

Paul's Affection For the Philippians – Part 2

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul greets the church at Philippi and expresses his affection and desires for them
2. aim – To cause us to love one another in partnering together to advance the cause of Christ
3. passage – Philippians 1:1-11

b. outline

1. The Greeting of the Letter (Philippians 1:1-2)
2. The Thanksgiving of the Letter (Philippians 1:3-8)
3. The Prayer of the Letter (Philippians 1:9-11)

c. opening

1. the **opening style** of the letter
 - a. **again:** Paul includes *all* of the standard elements: a salutation and greeting (**vv. 1-2**), thanksgiving for the saints at Philippi (**vv. 3-8**), and a prayer for what he desires (**vv. 9-11**)
 - b. **IOW:** *rhetorically*, the letter begins in the *typical Pauline fashion* ... however, it is *quite different* in the effusiveness of Paul's *affection* expressed therein
 1. **key theme:** Paul is *grateful* for what he *has seen* the Lord do in their lives, and *confident* that the Lord will *finish* what he began in them
 2. **implying:** the *initial* work of salvation *has a goal other than just that initial start* – it is *not enough* for the believer just “to be saved” – God has *greater intentions* for his people, and he *will* complete that process *in those who belong to him* (in *this life* and in eternity)
 3. **i.e.** it is a **tragic mistake** made by many to assume that “being a Christian” is only a **state** established by an initial “act of faith” – Paul is clear (here and elsewhere!) that to be a Christian is to be an *active follower* of Jesus (**an ongoing reality**)
 - c. so ... the thankfulness of Paul (his affection for them) is out of this *ongoing reality* – the Philippians *continue* to partner with him (**remember v. 5**) as **evidence** of this ongoing reality **being brought about by God himself** (**i.e.** there is a *reason* for the affection Paul has for them) ...

II. The Thanksgiving of the Letter (Philippians 1:3-8)

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c. the reason for Paul's gratitude (v. 7)

1. “*it is right for me to feel this way ...*” (**v. 7a**) = my affections for you as fellow believers is **justified**
 - a. **note:** this statement is *probably* the *completion* of the phrase “*and I am sure of this*” in **v. 6**
 1. **i.e.** it is *right* for me to be sure of what God has begun – it is right for me to feel this way
 - b. **principle:** **it is the shared reality of being “the family” of Christ that produces great commonality amongst believers, even when they are very different as people (see below)**
 1. **i.e.** the Spirit of God, actively working in the life of the Christian, that gives him or her a shared sense of belonging “beyond” themselves that ties them together in an *unexplainable way*
 2. **i.e.** the church, as the instrument of *community*, born out of the work of the Spirit, is *indispensable* to the individual Christian – we are “made” to fellowship together
 - a. *koinonia* (“*partnership*” **v. 5**) = a *living bond* between born-again believers
 - c. **IOW:** I feel this way **because we have something in common ...**
2. “*because I hold you in my heart ... partakers with me of grace*” (**v. 7b**) = the *shared thing* is **grace**
 - a. **grace (as before):** the *character* of God (love) whereby he *chooses* (radically; *against* what he ought to do) to bestow upon *certain people* (the elect) the blessings of his *benevolence* (salvation)
 1. **i.e.** just as *he* had received the grace of God in being called to Christ by faith (despite persecuting the church), *they too* had received this grace in being brought to faith
 - b. **grace (as above):** the *continuing* work of God to *complete* what he started in calling a people to himself, sanctifying them (setting them apart) from everything *contrary* to his image of them
 1. **i.e.** he sees the Lord working to fully realize in them *outwardly* what he has already accomplished in them *inwardly* (justification → sanctification → glorification)
 - c. **grace (now):** the *expanding* effort of the Philippians to “work alongside” Paul in his missionary ministry – the Lord granting *them* the *resources* and *desire* to help Paul accomplish his mission

1. “in my imprisonment” = providing aid and comfort to Paul during his (unpleasant) time in Rome
 - a. **i.e.** sending people to visit him (Epaphroditus: **2:25; 4:18**), monetary gifts (**4:18**), prayers and encouragements, etc. (**material graces**)
 2. “in the defense ... of the gospel” = providing aid to Paul *outside* his current situation, during the times he preached the gospel *as a free man*
 - a. **i.e.** financial help while in other cities (at Thessalonica: **4:15-16**), etc. (**financial graces**)
 3. “in the defense ... of the gospel” = proclaiming the gospel *themselves*, both at Philippi and into other locations beyond Macedonia
 - a. **i.e.** sending *their own* missionaries (Epaphroditus: **2:25**), etc. (**evangelistic graces**)
 4. **i.e.** he recognizes the grace of God *flowing through them* as they partnered with him in the advancement of the gospel, supporting *his work* and proclaiming the gospel themselves
 - d. **IOW:** I feel this way **because we share God’s grace** – God has been gracious to work through *both of us* to accomplish his will, in drawing us together *and* in expanding the kingdom of Christ
3. **reason for Paul’s gratitude:** the Philippian believers shared something *profound* with him, *both* in their common nature as followers of Christ *and* in their common experience of the grace of God
- d. the yearning in Paul’s gratitude (v. 8)**
1. “I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus” = we are **true siblings**
 - a. “yearn” = deeply desire; long for; crave; want to know and see in a powerful way
 1. **note:** not a *human-based* affection (**i.e.** I like you), but a *divinely-inspired* affection that is based on the commonality of the Spirit (**i.e.** I love you, as Christ has loved us)
 - b. a connection between believers that is based on a **true family connection** – a connection *far greater* (even) than the “blood” connection in the (fallen) physical family
 1. **as above:** *koinonia* (“partnership” **v. 5**) = a *living bond* between born-again believers
 2. **modern:** the church as a “social club” or “entertainment venue” or “counseling office” – where “felt” needs are addressed with little or no *bond* or *long-term connection* between members
 - a. drifting in and out, little connection to or concern for others (particularly in mega-churches)
 - b. the “lone wolf”, individualistic nature of the modern church = **get yours and get out**
 - c. **e.g.** the abandonment of the “constraints” of membership for a more “casual” polity
 3. **principle: the true church of Jesus Christ, founded on his gospel by his Spirit, is the gathering together of those who have become eternal brothers and sisters (to him)**
 - a. **i.e.** the bond of unity and peace in those who have been radically transformed by the Spirit and brought together *as family* (**Ephesians 4:1-6**)

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”
 - b. **note:** since **Ephesians** is also a prison epistle (written about the same time), the concepts quoted here are *undoubtedly* uppermost in Paul’s mind and heart, *especially* as he is *prevented* (physically) from participating in the regular life of a church body
 - c. **IOW:** for Paul, the church *wasn’t* just a “building” or a loose confederacy of people who had “something in common” – it was a **family** with ties closer than *any other human relationship*
 1. and he *yearned* to be a part of that fellowship, something *withheld* from him (for now)
 - d. **e.g.** Jesus’ understanding of “family” when his *natural* mother came for him (**Mark 3:32-35**)

“And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, ‘Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.’ And he answered them, ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.’”
 - c. **question: do you “yearn” to see your brothers and sisters in the church – do you long for time together with them in worship, prayer, instruction, and koinonia fellowship?**
 1. **i.e.** do you **pursue** God’s graces being poured out upon you (and through you) in the company of those who share the Spirit of God in Christ? or is “going to church” just a chore?
 2. **IMO:** the judgment upon our nation today is “sifting” *out* of churches many who are not truly brothers and sisters of Christ – they fall out *easily* **because they have no family connection**

III. The Prayer of the Letter (Philippians 1:9-11)

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a. the desired outcome of the letter

1. **note (as before):** Paul will now (in the form of a prayer) reveal his **thesis** = the desired outcome of this letter (**i.e.** why he was writing to them)
 - a. but ... unlike many of Paul’s other letters, this is *not* a theological truth (per se; **e.g. Romans 1:16f**)

2. **progression of thought:** three (3) sections, divided using the word “so” (or “so that”)
 - a. his **desire (v. 9)** → “so that” **outcome #1 (v. 10a)** → “and so” **outcome #2 (vv. 10a-11)**
 - b. **i.e.** the prayer has an *initial desire* to be seen in the Philippians, which *appears* in an *obvious* outcome from that, *ultimately resulting* in a final reality
 - c. or ... a growth in “*knowledge and discernment*” that leads to an ability to “*approve what is excellent*” thus making them “*pure and blameless*” before the judgment of Christ
 - d. or (**as we say**): changed *minds*, changed *hearts*, changed *lives* ...
3. **desire:** a prayer for an *abounding love* characterized by “*knowledge and all discernment*”
 - a. the “*abounding love*” is described by Paul **above** = that sense of *true family* that characterizes believers; the *connection* they have with one another by virtue of their common state in Christ
 - b. “*with*” = characterized by; having as a part of; bearing as a hallmark; being true of
 1. Paul believed that the relationship that believers have with one another is *founded upon* their “*knowledge and discernment*”
 2. **i.e.** not an *emotional* connection, but one characterized by *understanding of foundational truths*
 3. **IOW:** Paul’s desire is for the Philippian believers to grow closer together *by virtue of their continued growth in understanding what God has purposed, Christ has done, and the Spirit is bringing to bear in their lives*
 4. or (**in the typical Pauline fashion**) ... that they would grow in their understanding of Christian truth, as discovered in Scripture *and applied to life*
 - c. “*discernment*” = the ability to *differentiate* between what is true (good) and what is false (evil); knowing the *difference* between that which is from God and that which is from “the world”
 1. **e.g.** only 6% of American “Christians” hold a biblical worldview¹ – most embrace a form of *syncretism* that mixes Christianity with secular and pagan concepts (“*worldview plagiarists*”)
 - a. 46%: people are not born good or bad; they develop through “*accumulated life choices*”
 - b. 35%: to determine right/wrong, you are most likely to rely on “*reason and emotions*”
 - c. 31%: animals, plants, wind, water, etc. all have a unique spirit, like humans
 - d. 24%: “the best indicator of a successful life is being a good person”
 - d. **IOW:** Paul’s desire is that their love for one another grows **within the framework of** becoming more and more familiar with **the doctrines at the core of the faith** (understanding, knowledge)
4. **outcome #1:** the ability to “*approve what is excellent*”
 - a. “*approve*” = identify and *embrace*; to not only *know* what is “*excellent*” (godly), but to *embrace it as a part of what it means to follow Christ*
 - b. **i.e.** to make truth a *vital part* of what it means to live in a world of falsehood – to *choose* the excellent (as defined by *Scripture*) over against the “*impure*” (as defined by the world)
5. **outcome #2:** becoming “*pure and blameless ... filled with the fruit of righteousness*”
 - a. “*pure and blameless*” = holy; living *outwardly* what we are *inwardly* (as justified by faith)
 - b. **i.e.** to pursue a life of holiness and *separation from the world* – to accomplish (under the power of the Spirit) what *God purposes for the Christian to be* (transformed into the image of Christ)
6. **thesis: that the “eternal family” at Philippi would be filled with brothers and sisters pursuing after God’s truth, such that they are characterized more and more by a sense of discernment, which leads to them becoming more and more holy and blameless in the sight of God**
 - a. as in our motto: **changed minds ... changed hearts ... changed lives ... all to the glory of God**
 - b. **the picture of a truly healthy congregation of believers ...**
 - c. Paul’s **affection** for this congregation is *so great* that he doesn’t want to seem them fall victim to the world and its ways ...

¹ “Only 6% of self-professed Christians hold biblical worldview amid increasing syncretism in the US: survey”, Ryan Foley, May 1, 2024, www.christianpost.com