

Studying Philippians

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[0 : 00] Well, I've been really looking forward to studying this letter with you over the next few weeks because the letter to the Philippians is such an encouraging letter.

Philippians is written by the apostle Paul to the church in Philippi. In Philippi was a, I would have, I was going to have a map up here but I forgot, so you can just imagine, Philippi is a coastal city. That's one of the first Greek towns you'd enter if you were traveling over land from Turkey into Greece.

And Philippi was a very important city. It was a Roman colony in Macedonia and Greece and it was actually a place where a lot of Roman soldiers went and retired later on.

But it was one of the most important cities in the area. The church was planted after the apostle Paul visited it about AD 50, which we read off in Acts chapter 16.

And in many ways the Philippian congregation, we might consider them to be quite a model church. Well, no church is perfect. As we read through the letter of Philippians, you'll realize that Paul doesn't write to them because there's any kind of major heresy or immorality in the church.

[1 : 05] Rather he writes to encourage them and strengthen them to keep going in the gospel. You see the Philippians were in some ways a church very like us.

They faced many of the same threats that churches face today. They faced external pressure of trying to live as a Christian in a world that opposes the gospel.

How do you do that? They faced internal conflict within the church community. People didn't always get on. That's why Paul will see he'll call again and again for them to unite in the progress of the gospel.

And they also faced the constant danger of the gospel being distorted by false teaching, not necessarily in the church, but from voices coming in from outside. So in view of all that, in view of these external internal threats, Paul writes to encourage them to stand firm in the gospel and strive forward together for the faith of the gospel.

If you want one picture to think of Paul's message for the whole of Philippians, think of like a rugby team in a scrum. He wants them to stand firm and he wants them to push forward together in the faith of the gospel.

[2 : 15] And he works that out throughout the letter. It's a letter that's clearly relevant for us as we read it. It's encouraging it and it points how we should live. But my prayer as we work through it is that God will be using it to encourage us to shape us more and more like the best of the Philippians until he'll use the worst of the Philippians to maybe expose and shape us more to be like the church that God intends us to be.

And these opening verses I think are a really good place to start, not just because they're the start of the letter, but because in them Paul tells them why he gives thanks for the Philippians and what his hope for them is in the future.

You know, I don't know whether you've ever kind of chatted to someone and you know, maybe you've known them for about a year. They've been, they came to Christ a year ago or two years ago and it's a wonderful opportunity to reflect with them and tell them how they've grown and also to pray for them in the future.

And that's, that's what Paul's doing. This is a church that he knows well and he loves. And in his prayer we see all the things that he's thankful for and we see what his greatest priorities are as he prays for them.

And so first of all, that brings us to our first point, but we see what Paul's, what Paul gives thanks for. He praises God for gospel partnerships. So first point, praise God for gospel partnership.

[3 : 41] And again, just a health warning, this is, this is the longer point of the two. The Philippians were clearly a church close to Paul's heart. I don't know whether he was allowed to have favorites.

I think if he was, I wouldn't be surprised that it would be the Philippians because just look at the language he uses when he speaks to them in verses three to five. Verse three, for example, I think, I thank God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy.

You can think about it. Whenever Paul heard the name Philippi, he wasn't filled with joy. And they are those people again, what have they done this time? He was filled with joy. Every time he worked through his list of churches, he just gave thanks.

He just exploded into joy whenever he got to Philippi. And it wasn't just a few individuals in the church that will get it, you know, that Paul was encouraged by. It was all of them, always, all of you for making my prayer with joy.

He gave thanks for all of them all the time. Well, what would call as such an outpouring of praise? And we see, we see the answer in verse five, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[4 : 57] Paul bubbles over in thanksgiving, because ever since the church has been founded, this has been a church that has worked side by side with him for the faith of the gospel, in partnership for the gospel.

But what is partnership? It's quite a key word in Philippians. We'll see it come up quite a few times. We might hear the word partnership. We think of, I don't know, kids holding hands and skipping around together in the playground or adults sitting in a circle singing to God, singing kumbaya together.

But that's not what Paul's talking about. The word partnership in the Bible is the language of business. So in Luke five, we're told that James and John were partners in the business, were partners in the fishing business with Simon Peter.

So when we hear partnership, we should think about people working side by side for a common goal. Think of, I don't know, think of crofters working together. They meet together at the flank. They're making hay. They're cutting peat. They're shearing. They're lambing. They're making a fisherman going out in the boats each day. They don't just help each other when they've got nothing better to do.

[6 : 01] They are shoulder to shoulder through every season and every weather. And that's the kind of partnership Paul had with the Philippians. And the basis of this partnership is also really important.

It's a partnership in the gospel. You notice that partnership in the gospel verse five. And we see what that exactly means in the verses that follow. Verse seven tells us that they are partners in grace.

Paul says, it is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you all partakers with me in grace. When we read Acts 16, we heard about how the first members in the Philippians church came to Christ and it was made up of people from very different walks of life. You've got Lydia, the rich businesswoman who's the seller of purple cloth. You've got the prison hardened, the soldier who's probably an ex-soldier who's guarding the prison.

And they're probably an even more diverse bunch than the people in this room. Philippi was a melting pot of all different kind of people. But what did they share in common such that Paul speaks to them as close family?

[7 : 14] They're all partakers in grace. One or two Christians have the same story of coming to Christ. They're all united by grace.

That's what they have in common. Both Paul and the Philippian jailer could testify how God had revealed to them their sin and convicted them of their sin and their need for Christ. Both Paul and Lydia could speak about how Jesus had washed them clean and he'd given them new life and they'd know the joy of being adopted into Christ's family.

Each one of them knew the joy of peace to God with God, access to a heavenly Father. That's what meant that they could all join together in the work of the Gospel.

They were united in grace. They were family in Christ. And because they were partners in grace, that meant that they were also partners in gospel work.

Again, verse 7, Paul says, he says, if you're partakers with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

[8 : 16] Here we have proof, if you like, that partnership isn't just about being friends, but it's about laboring side by side for the faith of the gospel. So you think as Paul was in Philippi, they would have seen him as he reasoned in the synagogues, as he went and talked to people on the streets.

It would have been very easy for the Philippians to just leave it to Paul. He's the great evangelist.

But Paul says, you partnered with me. They were side by side with Paul.

And even when Paul was arrested in Philippi, they didn't distance themselves from him. We read how the first thing Paul did was come back to Lydia's house after he was free from the prison. They didn't duck down below the parapet in order to avoid persecution.

In fact, Paul will commend them later on in chapter 1, verse 30. He says that you're engaged in the same conflict that you saw I have and still hear that I have.

The Philippians were side by side with Paul in the trenches, shoulder to shoulder. They weren't just partners who joined Paul for a cup of tea.

[9 : 20] They were there. They were putting their reputations, their comfort, their jobs online to stand shoulder to shoulder with him. In fact, we know even if you look over in chapter 4, verse 14, even when Paul commends the Philippians, because even when he left Philippi to go and preach to other churches in Macedonia, in Greece, there was the Philippians who kept supporting him.

They weren't a rich church, but they kept financially supporting Paul so that he could be completely freed up to be preaching the gospel. They were part of Paul's evangelistic team, as it were.

Even though they weren't there in the town with him, they were partnering with him in the work of the gospel. And so Paul commends them. In chapter 2, we'll even hear about how when Paul was all the way over in Rome, they sent a pathroditus over to care for Paul's needs.

They were that concerned. That's what partnership in the gospel looks like. So there were partners in grace. There were partners in gospel work. And finally, there were partners in love.

God, what gospel partnership expresses itself in love. Paul says in verse 8, for God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

[10 : 35] Paul punnishop is a business word. It's also more than that. It's a relationship word. This is not just transactional. Paul loves them. He longs for them.

They're not just fellow workers. They're his family. You notice how deep his love is. He's bold enough to say that he loves them like Jesus loves them. His love for them is genuine. He says, I can call God as my witness.

It's not that he loves them just when he's with them and actually really can't be involved with them other times. He says, God is my witness, how much I long for you. This is a genuine whole life, deep Christ-like love.

And as we go on in chapter 2, we'll see that kind of love can only come from Jesus. That kind of love is only grown. That only comes from the seedbed of grace, as it were.

Grows from grace and it's expressed as grown as they partner together in the gospel. I have a friend who's begun basic training for the Marines.

[11 : 32] And he told me that for a while, many of the guys who are training with him will scatter at different points to various platoons. His sergeant told him that in those, they spent such intense time together, eating and sleeping and training.

Those 24 weeks will form such deep friendships that they'll be friends for life. As gospel partnership should produce a similar kind of love.

The Christians should be side by side, bearing one another's burdens, building one another up. At all times, in all stages of life, whatever the weather, that actually that in joy and sorrow and anxiety and hope, it's in those times, those bonds of love are made.

The Philippians will partners with Paul and Grace in gospel work, in love. And Paul sees that partnership and he rejoices. Not just because it's a wonderful thing in love itself.

He rejoices because it's evidence of God's work in their lives. That's the really key thing. If you look in verse five, Paul says, so he rejoices because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, verse six, sorry.

[12 : 47] And I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus. The Philippians partnership in the present was evidence that God had been doing a good work in them.

We often take, apply a verse six as an assurance about God's work in a believer's life. You know, it's that, that this verse is a great assurance to see God's work in a certain individual. But you see Paul's emphasis in this context is much more corporate. All the use in this verse are plural. The gospel partnership he sees isn't just evidence of God saving and growing a few different individuals.

It's evidence of God maturing and growing a whole church. It's evidence that these bonds of love are being made as people work side by side. They're growing more and more into the people God intends them to be.

And Paul sees that and he rejoices because he knows that even if he's locked up in prison in Rome, even if he can't be back with the Philippians, he's confident that God will continue that work in the church.

[13:56] This church isn't just going to wipe, be wiped out. They're not just going to decay without Paul because God has began a good work in them and he'll bring it to completion.

Paul praises God for gospel partnership. And in doing so, he sets us an example to follow. In chapter 3 verse 17, he'll tell the Philippians to imitate him as he imitates Christ.

And so we need to give thanks and rejoice when we see gospel partnership. Paul looked at it, he heard the messages of, he heard people talking about how the Philippians were doing and he rejoiced.

So we need to ask, where do we see that in our own lives? Where do we see that in the church? It's often much easier, isn't it, to find faults, to find things to complain about in church?

Well, let's imitate Paul and rejoice when we see signs of God's work. I try to make a list of just all the ways in which we as a church, Kalloy Free Church, are involved in different areas of partnership.

[14:55] I mean, we see people loving each other. That's the most important way, encouraging and building each other up. Seeing people invest in the kids, it's great that the kids aren't just a nuisance but the kids are loved and invested in.

It's great seeing people trying to build relationships and share the gospel with people, whether it's at the beach or at the car park. Hearing a room full of people praying for the work of the gospel.

We see that partnership in prayer. We're seeing it during the fundraising events. It's not just about raising money for the building project. We see members of the congregation side by side seeking to serve the community and build connections in order to share the gospel.

We rejoice when we see our partnership with the church next door, whether it's the joint Sunday school or prayers nights and just the ways in which we are brothers and sisters together in Christ. There's lots of partnership that we see and we should rejoice. Further afield, just over the past few weeks we've seen, you can list the ways in which we're partnering with WFM or steadfast global or Adams work for the persecuted church.

[16:05] There's the online discipleship group, men's discipleship group that is going on. There's so many things we have to give thanks for. It's wonderful just going through that list and seeing the ways in which God has been working in all of your lives.

It's only because God has saved us by His grace and united him in his gospel that we can give thanks for these things. It's God that brings and grows that work.

Let's give Him the glory. As well as praise God, we're also to encourage one another when we see gospel partnership. Again, Paul sets this pattern for us. He starts the letter telling the Philippians his prayer, doesn't he?

Have you ever wondered why does he do that? It's because he wants to encourage them. He tells them what he's praying for so that they realize it. You can actually, we're doing something right. It's so easy to be slogging away in the Christian life and to just think, hope I'm doing the right thing. This is just, maybe it's difficult to see progress or growth from one day or one month or one year away. When someone comes in and says, and encourages you how you've grown, encourages a church how they've grown, it's a wonderful thing to do.

[17:21] We've been recipients over the summer of people coming into the church and saying, what a wonderful welcome they were given. That's a wonderful way to encourage people. We can do that when we go to other churches.

We can also do that one to another. We know each other for years and years. We'll see the ways in which people grow as believers. Let's be those who encourage one another.

These opening lines are Paul putting his arm around the Philippians, reminding them how God's been at work in their life. That's a wonderful gift that we can give to someone else to encourage them in the Gospel.

Paul praises God for Gospel partnership. It's a wonderful sign of God's work in the church. Paul doesn't just give thanks for God's work in the past. He also prays for future growth.

That brings us to our second point, pray for growth in love and Godliness. We'll be looking at verses 9 to 11, particularly here. Pray for growth in love and Godliness.

[18 : 23] That's how I've tried to summarize these verses here. I don't know, maybe you can do better. But first, you notice as Paul has reflected all the progress that they've made, the first thing he prays for is that they were abound in love.

Verse 8, Paul's already talked about his own yearning for them. He's already given thanks for their love. What do you pray for someone who's really loving? Paul tells us here, you pray that they were abound in love more and more.

When we're saying love, we're not just talking about wishy washy feelings. If you look in Philippians where the word love comes up again, in chapter 2 verse 2, Paul contrasts love with selfish ambition and rivalry and trying to make yourself big.

Love is the opposite of that. Very practically, love is about putting the other person's needs before your own. How does love grow? Well, first of all, it's rooted in Christ.

You notice what Paul says? So that you're abound in love more and more with knowledge and discernment. What causes love to abound? Well, first of all, it must be rooted in the knowledge of Christ.

[19 : 39] That's what gives love its Christ-like quality. And again, Paul is the model. What drives Paul's love for them? As you go through the letter, we realize that Paul's not focused on himself.

Paul's constantly mentioning the day of Christ. That's where his eyes are fixed. And he speaks about pressing on to the goal to win the prize of the upward call of Christ Jesus. All Paul wants to do is to know Christ Jesus, his Savior more and more.

That's what drives him, not making himself great, wants to be with Christ. And he wants, his greatest desire for the Philippians is that they too would know Christ.

That they too would be ready for the day of Christ. Paul grows in knowing Christ and as a result, he puts himself last. He puts loving others first.

Love is rooted in Christ. But love is also something that needs to be cultivated. Love isn't just something you have. It's got to be cultivated. That's true for love in marriage.

[20 : 38] You'll hear that every time you go to a wedding, probably they'll talk about how you need to work at love. You read it in any marriage book. It's true for the church life as well, though. We're born into the Christian family.

We have brothers and sisters in Christ, whether we choose them or not. But we then need to grow at loving them. We need to grow in love one for another. Love requires constant cultivation.

In some ways it's just like a garden. In some ways it's just like growing plants in a garden. I've heard it helpfully summarized that as we grow in love, it's about pulling weeds and planting seeds. There's a helpful category to think of in growing love in any relationship, whether it's a friendship or a marriage or, in this case, church family.

Pulling weeds. The Philippians had some pretty nasty weeds to pull. If you scan through the letter, you'll see that the number of mentions of breakdown in relationship there was envy and selfish ambition and rivalry.

The Philippians, they were doing well, but there was still a lot of discord within the church. These things were all getting in the way of them growing in love.

[21 : 46] It's worth for us asking ourselves what weeds need to be pulled in our own life to clear the soil for love.

Where's their resentment in our hearts? Where is their anger or bitterness? One forgiveness or selfishness or self-righteousness?

I've seen all those things in my own heart over the years. What's in yours heart? What weeds have you allowed to grow and take root and choke out the love that should exist in your church family relationship?

Because unchecked, all those things will grow and build walls and they'll completely choke out the loving relationships that we should have. It's not a nice exercise, but if we as a church want to grow

in love, as the Philippians were and as Paul's praying for them, we need to do that.

We need to start weeding our hearts. We can help one another with that, not by pointing out the faults in others. First of all by weeding our own hearts, but also being ready to say two words or three words, I'm sorry, I forgive you.

[23 : 02] They go an awfully long way in tearing out and pulling out those weeds. As well as pulling weeds, we can be planting seeds, again Paul models the kind of seeds of love that we should be trying to grow.

For example, for example, Paul's words, Paul is constantly trying to encourage the Philippians, isn't he? The Philippians weren't perfect by any means and Paul does have some hard words to say later on in chapter four.

He'll have some hard words to say to two individuals who are causing a bit of disruption, but they're never harsh words. Paul writes like a loving father.

Words are powerful. In the letter of James, we're told that words can be like a spark that sets a whole forest on fire. But words can also be a great blessing when used in love.

That's what Paul is doing. Paul's using his words to build up and encourage the Philippians in their faith. No wonder Paul prays for growth and love into sermon and wisdom.

[24 : 03] We need wisdom to use our words. As well as praying for self-control in our speech, let's pray that God would use our words like our Creator uses his words to give life, to build up.

Pulling weeds and planting seeds, that's a daily, that's a weekly, a yearly work if we want to grow in love. It begins with prayer as Paul shows us because we can't do without God's help.

So Paul prays for growth in love. He also prays for growth in godliness. From the words Paul uses, we can just see that kind of godliness is where I've tried to summarize his aim there.

There's godliness in thought in verse 10. He prays that they may approve what is excellent. In other words, that they'd be loving what God loves and hating what he hates. Godliness in heart, that they would be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

And godliness in action filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God. It would just fill through all of their lives. I think what I find most challenging is the way that Paul directly links love and godliness here.

[25 : 13] Do you see the so that that comes at the beginning of verse 10? The church grows in godliness as they grow in love for one another. You don't have a godly congregation if you have a loveless congregation.

You might have a self-righteous congregation, but not godly. Godliness begins with a selfless love for others. Godliness grows in the seedbed of love.

Once again the application of verses 9 to 11 is quite simple. We're to imitate Paul and how we pray for one another.

We pray for growth in love and godliness for our church family, not a self-righteous way, but beginning with ourselves, that our own love would abound more and more.

And then praying corporately like Paul. I think sometimes we can struggle to know what we pray for our friends, for our family who are believers. I think we all know that our greatest priority for those who don't know Christ is that they would be saved.

[26 : 15] But then what do we pray next? What do we pray for the person who's a Christian, for the person who's steaming forward, who's growing in maturity?

Well, Paul gives us the example here. It's right that we pray for one another's physical needs. Paul, we were told to pray, give us this day our daily bread. Over here Paul reminds us that the believer's greatest need is growth in godly maturity.

Paul's prayer is again, they're shaped by the day of Christ. His overwhelming desire is that they should be ready for that day. So we can ask for ourselves, are our prayers shaped by that same thing?

Paul isn't just praying for convert, he's praying for mature believers. So let me challenge us all, do we pray for maturity? In view of the day of Christ, do we look at our brothers and sisters in church and long that they become more like Christ and pray for them?

Whether a person is growing or stagnating, no one has arrived, no church has arrived. We need to pray for each person to grow in love and godliness.

[27 : 23] As we draw to a close now, Paul's prayers are wonderful example about what to pray if we want to grow as a church. They remind us to rejoice when we see God at work in people's lives,

when we see people growing in love for one another, when we see churches growing.

They challenge us to be those who partner, to be those who partner more and more in grace and unity and in love. And they inspire us to pray that that love will abound more and more and that God would refine us so that we would be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Let's pray that now. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we gather this evening as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lord, we rejoice in the way in which you have been growing each person here who is trusting in you. Lord, we thank you that you are conforming more and more to your likeness.

We thank you even more for us as a congregation, as a group. Thank you for the bonds of love that you're building. Thank you for the partnership that exists within this church.

[28 : 31] We pray that you grow that more and more, that our love would abound more and more, that we grow in maturity and that you'd use all of our efforts to your glory.

We pray that in view of the day of Christ, that you'd make us a people who are pure and spotless.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.