

Text: Philippians 1:1-8

Title: Praying for the Church

Truth: Pray with joy for your church family.

Date/Location: Sunday November 21, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

Last time we examined the background of the Philippian church from Acts 16. We found that it was started around 50 AD. The letter was written during Paul's Roman imprisonment, perhaps 9 to 11 years later. Paul had been to the church several times and now was away and unable to visit. Put yourself in his place for a minute. Then think of yourself as recipient of this letter as if you were seeing it for the first time.

I. Greetings, 1:1-2

- A. Paul honors Timothy with a place in the authorship section, though Timothy was not really a co-author. To see this, look at verse 8's use of the singular pronoun "I."
- B. Paul sees himself and his protégé Timothy as servants of Christ Jesus. There is no better place to be than that.

About a related subject that some of you noted during recent preaching in Titus 2. Would you be able to be a servant to another person? Would you be able to be content in that lot? Would you scratch and claw and use any (evil?) means necessary to get out, or would you act as a Christian as long as you were stuck in your circumstances? In the case of "bad servanthood," being a Christian does not preclude you from getting out of the bad situation, but you must do so in a Christian way (Titus 2:9-10)! You can at one and the same time be content with the lot God has granted you, and work to improve that lot. Think of job and education, for example, where you can be content in a lower job, seek higher education, and try to better your employment situation—all in a Christian way, without complaining about your situation.

I trust, however, that you do not think about getting out of Christ's service or grumbling because you are His Servant. Or have you actually gotten "in" to that role? Are you holding back, wanting the

benefits of salvation but not the obligations? Ask yourself, “What am I doing to serve the Lord?”

C. The letter is written to Christians at Philippi. They are listed in three groups:

1. Saints. The believers. Yes indeed, they were living saints! There are only two kinds of people in the world: there are saints, and there are sinners! You either are a Christian or you are not. Either saved or not. There is no middle ground. What are saints? Saints are people who are made holy by God, not dead super-Christians who have a miracle attributed to them. *Saint* derives from a word that literally means holy, or set apart, dedicated, consecrated to God.
2. Overseers. We do not use these words today in our simple New Testament churches. Rather, we call these men elders or pastors. They mean precisely the same thing because pastors *are* overseers and elders. They are ones who have oversight of the work of God and who are spiritually mature, if not physically older. The word *bishop* is used in the King James Version but that is an unfortunate translation influenced by the English church from the old English *biscep*.
3. Finally there are deacons. We are fond of this term as it simply means “servants.” These are men who are called by the church to be servants of it. They assist by taking care of things so that the pastors can focus on the Word and prayer and doctrine and related necessary functions of the gospel ministry.

Typically, in a well-established church there will be one or more pastors and one or more deacons. The plurals in Philippians 1:1 simply indicate that there was a plurality of both pastors and deacons in that particular church. The plurals do not demand multiple of both in all churches. The right number for a particular church depends primarily on the church’s giftedness, and on its size and complexity of ministry. And while not all have the office of deacon, all are *servants* in the church.

D. Paul wishes the church grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. You may have learned before that this is an

adaptation of Greek and Hebrew greetings. Peace is a common Hebrew greeting translated from “Shalom.” Grace is a common Greek greeting. Both come from one source—God and His Son. You will not find true peace anywhere else, and you cannot find real favor anywhere else. If you are in need of those things, go to Christ to find them. And if you are in Christ, thank God for His grace and peace. I wish you more of the same experience from God in your day to day life.

II. Paul’s Prayer Part 1, 1:3-8

- A. Whenever Paul thinks of the people in Philippi, he prays for them. Undoubtedly he thinks of them often and therefore prays for them often—as should we regarding our fellow church members and other churches we know.
- B. In Paul’s prayer, he gives thanks to God for the Philippian Christians. This is a great thanksgiving verse because it reminds us that we do not simply “give thanks.” We give thanks TO GOD. Remember that. Also, we give thanks to God for specific people and things.
- C. Paul obviously prays often for these people, because in verse 4 he says, “always in every prayer.” He makes requests of God for the Christians. These requests will be detailed in the upcoming verses.
- D. Paul prays with joy. This church is a source of great happiness for the apostle Paul because of their generally excellent spiritual condition. Paul was experiencing the happy side of ministry described in Hebrews 13:17—

Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

- E. Verse 5 gives **one reason** that Paul is joyful and thankful for the Philippians, and that is their “fellowship in the gospel.” The word *fellowship* means sharing something in common. Of course they shared in the blessings of salvation since the first day of their salvation, But they also shared their material resources with him

for the sake of the gospel. They did this from the very beginning of their new Christian life until the present day. We saw in Acts 16 how Lydia and the prison guard helped the apostle and offered hospitality. After that, the church continued to help with Paul's financial needs. On this topic, turn to Philippians 4, and read verses 10 and 14-17.

To put it simply, the church shared its material things with Paul because he shared with them spiritual things (Romans 15:27, 1 Cor. 9:11). They gave him money to support him so that he did not have to work as much, and could therefore spend more time preaching the gospel and teaching the Bible.

- F. A **second reason** for Paul's joy and thanksgiving to God is that He has confidence in God's work in the Christians there. He had to move on from there to other places, but even if he were present there, he would not be able to complete the work of God in them. God has to do that via His Spirit.

His confidence is stated in the rest of verse 6: "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it." Salvation is a work of God from start to finish. It is *not* a work of man. We are involved, we participate, we enjoy blessings of salvation. But we do not initiate it, nor finish it. God does that. Looking at it from another angle, notice this: what God starts, he finishes. This is a strong verse for the eternal security of the true believer. We can be assured, certain, persuaded, and confident that this is the case.

The point of completion is "the day of Jesus Christ" which I take to be the rapture of the church. It will be complete after we die and are resurrected (or just are raptured if alive when Christ returns). At that time will be the judgment seat of Christ and a final statement of salvation and reward will be made. God will keep each and every believer until that time, without exception. See John 18:9. God does not lose His people.

- G. A **third reason** that Paul is joyful and thankful is that He loves the Philippians. That is what he means when he says, "I have you in my heart" in verse 7. They wove their way into his heart because they continued their partnership with him even in his chains. As he defended and promoted the gospel, they continued to partake

with him in the ministry. They were true friends, not leaving him in the lurch in a time of need. They stand with Paul.

H. Paul closes this first portion of his prayer with a solemn statement in which he calls God to be his witness. Paul has such a longing desire to see the Philippians, to be with them, to minister there again. This feeling is amplified by his current situation—in prison. How he longs to be with them instead of where he is. But he longs to be with them with the love of Christ. You see, what has happened is that Paul is in Christ, and the Philippians are in Him as well. And Christ loves Paul and Paul loves Christ, and that love is shared among all true believers. So in a sense, Paul is saying that because of Christ’s work in *him*, he shares the love of Christ toward *them*.

I hope you can spend some time thinking about this for a while. It takes some serious processing to think about how we relate to our fellow Christians in Christ, and whether we really do long for our fellowship with our friends in Christ. Or, perhaps, we are just fine in our lone ranger box doing our own thing without a lot of real love for others? Maybe it will take a sickness (like Epaphroditus, Philippians 2:26) or imprisonment (like here) to get you to realize the serious importance of Christian fellowship.

Conclusion

We have just scratched the surface. We need to discuss the meaning of “defense and confirmation of the gospel.” We could look further at the “how” of God’s work in us. We should think about how better to partner with our church’s missionaries. And then we need to read on to the remainder of Paul’s prayer in verses 9-11.

Meanwhile, remember that Paul prayed with joy for his fellow believers in Philippi. You too pray with as much joy as you can muster in Christ for your fellow saints.

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