

Philippians (1:3-11) Thanksgiving & Prayer

Introduction

As the consummate pastor, Paul begins his letter with warm and sincere thankfulness for his audience and offers a prayer for their continued progress in the faith. He assures the Philippian fellowship that his prayers are grounded in joy as they share in God's grace while suffering for the Gospel.

I. Paul's Thanksgiving (1:3-8)

A. Three Reasons for Thanking God (1:3-6)

1. *Their Memory of Him (v. 3-4)*
 - a) Verse 3 can be rendered "I thank my God for all your remembrance of me" (Could be "all your remembrance" or "all my remembrance," objective or subjective genitive; the Greek is ambiguous). Reasons for this reading include:
 - (1) This letter, in part, was a "Thank You" note to them for their gifts of support (cf., 4:10-20).
 - (2) Due to the personal nature of this letter, the Philippians would not have required Paul to spell out the object of remembrance.
 - (3) Paul's initial purpose for writing was to thank the Philippians for their support and he would naturally allude to their "remembering" him in this way. It makes little sense why he would wait until the end of the letter to explicitly thank them. Acknowledging their gifts up front prepares them for more detail later (cf., 2:25, 30; 4:10, 18).
 - (4) Paul indicates the Philippians had been repeatedly generous in support of his ministry (4:16), hence "all" or "every" remembrance of him.
 - b) It's not the material gifts that are being highlighted by his gratitude, but the gifts in so far as they are a tangible expression of their commitment to the Gospel. In typical Pauline fashion, the circumstances are never a focal point for him, but the accomplishments of God behind, in, and through circumstances (see 2:17; 4:17).
 - c) While Paul continues his thanksgiving in v. 5, he can't help but assure the Philippians that he too is remembering them in joyful prayer (v. 4).
 - (1) The repeated "all" could be a subtle hint at their lack of unity, which Paul will soon address (2:2; 4:2).
 - (2) This is the first of sixteen occurrences of the word group "joy" and is a recurring theme in the letter. *Joy is a composed, inner conviction that God is in control of all circumstances*, even those of Paul's imprisonment! It is evidence of the Spirit's presence (Gal. 5:22; Rom. 14:17). As a seasoned model for pastoral ministry, Paul not only admonishes the Philippians to rejoice in their sufferings (4:4), but does so himself.
2. *Their Partnership in the Gospel (v. 5)*
 - a) Paul's joy is prompted by the Philippians' commitment to the Gospel, demonstrated by their:
 - (1) Gifts to support Paul in Rome (4:15-18)
 - (2) Suffering for the advance of the Gospel in Philippi (1:30)
 - (3) Perseverance in Gospel living/preaching ("from the first day until now")
 - (a) Shown by the hospitality of Lydia and the jailer (Acts 16), and the

- (b) Cooperative evangelistic efforts with Euodia, Syntyche, and Clement (4:2-3)
- (c) Some ten years have passed since the Philippians first came to know Christ
- b) “Partnership” (“participation,” NASB) is more commonly translated “fellowship” in the NT (“*koinonia*”) and has the idea of a common commitment to a shared vision. It was frequently used of business partnerships, particularly of those partnerships that entailed personal contribution or sacrifice.
- 3. *Paul’s Assurance of God’s Finished Work in Them (v. 6)*
 - a) Recalling their active progress in the faith triggers for Paul their certain future.
 - b) Where God’s work of salvation has begun, it will certainly be completed (cf., 1 Thess. 5:24 for the same idea). Paul’s confidence is rooted solely in the faithfulness of God! While he was thankful for the Philippians’ remembrance of his needs and their commitment to advancing the Gospel, Paul’s certainty has nothing to do with the Philippians and everything to do with God (*πεποιθώς* perfect participle “I am sure,” dependant upon the verb of v. 3, *εὐχαριστῶ* “I give thanks,” the object of which is “my God”).
 - c) The “good work” is none other than entrance into and sustaining of the Christian life. God saves no one whom he does not also sanctify.
 - d) Note: The “good work” of salvation will be complete at “the day of Christ Jesus.” God’s redemptive plan extends well beyond the grave (1 Cor. 15:55-56) and offers certain hope!
 - e) Does this verse suggest eternal security? *Absolutely*. What God begins he finishes. Moreover, it is not as though we’re saved by grace and sanctified by works. All who are saved by grace are also sanctified by grace. In the end, “perseverance of the saints rests on the perseverance of God” (Motyer).

B. Transition: Verses 7-8

1. Paul’s warm affection for the Philippians is never stronger than here.
2. Just as Paul’s audience shared in the same sufferings as he (1:29-30), the Philippians share in the same amazing grace to endure those sufferings. Regardless of circumstances, Paul’s delight was that the Philippians shared in God’s saving and sanctifying grace (see 4:1).
3. Paul’s passion for them is so strong and he wants so much for them to feel his devotion that he places himself under oath (“God can testify,” v.8).
4. The deep emotions expressed in these verses demonstrate a deeply spiritual man.

C. Application

1. Like Paul, are you listening to God in your circumstances and longing to see His greater purposes?
2. Do you get emotional when thinking of others’ progress in the faith?
3. Do you experience spontaneous expressions of joy when you recall ministry done with others?
4. People of the Gospel are people of the future. We are citizens of heaven who are to be looking ahead constantly (3:13-14, 20). In doing so, we are kept pure from the stain of sin (Heb. 12:1-3; 1 Jn. 3:2-3). How should a forward focus affect your present circumstances?

II. Paul’s Prayer (1:9-11)

The whole of Paul’s prayer is concerned with the Philippians behavior, born out of an abiding pastoral love for them. Here there is neither judgment nor criticism; only an intense longing for God’s glory displayed in their maturing lives. Paul already told the Philippians that he regularly prayed for them (v. 4). Now he tells them the *what* and *why* of his prayers.

A. Paul Prays Specifically for Three Things

1. *Paul prays for a growing love that permeates into all of life.*
 - a) For Paul, love is the chief attribute of believers and evidences the Spirit's presence (cf., Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 13:13).
 - b) Where unity is threatened (2:1-4; 4:1-3), love brings together (cf., Col. 3:14). Love's function is to unite. Love and unity are combined in 2:2.
 - c) Paul does not explicitly list the object of love, but no doubt he had love for fellow believers in mind as he prayed the same for the Thessalonian congregation (1 Thess. 3:12).
2. *Paul prays for increasing maturity in knowledge and depth of insight.*
 - a) Love is to be informed, not merely felt; discriminating, not merely spontaneous emotion.
 - b) The single preposition governing both nouns (*ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει*) suggests Paul has one idea in mind. That is, knowledge and discernment go hand in hand. Possessing the former without the latter, though possible, stifles true Christian growth!
 - c) This is a petition that God would grant the Philippians the ability to determine what really counts in life.
 - d) While some decisions are of little to no moral consequence (for instance, which socket to plug in a tea pot), other judgments have huge moral implications and *really do matter!*
 - e) This kind of discernment is not merely making clear decisions between right and wrong, but the ability to see how choices differ and choosing the best option between two seemingly harmless choices.
 - f) This knowledge and insight includes not only examination and evaluation, but also determination in doing what is optimal for Kingdom living. No compromise!
3. *Paul prays for purity and blamelessness in righteous living.*
 - a) "Lack of moral stain" (i.e., purity) along with "not causing others to stumble" (i.e., blamelessness) is the natural outcome of increased love for others enabled by moral wisdom in decision-making.
 - b) The righteousness Paul has in mind here is that of Christ's, imputed to us at salvation (2 Cor. 5:21) and unfolding in our lives on a daily basis as our love grows in wisdom.
 - c) This righteousness "comes through Jesus Christ" and is not our own (cf., 3:9). Indeed, we can produce nothing of our own accord (Jn. 15:1-4).
 - d) Paul will soon tell the Philippians that their works must be in "fear and trembling" *because* it is God who is doing the work in them (2:12-13).
 - e) This is the second time he appeals to Christ's return as a basis for ethical living – a common petition in Paul (1 Cor. 1:7,8; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:11, 12).

B. Paul Tells the Philippians Why He Prays for Them

1. [Verse 11] In such lives where love is increasing and radical discernment is taking place in every area of life, the outcome of which is purity and righteous living, God receives the "glory and praise."
2. Paul's supreme ambition in life is the glory and praise of God (cf., Eph. 1:3, 6, 12, 14).
3. Praise is the spontaneous, exuberant response to all God's glorious attributes and works expressed in grace to us as undeserving sinners.
4. If sin is diametrically opposed to God's glory (Rom. 3:23), then righteous living expressed through moral wisdom and increased love for fellow believers beautifully articulates God's glory here on earth! What a blessing to be a means of expressing God's glory!

C. Application

1. Paul's prayer does not involve mere maintenance of the Christian faith, but maturity in all its splendor and vigor. *No compromise!*
2. So many pastors are caught up in endless activism, surrounding themselves with church "ministry." Yet, here we can learn a great deal about a pastor's priorities in prayer. How is your pastor doing in this area?
3. In our postmodern age where discretion between alternatives is not only missing, but virtually impossible due to the disregard for absolute truth, we must be a people whose choices are derived from what is best and not merely what is good!
4. Do you pray for your family members and fellow believers to know and choose what is best for them?
5. What really counts in your life? Relative financial and material comfort in retirement? Peace among the nations? What *do* you pray for? Catalog some of Paul's prayers (Rom. 1:8-10; 10:1; 15:5-6; 2 Cor. 13:7-9; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philip. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-14; Ph. 4-7) and note that:
 - a) He always prayed that God would work in and through circumstances, rather than merely change them.
 - b) Paul's focus in prayer was primarily for others, not for himself.