

Philippians Introduction

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, what an amazing joy to be part of this confirmation. And I talked to somebody at the greeting time who was not the parent or relative of any of the candidates.
- And she said how heartwarming it is to see this. And I think that this is the perfect introduction to the book of Philippians.
- Because Philippians is heartwarming. Our hearts are warm to see what God is doing in each of these 15 people who were confirmed.
- That's what warms our hearts. That's what gives us a deep sense of love and thankfulness to God for what he does in people. And every one of these candidates' journey is very different.
- And God is in control of their lives and has his hand on each of you as well. So some of you, I know your story more than others.
- [1 : 0 2] Nicholas is I know best. And I won't give a testimony at all about Nicholas. But I had to hold off on the temptation to say something when I confirmed him.
- I was confirmed when I was a teenager. And the bishop came to my point and they said, Daniel. And he was going to confirm and he stopped and he said, Daniel, stay out of the lion's den.
- So that was a word for my life apparently. And I want to congratulate you all for doing the work too. And to thank those who were mentors and leading those confirmation classes.
- What a marvelous job you did. I know Ben and Jeremy and Esther and Stephen and Willie. Who else am I forgetting? And Karen and Philip too.
- How could I forget? Have just really committed themselves to this. Have loved these candidates and taught them so very well. And Esther, I'm glad you were confirmed after teaching that class so well too.
- [2 : 0 9] Teachers get to know the material much better than others. When I first came to BC, I moved. I was a Canadian citizen but I was moving from the United States. And I came in and he couldn't quite figure out the board of guard how to what status I should have coming in.
- Because I was a citizen. Should I call you landed? Permanent resident what? He said, what is your occupation? And I said, I'm a minister. He said, oh, do you have something to prove that you're a minister? And I said, well, no.
- We don't carry an ID card or anything. There's really no way. He said, well, maybe I could ask you the Ten Commandments. Which all of you. And I said to him, do you know the Ten Commandments?
- He said, no, I better let you go through. So this is a wonderful context to begin this series on the book of Philippians.
- Because it is all about the gospel of grace. And you know, Paul in this letter draws us continually to Jesus Christ. That's what confirmation is about as well.

- [3 : 17] He is passionate about the good news of Jesus. That's called the gospel. And what is that gospel? But Jesus himself. And his work on a cross for us.
- His marvelous, powerful, life-changing resurrection that we celebrated last week as well. And when we put our faith and trust in this Jesus, nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- He adopts us into his family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ together in this confirmation service. We have permanent fellowship with him.
- Because we have been adopted by faith in him. That's the gospel. That's the good news in a world where many are confused about their identity.
- About threats in this world that they are fearful of. About their purpose in life. What is life about? Worried about threats like war in Ukraine and COVID pandemic, economic insecurity.
- [4 : 26] In Jesus, though, the gospel says God is in control. That this world with all of its pain and beauty is in his hands.
- That he is working all things together. Even those very difficult things for his good purposes. For our perfect well-being.
- And that he loves his people. That's the gospel. That's the meaning of this gospel for us. His mission through his people, his church, is something that you and I are part of.
- And it is very simply to bring sinners into a saving knowledge of God. So that he heals their relationship with him. Our relationship with him.
- And with one another. And makes us perfectly whole one day when Jesus comes again. And that idea of coming Jesus, coming again, runs all through this letter to the Philippians.
- [5 : 30] So as you read this great letter, you will see Jesus and you will see his grace very clearly. And that's why this letter is a warm and joyful letter.
- It's the same tone as this service is. And if you have not yet put your faith in Jesus. Whether you're watching here online or are here today with us.
- It's a particularly helpful letter. Because the living Jesus seeks you. And his grace is for you. That's what Jesus said his mission was.
- And you will see Jesus clearly enough to decide if you will put your trust in him for the rest of your life. As those who shared today were talking about.
- For all who receive Jesus, who have done this already. He will strengthen and encourage you through this letter. To serve him and to actually grow in your love for him.
- [6 : 28] And for your brothers and sisters of this church family. Just as we prayed for the Holy Spirit to do in those confirmations. The great thing about having 15 people is you probably memorized the words I said that prayer.
- Which is words for us as well. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So this letter is all about Jesus. And it teaches his church, us here today, to be united in him.
- So that we will be bright shining lights in a world that is often very dark towards God. It is so that, this letter is written so that, people will see his glory through you.
- So let's turn to the first 11 verses of Philippians. And you can find that in the Pew Bibles. And in fact, I also invite you to read the whole book of Philippians.
- Several times. And this week, read it at least once. I timed myself reading it. It was less than 10 minutes. And I wasn't reading fast. 10 minutes.
- [7 : 37] Very worthwhile. And I want to tell you a little bit of background as you're turning. Paul is under house arrest in Rome. With a Roman soldier continually watching him as he awaits trial before Nero the emperor.

And this is a serious trial. It can end in his freedom. Or it can end in his execution. So it's uncertain, stress-filled times for Paul.

But it's also a time that we're going to hear in the gospel, in this letter, that God works very powerfully through him. I mean, most of the guard in the Roman army got to know about him in the gospel.

But you can see also in verse 1 that his young faithful co-minister, Timothy, is with him as he writes the letter. And he writes it in to the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.

Now, that word saint in the Bible is a person who is set apart. So I could have said to all these people who got confirmed, you know, this is Saint Tatiana.

[8 : 43] This is Saint Esther. Saint Nicholas. You know, I could go down the line. Saint Brayden. But what that means very simply is anyone who God has begun this good work and is following the Lord Jesus.

You are a saint if you put your trust in Jesus. Even if you don't feel like a saint, you are God's work in progress. And the amazing thing about the saints in Philippi is they are a diverse bunch of people.

You know the church started because Paul was on a missionary journey. And he got diverted. He ended up in Philippi, which is not too far south from Istanbul. And you can read all about this in Acts 16.

But I'll tell you very briefly. His practice, Paul, was to go to a synagogue in a given city that he was visiting. But there's no synagogue to talk about Jesus. So he knew that there were people who went to pray down by the river on the Sabbath.

So he goes down there. And while he's there, there are women who are praying. And Paul speaks to them about Jesus. And one of those women listening was named Lydia.

[9 : 53] Who was a very successful international businesswoman. She produced very valuable purple dye from fields back in her hometown in Turkey.

And she manufactured all kinds of very valuable cloth that was dyed. And she distributed and sold them throughout the Roman world.

She was very influential and very successful. And I love how Luke describes her conversion in Acts 16. It says, The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

We should all pray this before we hear any sermon. That God would open our heart to hear what was being said. And after she was baptized and her household as well, she urged us.

This is Luke talking about he and Paul. If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay. And she prevailed upon us. She did not take no for an answer.

[10 : 51] You're coming. And her home became the church gathering place. Now, wonderfully, there's two other people mentioned in the early days of Philippi.

One's a slave girl who used to tell fortunes because she had this spirit that was not from God. And men made money off of her.

And she was oppressed. Paul, in the name of Jesus, released her from that spirit so that her owners no longer could profit from her. And she's free. She likely then was cared for by the church and brought into the church's fellowship as a sister in Christ.

Now, those owners were so angry about their loss of income that they created this riot. And Paul and Silas were beaten badly and thrown into prison. But then you know the story. There was an earthquake that opened all the doors of the jail.

And the jailer who was there was about to kill himself because his job failed. All of them were gone, he thought.

[11 : 58] But Paul stopped him suddenly, telling him that all had stayed in the jail. And like Lydia, he listened to Paul speak about the Lord Jesus. And he believed and he was baptized.

His whole family with them as well. And he cared for Paul and actually bathed his wounds that he had actually caused.

He opened his home to Paul as well. You see this response of joy and thankfulness and generosity because of the gospel of Jesus. These are very different people, these three people.

Wealthy business owner, destitute slave, rough jailer. All of them transformed by the good news of Jesus. God opened their hearts, each of them, so that they believed this news.

And so they put their trust in Jesus with a deep generosity of spirit towards others and thankfulness. So those are the first converts. Those are the first saints of Philippi, the core of that church plant.

[13 : 02] Joel and Jeremy take note. And this was a church that knew the lavish grace of God and his peace, reconciliation with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ that Paul says at the beginning here.

It's a church that is close to Paul's heart. It's a church known for a deep sense of thankfulness and generosity. But they're not a perfect church.

Like every Christian, this diverse group of believers fights bravely under Christ's banner against the devil's deception, the empty promises of this world, and the sin in our own hearts.

And I love the fact that in our welcome sessions, David Short usually says, we are going to disappoint you in this church.

And that's the beginning of saying we're all sinful people who are saved by grace and we are in process. We heard that those that were confirmed publicly renounced this sin that we deal with that continues to work in us, even though God has saved us.

[14 : 12] And the Philippians were dealing with divisions among them that had started up. Rivalries because of pride, false teachers, and real fears because the world seemed to be turning against them.

And all of these things could pull the church apart so that they are not serving together. So then they are not together about this mission of bringing the light of the gospel into this world and to one another.

So Paul in this letter brings them and us to Jesus Christ. He shows us that where sin increases, grace abounds all the more, more and more.

That's what we prayed for this morning. There are two simple things that I want to go over and just briefly it looks like. Two things about this letter, the way it's structured. Paul gives thanks to God for his powerful work in this church in the first section, three through eight.

And then he simply prays for the church in verses nine through 11. So what does he give thanks for? Well, three things that I just want to mention briefly.

[15 : 23] The first thing he prays for is gospel unity. Look how many times Paul uses the word all or every in these six verses. I thank my God in all my remembrance, always in every prayer for you all.

Well, you can't miss the fact that everyone in the church is included. And at the end and towards, as you go on in this passage, he said, I feel this way about you all.

I yearn for you all. And what he is saying in that thankful statement is that receiving the good news of Jesus means being one in him.

We actually work against Christ's grace if we separate ourselves from this congregation or into groups that separate from one another.

So receiving the gospel means that we've been brought together into the family of God, into Jesus' body, the church. And you know that in this pandemic, we have been faced with big temptations to pull apart, to be isolated from one another, to pull out of the fellowship of believers or to gather in groups as we grapple with difficult issues.

[16 : 43] Groups that may believe differently about restrictions or vaccine mandates or how we deal with these upheavals in our society.

So what Paul does is he lifts our eyes at St. John's along with the eyes of the people in Philippi to Jesus and to his gospel with thankfulness for his grace.

And that thankfulness is a gift from God. And Paul is calling, he's modeling that and calling us to that thankfulness every day. He is the good shepherd.

And the shepherd calls his sheep into his flock by name. So unity is an expression of the gospel of the Lord Jesus.

That's how central it is in God's work in this world. And the aspect of unity that Paul talks about particularly is partnership in the gospel.

[17 : 43] Look at verse 5. From the first day until now. Now that word is a special Greek word called koinonia. And it is this practical expression of the deep unity that God gives us in Jesus.

It is being partners together in Jesus' gospel work as brothers and sisters in Christ. So the hospitality of people like Lydia and the jailer, that is partnership.

The material financial support that was given to Paul so he can devote more time to his ministry is koinonia. But also it was their prayers for Paul.

And the work of the gospel in that local church of Philippi. The sharing of good news with neighbors. The loving care of people who needed a home.

Who needed friendship. All of that work are tangible examples of koinonia. So he is really saying that koinonia is every word that is spoken.

[18 : 51] Every act of grace that is done to further the cause of the gospel in people's lives. We are called into that partnership. It's a partnership with each other.

But it is also a partnership with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are his ministers. Working with him in koinonia. And so that's why this is not only a partner and fellowship with one another that grows as we serve.

It's a fellowship with God as we serve together. Everyone is called in this partnership of serving the gospel. In this gathering that we have today, there is an immense diverse gifts in our gathering.

And I know the leaders of the confirmation service saw, classes saw that in the candidates as well. And the more we are involved in gospel work, the more we will value one another.

We will see how different the different ways are of serving Jesus and one another. But the key here is that you must be involved in gospel ministry to be healthy.

[20 : 00] And the question that God asks us here is, how are you serving? How are you committing yourself to live for Jesus in very practical, tangible ways? It's part of the preparation of the confirmands as well.

And then secondly, Paul is thankful for not only gospel partnership, but gospel confidence. Look at verse 6. I love this verse.

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. We should all memorize this. Because this is God's work in the lives of these confirmands and you and I too.

It's deeply encouraging. It was strengthening for the Philippians. Because that good work is very simply God's grace working in you.

When you first believed and received the work of Jesus on the cross, reconciling you to God, giving you his righteousness, his goodness, purity and right living, God saved you.

[21 : 01] He actually did the job. You have been made God's people. You were filled with grace. And I want to let you know something that you may not know about that word completion.

It does have the sense of an ongoing work. And it can be translated, the sense is about like a finishing work. A finishing work that God is doing.

So that it's not as if God has barely started his work in you when you started believing. And there's an uncertainty about whether it will be finished. The huge work has already been done in Jesus Christ.

And that word completion is about the finishing touches. You might see finishing touches. There's a lot of finishing touches that needs to be happening. But that is what Paul is saying here.

And maybe a way of understanding it is in our neighborhood, we have had many houses torn down and built. We live in Richmond. And we have seen literally dozens in our very small neighborhood in the past 14 years.

[22 : 08] And walking by the neighborhood, you watch the progress of these houses. And it's interesting that each house reaches a stage where it's completed. It looks all finished.

It looks like a house. It's all ready to go. But it takes months, maybe even years sometimes, for people to move in. Why is that? Well, it's because there's finishing work that has to be done.

There's the painting and moldings. The floors being done. The furniture, lights, cupboards, appliances. So even though the structure is complete, the heavy work is done, there is a beautiful work that still needs to be done inside that takes time.

In Jesus, your salvation is complete. The vast work has been done. It is permanent. It is there, eternal.

And God is doing a finishing work in you now. He is making you ready for heaven. And that work may seem big to us.

[23 : 16] It feels like the house of our salvation has just been started. We may be frustrated by the time God is taking. But in God's sight, the structure of your salvation is already built.

It is done when you believed. And he sees what lies from now until the last day when Jesus comes again as finishing touches.

He is making that thing that's already built, the eternal structure of salvation, beautiful in your life through the finishing work of his Holy Spirit. You are becoming what he has already made you.

So it is the gospel of completion, the grace of completion. And then finally, gospel love. Now, in verse 8, Paul has this deep, heartfelt love for the whole church.

You know, as parents, you feel a deep love as you watch your son being confirmed. It is that kind of love and yearning that Paul has for this church of Philippi in verse 8.

[24 : 23] He loves and yearns for them, he says, with the affection of Christ. Now, in the original, that word's very earthy. So the King James Version, it talks about the bowels of Christ.

And we think that's a bit inappropriate here. But it is talking about the gut-deep, felt love of Jesus for us.

And Paul experiences this because he has been loved by the Lord Jesus. And he is loving with the Lord Jesus those who belong to him.

And he says, I hold you all in my heart. It's as though they are there with him in prison. Why? Because you all are partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and defense and confirmation of the gospel.

This is amazing because the difficult things that are happening, the crisis, can serve to tear us apart the suffering. But it can also bring us deeply closer together by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[25 : 26] That's what's happening here. Paul's love is deepening for his people. God's grace is so strong, it shines even brightly in suffering and in crisis.

So you see, not only gospel love, we saw gospel confidence in what he is doing. We saw gospel partnership. And I want to close and leave this passage by what does he pray for?

And it's very short and simple. Look at verses 9 through 11. Very simply, that's his prayer for the church.

It's his prayer for us as well. And this is a love that is not a felt love, a sentiment that doesn't go any deeper than that.

It is modeled by the Lord Jesus, who in chapter 2 gives his life away for our sake. It is a love that's motivated by the well-being of the one that you are serving and loving.

[26 : 39] And that's what Paul is praying for us and for them. It's a very powerful love. And it is not easy. It's this path that these contrabandes are on, to abound in that kind of love.

It's a relational love. It's based on knowledge, on the knowledge that we have, the knowing of God, but also of the knowledge that God has of us and for us.

That we look to him in this love. And we actually depend on him to know what is best for us. It is a love of discernment.

There is an insight that actually tells us how we can make decisions that honor the Lord Jesus in our love. How do we give him glory?

And wonderfully, this is how this passage ends. It ends with the last day of the Lord. And it says there that the result of all this is that you will be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

[27 : 39] You will be pure and blameless on the day of Christ. And you will have fruit that actually makes a difference in people's lives and in this world. For what purpose?

It's at the very end. To the glory and praise of God. Now, in this Bible, we are told what brings glory to God.

What brings glory to God? What reveals his glory? There's three things. One is the universe. God's beautiful creation gives glory to God.

It reveals glory to the world. Secondly, it's in the face of the Lord Jesus that we see the glory of God. In all of its goodness and power.

Its love. Its amazing gift to this world that has been so broken. We see the glory of God in Jesus. That's why we tell people about Jesus.

[28 : 36] But it is astonishing that here we also see that God's glory is revealed by the local church. By the way that we love one another.

God's glory is revealed by our righteousness. By the way we live. By the way we deal with our divisions. By the way we serve people in costly ways.

By the way that we abound in our love. The world sees the glory of God. And praises him for it. May God give us grace to abound in that love.

To have confidence in his gospel. To know the partnership of serving with Jesus. For him. Together. And may we know the goodness of God's love.

The grace of his love in our lives. Which we reflect in that abounding love. And let's pray now. As we leave this passage. Father in heaven.

[29 : 42] We thank you for this prayer. This passage which was Paul's prayer. And we confess our own prayerlessness. We don't pray as we ought.

So we pray that you will pour out on us. A spirit of prayer. We pray that you will help us to pray for our children. That we pray for our parents.

That we pray for our brothers and sisters here in Christ. That we might abound more and more in the Lord Jesus. And that as we lead and as we serve.

We will point many to the Lord Jesus. To the glory of God the Father. To him all honor, praise and glory belong. Amen.

Amen.