before God that he was deeply committed to them because God knew Paul's heart for them.
 - 2) *yearn* is a word emphasizing Paul's *great affection* for them.
 - 3) *with the affection of Christ Jesus*
 - a) His love for them was the same love Jesus Christ had for them, Max Anders, *Paul loved them with the same unconditional love Jesus exhibited during his earthly ministry...*
 - b) Others came to declare their commitment to the Philippians but it was not tied to the fellowship that Paul had with the Philippians which was tied to the Gospel.
 - 4) T. Constable, *These expressions of thanksgiving provide insight into the unity that exists among believers and between believers and our Lord. The gospel and salvation are the great unifying elements.*

A PRAYER OF PETITION, PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

- A. That their love would increase (9), ***And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,***
 1. Paul used the word *agape* for love.
 - a. This is love that is other-centered, self-sacrificing.
 - b. It is based on sincere appreciation and high regard for God's calling believers to serve others.
 2. Paul emphasized that the love they already had for others should increase.
 - a. Spiritual maturity demands ever increasing love for others.
 - b. A spiritually mature Christians focuses more and more on serving others and not on serving himself.
 3. Paul identifies two characteristics of the love he prayed would increase in their lives.
 - a. *knowledge*
 - 1) This is knowing based on understanding and experience.
 - 2) Note Romans 10:2, *For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.*
 - 3) Thomas Constable, *It should arise from an intelligent appraisal of reality. It should also rest on spiritual sensitivity to truth as God has revealed it in His Word and not on mere sentimentality.*
 - 4) D. A. Carson, *...he wants them to enjoy insight into God's words and ways, and thus to know how to live in light of them.*
 - b. *discernment*
 - 1) It is a capacity to understand, knowledge properly applied to life.
 - 2) It is insight guided by the Word of God and the indwelling Holy Spirit.
 - 3) It includes judgment, loving that is productive not just sentimental.
 - c. Robert Lightner, *Having genuine spiritual knowledge of God and depth of insight into His ways enables Christians to love God and others more.*
- B. That their faith would be evident through their actions (10), ***so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,***
 1. Paul prayed that the Philippian Christians would identify and pursue the best.
 - a. He wanted them to major on the majors.
 - b. Thomas Constable, *Most of the choices that a spiritual believer faces are not between morally good and morally evil things but between things of lesser and greater value. The things that we choose because we love them reflect how discerning our love really is.*
 - c. H. D. M. Spence, *With love there comes a spiritual sense, spiritual sight, spiritual hearing, a sense of the beauty of holiness, a fine perception of Christian propriety.*

2. Such love in action produces holiness.
 - a. *pure*
 - 1) The emphasis is on sincerity, without hidden motives.
 - 2) It carries an emphasis on moral purity, having clean lives.
 - b. *blameless*
 - 1) It continues the ideal of moral purity with an emphasis on having a clear conscience.
 - 2) Christlike love will produce a clear conscience because it is living what we believe.
 - 3) It also carries the sense of not offending or causing others to stumble, note 1 Corinthians 10:32, *Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,*
 - c. Robert Lightner, *Paul's desire for his friends at Philippi ought to be the concern of all believers—to be morally pure, not causing others to stumble.*
 3. The time frame for developing such love is til the Lord's return.
 - a. A proper motive for pursuing holiness is the Lord's return when we will give account of our lives in Christ.
 - b. Max Anders, *Since we do not know when this event might occur, an incentive for living a pure and blameless lifestyle is to be unashamed before Christ should he choose to come at a time when we least expect him.*
- C. That they would be filled with the righteousness of God (11), ***filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.***
1. This verse is tied to the last part of verse 10, by giving the way Christians can be prepared for the *day of Christ*.
 2. The only way to be ready for the *day of Christ* is to be filled with the fruit of righteousness.
 - a. This fruit is described in Galatians 5:22-23, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*
 - b. The Holy Spirit fills believers with this fruit as we allow Him to control our lives.
 - c. This control may be described as abiding in Christ, John 15:4-5, *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*
 - d. John Stott, *Every other ethical system calls us to the costly effort of becoming what we are not. But in the full salvation already bequeathed to us in Christ, the new nature is already ours, waiting for expression, poised for growth, until its potential is triggered by our obedience to the word of God.*
 3. *to the glory and praise of God*
 - a. This righteousness is all of God's grace and none of our works.
 - b. The righteousness we possesses has flowed directly from the heart of God through the work of the Son and delivered by the Spirit of God.
 4. Comments
 - a. R. C. Sproul, *If people find worship (or pursuit of holiness) boring and irrelevant, it can only mean they have no sense of the presence of God in it. It is impossible to be bored in the presence of God if you know that He is there.*
 - b. Thomas Constable, *In our day when we tend to voice prayer requests for physical needs primarily we need to follow Paul's example of putting the spiritual needs of others high on our prayer lists. Christians still need God's supernatural enablement to value highly the things of greatest importance as revealed in Scripture. Only then will we make choices that will prepare us to give a good account of ourselves at the judgment seat of Christ.*