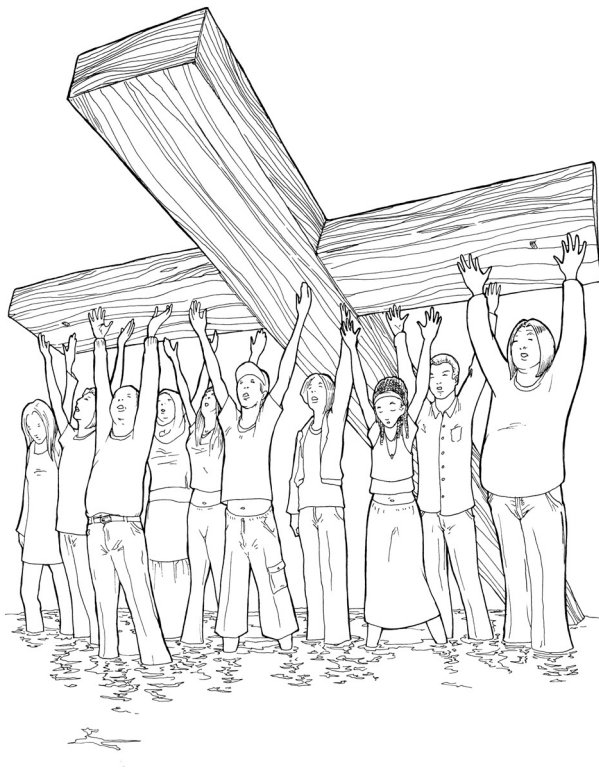
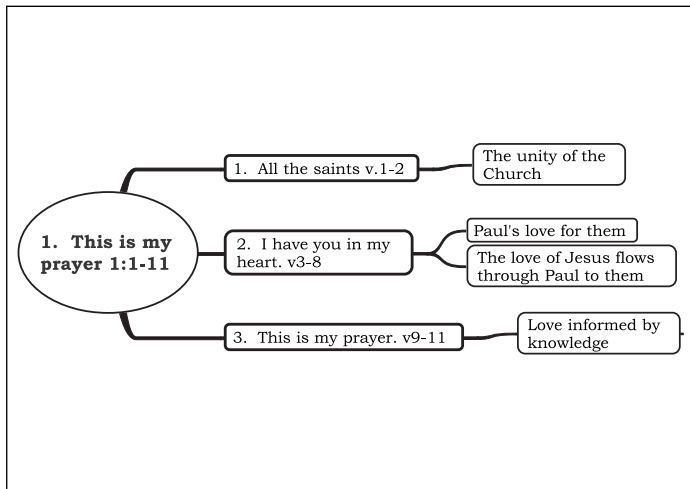


1. This is my prayer. 1:1-11



'Fellowship in sufferings'



1. TO ALL THE SAINTS (1-2)

The great theme of the Philippian letter is the united fellowship of the Church. We find our joy and fulfilment when we focus on serving the needs of others rather than on our own perceived needs. The Christian family must have a higher priority than our own individual lives.

In the modern world there is so much pressure to focus on our own individual lives and families, to be self-centred. This wonderful part of God's Word shows us how to escape the prison of self-interest into the freedom of Jesus. Putting the needs of others before our own needs may seem unattractive to us, yet this self-sacrifice will set us free and unite us together in Jesus. There is nothing so vital to the health and purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ as her unity in the gospel. We will see that theme in the letter time after time.

We will see how the unity that comes from faithful gospel work is the only way that a local church can experience genuine Christian unity and fellowship. Paul will set evangelism as the rallying point where any church can find genuine, deep unity, no matter how diverse they may be.

As a kind of preview of this we see that the letter is written by both Paul and Timothy, and it is addressed to "all the saints... together with the overseers and deacons" (verse 1). Paul and Timothy are united in their letter writing and the whole church at Phillippi is included in the address.

However, the sense of unity goes even further in verse 2. Grace and peace come from the unity of the Father and the Son. This reminds us that the unity of the Church (and all human love and fellowship) ultimately flows out of the Living God who is a unity! The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have been perfectly united together in love and purpose for infinite ages before the universe began.

We can never claim to be a healthy or truthful church if we are not united in our gospel work together.

It is important that Paul calls the Philippian Christians "saints" – "holy ones". The Hebrew Scriptures define Israel as the LORD's *holy people*. For example, when the Angel of the LORD brings Moses and the people to Mt Sinai in Exodus 19, the first words that the LORD speaks from the mountain define Israel as a holy people.

Exodus 19:5-6 "Out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

As we go through Philippians we will see that there was a problem with unbelievers who wanted to enforce the Law on the Philippian believers. By addressing them as 'the holy ones' Paul is acknowledging that whatever the false teachers say, the Philippians are members of the LORD's holy nation. This will become very important when we begin to study chapter 3.

2. I HAVE YOU IN MY HEART (3-8)

Verse 3 poses a slight problem. In the NIV translation of the Bible it reads "I thank my God every time I remember you", but it could equally well be translated "I thank my God every time *you* remember *me*."⁴

The second option is perhaps slightly more likely, because of the way that it leads into the next verse. Paul thanks the Father every time the Philippians think about *him*, and he wants *them* to know how he remembers *them* in his prayers all the time.

⁴ The Greek is literally – "every remembrance of me". Does that mean 'every time I remember' or 'every time I am remembered'?



We know that the Philippians have been thinking about Paul's gospel work because they have sent him money. In 4:15-16 Paul describes how they kept giving money to him while he was in Thessalonica.

Philippians 4:15-16 "...as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, *except you only*; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need."

Given that he was only in Thessalonica for about a month, it shows how passionate the Philippian church was towards him. So, it makes sense that Paul would acknowledge their generosity at the beginning of the letter, as well as his proper 'thank you' at the end.

So, Paul is full of joy because he knows that the Philippians are fully behind him in his evangelism. When we are facing fierce opposition from the world and false teachers, nothing is as precious to us as genuine, practical fellowship with other gospel-centred Christians. When we speak about the need for "Christian fellowship" or the "lack of community" in the church, what are we really looking for? It is not just a matter of having a cup of tea after a Sunday service. We need to be 'gospel-partners' together, sharing our lives as we put the mission of Jesus ahead of everything in life. It is when we are serving each other in the service of Jesus that we find genuine fellowship.

Hugh Palmer, the minister of All Souls church in London, points out that every person we meet needs to be a gospel partner. If we meet a non-Christian person, our desire is not just that they be saved from hell, but that they become a gospel-partner in the church in this life. The gospel sets us free from a wasted life now and sets us free from hell in the future.

Paul uses the Greek word '*koinonia*' (English – 'partnership') to speak of the way the Philippian Christians are joined with him in the gospel work. This is the word that later Christians used to describe the way in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are united together.⁵ The Philippians share their lives (and money) with Paul in the work of the gospel.

⁵ Although no-one in the Bible uses the word to describe the Trinity, it seems a reasonable word to summarise all that Jesus says about the Trinity in John 17, for example.

Paul points out that 'from the first day' the Philippians were like this. This was a very clear mark that the Father was genuinely at work in them. We all come across those who appear to begin the Christian life, but they are reluctant to be sacrificial gospel-partners. This naturally makes us hesitant about their true spiritual state. Paul had no such hesitations with the Philippians. He was confident that the Father had begun the work of salvation in them (verse 6) and would certainly complete it, so that on the day when Jesus returns they would be welcomed into the New Creation.

There is such warm affection in these opening verses and Paul explains why he feels like that. "I have you in my heart" (verse 7) shows us the deep love that the apostle has for them.

Why does he love them in this way?

- the Philippians share in God's grace with Paul (verse 7);
- and the love of Jesus flows through him to them (verse 8).

Verse 7 – while Paul is in prison his apostolic ministry is limited, but when he is out of prison he "defends" and "confirms" the gospel. Paul *defended* the gospel from false teaching from within and criticism from outside. He also *confirmed* the gospel in preaching as a witness appointed by Jesus. We see this kind of language in Hebrews 2:3-4 – "This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was *confirmed* to us by those who heard him. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."⁶

So, as an apostle, Paul was establishing the gospel wherever he could... and the Philippians shared with him in this. The "grace of God" in verse 7 could refer to this apostolic work, but also to the fact that both Paul and the Philippians were united in the grace of God in the gospel. The apostle and the saints all stand together in the undeserved friendship of the Living God.

In verse 8 Paul calls the Father as a witness of how much he longs to be with the Philippians, but the love that Paul feels is not of his own making. Paul is so joined to Jesus, so in harmony with the mind and heart and agenda of Jesus, that he loves the Philippians with the love of Jesus.

Too often Paul is caricatured as simply a tough-minded debater, yet in these opening verses we are shown the true heart of the great apostle. He was a man whose life was Jesus. His heart was beating in time with Jesus' heart. Jesus love for the Church flowed through Paul.

⁶ See also Acts 14:3



Paul is studied by thousands of scholars around the world for the content of his mind, and yet we must also study the content of his heart.

We must not only agree with the *doctrine* of Paul but also the *love* of Paul, drawn from the love of Jesus Himself.

3. THIS IS MY PRAYER (9-11)

Paul made it clear that he often prayed for the Philippian church. What did he pray for them? That is what he explains in these verses.

We saw the great love in Paul's heart, so we are not surprised to see that it is the great theme of his prayer. We can break the prayer up to understand what he is saying.

that your *love* may abound more and more
in knowledge and depth of insight,
so that
you may be able to discern what is best
and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,
filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ –
to the glory and praise of God.

Paul asked for *love* for the Philippian church. That tells us right away what this letter is going to be about – love between the saints at Philippi.

It is not as if they don't have love already. If their love must "abound *more*", then it indicates that their love already abounds! We have seen evidence of that in their generosity in supporting Paul. However, perhaps Paul is asking that their love abound more and more *with knowledge and insight*. He wants the Father to grant them knowledge and insight so that their love could be focused more fruitfully.

The connection between love and knowledge is always in Paul's mind. In Romans 14 he explains how knowledge in eating practices must be controlled by love. In 1 Corinthians 13, in his great exposition of love, he begins by stating that all knowledge without love is *nothing*. In those cases, knowledge must be controlled by love, but here he wants the Philippians' love to be informed by knowledge. Their love is evident in their support for the gospel, but is it being lived out as it should in their local church fellowship? They need to understand more about what the love of Jesus looks like in the Church family.

One of the mistakes I have made is thinking that the love shown in evangelism is more real than day-to-day church family love. This letter shows us that we need a fully informed love, a love for the lost and for the saved, a love for souls and bodies.

Paul's request for a "knowledgeable love" is for a purpose (verse 10). Knowledgeable love would make them able to test and discern the best way for them to live. This, in turn, would have two results: the glory of God; and their purity and fruitfulness when they stand before Jesus on the Last Day. In 2:14 he will show that 'purity' involves "doing everything without complaining or arguing".

In 2 Timothy we see how Paul had a great passion for Christian fruitfulness. The Christian might make bad, worldly choices and end up 'ashamed' before Jesus. So, the Christian must keep their eyes on the future, making the right (though costly) choices now, so that they will be unashamed and fruitful before Jesus. One of the key things that Paul is doing in this letter is instructing the Philippians (and us) exactly what is "the best" way to live. What way of life will unite the church family together? What purpose can unite our minds and hearts, leading us into the joy, contentment and love that are in Jesus? What is "the best" that will ensure that we are profitable, fruit-bearing servants of Jesus?

This is what Paul wants for the Philippians. He wants them to be full of righteous fruit, produced by Jesus through them, when they enter into the New Creation.

Paul's prayer has such depth. We learn so much truth as he allows us to listen in on his prayers for the Philippians.

As we study this letter together, let's take Paul's prayer for ourselves and our own church family. We must abound in love, and this love must be guided and directed by the deep insights that the Bible will show us as we study it. In this way our local church family will be full of righteous fruit and we need have no shame when the Lord Jesus gazes upon us with his flaming eyes on that Last Day.



SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR BIBLE STUDY ON PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

1. To which members of the church do Paul and Timothy write according to verse 1? What might this tell us about Paul's thinking as he writes?
2. Who are the "saints" of verse 1 (compare Exodus 19:5-6)?
What difference does it make to be referred to as a saint?
3. What does Paul mean when he speaks of the Philippians' "partnership in the gospel"? In what ways have they demonstrated this partnership?
4. How does Paul describe the way he prays for the Philippians in verses 4-6?
5. Why could Paul speak with such confidence about the future of the saints at Philippi in verse 6?
6. Why does Paul have such affection for the believers at Philippi?
What lessons might we learn concerning our attitude to other believers from this verse? How do we "share in God's grace"?
7. What is the specific request of Paul in his prayer to God for the Philippians in verse 9?
What will be the effect of this prayer according to verses 10 and 11?
8. What might be the effect on our church if we prayed as Paul does in verses 9-11?