

October 6, 2024

The Point: God is glorified when we live with Christ-centered purpose.

Session Passage: Philippians 1:1-11

Philippians 1:1-5

Connection to the Point. Paul thanked God for the Philippians' partnership in the gospel.

Overview. Paul probably wrote his letter to the Philippian believers about AD 60–62 while he was imprisoned most likely in Rome (Phil. 1:7,13). He wrote to thank the Philippians for their continued support, particularly the gift they had sent him while Paul was imprisoned (4:15-18). He also wrote to inform them of his present circumstances (1:12-26), to encourage the Philippians in their faith (1:27–4:9), and to tell them about Timothy's and Epaphroditus's travel plans to Philippi (2:19-30). Paul had visited Philippi during his second missionary journey (about AD 50–52), founding the church in the city (Acts 16). Paul had formed very strong bonds with the Philippian believers, which was demonstrated in the warm, personal tone of the letter.

Paul and Timothy (v. 1). *Timothy* played a crucial role in the development of the Philippian church. He had been with Paul when the church was founded during Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 16). In fact, Paul desired to send Timothy to Philippi because he was "like-minded" with Paul, and Timothy would "genuinely care" about the Philippians' interests (Phil. 2:19-20). They knew Timothy's "proven character" as a co-worker with Paul (v. 22), and Timothy would stand in Paul's place while the apostle was imprisoned. Paul recognized Timothy's role in God's purposes, and he elevated the status of his co-worker by mentioning him at the beginning and in the middle of the letter.

Servants (v. 1). The term (*doulos*) can also be translated as "slaves" and here identifies Paul and Timothy as co-workers in the service of Christ Jesus, their Savior and Lord. Paul expanded upon the close relationship he had with Timothy as servants of Christ later in the letter (2:19-23).

Saints (v. 1). The term (*hagios*) means "sacred" or "holy"; it was used of persons or things set apart or dedicated to special use as opposed to what was common. In the New Testament it refers to those who have put their faith in Jesus as their Savior and Lord (Acts 9:13,32,41). It was a favorite designation of Paul's for those who trusted in Christ (Rom. 1:7; 8:27; Phil. 4:22) and was a substitute for the term "church."

Philippi (v. 1). The city of Philippi became a Roman colony in the Macedonian region (modern Greece) in 31 BC. The *Via Egnatia*, the main highway connecting Rome to the eastern provinces of the empire, traveled through Philippi. It was a wealthy city by the standards of that day. All these factors made Philippi a central city in Paul's plan to spread the gospel and plant churches in the region (Acts 16:12).

Overseers and deacons (v. 1). These two terms represented two callings and roles in the early organization of the church. An *overseer* functioned in the role of a pastor or elder in the church. The Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17) who met Paul in Miletus also had the designation of overseers (v. 28). The qualifications for this office are listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. *Deacons* were those who serve the church in tasks that allowed the overseers to concentrate on prayer and preaching of the Word (Acts 6:4). The qualifications for *deacons* appear immediately after those for *overseers* (1 Tim. 3:8-13). By separating *saints* from *overseers* and *deacons*, Paul merely indicated that he wrote to both the church body and its leaders.

Grace . . . peace (v. 2). These two words expressed Paul's typical greeting in his letters (Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Col. 1:2; Philem. 3). *Grace* (*charis*) means the unmerited favor of God to sinful humanity. By wishing grace to his hearers, Paul prayed for God's continued favor in their lives. *Peace* (*eirene*) represents more than the absence of conflict. Rather, it corresponded with the Hebrew word *shalom* which emphasizes well-being, wholeness,

and peace in both one's self and one's relationships. Grace and peace are both gifts of God, and Paul prayed for God to grant them to the Philippians.

I give thanks (v. 3). Many of Paul's letters contain a note of thanksgiving for his readers. As Paul reflected upon the enthusiastic reception of the gospel in Philippi and the continued relationship he had with these believers, he gave thanks.

Every remembrance of you (v. 3). Not every memory of Paul's time in Philippi would have inspired thanksgiving in most people, but it did for Paul because even the bad memories resulted in the furtherance of the gospel. His delivering a slave girl from a demon led to him being put in jail (Acts 16:16-24). However, God had put him there to preach the gospel to a jailer who needed Christ (vv. 25-34). As a servant of the sovereign God, Paul could give thanks both in good times and in difficult times.

Praying with joy (v. 4). The church in Philippi was not perfect. Members there faced some dissension from those promoting circumcision as a requirement for salvation (3:2-11), and two women who battled with each other (4:2-3). Even so, thinking of this church brought joy to Paul in his prayers.

Partnership in the gospel (v. 5). Paul could rejoice because of their *partnership* (*koinonia*) in the work of the Lord, even when the church had problems. The term could mean "fellowship," and it certainly implied shared partnership in the spread of the *gospel*. The church had sent Epaphroditus with a message to Paul, and Paul sent the letter to the Philippians back with him (2:25). They also shared financially with Paul both in the past and while he was in prison (4:10-18). He appreciated their continued partnership.

From the first day until now (v. 5). The Philippians' generosity and commitment were ongoing. From his first visit to Philippi, the Philippian believers had shared with him, which had enabled him to preach the gospel in their city. Paul had received hospitality from Lydia (Acts 16:15) and the Philippian jailer (vv. 30-34). The Philippians continued to support Paul through their gifts while he was in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:16), Corinth (2 Cor. 11:9), and while he was in jail in Rome.

Philippians 1:6-8

Connection to the Point. Paul was confident that God would continue to work in the lives of the Philippians.

He who started (v. 6). God was the Source of the good work in the lives of the Philippian believers. However, the sovereignty of God does not negate the believer's responsibility and need for action. Paul worked hard in Philippi to spread the gospel and disciple the Philippian believers. The Philippians had also worked hard to support Paul's ministry. At the same time, it was God who was at work in both Paul and the Philippian believers.

Good Work (v. 6). The *good work* was the work of God's grace in the lives of the Philippians. God had brought new life to Lydia, the jailer, and others as He began the church in Philippi, and that work continued to the day that Paul wrote this letter. The entire process of salvation is seen in this verse. God's good work *started* when He exchanged these believers' sins for Jesus's perfect righteousness (justification) when they repented and placed their faith in Christ (Rom. 5:17). God, who is both all powerful and faithful to fulfill His promises (1 Thess. 5:24), would *carry it on* as the believers were being conformed into the image of Christ (1 Thess. 5:23; see Rom. 8:28-30), the life-long, on-going process of sanctification that continues until the believer's death or the return of Christ. This process would be brought to *completion* at the end of the age when God will glorify all believers on *the day of Christ Jesus*.

The day of Christ Jesus (v. 6). *The day of Christ Jesus* refers to the time when Jesus will return to judge the wicked, glorify and reward believers, and on that day the world will be renewed (Matt. 25:31-46; 1 Cor. 15:50-58; Rev. 20:11-22:5).

Have you in my heart (v. 7). Paul had a deep-seated affection for the Philippian believers. Though some have suggested that this was due to the gifts they had sent Paul, it more likely refers to the work of God's grace in their lives from the start of Paul's relationship with them. The *heart* can refer to the mind, the will, or as here Paul's entire being. Paul had

opened his heart to the Philippians by sharing the gospel, and they had responded by believing in Jesus and partnering with Paul in the work of spreading the gospel. This type of affection led Paul to pour out his life for them (2:17).

Partners with me in grace (v. 7). Paul again referenced their common pursuit to spread the gospel so that others might come to Christ. The gospel is the demonstration of God's grace.

My imprisonment (v. 7). Paul viewed his suffering as something done for the sake of the church (Eph. 3:13; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 2:10). The Philippian believers participated in Paul's suffering by supporting him while he was imprisoned by sending a gift to him by way of Epaphroditus (Phil. 4:18) whom they also sent to minister to Paul's needs (2:25-30). Paul appreciated their prayers, but he also appreciated their support of his ministry through their gifts and in the person of Epaphroditus. The Philippians demonstrated what partnerships in ministry should be—prayers and helpful actions.

Defense and confirmation of the gospel (v. 7). Paul used two terms from the legal field. The first, *defense (apologia)*, indicated a rebuttal against those who attacked the gospel. It involved "disarming prejudice and overcoming objections to the truth" of the gospel.¹ The second term, *confirmation (bebaisis)*, entailed presenting the case against those who denied the gospel. Taken together, *defense* and *confirmation* dealt with providing reasons as to why the critics of the gospel were wrong and presenting an argument as to why people should embrace the gospel so as to be forgiven and receive eternal life in Christ. Peter encouraged believers to be "ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet. 3:15). This should be just as true for believers today.

The affection of Christ Jesus (v. 8). The Greek word for *affection (splanchnon)* literally meant "bowels" or "inward parts." Paul's affection for the Philippian believers came from the deepest parts of himself and had its source in Jesus Christ. The work of Christ that Paul shared with the Philippians created a bond between them. Paul knew that in the work of spreading the gospel, he could depend upon these believers in both good times and bad.

Philippians 1:9-11

Connection to the Point. Paul prayed that the Philippians would continue to grow in Christlikeness.

I pray this (v. 9). Paul moved from thanksgiving for the Philippians to praying for them. Thanksgiving is a wonderful gateway to prayer. Paul often began his letters with prayers for its recipients (Rom. 1:8-10; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 1:15-23; Col. 1:3-14). Paul tailored his prayers to each church's unique circumstances.

Your love will keep on growing (v. 9). Paul prayed that the self-sacrificial *love (agape)* of Christ would continue to get stronger in the Philippians. Such love is selfless and is modeled on Jesus Christ, who gave Himself to redeem all those who will put their faith in Him as their Savior and Lord. Certainly the Philippians needed to progress in their love for and faithfulness to God, but they also needed to grow stronger in their love for one another. Like many churches, they experienced disagreements and disunity (4:2-7), but Paul prayed their love for one another would continue to grow stronger and overcome such issues. A failure to love other people indicates some deficiency in our love for God (1 John 4:19-21).

In knowledge and every kind of discernment (v. 9). Paul prayed that the Philippians' love would grow in two ways. First, he prayed it would grow in *knowledge*. He always used this word (*epignosis*) to indicate deep, personal, experiential knowledge which would be expressed in practical ways. Second, Paul prayed that this love would grow based on every *kind of discernment*. The term for *discernment (aisthesis)* refers to having the capacity to understand the true nature of something. The phrase could be translated "depth of insight," which enables a person to make correct moral decisions. Since in this case neither term has an object, *knowledge* probably includes "an accurate understanding of God and the world," as well as of oneself. Having *discernment* means a believer has the moral insight by which to accurately judge between "the rightness and wrongness of all thoughts and actions."²

Approve the things that are superior (v. 10). Paul encouraged the Philippians to put everything to the test to find out what was superior. With both knowledge and discernment guiding them, they could make good choices. The term for *approve (dokimazo)* means to test the quality of something such as the purity of metals. Paul used the term in his letter to the Romans, where he urged believers not to be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of their

minds so that they could “discern [*dokimazo*] what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Rom. 12:2). He wanted the Philippians to live for the things that mattered most, and in order to do that they had to be able to separate the bad from the good and the good from the best.

Pure and blameless (v. 10). The goal of being prepared for Christ’s return is two-fold. First believers need to be *pure*. The Greek term (*eilikrines*) means “to be unmixed or sincere.” Believers are to be unmixed with or separate from the world while awaiting the return of Christ. The Greek term is a compound word combining “sun” (*helios*) and “to judge” (*krino*). The idea was holding something in the light of the sun to inspect it. Second, Paul said believers are to be *blameless* (*aproskopos*). The idea behind this term is not to stumble or cause others to stumble. As believers grow in their love for God and others, they will know how to make the best choices that will demonstrate their sincerity and not cause others to stumble.

In the day of Christ (v. 10). For the second time in this passage, Paul mentioned the return of Christ (v. 6). The Philippians had a responsibility to prepare themselves for Christ’s return. While Paul had already noted that God would complete the process of the sanctification of Christians (v. 6), believers have a role in this process as well. In the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, believers must by faith resist sin and submit to God in their thoughts, words, and actions as He conforms them into the image of Christ (Rom. 6:11-14; 8:28-30).

Filled with the fruit of righteousness (v. 11). Paul also prayed that the Philippian believers would be *filled with the fruit of righteousness*, which requires cooperation between the believer and God. The term *righteousness* (*dikaiosune*) can be understood in two ways. Some view the term as referring to the perfect righteousness of Christ that God gives to every believer at the moment of salvation. The believer’s sins are permanently exchanged for the perfect righteousness of Christ. This is known as justification (see Rom. 3:28; 4:6; 5:15-17). However, most see the word as an ethical term referring to the effects of living pure and blameless lives in expectation of Christ’s return (Phil. 1:10; see Hos. 10:12). Both ideas could be present because divine initiative and human responsibility go hand in hand.

The word for *fruit* (*karpos*) is an agricultural term that could also be translated as “harvest.” The fruit is what God produces within the believer. In Galatians 5:22-25, Paul described these effects as the fruit of the Holy Spirit which is produced as believers “walk by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16), again emphasizing the cooperation between God and the believer in the work of sanctification.

That comes through Jesus Christ (v. 11). All the effects of salvation flow out of the atoning work of Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ yields both the believer’s legal standing before God as being permanently righteous through having received the perfect righteousness of Christ (justification) and the believer’s daily experience of gradually growing more Christlike as he or she cooperates with the Holy Spirit in living a godly life (sanctification).

1. Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 69.
2. Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1991), 65.