

philippians : putting the gospel first philippians 1v1-11

background – where & when

Paul tells us in 1v13 that he is writing from prison. He was imprisoned at various times, but it was probably while he was in prison in Rome, around AD 61. Paul had been to Philippi before – it might be helpful to read about it in Acts 16. A rich woman, a slave girl and a jailor are all converted, and form the beginnings of the Philippian church.

Philippi was a city in eastern Macedonia. It had an important position along the route from Rome to the east, and it had the privileged status of being a Roman colony – a little bit of Rome in Greece.

This section is all about gospel partnership – the kind of fellowship which is based on the good news of Jesus Christ...

verses 1-2

The first two verses are like the envelope of the letter. They explain who the letter is from and who it is to, followed by a short greeting.

The letter is from Paul and Timothy (although Paul immediately switches to using "I" and "me"). He describes them as servants of Christ Jesus – literally, "slaves." This is how Paul sees his role as an apostle – his whole life is given over to serving Jesus.

Paul writes to the "saints" or "God's holy people" at Philippi. He is writing to the Christian church there. He specifically mentions the overseers and deacons – he wants them to take particular note.

Paul adds a typical greeting: "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (v2). It's very Paul, but grace and peace are also issues which will arise in the letter...

verses 3-5

Paul talks about his thankfulness for the Philippians. Whenever he remembers them, he gives thanks to God for them. When he prays for them, he prays with joy. And he explains why – his joy comes from their unstinting partnership in the gospel.

Paul is convinced that their support is motivated by Christ at work in them. His joy ultimately comes from seeing Jesus at work in the Philippians, not because there is something particularly joy-inspiring about them.

verses 6-8

Paul's joy does not just come from his current partnership with the Philippians - he is convinced that Christ will go on working in them, and that He will eventually complete what he has started. Paul's partnership with the Philippians is evidence of Christ at work in their lives, and so he can be sure that He will continue to work in them.

The basis of their partnership is the gospel. They are all "partakers of grace" – that is, they have experienced grace for themselves. And they are now involved in sharing it with others.

Paul longs for them with the affection of Christ Jesus. Again, the love of Christ is central to their relationship. It is the love of Christ, at work in Paul, which longs for the Philippians. Notice how strong Paul's feelings are – he adds extra force to his words by saying "God is my witness..." – he *really* wants them to know how much he yearns for them.

verses 9-11

Paul moves on to explain how he prays for the Philippians – imagine what an encouragement that must have been to the Christians in Philippi. He prays that their "*love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...*" He wants their love to grow, but he wants it to be based on a growing understanding of the truth. To grow as a Christian is to grow in our grasp of the truth. But this isn't just academic knowledge, it's the knowledge of God and all that he has done to rescue us through Jesus.

Notice the links Paul makes as he prays for them, starting at the 'root' (love), and resulting in the fruit of righteousness. He prays that their love may abound, in knowledge and insight, **so that** they might be discerning and approve what is excellent, **so that** they might be pure and blameless for the day of Christ **and** filled with the fruit of righteousness, **which will be** to the glory and praise of God. And this will ultimately bring glory and praise to God.

NB: When Paul talks about "the fruit of righteousness," he probably isn't talking about the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5v22). He's talking about the observable, constantly developing results of growing in love.

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questions

Remember, these are **suggestions** – feel free to add, remove or change them!

for starters - a discussion question to get you going.

“What brings you joy?”

“When you think about other Christians, what do you thank God for?”

discover

v1-2 What would be written on the envelope.” (Maybe get them to write on real envelopes?)

How does Paul describe himself and the Philippians? Is there anything surprising about what he says?

v3-5 What brings Paul joy, and how does he show it? How does this compare with what brings you joy?

v6-8 How can Paul be sure the Philippians will keep going?

What is the foundation of their gospel partnership?

v9-11 What does Paul pray for the Philippians?

understand

v1-2 Why might Paul greet them the way he does? Why grace and peace?

v3-5 Why do you think gospel partnership would bring Paul joy?

v6-8 How does the partnership Paul has with the Philippian Christians lead to his confidence that they will continue to grow?

What is it that makes Paul love them?

v9-11 Look at Paul’s prayer for the Philippians. How does this compare with what you might pray for fellow Christians?

How does growing in love lead to fruit? How might this work out in real life?

What is the ultimate goal of Paul's prayer?

respond

v3-5 Does gospel partnership bring you joy? Why/why not?

v6-8 Have you experienced or seen this kind of gospel partnership? What is it like?

v9-11 What do you need to be praying for each other? What will it look like if God answers these prayers?

things to ponder

How does this kind of partnership work out in a CU small group?

What part does it play in how we 'speak for Jesus'?

What needs to change for this kind of gospel partnership to be a reality in your small group?

How can you practically show this gospel partnership with each other? (*Hint: this isn't about following rules – remember it's all based on the gospel of grace...*)

