

**Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving for the Philippians
Philippians 1:3-8
Part 2**

This morning we will be continuing our study of the book of Philippians. We have considered Paul's greeting in VV. 1-2 and we have now begun to consider Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippians in VV. 3-8.

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."**

Last week as we began to examine this passage of Scripture we asked the question: "What is Paul thankful for?" The first thing Paul was thankful for were his memories. Look at **V. 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you."** We know that churches are not perfect. We know that people are not perfect. And yet, we learn from this verse that when Paul would reflect on his past experience with the Philippians, he found himself thanking God in all his remembrance of them.

How could this be, in light of the imperfections that exist in all churches? The Philippians effectively erased Paul's tape of negative memories by loving him and by loving the Lord. The Philippians effectively erased Paul's tape of negative memories because their love for him and the Lord was so overwhelmingly powerful. This is why I believe he could say, **"I thank my God in all my 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. Why? Because, I believe, based on the context of this epistle, their love for Paul and for the Lord dwarfed all of his other memories of the Philippians.

I hope that this thought has been personally challenging to you. I would hope that we can see how effective the power of love can be in erasing negative memories. I would hope that this would give you hope as you seek to relate with people who in the past you may have personally failed.

This week we will continue answering the question, "What was Paul thankful for?" We find the second reason for Paul's thankfulness in **V. 5**, but before we get there we need to consider **V. 4**, which is a transitional verse. As we do this, we will find ourselves touching on the theme of this epistle.

Look at **VV. 3-4** **“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, (4) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.”** The joy that the world experiences is totally dependent upon good circumstances, but this is not the case with biblical joy. This is not the case with the joy that Paul experienced as he offers prayers of thanksgiving to God for the Philippians.

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.

Certainly biblical joy was Paul’s companion. Even though Paul was in a Roman prison and facing the possibility of execution, he had a deep down confidence that all was well in spite of his circumstances. Paul’s joy in spite of his circumstances is evident throughout the epistle. But what is interesting as we consider this prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippians is the fact that the joy Paul is referring to in **V. 4** is not related to the deep down confidence that all is well with him in spite of his circumstances, but that all is well in the Philippian church in spite of their circumstances.

Paul was not the only one going through difficult times. The Philippians were going through difficult times as well. Let me read for you **Phil. 1:27-30**, **“Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; (28) in no way alarmed by your opponents - which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that too, from God. (29) For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (30) experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me.”** The lives of the Philippians were not easy and you might expect that the difficulties they were going through might upset Paul but this did not happen. In fact, rather than being upset about their circumstances, he was able to find cause for rejoicing. Rather than being upset about their circumstances, he had a deep down confidence that all was well.

Wouldn’t you like to have this ability to find something to rejoice in when people you love are going through hard times? Wouldn’t you like to have this ability to find something to rejoice in when people you care about are going through severe trials? It is possible. How do we know this? Because Paul was experiencing this kind of joy in respect to the Philippians, who he dearly loved, even though they were undergoing severe trials.

How was he able to do this? He explains it in **VV. 5-8**. And this explanation gives us insight into a second reason why he is thankful for the Philippians. Paul was thankful for their participation in the gospel.

PAUL WAS THANKFUL FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE GOSPEL

Let us read **VV. 3-5** **“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, (4) always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.”** Why, was Paul able to always offer prayer with joy in his every prayer for the Philippians? Look at V. 5. **“in view of your participation in the gospel ...”** Because of their participation in the gospel he knew that all was well with the Philippians in spite of their circumstances.

Why? Because their participation in the gospel confirmed that they knew the Lord. Their participation in the gospel confirmed that they truly possessed saving and living faith. This is why Paul knew that all was well with the Philippians in spite of their circumstances.

If we are convinced that our loved ones possess genuine, living and saving faith we know that it will all turn out well in the end. Yes, we may have sorrow for them in their afflictions, but we also possess an abiding joy, that in light of eternity, all is well. Listen to **1 Pet. 1:3-7**, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, (4) to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, (5) who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (6) In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, (7) that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold, which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”** Good things are coming to those who know the Lord. Paul knew this in respect to the Philippians. He knew good things were coming to the Philippians because of their participation in the gospel. Their participation in the gospel confirmed to Paul that their faith was real and genuine.

What does **“in view of your participation in the gospel”** mean? Does it mean that they received the gospel rather than rejected the gospel? Certainly it includes the fact that they had received the gospel rather than rejected the gospel, but it obviously means much more than that. Why would I say this? Look at the very next phrase, **“...from the first day until now.”** He sees their participation not as something that happened at a point in time but rather as something that continued to happen over time.

If this is so, then perhaps Paul is speaking about the benefits and blessings of the gospel which they had enjoyed over time when he says, **“...in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.”** Certainly it may include this thought but it obviously means much more than that. Why would I say this? Look at the immediate context. Let us look specifically at V. 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.”** What does “in view of your participation in the gospel” mean? **“In view of your participation in the gospel”** means that the Philippians were working together with Paul to advance the gospel. The Philippians had rolled up their sleeves to

work alongside Paul to get the gospel message out to the world.

When Paul looked at the Philippians and the way they were living their lives in respect to the gospel, he felt a real camaraderie with the Philippians. He saw them as his brothers and sisters in Christ. The Philippians and Paul, because of their mutual participation in the gospel, were enjoying true Christian fellowship. How do I know this? Let us consider the Greek word that is translated “participation” in **Phil. 1:5**. It is the word “KOINONIA.” Does this word sound familiar to you? It should. It is the word that is most often translated “fellowship” in the New Testament. In fact, this is exactly how the KJV translates the word. Listen to **Phil. 1:4-5** in the King James Bible, “**Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy. (5) For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.**”

The word “fellowship” (KOINONIA) has lost its true meaning in Christian circles. What do I mean by this? Presently, most Christians believe that if they invite an unsaved neighbor to their home for a cup of coffee, it is friendship; but if they invite a Christian neighbor, it is considered “fellowship” (KOINONIA). Presently, if you attend a meeting at church and leave as soon as it is over, you have participated in a service; if you stay after and talk with the people, then you have enjoyed fellowship (KOINONIA). In the modern use of the word, fellowship has come to mean warm fellowship with believers. This is not how Paul used the term. In Phil. 1:5 he used the term KOINONIA.

In the first century, the word commonly had commercial overtones. It did not speak of a warm fellowship but rather joint participants in a venture (Rom. 15:26). It did not speak of a warm fellowship but of a shared partnership in some undertaking. Listen to **Rom. 15:26**, “**For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.**” Is this verse speaking of Christian fellowship? Is this verse talking about KOINONIA? The answer is yes! The word “contribution” is the word “KOINONIA.” It is not communicating that Christians were talking to one another over coffee and donuts but rather doing something sacrificially together in order to accomplish a common goal. The heart of true fellowship is self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision, which flows out of our devotion to Christ.

Are you enjoying Christian fellowship at Valley Bible Church? How would you answer this question? In order to answer this question you must first of all identify the vision that Christ has given His children. What is that vision?

The Christian vision is holiness (Eph. 1:4). Listen to **Eph. 1:4**, “**Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.**” The whole purpose of our salvation is that we be “**holy and blameless.**” To be holy is to be morally blameless. It is to be separated from sin and therefore, consecrated to God. This is a given. If we are not pursuing holiness, it is very likely that we are not a Christian at all. Why? Because the whole purpose of our salvation is that we be “**holy and blameless.**”

If it is your vision to be holy and blameless and this is my vision and we are sacrificially conforming ourselves to this vision, then we are enjoying what? Christian fellowship. Will this

mutual pursuit of holiness produce in us a sense of closeness between us? Yes, if we become aware of each other's pursuit.

When I see a brother or sister in Christ doing hard things in order to live a life pleasing to the Lord, when I see a brother or sister in Christ doing the hard things in order to be morally pure, I am drawn to them. I feel close to them. I don't need them to invite me over for pizza. I don't need them to go out of their way to say hello to me. I don't even need them to know my name. All I need to see is their desire to live a godly, holy life as an outflow of their devotion to Christ. This is what Paul saw when he looked at the Philippians and their participation in the gospel of Christ. He saw this as an outflow of their pursuit of holiness to live a life pleasing to the Lord. We experience the closeness of Christian fellowship when we see each other pursuing the Lord sacrificially.

CONCLUSION

In considering Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the Philippians, we have asked ourselves the question, "What is Paul thankful for?" We have first of all seen that Paul was thankful to God for his memories. What does **V. 3** say? "**I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...**" These prayers of thanksgiving were based on these wonderful memories of their love for him, and the Lord led Paul to pray every prayer with joy. Look at **V. 4**, "**always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all...**" This joyful praying was not generated by good circumstances either in Paul's life or in the Philippians' life. Rather this joyful praying was generated by the way the Philippians were living. Look at **V. 5**, "**in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.**" Their participation in the gospel of Christ confirmed to Paul that they in fact possessed genuine, living and saving faith. He was joyful when he prayed, not because the circumstances were good or he was convinced that the circumstances would get better, but rather that in spite of the circumstances all was truly well, not only with himself but with them.

There are people in your life that you care about. There are people in your life that you deeply love. Today their lives might be without trials, but there is a day coming when this will no longer be true. If you want to be spared from grieving for them without hope, I would strongly encourage you to follow the example of the Philippians and the Apostle Paul and seek to reach them with the gospel of Christ. If you want to always have joy when you think of your loved ones in the midst of their most difficult times, I would encourage you to follow the example of the Philippians and Apostle Paul and seek to reach them with the gospel of Christ.