

Philippians 1:1–11

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[0 : 0 0] Philippians chapter 1 verses 1 through 11. Please stand for the reading of God's word. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you, all making my, for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus

Christ to the glory and praise of God. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Well, good morning and welcome to Christ Church Chicago. I want to send special greetings to those of you who are visiting with us today and in town for the weekend celebrating various family members. Special welcome to you.

I want to begin this summer series by asking a direct question. What kind of church would it take to excite your engagement? What kind of church would you actually consider attending by virtue of its activities? What kind of a ministry would solicit your personal and ongoing involvement? Think of it this way.

What kind of church would you be able to say, I'm a member and I love it. I'm an attendee and I'm excited about it. Evidently, fewer and fewer people are finding any decent reasons to answer such questions in the affirmative. According to statistical data, membership in the local church, attendance in a local church is actually in sharp decline in the West generally, but uniquely in the United States as never before. In the year 2000, 70% of men and women in the United States attended churches regularly, whether that be Christian churches or Jewish synagogues or Islamic mosques. According to the data of 2019, it's plummeted from 70% to 47%. More recently, even this year, the Pew Foundation, folks who explore these kinds of things through phone surveys would say that that data of 47% is actually high.

So the decline is on. Fewer and fewer people are able to engage a local church with their own personal involvement. So let me take a swing at it. Here's the kind of church I'd like to be a part of. You ready?

[4 : 0 8] The church, a church that pleases God by remaining in partnership with Christ. Let me say that again, a church that pleases God by remaining in partnership with Christ. I think if I was a part of something that I felt was pleasing God, learning myself how to please God, that would probably excite me. I think if I was giving myself to something that was in partnership with Christ, then that would excite me.

And if that's the case, then our summer series in Philippians is perhaps for you, for me, for us, for us all, for this church, the church in Philippi, was a church that pleased God by remaining in partnership with Christ. How do I know? First of all, it's a church that made much of Jesus.

Point one, a church that made much of Jesus. Can I have you take a look again at the prescript, verses one and two, Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus to the saints in Christ Jesus, who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons, grace to you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. You know, more often than not, when somebody would start to explain an epistle from the Bible to a local congregation, they would look at the introduction and they would speak to you for probably 10 or 15 minutes on the author and the audience, on the writer and the recipients.

They would introduce to you, in this case, plural, the writers and the recipients, a church in total. What's interesting about this, though, is the often overlooked person in the text.

Look at it again. It's so easy to miss him. The surprise of this introduction, unlike any other Greco-Roman letter that's extant, this introduction does not overlook the person of Jesus Christ in the prescript. And yet, he gets so little time in our conversation. It's almost as though the letter opens with Jesus standing off stage left. And all we have to talk about is Paul, Timothy, and the congregation in Philippi. But look again, Paul and Timothy's servants, notice the prepositions of Christ Jesus to the saints that are in Christ Jesus. Grace to you and peace from Christ Jesus, Jesus Christ. He's appearing here more than anyone else. In fact, both the author and the audience, the writers and the recipients, are only known in the prescript by their relationship to Christ Jesus.

[7 : 25] It certainly reveals that these writers understood that in addressing the church in Philippi, they needed to make much of Jesus.

Notice how even Paul and Timothy's names appear as servants of Christ Jesus. What an irony there.

You think of Paul as the apostle, the one who often begins his letters with this fixed statement that he is an authority over things on behalf of Christ Jesus. But here with this church, he is introducing himself as under the authority of Christ Jesus. And the word servants here is as low as you can go.

In fact, when he planted the church in Philippi, Acts 16 records that there was a Greek slave girl who followed his entourage, mockingly and unwittingly declaring, you know, these two are servants of the Most High, servants of the Most High, to the point where it was creating this dilemma for Paul to actually accomplish his desire to preach or teach or speak a word about Christ Jesus.

And so now, these months or years more likely later, when he writes them, he has embraced the very derogatory term that was applied to him on his arrival.

[9 : 17] And he says, yes, she got it right. Servants of Christ Jesus. Look at the congregation itself.

How did they view themselves? To all the saints that are in Christ Jesus. And notice it says to all the saints.

I mean, this word of allness continues to roll through this introductory set of verses.

When you go ahead and take a look, you'll find it in verse three. I thank my God and all of my remembrance of you always in every prayer of mine for you all.

Take a look down at verse seven. It is right for me to feel this way about you all. For you are all partakers.

[10 : 15] Verse eight. How I yearn for you all. I mean, when you're introduced to the letter, you're introduced to this whole family in Philippi.

Whether they've been there a short time or a long time, whether they were founding members on his second missionary journey or more recently began attending that church, even though they may have never met him.

Paul wanted them to know. I'm excited about this church because I know that you are all in Christ Jesus. I am a servant of him, but you are in him.

And notice the term. It's saints. What a wonderful thing. It doesn't say for all of you sinners who have walked in week by week. Of course, we know we are sinners.

But the word here is saints. You have a new position in Christ. You can imagine the gathering of that congregation, people, men, women, children, buoyantly entering.

[11 : 22] To see what God would have for that church. What about the context of this church that made much of Christ Jesus?

The context says they were at Philippi. I don't want to rehearse all of the founding of Philippi through its Greek traditions in Macedonia in the fourth century.

The way it moved into a Roman colony. All of those things are true. But you need to know that this context of this church, it stood almost at the strategic middle of the Roman Empire.

If you stretched to the far western shores of Spain on one end to the Judean hillsides on the other end with Rome anchoring the capital of the empire, Philippi is just a little in the middle section of the empire on the eastern side.

Reminds me a little bit of the way Chicago would be positioned in our own country. It holds a special contextual place because it's in a strategic middle.

[12 : 32] That was the context of this church that made much for Christ. And the composition of the congregation, it says all the saints, and we don't know who they all were.

There's a few names listed here in chapter four. But we know some of the founding members. Get this for just a second.

Catch the core early adopters of the Christian message in Philippi. A wealthy Asian businesswoman by the name of Lydia.

Probably held a home in Philippi as one abode among many. She was a maker of fabrics.

And in Acts 16, we learn that she was religiously oriented and a woman of prayer who, when hearing Paul's preaching and speaking, embraced the message of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ.

[13 : 41] She's the first member of the church, a wealthy Asian businesswoman. And she's coupled in the same congregation with this Greek impoverished slave girl who was herself employed by others to simply make money on their behalf, reading palms.

So the local palm reader had become a Christian and closed one shop to open up another. And then the third convert, that Roman citizen, not the wealthy Asian businesswoman or the impoverished Greek slave girl, but the hardworking Roman citizen.

He was a Roman, he was a jailer. And he and his entire household become founding members. Now, whether they were still in the church at the time of the letter, we don't know.

But that little cosmopolitan core was pleasing to God and enlarged as they remained in partnership with Christ.

What kind of church pleases God and remains in partnership with Christ? This kind of church. A church that makes much of Jesus Christ.

[15 : 03] A church that their collective center is not their interests or their principle of homogeneity.

Their collective center isn't even their diversity. It's their union of being in Christ. And being centered in him, they fell in love with one another.

I guess that moves us. What kind of church do I want to be a part of? I want to be a part of something that pleases God and remains in partnership with Christ.

I want to do it in this kind of context, in this strategic middle. With people from all walks of life. Who are brought together by what we have in Christ.

Wow. Can you imagine? What he might yet do. Not only that. It's not just a church that made much of Jesus Christ.

[16 : 10] It's a church that had deep affection for one another in Christ. This is an aspect of communion. Can I show this to you?

This deep affection they had for one another. Let me just show it to you in three textual hints. Beginning at verse 7. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

What a little phrase. I hold you in my heart. Grammatically, it's a little more complex. In fact, there has been some discussion among those who study these languages, how we ought to take these terms.

Is he sane here because he holds them in his heart or is it that they hold him in their heart? And the debate rages.

And I'm not here to solve the grammatical problem. I'm here to point out the solution that problem actually affords. Because if you or I were in the church, they'd say, well, what are you talking?

[17 : 17] What does it matter? Whether it's he who loves us or us who loves him is both. This church had a deep affection for one another.

They held one another. Imagine it. Look around. Look around at names and faces that you don't even know yet who are here this morning. Imagine being in a church where you might be able to say, they hold me in their heart.

I hold them in my heart. Second clue in the text about this deep-seated affection. Verse 8.

For God is my witness how I yearn for you. What a word. Yearning. I mean, it's evocative by intent.

This is not a church where the relationship between Paul and the people or the people with one another was simply perfunctory. It wasn't as though they attended a service and left.

[18 : 21] This word yearning is longing. And it's used in 2 Corinthians. It's used in 2 Timothy. In instances where Paul is expressing the longing for relationships when those relationships are presently absent, as they were here.

Paul was absent from them relationally. And the longing was a relational longing to see one another face to face. That's been one of the most deadly things of the COVID on the health of the church.

The false notion that you can have fellowship outside of human relationship.

Not possible. Not possible. For a very long period of time. In fact, not only is it lamented, it ought to be longed for on the day that you can actually return to that and see that and to come and be together.

Third grammatical indication in the text that they were pleasing God by remaining in partnership with Christ as expressed by their deep affection for one another in Christ.

[19 : 44] Not only the grammar of verse 7, I hold you in my heart. Not only the lexical sense of I yearn for you. But look at the way that sentence ends. It wasn't enough just for him to say, I yearn for you.

I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. That term affection was used in the Gospels of Christ Jesus when he looked out over the masses and thought that they were like sheep without a shepherd.

It's an affection that longs for care. It's an affection that expresses compassion. It's an affection that actually wants to meet real, tangible, personal, human, spiritual, social, emotional, physical need.

It's that kind of affection. Paul says, that's what I have for you. The church that pleases God by remaining in partnership with Christ makes much of Jesus.

They have deep affection for one another in Jesus. And what is it that develops that affection? What could possibly account for a growth in your own heart toward those that you're sitting in the midst of, some of whom you do not yet even know?

[21 : 07] What would make it personal? Well, look, third, this is a church with a deep-seated commitment to advancing the Gospel together for Jesus.

This was the activity of their gathering. Let me just show it to you in two places, both by the word because.

Let me back up and look at verse 3. He's thanking God in all of his prayers for them. Here it is. Because, verse 5, of your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now.

And then look down, verse 7. It's right for me to feel this way. Because you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and the defense and confirmation of the Gospel.

This is the grounding for their growing affection. They cared about one another because they were partakers.

[22 : 16] They were partners in advancing the Gospel. In other words, his heart devotion was directed to them because of their dedication to advancing the Gospel.

Your love for those who will enter this church will grow because you have decided together to labor for the Gospel.

This is profound in regard to its implication for our church. Our mutual love for one another depends upon a commitment to mutually labor for the Gospel.

And this also accounts for why churches are fraying. Because there's so little collaborating for the Gospel.

This word partnership is interesting. It's there clearly in verse 5. And yet in verse 7, the same word is there in the word partakers.

[23 : 38] They are sharers of something. They are partners in something. Even more than that, they are contributors to something.

In chapter 4, verse 15, this word will appear again as he thanks them for their partnership to his needs. They were making financial contribution to the expansion of the Gospel after Paul had left them.

It actually says that they had sent him gifts. Money gifts was an aspect of partnership for the Gospel. It wasn't just sharing in fellowship around a table and a good meal, as good as that can and should be.

It was sharing in the resources that together we would couple to send out. Now, you think about Christ Church Chicago.

What are we going to do when we sit under stained glass rather than dwell upon the open grass? Well, we're going to partner for the advance of the Gospel.

[24 : 46] And if that's not enough to draw your interest, your engagement, your interaction, your membership, your desire to move together, then it won't be enough. But for this church, their affection for one another grew because they were partnering and advancing the Gospel to one another.

I cannot wait to see what the Lord does with us as we prayerfully discern how might the Gospel be advanced by our communion with one another.

We know how they did it, Philippi. They funded the furtherance of Gospel enterprise through the planting of churches and the partnering with global ministry partners.

That's what they did. In other words, they were already, when they joined together, considering things outside their own neighborhood.

I mean, this has just been sitting on me now for a few weeks. Everyone trying to resource woodlawn with what they determine it needs.

[26 : 03] And from heaven above, I am convinced that God will use woodlawn to resource the world with what it actually needs.

It's all here. A cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic, socioeconomically diverse, needy, affluent, hardworking citizenry.

It's all here. The world is already here. 2,300 undergraduate students will dwell within a block of a new building that your family comes into each week.

How foolish would we be to not get excited about partnering for the advance of the Gospel to the ends of the earth? The Gospel will go to the ends of the earth, and one day someone will say, and how did it get here?

Woodlawn Center. As everyone in our city is all worried about how to resource woodlawn, woodlawn will resource the world with the Gospel.

[27 : 07] I just think this is so wonderful to think about. And it stands as the central point in the text. The church that I want to be a part of is the church that pleases God by remaining in partnership with Christ.

It's not about just you and me. Think about it today. Where's Jeremy Meeks, one of our members? Oh, he's preaching at another church in Chicago. Where's Jim White, one of our members?

Oh, he's also preaching at a different church in Chicago. Where's Ayanna Heron, one of our deacons? Oh, she's supporting the preaching of another church in the city of Chicago as our member preaches, and she is in prayer.

Already, already this church is expanding itself in its own city beyond its collective gathering. May that only increase.

First, a church that makes much of Jesus. A church that has affection for one another in Jesus. A church that has tangible commitments to advancing the Gospel for Jesus.

[28 : 22] Fourth, a church that's making progress until the day of Jesus. That's the kind of church I want to be in. Don't give me a church that's all done and all tied up and all bowed and everyone looking good, smelling good, being good.

Give me a church where there's progress to be made. My progress and yours. Look at verse 6. Famous verse, and I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

They were making progress. Claire Rothschild, our own member, reminded me this week that this is Paul turning over the work that he began to an acknowledgement that it is God who began.

Remember, it was Paul that got this thing off the ground. But now here, Paul says, I am sure of this, that he who began it, God began it, that's past, will bring it to completion, that's present.

At the day of Christ, that's future. It's a church where people are making progress, where nobody is perfect, where we are on a continuum that is growing.

[29 : 41] You know, we like to say we want to grow together in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. That would excite me about increased effort at Christ Church Chicago.

That would involve me with personal vigor. Hopefully that would capture your imagination to be a part of a local church family where we all view one another as making progress in Christ and depending on God who actually started it, is in it, and will complete it.

He who began a good work in you, justification, will bring it to completion. Thank God for sanctification. At the day of Christ Jesus, that's glorification. And when you take a look at verse 10, the way it ends, that's certainly in his mind that he wants them to be pure and blameless for that future day of Christ.

Oh, to be a church where we acknowledge we are all unfinished works and to see the glory in the unfinished nature of the project.

You know, just recently I was in the building and, you know, we had dorksbox got all this stuff going on in there and there's dirt everywhere and mounds and there were actually little backhoes running around in the basement digging up things.

[31 : 01] And I loved it. It was a disastrous, glorious mess. Now all the pipes have been put down. All the concrete's been laid. It's starting to look a little clean.

And I said, it's all starting to look a little too clean. Only because I love the glory of the journey. That we all have to be torn down if we're going to be built up.

That we have to expose ourselves if new vital lines are to run through ourselves. And that's Paul saying this. I am confident that what God started in you, you all, you individually, he's got an ability to keep doing it.

And eventually, at the day of Christ, you will stand as the glorious brick in the temple of God, pure and blameless.

But until that day, let us walk together and treasure, treasure the opportunity to train and to grow in grace.

[32 : 06] Finally, what kind of church do I want to be a part of? Not only a church that makes much of Jesus. Not only a church where there's deep affection for one another in Jesus. Not only a church that's committed to advancing the gospel for Jesus.

Not only a church that's made up of people who are making progress until the day of Christ Jesus. But finally, a church in which the prayers for it are accomplished through Christ Jesus.

Look at nine. Again, it's my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment. So that you may approve what is excellent. And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

Notice that through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. What is he praying for? He's praying that they will be able to approve what is excellent.

In other words, that you'll be faithful to that which is excellent. But he's also praying that you will be approving of the things which are excellent so that you will be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

[33 : 16] He's praying that their faith and their fruit would continue to remain as they've given themselves to pleasing God through ongoing partnership in Christ.

It happens after prayer.

By remaining in partnership with Christ. And so I close where I started. What kind of church would it take to excite your own personal engagement?

It's a church that would please God by remaining in partnership with Christ. Why not us? Why not here? Why not now?

Why not now? The key, of course, we're already well on our way. But the key, of course, is understanding that the gospel that saves us is a gospel that will convince us to partner, to advance that.

[34 : 51] And as we advance that gospel, it will produce in us the things that bind us and the things that build us.

The gospel that saves you is a gospel you want to advance together for him. In advancing the gospel together for him, we will be bound together and built up.

And those dreaded statistics taking place across this great nation of ours. It's a Tony Horton line for those of you who don't do P90X.

That great nation of ours will be reversed. Why not join us? Our Heavenly Father, thank you for this letter that you've given us for the summer.

Encourage our hearts like buoys on the water. As we learn your plans for us in Christ's name. Amen.