

Philippians 1:1-11
Gospel Centered Relationships

Introduction

1. Today we begin our study of Paul's letter to the Philippians
2. As we generally do, we will start with some introductory material to help us understand the book
3. From a historical standpoint, we know a number of things about this letter:
 - a. Philippians is one of four books referred to as the Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon) because he penned the letter while in prison in Rome, probably around 60 to 62 AD
 - b. We also know that Timothy is with him (mentioned twice in the letter, but he was not confined to prison like Paul)
 - c. His audience was the church at Philippi, which was a Roman colony in Macedonia (modern day Greece)
 - d. This church was the first church Paul founded in Europe, (on his second missionary journey)—Acts 16
 - e. Paul visited the city two more times during his third missionary journey (2 Corinthians 8:1-5 and Acts 20:6)
 - f. Four years later, while he was in prison in Rome, the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to him with some gifts to help care for his needs
 - g. Along the way, Epaphroditus got sick (almost died), so Paul decided to send him back to the Philippians with this letter
4. The letter indicates a number of reasons for writing the letter:
 - a. One was to thank the Philippians for sending the gifts
 - b. Another was to let them know how he was doing
 - c. He also wrote to encourage them to stand firm
5. Genre
 - a. Philippians is rather unique in that its structure and content indicate that it can best be described as a letter of friendship
 - b. Letter writing in Paul's day was a bit of an art, and wasn't something that everyone did or could do (partly because not everyone could write, and partly because of the cost and scarcity of paper)
 - c. According to Gordon Fee, the ancient Greeks recognized 21 different categories of letters (i.e. what was taught in school), and the "friendly type" or friendship letter was the most common
 - d. These friendship letters were generally written when the two parties were absent from one another, and they had a particular structure and content to them-- Paul's letter to the Philippians follows this fairly closely
 - e. One of the reasons these letters were the most common of all the types was because of how the Romans and Greeks valued and viewed friendships (they saw them in three categories):
 - 1) **Need-based Friendship**—based purely on what each party provides to the other (this was the least important, often distained by Greeks)

- 2) **Utilitarian Friendship**--based on enjoyment of the same things; based on usefulness and practicality. You might call this a functional friendship meaning it provides a function (i.e. enjoyment, entertainment)
 - 3) **True Friendship**—this was the pinnacle of friendship, the most desired and valued. It was friendship built upon goodwill and loyalty to one another, as well as the sharing of the same virtues or high moral standards
- f. We can see in this letter to the Philippians that Paul considered their friendship to fit this last category: True Friendship
6. Themes
- a. Joy: the words joy and rejoice occur 15 times
 - b. Thankfulness
 - c. Fellowship/Participation
 - d. Gospel: occurs 9 times
 - e. This last theme, that of the Gospel, permeates nearly every section of the letter and therefore every part needs to be seen and understood in light of the Gospel (thus, the “Gospel Centered ...” titles to this series of messages)
 - f. Today, we begin with Gospel Centered Relationships

A. Gospel centered relationships are characterized by thankfulness and prayer

1. Read 1-11
2. These first 11 verses make up the introduction to the letter and reveal a couple of things regarding the nature of the relationship between Paul and the Philippians—that is, that theirs was a Gospel Centered Relationship
3. It naturally falls into two sections, and these two sections reveal two traits of Gospel Centered Relationships:
 - a. The first focuses on Paul’s thankfulness for the Philippians and that’s found in verses 3-8
 - b. The second focuses on the content of Paul’s prayers for the Philippians and that’s found in verses 9-11

B. Paul’s thankfulness for the Philippians (3-8)
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1. Paul begins by expressing his thankfulness for the Philippians
2. Most translations break verses 3-6 down into two sentences which gives the impression that Paul is talking about thanksgiving in v. 3 and prayer in the rest of the verses.
3. However, verses 3-6 are one long sentence in the Greek, indicating that they are all one thought, and in this case all about Paul’s thanksgiving.
4. A more literal translation would be: **“I always thank my God whenever I remember all of you, always praying with joy for all of you, because of your participation in the Gospel from the first day until now, having been persuaded of this—that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion up until the day of Jesus Christ”** (own translation)
5. We learn a number of things about Paul’s thanksgiving here:
 - a. He thanked God for them often: **“always”** (2x) and **“whenever I remember all of you”**
 - b. It was a regular part of his prayer life, and something he did with great joy: **“always praying with joy for all of you”**
 - c. We also learn what it was that made him so thankful: their **“participation in the Gospel”**:

6. What did Paul mean by their participation in the Gospel?
 - a. Paul uses the Greek word *koinonia* here which is often translated as fellowship, but it can also be translated as share or contribution which is more likely here
 - b. He uses the same word in the same exact grammatical construct (*koinonia eis*) in 2 Corinthians 9:13 and Romans 15:26 where it refers to **participating in or contributing to something** (i.e. in those cases, the collection for the saints)
 - c. What Paul is referring to here is that the Philippians were partners with him in the proclamation and spread of the Gospel:
 - 1) They did this by praying for him (1:19)
 - 2) They did it by showing concern for him (4:10)
 - 3) They did it by contributing to his needs (on multiple occasions; 4:15-19)
 - 4) They even did it by sending one of their own, Epaphroditus, to minister to his needs while he was in prison (2:5; 4:18)
 - d. So, it was this partnership in the Gospel that formed the basis of Paul's thanksgiving:
 - 1) Their partnership was a faithful and loyal one: **"from the first day until now"** (6)—compare this with what Paul wrote in 4:15-16
 - 2) It was one Paul knew would continue because it was grounded in God's work in their lives: **"having been persuaded of this—that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion up until the day of Jesus Christ"** (6)
 - 3) And it created a bond between them and Paul like few things can: **"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. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus"** (7-8).
7. So, you see, one of the characteristics or traits of a Gospel-Centered relationship is that of regular thanksgiving:
 - a. How often do you thank God for the Christian family, friends and acquaintances that He's brought into your life?
 - b. Do you realize that the one thing above all others that you share in common with them is the Gospel? We are all co-participants in the Gospel!
 - c. How often do you thank God for these people?
 - d. How often do you thank Him for how they minister to you or encourage you to live out the Gospel in your life?
 - e. Let's turn it around—do you minister and encourage them in a way that makes them thankful for your friendship?

C. Paul's prayers for the Philippians (9-11)
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1. We see a second characteristic of Gospel-Centered relationships in the new few verses: prayer
2. Paul has already indicated that he prayed for the Philippians on a regular basis
3. Here we discover the SUBSTANCE and PURPOSE of those prayers (9-11): **"And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God."**

- a. The first thing we see is the SUBSTANCE of Paul's prayer (what did he Pray for the Philippians): **"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,"** (9):
 - 1) The grammar indicates that Paul already recognized their incredible love (as they had already expressed it to him)--what he prays for here is that their love would **"abound still more and more"**
 - a) In the Greek, the phrase **"still more and more"** is placed before **"abound"** as a means of emphasis
 - b) Even the word abound indicates something **beyond what is expected** (Louw & Nida)
 - 2) The love Paul is referring to here is likely love for one another (see 2:2), and it's a love he prayed would grow exponentially **"in real knowledge and all discernment"**
 - Epiginosko: experiential, definitive knowledge
 - Aisthesis: to perceive clearly, fully understand, possibly in a moral sense
 - 3) What Paul is praying for here is that their love for one another would be built upon an ever increasing practical (or experiential) knowledge and moral perception as they grow in their relationship with Christ
 - b. The second thing we see is the PURPOSE of Paul's prayer (why did he pray for the Philippians): **"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."** (10-11)
 - 1) That they might develop discernment: **"approve the things that are excellent"** (NET: "so that you can decide what is best")
 - 2) Which would help them remain **"sincere (pure) and blameless"** until facing Christ
 - 3) and would be evidence of their **"having been filled with"** the righteousness of Christ
 - 4) and ultimately result in **"glory and praise of God"**
4. So we see that a second character trait of Gospel-centered relationships is praying for others, especially believers
- a. Sure we all pray, and that's a good thing—Paul wrote that we are to pray without ceasing
 - b. Health and other temporal things are important, and we should pray for those things—in fact, John prayed for the "good health" of his readers in 3 John 1:2
 - c. However, in Gospel-centered relationships we should also be praying for spiritual things as well
 - d. How often do you pray for your Christian friends and family regarding spiritual things like those Paul prayed for the Philippians?
 - e. When you pray for them, do you stop at their temporal needs (i.e. health, physical ailments, finances, etc.) or do you ask yourself what they need spiritually?
 - f. You might ask, What kinds of spiritual things should we pray for?
 - g. I will close with some examples from the NT:
 - 1) 2nd Corinthians 13:9: Paul prayed that his readers might be made complete (mature)
 - 2) Ephesians 1:18: Paul prayed for the Ephesians eyes to be opened regarding the incredible inheritance we have in Christ
 - 3) Ephesians 6:19: Paul asked his readers to pray that he would be given an opportunity to open his mouth and preach the Gospel
 - 4) Colossians 1:19: Prayed that the Colossians would grow in their knowledge of God's will

- 5) 2 Thessalonians 1:11: that God would be glorified in them by counting them worthy of their calling in Christ and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith
- 6) 2 Thessalonians 3:1: Paul asked his readers to pray that the Word of God would spread rapidly
- 7) Philemon 1:6: Paul prayed that Philemon's faith would be an effective faith
- 8) Hebrews 13:18: the author of Hebrews asked that his readers would pray that he have a good conscience before God