

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

The Book of Philippians #3

We have started out study in the book of Philippians by looking at the first four verses of chapter one, placing our emphasizing on what it means to be a bond-servant of Christ, the grace and peace which comes from God alone, and the financial and spiritual participation of the Philippian church in spreading the gospel of Christ and supplying the needs of the saints.

Today we are going to take a look at verses 6-11 Paying particular attention to God's faithfulness and our response to it. We'll start with verses 6-8 then proceed to the other verses later.

PHILIPPIANS 1:6-8

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

Paul said he is confident that God will finish what he started in the Philippian believers. The word translated as "confident" means to be persuaded, to trust, to be confident, and to yield to. In most passages the word "confident" is actually translated as either "persuaded" or "convinced". So Paul is saying he is persuaded or convinced that God will perfect the work He had begun in the lives of the Philippian believers all through their lives up 'til the day of Christ Jesus.

That's an incredible statement. I don't know about you but I have had times in my life where I was not always convinced that God was at work in my life. I have had my moments of weakness and times of wondering where God was and why He was taking so long to do what he had promised to do. And though most of us would consider Paul a "super apostle", I don't think he was that different from any of us. So how can he be so confident that God would complete the work He had begun in the Philippians?

I believe Paul is confident because he has seen these things come to pass in his own life and in the lives of other believers. He is also convinced of God's power and of God's promises. His "confidence" comes from the One who is doing the work. His "persuasion" and "conviction" come from his own personal experience.

Let's refresh our memories as to what Paul said he experienced in his walk of faith.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:24-33

"Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. In Damascus the (provincial ruler) under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands."

Paul then speaks about his visions and revelations from the Lord, the thorn in the flesh given him to keep from exalting himself above others, and then concludes with these thoughts:

2 CORINTHIANS 12:10

“Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Paul's journey, like ours, started in faith. Perhaps more dramatically than ours, but faith played a key part nonetheless. His confidence came from his faith which was tested in the furnace of affliction. He became persuaded and convinced that God could do what He said He would do because He had experienced God doing so in His own life through his own personal suffering. It is out of these experiences that Paul could write to the Romans the following:

ROMANS 8:28-39

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”

“Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, “For Your sake we are being put to death all day we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

*“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am **convinced** that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Paul was convinced that nothing could separate him from God's love and care. Neither the things man could and did do to him, nor the things any other created authority in any heavenly realm could attempt. Nothing would ever sever him from the love and purpose God had for him.

Paul was so aware of this that he staked his life on it, treating the sufferings and losses in his life as garbage because through them he gained a firsthand knowledge of Christ. He was not ashamed of his sufferings because he knew they could never separate him from the destiny and destination God had in store for him.

2 TIMOTHY 1:12

*“For this reason (because I teach and preach the gospel of Christ) I also suffer these things (beatings, imprisonment), but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am **convinced** that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”*

This is now the third time Paul has used the word “convinced”. Paul entrusted his life, his soul, his eternal destiny into the hands of God because he was convinced God was capable of guarding these personal treasures until he received the inheritance that was promised to him through faith in Christ.

This did not mean there would not be trouble, trials and persecution. For Jesus had told his disciples, *“If they persecuted me they will also persecute you.”* And Paul was told by Jesus Himself of the things he must suffer for the sake of the gospel. Paul had a great deal of experience with persecution. But he understood that this world was not his home. He was not looking for an earthly dwelling but a heavenly one. For this reason he could say:

2 TIMOTHY 4:18

“The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”

He was convinced that God, who had begun a good work in him, would perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

The word translated as “perfect” means “accomplish”, “complete” or “finish”. So Paul is saying he is convinced that God will complete or finish the good work which God has already begun in himself and in the Philippians.

This concept of God’s work in us being completed is not limited to these verses. It is mentioned in several others places as well.

1 CORINTHIANS 1:4-9

“I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, that in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you, so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”

1 THESSALONIANS 5:23-24

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”

2 THESSALONIANS 3:3

“The Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.”

All of these Scriptures come together to tell one story. God will complete or finish what He has started in us. The beginning of salvation came by faith and God responded to this faith by granting the presence of the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. He is God’s seal of promise for our salvation. This same Spirit empowers us to overcome and provides the impetus or desire to do and accomplish His will.

We all experience times in our lives when we feel like we are not making any progress in our spiritual life. But this verse reminds us that when God starts a project, he completes it. God will help us grow in His grace, continually working until He has completed His work in our lives. When we are discouraged we need this reminder - that God will never give up on us. He promises to finish what He started.

So when you feel incomplete, unfinished, or discouraged by your shortcomings, remember God’s promises and provision. Don’t let your circumstances or your present condition rob you of the joy of knowing Christ or keep you from growing closer to Him. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He WILL finish the work

He began in you. And what is that work? To conform you to the image of His beloved Son.

After expressing his confidence and affection Paul prays for the Philippians. We read about this in verses 9-11.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

It is interesting that Paul added the words *“in real knowledge and discernment”* as part of his prayer for their love to abound.

Why would he add this? Why not just pray that their love would abound? Surely that would have been a sufficient prayer. If someone had prayed that the love of this church would abound “more and more” I would have been very happy with that prayer and added my “Amen” to it. Our congregation does not lack love for one another. So having the love that already exists “abound more and more” would be a welcome thing.

But Paul does not stop there. He qualifies his request. By doing so I believe he is revealing more than the fact that he wants their love to abound “more and more”. He is also stating the type of love that he is praying to be manifested among them and how they will recognize its authenticity.

There are many types of love. Some are based on feeling, fact, or commitment; some on responsibility or gratitude; some are even based on need or dependency. Some of these loves can last a lifetime. Some only last as long as the need or feeling exists. But Paul is praying that their love should be based on *“real knowledge and all discernment”*. What is *“real knowledge and discernment”*?

The knowledge and discernment spoken of here is the knowledge of things ethical and divine and a moral discernment in ethical matters. So Paul is praying that their love would be manifested through spiritual knowledge and discernment concerning how to love and behave properly according to spiritual principles.

Love without this type of knowledge or discernment can be destructive and self-serving. It can also be overpowering and blinded by unrealistic expectations. 1st Corinthians also tells us that knowledge without this type of love amounts to nothing and makes one arrogant.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2

“If I ...know all mysteries and all knowledge...but do not have love, I am nothing.”

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1b

“Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.”

Real knowledge comes from the Scriptures and discernment comes from the Holy Spirit. Paul is asking that their love be based on God’s word and the presence of the Holy Spirit within them and not on some emotion which rises and falls with the desire of the flesh or the performance of the one loved. If we continue in His word and in this love we will not only know the truth, we will live the truth. (John 8:31; 13:35)

In 1 John 4:10-11 we read: *“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”*

True, authentic love comes from God’s reaching out to us in love and in our response to this love. We love because He first loved us. And because He loved us, we also ought to love one another. So the foundation of love starts with the spiritual knowledge of God’s unfailing love for us and out of this love comes the love we have for one another. Understanding this truth provides the knowledge and discernment needed to live it out.

This is confirmed by what Paul says in the next few verses as he explains the reason he is praying for this type of love to abound.

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Paul is laying a foundation here for some specific directions to believers later in the book in chapters 2 and 4 which we will address later. So let it be sufficient for now to know that Paul is saying that by seeking after and embracing the true knowledge and discernment of spiritual and ethical truths the Philippian believers will be able to continue to approve the things that are excellent. This in turn will keep them sincere and blameless until the coming of Christ.

The word excellent has some interesting connotations. It literally means to “bear or carry through any place”; “to carry in different ways in different directions”; “to distinguish between good and evil, lawful and unlawful, to approve of things that excel, to differ from one; to surpass”.

It would appear that Paul is saying that through real knowledge and discernment the love of the Philippians will be able to choose the appropriate moral path in all situations. No matter where they go or how they are tested, they will be able to discern what the right thing to do is.

Perhaps we should pay more attention to this prayer and make it our own. Wouldn’t it be nice to be so grounded in our love for God and for each other that we would know at any moment in any situation what the right course of action should be? That we could easily discern if our thoughts and intentions were morally on course or leading us astray? And that we would consistently choose the right course and make the right decision?

This may seem like a dream to some of us, but it is the prayer Paul was praying for the Philippian church. And I think Paul was a realist and not a dreamer. I don’t think Paul prayed for something that was impossible to realize.

There is one more thing I want to look at before we close. In verse eleven Paul speaks of the believers in Philippi as being *“filled with the fruit of righteousness”*. Let’s look at a few related Scriptures to help us understand what this fruit is, where it comes from, and what the possession of this fruit is supposed to lead to.

FIRST: Where does this fruit come from?

It comes from Jesus Christ, the vine to Whom we are attached by faith. It comes from abiding in Him, in being and staying connected to Jesus.

JOHN 1:4-5

"Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."

Everyone produces fruit. It's the quality of the fruit that is the issue. Human fruit comes from human sources. Evil fruit comes from evil sources. Spiritual fruit comes from a spiritual source. When Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruit", he was telling us to inspect the fruit to see if it is righteous fruit. He also says here that it is impossible to produce righteous fruit without being attached to the True Vine. The fruit of righteousness can come only from Jesus who is called "The Righteous One." As we partake of His righteousness through faith He will produce this fruit in us.

SECOND: What is this *"fruit of righteousness"*?

We understand that righteousness comes by faith in Christ. And the fruit of this righteousness comes through the cultivation of the Spirit as the believer clings to the Vine (Jesus) and prepares his soil to receive the Word implanted. But to understand what the fruit of righteousness is let's look at Galatians because it provides a list of the various fruits that righteousness produces.

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."

If we are to look for the fruit of righteousness in our lives we need to look no further than this list. Having all these fruits manifest at the same time would be fruit heaven. But like earthly fruit each one has its own season to come forth. In our season of winter we may need patience. In our summer seasons we may need self-control. But in whatever season we find ourselves, we can be assured that the appropriate fruit will be available for harvest. For God's Spirit is constantly at work within us to produce this fruit.

The THIRD question I want to address is: What is the possession of this fruit supposed to lead to?

Verse 11 provides the answer.

PHILIPPIANS 1:10-11

*"...having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, **to the glory and praise of God.**"*

The fruit of a believer's life is always meant to bring praise and honor to God and glory and dominion to Jesus. If this does not occur then the fruit which is being produced is not of the Spirit, for the Spirit's job is to glorify Christ. So the test for righteous fruit should be that it brings forth glory and praise to God. If the fruit glorifies self it is not the fruit of righteousness.

These few verses should cause us to examine ourselves in three areas.

GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING FORTH PERFECTION

GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING FORTH EXCELLENCE

GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING FORTH FRUIT

1-GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING FORTH PERFECTION: How confident are we in God's ability to complete the work He began in us? Will we persevere to the end or will we abandon the race because we rely on our own strength rather than the power of God within us? We must not base our decision to persevere on our own strength and ability or even our own discernment. We must base our determination to continue on what God is able to do.

Ephesians 3:20 tells us, *"God is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."* We are not able to perfect ourselves. But God is able to perfect us. He has already started the process. We must trust that He will continue to perfect it until the day we meet the Lord face to face.

2-GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING FORTH EXCELLENCE: We love because He first loved us. Is our love reflective of the love we have received? Is our love innocent? Is it morally and ethically sound? Are our actions pure? Does our love stem from need and desire, or from an unselfish gratitude for the love which we have first received? Can we maintain moral excellence in all situations at all times? If not, how can we attain this excellence?

God is in the process of perfecting us. And He has made Christ the provision for our perfection. Yet in our journey through life we may fall short of God's expectations. We may have moral or ethical failures. But God has made Christ the provision for our failures as well.

1 John 1:9 tells us, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* So though we may temporarily fail in the area of our moral excellence, God has made it clear to us that we do not have to stay there. Through confession we can be made morally right once again. God has the ability to bring forth excellence in us, even when we fail.

3-GOD'S ABILITY TO BRING FORTH FRUIT: Are our lives filled with the fruit of the Spirit? Do we stay in the Vine bringing forth the fruit of righteousness? Or do we occasionally find ourselves producing bad fruit as we quench the Spirit's influence in our lives?

Galatians 6:7-10 says, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time, we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith."*

God is able to bring forth the fruit of righteousness in us. But fruit comes from planting. God has sowed the seed of His Holy Spirit in the soil of our hearts and from this sowing God is able to bring forth the fruit of His Spirit. But we are equally capable of sowing the seed of our flesh in the soil of this world. And when we sow fleshly seed we reap fleshly fruit. When this occurs we should not be surprised if the sweet smell of righteousness is replaced by the stench of this world's decay.

I think one of the reasons the color and texture of our fruit changes so often is because we grow impatient

with God. We want improvement now. We want convection oven patience, microwave goodness, on-tap kindness, and instant self-control. We fail to realize, in our instant access society, that the fruit of righteousness come from perseverance, from a long obedience in the same direction.

The disciples were not instantly transformed into those who turned the world upside down. Jesus walked with them, talked with them, ate and slept with them, and taught them before He sent them out to minister. But Jesus did not give up on them. Even knowing Peter would betray Him, Jesus said, *“When you have been restored (or turned back to Me again), strengthen your brothers.”* (Luke 22:32)

God does not say *“I am so done with you”* when we stray from Him. Instead he woos us back to Himself. He knows our frame, knows that we are but dust. He’s consistently and diligently working to perfect us. He is willing and able to bring forth the fruit of righteousness in us. All He asks of us is to yield to the power that works within us to produce this fruit. If we do so, and do not grow weary in the waiting, we will see the righteous seed that God has planted in us bring forth its fruit to the glory and praise of God the Father and Jesus His Son.

PRAYER

Father, we thank you that we can have confidence that what you have already begun in each of us who believe will be perfected throughout our life and come to its full fruition on the day of Christ Jesus. We ask, as Paul did for the Philippian church, that our love would abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that we may approve the things that are excellent in each and every situation we find ourselves in.

We give thanks to You for planting the seed of righteousness in us and acknowledge that You are able to bring forth the fruit of righteousness in our lives. But Father, we also understand that we can either cooperate with the growing process or hinder it. So we ask that You would continue to work within us to want to do Your will, to not be impatient with the process but allow the full measure of time to occur in order for the fruit to ripen.

We pray these things in the hope that our love and the fruit of righteousness displayed in our lives would result in all glory and praise going to You through the power and the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.