

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-18



Joy in Gospel Unity

- I. Greetings to Them and Gratitude to God (Phil. 1:1–5)
 - A. Paul includes Timothy as a writer, for he has much to commend in him later.

We are not told precisely what sentences or ideas Timothy might have contributed, but that his concern for the Philippians was consistent with that of Paul's is seen in passages such as Philippians 2:19–24. In light of the work of the Spirit in the apostolic community, Timothy's part in this affectionate discourse would be perfectly in-line with the revelatory operations of the Holy Spirit, just as Paul's were. Paul viewed Timothy as a guardian of the revelatory deposit (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:15; 4:16; 6:20).

- B. The church is young but fully gifted.

Those qualified to be bishops and deacons had been set apart and were functioning in their designated roles. This was a goal that Paul had for all the churches (1 Tim. 3:1–13; Titus 1:5–10).



Sylvia's Comments: Paul and Timothy are speaking in the role of servants of the Messiah, Jesus. Their emphasis

seems to be not so much as teachers or masters to them, but as meek, humble, obedient emissaries of Christ Jesus. Their letter is directed toward all the saints, including those charged with the teaching of doctrine and the care of the believers. Though believers have different stations in the church, they are equally in need of encouragement, direction, and being reminded of their gospel foundation. In keeping with the servant spirit, this greeting points them to the grace and peace they have from the Father and the Lord Jesus. This grace and peace do not come from only the Father or only the Son, but is directed to them from the complete unified Godhead. There is great power, authority, and comfort in this statement of grace and peace.

C. Notice the pervasive nature of his prayer.

“*All* my remembrance . . . , *always* in *every* prayer of mine for you *all*” (Phil. 1:1, emphasis added). It seems that Paul never had a bad memory of the Philippians, or at least he was grateful for every memory that he had. Every time he thought of them, he prayed for all of them with gratitude. God owns our lives, and there are no moments, words, or thoughts that have a God-free zone. There is no part of our lives or persons who are in Christ with us that can be exempted from a sense of our personal stewardship before God. Our remembrance that fuels our prayers is for all and should be permeated with gratitude. So Christ prayed, “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word” (John 17:20).



Sylvia's Comments: Wow! What a commendation and encouragement in this statement! Just imagine someone coming up to you, or writing to you, and saying, “I’m thankful

to God for you and all of the memories I have of you.” Wouldn’t that be encouraging and humbling? Scripture encourages us in many places to be thankful and to encourage each other, and Paul and Timothy are certainly living it out here. This church was not perfect, as we will see later, but the relationship between Paul and Timothy and the Philippian church was incredibly special.

D. Thanksgiving finds its source specifically in their participation in the gospel.

As we view God’s sovereignty over all things, and the great gifts He has given us throughout creation, as well as the multitude of edifying relations that He has given us through His grace, we must see partnership in the gospel as a transcendent blessing that evokes deep gratitude. There is no more lasting and excellent partnership than that of the gospel.



Sylvia’s Comments: Again we see the inclusive word “all” as Paul continues with the assertion that these believers are special in their continual partnership in proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Savior. The evidences of this include being hungry for the truth, putting aside their own needs in favor of others, giving generously, praying continually, etc.

II. Confidence in the Work of God (Phil. 1:6–8)

A. God’s activity is prevenient and thorough.

1. Historically, God “began” the good work in the call to Macedonia (Acts 16:9–10). The first convert was Lydia. The Lord “opened her heart” to pay attention

to what Paul said (Acts 16:14). The conversion of the jailer had obvious supernatural intervention with the “great earthquake” (Acts 16:26) that loosed the prisoners and then brought the jailer prostrate before Paul and Silas. He brought them out of the jail and asked, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Paul and Silas were brought to his house where they explained the gospel to the family. All of them, the entire household, who heard and believed were baptized. With just such certainty, God effects salvation in the heart of each of His elect. The beginning of the “good work” (Phil. 1:6) did not take place in any particular dependent historical event, but in the wisdom of the eternal covenant in which we were chosen in Christ Jesus “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4; Titus 1:2).

2. As in the case of Lydia and the jailer and their respective households, God’s eternal decree brings about the specific historical events by which we are brought to believe the gospel.
3. He will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Having begun in eternity past, the work will proceed until the present world comes to an end at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Paul gives an exposition of the theological reality in the form of personal confidence in Philippians 3:10–16 that he expands to the entire redeemed community in 3:20–21.



Sylvia's Comments: They are assured that God not only has begun work in them, but is sanctifying them and will glorify them. They will never be stripped of their position in Christ or be denied access to God. From beginning to end, God

is faithfully carrying, shaping, challenging, correcting, and cheering them on. He will never leave or forsake those whom He has called.

- B. His confidence in their perseverance is based on the evidence of their continued labors for the gospel in spite of opposition and persecution (Phil. 1:28–30).

They have valued the gospel a greater thing than their own safety. He gives several points of evidence for his confidence.

1. His confidence in their perseverance arises from deep heart connections with them. His knowledge of their help to him during times of persecution and opposition at Philippi convinced him that they were one in heart in their love for the gospel. As a result of this common suffering and sameness of commitment, he held them in his heart (Phil. 1:7).



Sylvia's Comments: This is not some mushy statement, but is a deep-seated love and attachment for all in the Philippian church based on the fact that they are united through God's grace. Distance and time do not separate believers, because through God's grace we are joined together by His Spirit. When one suffers, we all suffer. When one shows more of Christ in his nature, we all rejoice. When someone stands firm in a tough situation, we are all encouraged and pray.

2. It has objective verification by their sharing in his gospel work. He mentioned two distinct elements of his ministry there: his imprisonment and his efforts at proclaiming and demonstrating the truth of the

gospel. In both of these, Paul observed that they had shared with him, or in light of the purpose of God in both of these, he said, “You are all partakers with me of grace” (Phil. 1:7).

- The defense of the gospel would include at least the demonstration that the life and work of Christ were consistent with and were the precise fulfillment of the prophetic material (Acts 9:22; 28:23). Jesus is the Christ, and the eternal covenant of redemption found its complete verification and fulfillment in Him (Rom. 16:25–27; Titus 1:1–3; 2:11–13).
 - The confirmation of the gospel would include Paul’s presentation of the historical evidence that all the claims involved in the gospel are true. Jesus was “born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under [the condemnation of] the law” (Gal. 4:4–5). His death made it possible for God to be just and yet justify those who trust in the redemptive work of Christ (Rom. 3:21–26). All of this is bound up in the verification of Christ’s work in the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (1 Cor. 15:1–28).
3. Paul considered his deep longing for them to be a witness of shared grace (Phil. 1:8). His desire seems twofold: he wants to see them and he wants to see their increasing conformity to Christ—“the affection of Christ Jesus.” He uses a construction that can be interpreted either as their common affection for Christ or as Christ’s eternal love for them.



Sylvia's Comments: Paul longs for them in such a way that exceeds human understanding. It is a supernatural, God-given desire not only to write to them and pray, but also to go to Philippi and sit in their homes, eat meals with them, have one-on-one conversations with them, and weep and rejoice with them. No human has this intense other-focused longing without it being a gift from God. This is a pure love seated in Christ Jesus.

III. A Prayer for the Saints (Phil. 1:9–11)

On the basis of their deeply spiritual and Christ-centered affection for each other, Paul inscribed a prayer for the saints.

A. He prayed that they would experience abounding love.

1. Love, though genuinely implanted deeply in the affections, and which could legitimately be called an emotion, involves traits that can be identified with some high degree of objectivity. First, love will abound with increased knowledge. Increasing knowledge of God's infinite perfection, the infinite condescension of the mercy of Christ, and a deeper impression of the joy of eternity will lead to increased love.
2. Love also increases, even abounds, when discernment based on gospel principles informs one's life. Paul gives examples of such gospel-centered discernment throughout this letter. For example, he viewed his imprisonment not as a hindrance, but as an increase of gospel proclamation. He could see that even

some who were envious of Paul were, nevertheless, increasingly zealous to make an impact by preaching the gospel. How did Paul respond? “Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice” (Phil. 1:18).

B. One aspect of developing a discerning spirit is approving “what is excellent” (Phil. 1:10).

1. In Philippians 1:27, Paul says to “let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.” What could be more excellent when seen in all of its dimensions (Eph. 1:14–19)? In chapter 2, Paul reminds his readers of the example of Christ’s incomprehensible act of humiliation for the good of others, and he points to this as the most excellent of all things. It is excellent to look to the interests of others, even as Christ Himself did: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:4–5). Again, the example of this eternal disposition in the Son of God to give Himself even for rebels and enemies is an immutable standard of excellence that cannot be transcended.
2. Excellence consists of moral beauty and spiritual symmetry. It is a true aesthetic, but is not focused on physical beauty. Throughout the letter, Paul gives prominence to excellent things. He refers to the centrality of the excellence of gospel preaching (Phil. 1:18), the example of Christ’s incarnation (2:5–8), and the final glory of Christ Himself and His transforming power in His people (2:9–11; 3:10–11, 20–21). In Philippians 4:8–9, Paul summarized this portion of his prayer by instructing them to place

their minds on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable—in summary, on whatever is excellent and “worthy of praise.” When the mind discerns and embraces the compelling form and symmetry of spiritual excellence, one’s life is transformed “from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18; see also 2 Cor. 4:17–18).

3. This is the means by which Christians are perfected, or brought to “completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). The idea of perfection is progressive in this life and is consummated in the dual realities of death in which the spirit joins the “spirits of the righteous made perfect” (Heb. 12:23), and resurrection, in which our corruptible body is made like “his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). This is the means by which God brings to completion the work He has done (see Phil. 1:6).
- C. The result of testing and proving excellent things is a life that is not characterized by sham and mere show.
1. They will be found sincere in the day of Christ. The image of this word is that of sunlight beaming on an object so that its true colors and contours are clearly seen. A sincere person, examined under the light of God’s Word, will be shown to have a true faith propositionally—that is, believing the right things as revealed in Scripture—and a true character as formed by unfeigned faith in Christ, the righteous One.
 2. They will be blameless. If others closely examine their lives, they will not find their faith to be an occasion for stumbling. The fall of others into doctrinal or moral error cannot be attributed to an impure

witness or example of those who “approve what is excellent” (Phil. 1:10).

- D. “The fruit of righteousness” (Phil. 1:11) may be understood as “the fruit that is righteousness” or “the fruit that arises from righteousness.”

Actually, both are true in the biblical view. A loving adoration of the righteousness of Christ produces a desire to be like Him; e.g., “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), and “I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12). The fruit of such abounding love through the means mentioned is “righteousness.” Righteousness is the external manifestation of motives, attitudes, and actions that arise from perfect holiness. Righteousness characterizes all of God’s actions toward the world and its people, and what this implies about those made in His image is revealed in the Ten Commandments and all of their applications. Increasing holiness in the saints increases the degrees of righteousness in their thoughts and deeds.

1. This righteousness comes “through Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:11), who accomplished a perfect righteousness. His righteousness imputed to us qualifies believers for eternity in the presence of God and, by the consistent working of the Spirit through truth, gives us a personal condition of righteousness in the “day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10).
2. This completion of God’s purpose for His people results in a manifestation of “the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11). Glorified bodies, perfected minds

and hearts, and fullness of unalloyed praise to the triune God will bring to consummation the temporal purpose of God and then saturate eternity with an ever-increasing display of such praise and glory.

3. Later, Paul instructs the Philippians, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12). That is, a salvation has been granted to each of them by the grace of God. The implications of this salvation of regeneration, forgiveness, justification, sanctification, and the promise of eternal life must be “worked out.” The package of gifts of grace holds promise not only for the future but also for godliness and joy before the Lord even now. As we follow Paul’s description of evermore abounding love, we will find an increased spiritual strength to desire such fruits of righteousness in the day of Christ.
4. Psalm 92:12–15 describes the source and continual fruitfulness of the righteous and the motivating power of God’s righteousness. Their fruit increases as the result of their fellowship with the people of God. It lasts even until old age. It glories in the perfect righteousness of God.

The righteous flourish like the palm tree
and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.
They are planted in the house of the LORD;
they flourish in the courts of our God.
They still bear fruit in old age;
they are ever full of sap and green,
to declare that the LORD is upright;
he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness
in him.



Sylvia's Comments: He prays that they will have an abundance of this God-shaped love, fueled by knowing God and His character and attributes. It makes Spirit-led judgments and decisions based on humility and care for others, not self-interest. As the church grows in this love, believers begin winnowing thoughts and deeds to accept only the excellent ones, not settling for less than the truth, purifying minds and hearts, staying away from temptations, not making excuses for sin, sitting at the feet of Christ to grasp what righteousness is, submitting to Him, and staying focused on His return when only the glory and praise of God will rule.
