



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Thanks, Confidence, and Prayer (Phil 1:1-11)

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Introduction

According to Acts 16:11-40, the Apostle Paul visited Philippi on his second missionary journey. He traveled from the island of Samothrace to Neapolis (modern Kavalla), which was the seaport utilized by the Philippian residents. The city of Philippi was approximately nine miles northwest of the seaport. The city was named in honor of King Philip II of Macedonia (the father of Alexander the Great). Philippi became a Roman military colony in 42 BC, following the defeat of Brutus and Cassius in battle by the triumvirs (Antony, Lepidus, and Octavian). The citizens benefited from an autonomous government, immunity from taxation, and conduct as if living in Italy.¹ The first convert of the missionaries in Philippi was “a woman named Lydia” whose heart was opened graciously and sovereignly by the Lord “to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). The church at Philippi was founded through the faithful ministry of Luke, Paul, Silas, and Timothy (16:1, 10, 12, 19; 20:6).²

The Epistle to the Philippians was written during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. Epaphroditus was sent from the church at Philippi to bring a monetary gift to the Apostle, which occasioned the writing of Philippians as an expanded letter of thanks (Phil 4:10-20; cf. 1:3, 5; 2:25, 30).³ Epaphroditus became “sick to the point of death” in Rome, which was cause for the Philippians’ expression of concern. Consequently, the Apostle informed the church with regard to Epaphroditus’ return to Philippi (2:25-28). Paul also reported the status of his trial before the Roman imperial court (1:7, 13-17), and even attempted to reconcile a church conflict (4:2). The theme of Philippians is “joy,” which is used thirteen times. Christ is also mentioned thirty-eight times, and therefore, “rejoicing in the Lord” is a prominent emphasis. The epistle contains significant revelation concerning Christ’s kenosis (2:7), which means His self-emptying of the prerogatives and powers that were His eternally by virtue of His divine attributes. The passage concerning His humiliation explains that by not asserting His divine prerogatives and powers, the Lord Jesus took the form of a servant (while never emptying Himself of His divinity) to become true humanity (2:5-11). The epistle may be outlined quite basically as follows: (1) rejoicing in prison (1:1-30); (2) rejoicing in others (2:1-30); (3) rejoicing in the future (3:1-21); and, (4) rejoicing in all things (4:1-23).

GREETING: THANKS AND PRAYER

THE RECIPIENTS OF PAUL’S EPISTLE: “TO ALL THE SAINTS IN CHRIST JESUS”
(1) Holy Ones (the same Greek word is translated holy or saint): applied to God, the terms signifies His unique transcendence applied to humanity, it signifies being sanctified for God’s service
(2) Belong in Christ Jesus the Greek genitive case signifies belonging (possession)
(3) United in Diversity the believing Philippians constituted the church in the city

Following his introduction of himself and Timothy as “slaves” (Gk. *douloi*) of Christ Jesus, the church at Philippi was addressed as “saints” (Gk. *hagios*). Unique among Paul’s epistles is the special designation of elders and deacons. Elders were probably distinguished because of their maturity and stewardship to propagate God’s revelation to the church (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:9; Phil 3:15). Deacons may have been mentioned because servanthood is a primary emphasis of this epistle (cf. Phil 2:5-11). The church would continue their unification by adopting the servant attitude as exhibited in Christ Jesus.

PRAYER THAT IS PERSONAL
(1) Frequency: “in all my remembrance” (vv. 3-4)
(2) Reason: participation in the gospel (v. 5)
(3) Content: completing what God began (v. 6)

Adopting the typical practice in Greek (Hellenistic) writing to offer prayer and thanks to a god or gods, the Apostle offered his prayer and thanks to *the one true God*. He then reiterated to the church his continual remembrance of them in prayer. Paul’s prayer for the church expressed the following:

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(1) his thanks for their Christian life; (2) participation in the gospel; and, (3) confidence in God to complete His good work in their lives.

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

Another primary emphasis of this epistle is the confidence that the good work begun by God would be perfected sovereignly as the Lord is both the origination and completion of faith in Him. The expression emphasizes both the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. God is sovereign to complete the good work He began in the believer's life because it is his intent to conform every believer to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. The believer is also responsible to work diligently as evidence of God's work (2:12-13). The work of sanctification is an ongoing work that begins with regeneration, continues with conformity to Jesus in His sufferings and resurrection (3:10), and concludes with the transformation of "the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (3:21).

THE WORK OF SANCTIFICATION IS AN ONGOING WORK THAT BEGINS WITH REGENERATION, CONTINUES WITH CONFORMITY TO JESUS IN HIS SUFFERINGS AND RESURRECTION (3:10), AND CONCLUDES WITH THE TRANSFORMATION OF "THE BODY OF OUR HUMBLE STATE INTO CONFORMITY WITH THE BODY OF HIS GLORY" (3:21).

MUTUAL IMPACT

Confidence in God to complete His good work of salvation is because it is "right" (Gk. *dikaion*, "just") to think this concerning the church, as a consequence of the evidence of saving faith. The reason for this confidence is "because I have you in my heart," which indicates a tender affection to the church, as a consequence of many proofs of their salvation. The believers were certainly "partakers of grace," and therefore mutual effort in the cause of the gospel would be a shared blessing. In his imprisonment and in the defense (Gk. *apologia*) and confirmation (Gk. *bebaiōsei*) of the gospel, the church helped the Apostle in the monetary gift provided to him through the intermediacy of Epaphroditus. The love of the church towards the Apostle and his ministry, even during his imprisonment, were evidence of a mutual faith and experience of the grace of God. The heartfelt affection for one another in the cause of the gospel was clearly mutual.

Therefore, Paul wrote that it was "right" to think of the church, as God was his solemn witness that he did, with such affection as that of the Lord Jesus.

ABOUNDING IN LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING

It is natural to pray for those we love. Therefore, the Apostle Paul prayed that God would cause the church to abound in love, to approve the best things from many good things in life, to be "sincere and blameless" when they appear before the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:9-10), and to be fruitful in righteousness. Although the object of the love is not stated, it seems evident that it is not toward the Apostle exclusively nor merely for one another, but the continual and absolute increase in love as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The impression is that of limitless growth of love that is founded by two stakes—knowledge and discernment of spiritual pursuits—and yields a harvest "with the fruit of righteousness." The metaphor of vigorous growth in the life of the believer is evident. An understanding of the best things in life is the outcome of discernment and approval of "the things that are excellent." The imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ is the foundation for a life abounding in love and understanding that brings glory and praise to God, which is the ultimate and chief end of man.

THE IMPRESSION IS THAT OF LIMITLESS GROWTH OF LOVE THAT IS FOUNDED BY TWO STAKES—KNOWLEDGE AND DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITUAL PURSUITS—AND YIELDS A HARVEST "WITH THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS."

The parable of the vine and the gardener illustrates an important truth with regard to living for the Lord. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:2). The work of God is always good for believers because it will result in greater works, accomplished through Christ, and to the glory and praise of God.

¹ F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, eds., *The Acts of the Apostles*, 5 vols. (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 4:187-90.

² Although he is not mentioned specifically in Acts, the "we" sections in the narrative are understood as references to Luke, the "beloved physician" (cf. 16:10-17; 20:6—21:18; 27:1—28:16) (cf. Richard Belward Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles* [London: Methuen & Co., 1901] xv-vii).

³ Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 513.