

## **Philippians 1 pt. 2 v3-7**

Having set for the framework for how Paul relates to the Philippians, and in fact all the churches, we proceed with Paul's heartwarming introduction.

Remember that in v.1-2 Paul commends the grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ to the saints and the servants in Philippi.

What a blessed and lovely way to start things off! What if we reframed our interactions with others in these terms - grace and peace? Oh what a wonderful prospect!

Carried along in the realm of God's grace and peace Paul then sets forth his personal heart's prayer for them.

V.3-7 Paul prays for the saints at Philippi -- more specifically he tells them that he has prayed for them and continues to pray for them. Marked down for all of history to see, Paul professes to thank God for them every time they are brought to his remembrance.

This is kind of sentimental but it demonstrates his great love for these saints. We understand this to be a sincere declaration of affection towards them as well, not some lifeless incidental comment made to wrap up their conversation but to start the whole thing off.

How wonderful it is to hear the heart of others when they say they've been thinking of us and praying for us. And how wonderful a blessing it is to be able to do likewise!

If ever you feel the tug on your heart to pray for someone and to encourage them by letting them know - please do.

Don't listen to that cynical part of our nature that tries to convince us that they don't want to be bothered or that it would be weird to reach out.

We GET the opportunity to love one another. We are SUPPOSED to love one another and encourage each other and build each other up.

We've talked about the danger that kind of circulates through our culture where we feel like we can't encourage another person or

give somebody a compliment because, “I don’t want you to get a big head.” What a travesty!

The Bible teaches us the opposite in all kinds of varying circumstances that the early churches dealt with:

To the saints in Thessalonika questioning the coming of the Lord and the reality of the resurrection Paul writes: [1Th 5:11 NLT] 11 So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing.

To the saints in Rome when discussing how we are to not cause offense to one another Paul writes: [Rom 14:19 NLT] 19 So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.

While writing of how we are to contend earnestly for the faith Jude writes: [Jde 1:20 NLT] 20 But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit,

After laying out this grand treatise of how the OT serves as a shadow of the things to come, of Christ the author of Hebrews

writes: [Heb 10:25 NLT] 25 And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

In regards to our own humility [Jas 4:10 NLT] 10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

It is not our responsibility to humble others or to keep them from arrogance but to build one another up in love and encouragement serving one another for Jesus' sake.

[Jhn 13:35 NLT] 35 Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

All of this is on full display in Paul's opening lines to the Pilippians - He is full of joy making requests for them, praying for them, thanking God for them in his prayers.

Let us adopt this to our prayer habits as well! Pray for one another loved ones! Pray WITH one another loved ones! It may feel a little scary at first, or socially awkward but the Bible makes no allowance for us to cling to our caginess and ignore others in our prayers.

Paul was openly prayerful for the churches and for the people he cared about and he was intentional about letting them know.

We also see that this was personal to him. Paul viewed this time of prayer as time to come before "...my God." And what a privilege that is!

We have been given this nearly unfathomable access to the author of all creation whereby we may approach Him at any moment and share our most intimate thoughts, feelings, desires, requests, etc.

[Jhn 20:17 NKJV] 17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and [to] My God and your God.' "

There's no distinction between Jesus' access to the Father, Paul's access to the Father, and our own access to the Father.

This is personal! If it's not then we must ask ourselves "What are we doing!?"

Note too that Paul takes this time to be thankful for the other saints! He sees them as a blessing to him not a hindrance. Where often we see the reverse! There is so much division, so much criticality -- so little grace and peace.

But, Paul is plain that he is grateful for them even in the midst of his own distressing circumstances -- imprisoned half a continent away; and he makes time for them in his prayers.

Notice he says he gives thanks for them, "always in every prayer of mine."

A few key thoughts here:

First, the implication is that Paul had a robust prayer life. What a shame it would be if the times he mentioned them in prayer were once a year! The weight of Paul's language though is that they are frequently in his prayers - not rarely.

Second, we can only take Paul at his word - that he is sincere in his declaration of praying for them, thanking God for them often and not just putting on a show.

Often people can feel quite guilty about their own prayer lives - as if they don't spend enough time in prayer.

Perhaps one of the reasons why is because we don't find any joy in it as Paul did. It's become tiresome for us to spend time with the Father or we feel like it's ineffectual or we're just speaking hopeful words without any real consequence into the air.

We've all felt these things. May the Lord grant us the understanding and the spark of desire and joy to spend time with Him in our prayers. After all - parents desire to speak with their children.

For Paul, his prayer life was joyful. That is somewhat remarkable given his circumstances.

One of our common arguments about why our prayer lives are so toneless, weak, and inconsistent is that we don't have enough time. Or, life gets in the way.

More than being completely false what that kind of thinking does is reveal our own personal value systems. We value, we enjoy, other things better than prayer.

This isn't a guilt trip - it's a reality check. We do the things that we find joy in and we procrastinate and dismiss those things that we don't enjoy -- like working out.

We know it's good for us and beneficial but we just can't find the time, we just can't get up and do it...until we find something we enjoy.

We don't HAVE to pray...we GET to pray! But this is one of those things that gets taken for granted with the cross in our rearview mirror.

What is Paul thankful for with the Philippians? Something that makes my pastor's heart so joyful...shared mutual interest, fellowship, IN THE GOSPEL - THE GOOD MESSAGE.

AND, remarkably the Philippians had a reputation for faithfulness over the long haul, "from the first day until now."

“The church at Philippi was founded by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey from Antioch, Syria. The precise time of Paul’s arrival is unknown, but most likely it was around a.d. 51.” Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 26.

That puts this letter about ten years after the church plant. Ten years of faithfulness is nothing to scoff at.

It is also recorded that the Philippians maintained a vibrant, caring church for much longer!

“The church remained strong into the second century...Fifty years after Paul’s letter to the church, Ignatius was escorted to Rome by Roman soldiers to be tried for his faith in Christ and he was comforted by the church at Philippi on the way.” Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 29.

Endurance loved one! Faithfulness! That is what marks the Lord’s churches. Names change, buildings change, trends come and go

but the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, wherever it may be, endures!

Paul takes his confidence in the staying power of the saints from the Lord Jesus. It is Jesus who began the good work in them and it is Jesus who will finish it.

This is so important - especially as we are considering the endurance and faithfulness of the saints. It is Jesus who is responsible for the work. We have a shared responsibility given to us by Him to be obedient to His direction but it is ultimately His work to complete.

We would do well to remember this! “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

We must resist all temptation to take over, to assume the role as lord over our own domain. We are woefully unequipped for such a role.

We like to do that though don't we? Having come to faith in Christ by no power of our own but by the grace of God we sometimes come to a place where we believe that we have matured to a

state where we can take over, we can finally take responsibility for our own spiritual growth. NOT SO!

We cling to the person and work of Jesus Christ knowing that our best efforts are fraught with failure if we rely on our own authority and lordship.

We must allow Jesus to complete the work that He has started in us - He is faithful to do so in His timing, on His terms, for His purpose and glory.

In Galatians Paul spends time addressing the trap that they fell into with regards to trying to keep the old covenant and traditions when he wrote: [Gal 3:3 NKJV] 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

But the same challenge resonates with us. Are we trying to perfect ourselves by means other than the cross of Christ? Ultimately those attempts will prove unsuccessful and burdensome.

But praise be to our Lord who is faithful when we are not and who has promised to carry out every good work both within us and through us until His day, until the very end.

As on text reads: “The outward cooperation in the work of the gospel is, of course, the outcome and expression of the inward change made at the time of conversion.” I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 12.

This is incredibly hopeful - what we do, our cooperation in the kingdom, in our shared fellowship in the gospel matters AND will be accomplished according to Jesus’ faithfulness rather than our own. That’s amazing!

Jesus will go on completing the work that He started! This informs our understanding of how sanctification or growing in holiness works. It is not a flash in the pan situation but something we grow in over time, over years of interacting with and responding to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. We are made righteous by the blood of Jesus and we are being made righteous, “conformed to His image,” (Rom 8:29) until He comes again.

That leads us to consider the when of it all. WHEN is “the day of Jesus Christ” - what does this mean?

“The Lord’s coming, designed by God in every age of the Church to be regarded as near, is to be the goal set before believers’ minds rather than their own death.” Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 360.

“*The Day of Christ Jesus* is not a reference to the day of one’s death, but to the Parousia, or the return of Christ.” I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 13.

We as Jesus followers are to live in a state of expectancy. It’s not as if the early church was duped, or had bad theology since they expected the Lord to return at any moment.

We are hopeful of the same thing! That is what lends urgency to our witness, to our labor for the kingdom - that more may be saved while the patience of God continues.

[Rom 13:11 NLT] 11 This is all the more urgent, for you know how late it is; time is running out. Wake up, for our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

V.7 Paul's affection and prayers for the saints are not misplaced, nor out of line, nor is this some form of flattery to be avoided.

It is right and good to have affection for the saints - and we would do well to remember that and internalize that!

Paul doesn't shy away from this type of tenderhearted language.

We know from his other writings that he certainly does not hold back in saying the hard things good or bad. Paul speaks truth and it is good for us to both speak these things in sincere love for one another and to hear these things from others.

Even though Paul found himself in trying circumstances he took great comfort in the relationship that he had with the saints. Going so far as to say, "I have you in my heart."

We understand what deep affection this communicates. AND we find that the foundation of this affection was the grace of God that they shared in together.

We share in God's grace individually but also collectively.

When we recall that these fellow saints who are being shaped by Jesus in the kingdom with us are joint heirs, and joint recipients of God's favor that has a unique way of shaping how we interact with one another and how we hold people in our hearts.

We are sinners! Yet we are loved by God, saved by grace, and we're all in this together. Let us then endeavor to keep one another in our hearts, in our prayers, and to lean into this blessed fellowship in the gospel that the Lord has established for us.