

Philippians

Part 2 – “A Well-Placed Thankfulness”

Philippians 1:3-7

Following his greeting to the Philippian believers (vv. 1-2) Paul included an introductory word of thanksgiving. This is a common feature of Paul's epistles as it was in most correspondence of the day. It is clear that Paul had great affection for the Philippian congregation. One commentator points out that Paul's thanksgiving in this letter "is distinguished by emphatic repetitions and emotional intensity" (Silva, 45). Paul's gratitude was no perfunctory literary convention. To read Paul's thanksgiving in Philippians is to be taken into his inner world of deep affection for these who shared not only God's gracious salvation in Jesus Christ but also were his partners in advancing the gospel.

While Paul utilized the common format for correspondence, at no time did he waste words on meaningless pleasantries. Even the introductory words of thanksgiving are laden with theological depth. Indeed Paul's words of thankfulness foreshadow the letter's most important themes.

In reading Philippians we are not merely eavesdropping on a pastor's letter to a church. Paul is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit so his letter to the Philippian church is simultaneously an expression of love from Jesus to us today. "Paul's thankful heart shows that as we entrust ourselves to Jesus, he gives two gifts: a love that stretches our hearts to embrace others, and a joy that places our pain into perspective, enabling us to see our suffering in the context of God's comprehensive plan to make us more like his Son" (Johnson, 22).

Main Idea: Paul explains the deep and varied reasons for his thankfulness for the Philippian church.

Vs. 3 – eucharisteo was a common verb used to open letters thanking God or "the gods" for the recipients. Paul's is a Godward prayer of thanks for the faithfulness of Philippian church.

Vs. 4 – Paul's use of the adverb "always" indicates a consistent pattern of prayer for the Philippian church. The repeated use of "all" in the letter reminds the reader that Paul's gratitude was comprehensive. Paul's gratitude was due in part to the Philippian's generous financial support. But as he will remind them in 4:10-20 his thankfulness is due primarily to the spiritual growth of the Philippian church.

Vs. 5 – Additionally Paul is thankful for the Philippian church's partnership in the gospel. Their partnership (*koinonia*) was broad and included their financial support, open identification with the apostle, obedience, prayers, witness to the Lord Jesus, and endurance through trials.

Vs. 6 – To stress his certainty Paul uses the perfect participle of the verb "I am sure" (*peithow*). The "good work" is a reference to the salvation of the Philippian believers which commenced when they heard and believed the gospel. Just as God was responsible for the inauguration of their salvation so too will he keep them till the end of the age.

Vs. 7 – Paul states that his deeply felt affection for the Philippian believers and his confidence in God's work in them is firmly grounded. Paul mentions both his present circumstance ("my imprisonment") and his present activity ("defense and confirmation of the gospel"). The Philippian's open identification with and continuing support for Paul mean that they are participants with him in these things.



1. The direction of Paul's thankfulness – “I thank my God”

Vs. 3

- Paul had something of a spiritual reflex when it came to the Philippian church. Every time he thought of them he gave thanks to God. Later in the letter he will thank the Philippian believers directly. But at the outset Paul establishes the fundamentally God-ward direction of his thankfulness. Christian thankfulness recognizes our indebtedness to God. All our thanksgiving is ultimately directed to God who is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17).

2. The expression of Paul's thankfulness – joyful prayer

Vs. 4

- Paul expresses his thankfulness for the Philippians by praying for them. “Genuine godly gratitude works itself out in praying for others by freeing us from our self-sufficiency and self-absorption in order to recognize the grace of God at work in other’s lives” (Harmon, 80).
- Notice the comprehensiveness in Paul’s language: “*always in every prayer of mine for you all.*”
- Paul’s prayers for the Philippian church are “with joy.” This is no perfunctory task. It is a joy for Paul to pray for these friends.

3. The occasion for Paul's thankfulness – partnership in the gospel

Vs. 5

- The term “partnership” (*koinonia*) means more than mere fellowship. It is a strategic relationship. In this case Paul is offering thanks for the fact that the Philippian church had given him direct and practical support for his work in gospel proclamation. Not everyone is called to preach and only a small number of men were ever apostles. But all Christians can and should participate in advancing the gospel in whatever capacity the Lord has given them. Paul understood the financial support given to him from the church at Philippi as a vital and strategic partnership.

4. The foundation under Paul's thankfulness – God's grace in salvation

Vs. 6

- Paul’s thankfulness rests ultimately upon the grace of God in the salvation of his people. This work of salvation is from beginning to completion the sovereign work of God. Nothing else mattered more than this. This grace is the foundation under which Paul builds his thanksgiving. This expression probably finds its way into the thanksgiving because of the need for assurance that the Philippian church will surely require as resistance to them increases.

5. The affection in Paul's thankfulness – costly friendship

Vs. 7

- Paul’s deeply felt affection for the Philippian church was connected to their continued willingness to identify with him while a prisoner of Rome. It was risky for the Philippian Christians to openly identify with a man under possible sentence of death. Not only that but they joined the apostle in the defense of the gospel. In a city with such close ties to Rome the Christians at Philippi were risking their own well-being. No wonder Paul’s thankfulness for them was joined with such tender affection.