

Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Philippians
Philippians 1:3-8
Part 1

This morning we are transitioning from the introduction of this epistle into the first major section of this wonderful book. I have entitled this section, "Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Philippians."

Let us read this section of Scripture, **"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, (4) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, (5) in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. (6) For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (7) For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. (8) For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."**

Hopefully you remember the theme of this epistle. The theme of this epistle is joy. Paul is writing this epistle to the Philippians so they might not only know about his joy, but that they might even share in his joy.

We see this theme surfacing very early in this prayer. Look at vv. 4-5, **"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, (4) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all."** Paul, in spite of his circumstances, was rejoicing. Paul, even as he is sharing with the Philippians his prayer of thanksgiving for them, makes sure they know that biblical joy is his companion.

Biblical joy is a deep down confidence that all is well no matter what the circumstances might be. It is a gift from God to all those who believe, produced in them by the Holy Spirit as they receive and obey God's word. It is not diminished by trials. Trials only cause biblical joy to focus on future glory. Though as Christians we may or may not experience happiness, which is related to circumstances, joy should be our constant companion.

No one and absolutely nothing can produce this kind of joy other than the Lord. In preparing for this message I came across someone who made reference to a book written by a man named Slagel entitled "How to Overcome Depression." This book recommends amino acids and vitamin supplements. The book proposes that the amino acids and the supplements will help establish a healthy brain chemistry. In the brain there are neurotransmitters that transmit impulses from one cell to another. If the brain chemistry is not healthy or deficient of certain chemicals, such as serotonin or noraphrenerin, the brain will not effectively transmit it's signals from one cell to another and if this happens the author believes that it will result in depression. After spelling out throughout the entire book how this works, he then came to the last chapter and said, "If, however, you continue habitual negative thought patterns, you will severely undermine the whole treatment." Think about that for a moment. In essence that last chapter is saying that this approach to depression will only significantly help people who are not thinking negatively. Or in

other words, this approach will only significantly help people who do not need help. This is an irrational statement. The world is desperately searching for joy, even willing to embrace the irrational. I believe a better approach would be to search the Bible for answers and make the Scriptures the centerpiece of their efforts to find joy. And a good place for them to begin would be the book of Philippians.

Paul is writing the epistle of Philippians from a Roman prison and facing the possibility of execution, but Paul is joyful. Where did his joy come from? Did it come from having healthy levels of serotonin or norepinephrine? How would Paul answer this question? He would say it came from having a deep down confidence that all was well no matter what the circumstances. And where did this come from? It was a gift from God, produced in him by the Holy Spirit, as he received and obeyed God's Word.

This morning I would like us to look at this prayer of thanksgiving and answer the question, "Why was Paul thankful for the Philippians?" My hope, as we seek to answer this question, would be that we would have a growing appreciation for the kind of relationship that the Lord would have us to enjoy with one another. And that we would not only see the rightness of pursuing it but also the wisdom of it as well. What was Paul thankful for?

PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR HIS MEMORIES

Look at **Phil. 1:4**, "**I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.**" This is a very interesting statement. What does Paul mean? Does he mean that the Philippian church was perfect? Does he mean that every situation that he encountered at the church was perfect? Does he mean that every stored memory that he had of every person at Philippi was perfect? Is this why he was thanking God in all his remembrance of them? The answer has to be no. We know that churches are not perfect. We know that people are not perfect. And yet we learn from this verse that every time Paul would reflect on his past experience with the Philippians, he found himself thanking God for them.

From the first day that the church was born in Philippi to the time this epistle was written, I am personally convinced he knew of many shortcomings within the church at Philippi, either directly through personal experience or indirectly through reports. I believe that we can deduce this from the epistle itself. Listen to **Phil. 2:1-4**, "**If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, (2) make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (3) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.**" Why did he feel he needed to give exhortations such as this if he did not see the need for them? Someone might see this as speculative, but then we read **Phil. 4:2-3**, "**I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.**" There were problems in the church. I am not making this up. They were real and Paul knew about these problems. And yet what does he say? "**I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.**"

Paul had selective memory. When Paul looked on the Philippian church in a general sense, all that he could see were good things. How did this happen? I believe it happens through love. The Philippians effectively erased Paul's tape of negative memories by loving him and by loving the Lord.

When he would reflect on the church at Philippi, his mind was filled with good thoughts. When he reflected on the church, I suppose it might go something like this.

Thank you Lord for opening the heart of Lydia to your gospel. Thank you Lord for the love and care that she extended to us and our missionary team when she opened her home to us. Thank you for the wonderful meals she labored to prepare for us. Thank you Lord for all those in her household who also opened their hearts up to the gospel and who I have come to know and love as well. Thank you Lord for how they remained faithful to you in the midst of the uproar caused at the deliverance of the young slave girl from demon possession. Thank you for their faith that was not intimidated by any threat to themselves. Thank you Lord for their love.

Thank you Lord for the Philippian jailer and his transformation from a hardened jailer to a caring brother in Christ. Thank you Lord for his willingness to take us out of our cells in order to care for our battered, bruised and bloodied bodies. Thank you Lord that he was willing to bring us into his own home to feed us and to give us nourishment. Thank you Lord for the conversion of his household and the wonderful friendships that I now enjoy with them.

Thank you Lord for the way that each of these, without personal concern for themselves, were willing not only to defend the gospel but proclaim it to their friends and family in Philippi after we left. Thank you Lord that they have done this with zeal and with passion and without fear. Lord, I thank you for such a wonderful family in Christ who share the same burden for the lost and same love of the church.

Thank you Lord for the financial help that they have extended to me over the years at such great personal sacrifice. Lord, I thank you for their love for me and my love for them. Every time I think of them I only see good things. And for this I praise you!

The Philippians effectively erased Paul's tape of negative memories by loving him and the Lord. This is why I believe he could say, **"I thank my God in all remembrance of you."** Could Paul actually remember negative personal experiences if he were challenged to do so? I would think he could do this rather easily. Could he remember negative reports that may have been passed on to him if he were challenged to do so? I would think that he could do this rather easily. But when his thoughts would casually drift to the Philippian church as he brings them before the Lord in prayer, only good things came to his mind.

Someone might ask, "Is this an illustration of the biblical truth that "love covers a multitude of sin"? In order to answer that question we need to understand what this phrase means? Does this mean that we are to ignore sin? Does this mean that we are to sweep the sin of others under the rug, pretending that it never happened? And the answer would have to be, "Of course not!" We cannot sweep it under the rug. The Scriptures are very clear; our sinning brothers and sisters in

Christ need to be dealt with. But neither can we retaliate and seek revenge either. The Lord has made it clear, “**Vengeance is mine. I will repay sayeth the Lord.**” We can and should deal with sin but there is a right way of doing it and a wrong way of doing it. There is a loving way and there is an unloving way. Therefore, when we hear the expression “love covers a multitude of sin” we should not think of it as promoting a passivity toward perceived sin in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ, but rather we should think of it as condemning a spirit of retaliation. And I believe this is clear when we read **Prov. 10:12** which says, “**Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all transgressions.**” This does not mean that we have to ignore sin, but it does mean that we will not retaliate or, in other words, stir up strife because of some perceived personal injustice against us.

Let us go back and ask the question again. When Paul says, “**I thank my God in all my remembrance of you**” is this an illustration of the biblical truth that “**love covers a multitude of sin**”? And I believe that the answer is, probably not.

If it is not, then is it an illustration of the biblical truth that we find in **1 Cor. 13:7** which says, “**love, believes all things, hopes all things...**”? The love that is being referred to here is “agape” love or in other words the love that comes down from God. Is this the reason why Paul was able to say “**I thank my God in all remembrance of you**” because he, through the love of God, was able to believe all things about them and hope all things about them?

What do these phrases mean? When it says that “**love believes all things**” this does not mean that the love that comes from God is easily deceived. Rather it simply means that the love that comes from God will take the kindest view of others in every circumstance, as long as it possibly can. When it says that love “**hopes all things,**” it simply means that we are holding on to the belief that with God all things are possible.

Let us go back and ask the question again. When Paul says, “**I thank my God in all my remembrance of you**” is this an illustration of the biblical truth that the love that comes from God believes all things and hopes all things? Certainly this could be a part of it. But I do not believe that this is the primary reason for him saying what he does.

I do not believe that Paul’s statement concerning the Philippians has to do so much with God’s love flowing from Paul to the Philippians, but rather I believe it has much more to do with God’s love flowing from the Philippians to Paul. Why do I say this? Paul was loved by the Philippians in very practical ways. They supported his person. They supported his ministry. They supported his cause. We will see this throughout the study of this epistle. And therefore it is the most likely explanation.

What does this have to do with us? This relationship that existed between Paul and the Philippians, I believe, gives us an insight into the relationship that God would desire among all believers. **John 13:35** says, “**By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**” If we would love one another in the way that the Scripture call us to love one another, one of the byproducts would be that negative memories would be erased, leaving us only to contemplate the acts of kindness and expressions of love that we have over time come to

treasure. It all boils down to loving one another.

When you think of your brothers and sisters in Christ at Valley Bible can you say with Paul, because of your mutual love for one another, **“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you?”** Or when you think of your brothers and sisters in Christ at Valley, is there a numbing indifference or even a critical attitude? If either of those conditions are present then there is a challenge before us.

You are not responsible for how others at Valley Bible love you. But you and I are responsible for how we love our brother and sisters in Christ. This becomes our challenge. And it is stated very succinctly in **1 Peter 1:22** which challenges believers to **“fervently love one another from the heart.”** Your challenge this weekend is this: To live your life in such a way in regards to your brothers in sisters in Christ that you are not only known by them, but your love for them is known by them.

CONCLUSION

Paul in **Phil. 1:3-8** shares with us his prayer of thanksgiving. What was Paul thankful for? First of all, he was thankful in all of his remembrance of the Philippians. How was he able to do this? He was able to do this because of the Philippians' love for him and for the Lord.

Can our brother and sisters in Christ, who we know at Valley Bible Church, pray this same prayer of thanksgiving in respect to ourselves? Do those who we know at Valley Bible Church, who know and love the Lord, who are seeking to serve the Lord, know through your words and actions that you support them, their ministries, and the great commission?

If all of us together would rise up by the grace of God to meet this challenge, I believe the result would be a much richer Christian experience and a far more effective ministry for ourselves and for our church.

I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God. I've been washed in the fountain cleansed by His blood! Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod. For I'm part of the family, the family of God. You will notice we say “brother and sister” ‘round here - it's because we're a family and these folks are so near; when one has a heartache we all share the tears and rejoice in each victory in this family so dear.