

Paul's Prayer of Praise

Text: Philippians 1:3-8

Introduction:

1. Review: The overarching theme of the Epistle is joy (See 4:4). Joy is not something dictated by our circumstances as it is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and therefore something that is supernatural.
2. The Apostle Paul now informs the Philippians of his prayers for them. A prayer report is a common introductory feature found in many of Paul's Epistles.
3. In this section Paul speaks of his prayer of thanksgiving (Vs. 3-8) and then for what he was praying for them specifically (Vs. 9-11). "Thanksgiving and petition blend in Paul, resulting in a combined thanksgiving/prayer report: offered to God with joy because of their long term, and now recently expressed, partnership in the Gospel, and based on his confidence in God's work among them and deep affection for them." All of Paul's Epistles contain a prayer of thanksgiving in the first chapter with the exception of 2. Corinthians, Galatians and Titus.
4. Each verse in this section (Vs. 3-8) contains the mention of 'you'. Paul was others centered even in the midst of his trial.
5. In this message we will focus on the prayer of thanksgiving, dividing the prayer into three sections for our study.

I. THE REMEMBRANCE INFLUENCING PAUL'S THANKSGIVING (VS. 3-4)

A. The Person in his Thanksgiving (Vs. 3a)

1. "I thank" = in the present tense. Thankfulness for Paul was a habit of life. Thankfulness runs through Paul's life and prayers like a golden thread. Prayer, thanksgiving and joy go together!
2. "**my** God" = the personal pronoun 'my' emphasizes Paul's personal relationship with God. What an amazing thing that because of salvation we can call God "our God". Illustration: We use the personal pronoun in phrases like "my wife" or "my husband".

B. The People in his Thanksgiving (Vs. 3b)

1. "upon every remembrance" = Paul's thanksgiving rested upon and was supported by memories.
2. "of you" = as you study Paul's prayers of thankfulness, the emphasis is on thankfulness for **people**. Our society is so "things" oriented it tends to shape the prayers of God's people towards an emphasis on possessions rather than people. Of course, we should express our gratitude to God for every blessing He bestows upon us, including material blessings, but do we ever thank God for the brethren? Are you thankful for the local church body God has placed you in? Thankful for your pastors? Thankful for your fellow church members?
3. Note: It is worth asking, "Am I the kind of Christian who brings joy to my pastor's mind when he thinks of me?"

C. The Practice of his Thanksgiving (Vs. 4)

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The following three words help summarize the Apostle's habit of thanksgiving:

1. **Regularity** – “always in every prayer of mine for you all”. This means that each time Paul prayed for the Philippian church, he remembered to thank God for them. “His thanksgiving takes place in the context of his petitions for them. On every occasion that he petitions God on their behalf, he does so with thanksgiving.” (Fee) Paul was a man of regular prayer. How important is prayer to you?
2. **Request** – “making request”. Paul not only thanked God for the Philippian believers, he also made specific supplication for them. The word refers to an entreaty or a supplication. Hendriksen defines it as “a petition for the fulfillment of a definite need that is keenly felt.” Verse 9-11 provide details of some specific things he was praying for them about. You will notice that Paul's requests in prayer for God's people majored on the spiritual and the eternal rather than the carnal and the temporal.
3. **Rejoice** – “with joy”. This is the first time this key word appears in the Epistle. Prayer and joy are intimately connected. Want to know joy, then be a praying Christian! “Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer.” For Paul, the remembrance of this church and his subsequent prayer for them was a joyful exercise. When the Philippians came to Paul's mind, his heart flooded with joy and was poured out to God in words of thanksgiving. When your pastor prays for you, does he do so with a joyful or heavy heart?

II. THE REASONS INFORMING PAUL'S THANKSGIVING (VS. 5-6)

A. The Fellowship of the Philippians (Vs. 5)

1. The Quality of their Fellowship (Vs. 5a)
 - a. 'fellowship' = comes from the Greek word 'koinonia' and denotes “sharing, holding something in common” (Gromacki). It means a “joint-participation in a common interest and activity.” (Wuest) Fellowship therefore goes deeper than a chat over a cup of coffee. Paul and the Philippians experienced a fellowship in the gospel (1:5), grace (1:7), in the Holy Spirit (2:1), in the sufferings of Christ (3:10) and in giving (4:14-15).
 - b. “in the gospel” = the word 'in' (eis) has the idea of 'unto'. It has the sense of “with a view to”, in this case, “with the gospel in view.” This was fellowship in the evangelization of the lost. (Berry) Their fellowship was centered in the Gospel. For Paul, the Gospel was the consuming passion of his life.
 - c. This definition of fellowship means:
 - i. When we go out soul-winning as a church, that is fellowship in the Gospel.
 - ii. When we give to missions, that is fellowship in the Gospel.
 - iii. When we pray for souls and the work of missions, that is fellowship in the Gospel.
2. The Longevity of their Fellowship (Vs. 5b)

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- a. “from the first day until now” = the Philippian church had been a faithful supporter of the Apostle Paul from its inception to the present. What a wonderful testimony of this church! Faithfulness is rare today in individuals and in churches.
 - b. Later in the Epistle, Paul speaks more specifically about the support he had received from the Philippian church. “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once again unto my necessity.” (Phil. 4:15-16)
3. In summary, we learn the following principles from this verse concerning Christian fellowship:
- a. True fellowship requires real unity. Both parties must be on the same page and working towards the same Scriptural goal.
 - b. True fellowship does not require the parties to be in the same physical location. Like the Philippians, we can have a partnership for the furtherance of the Gospel with faithful servants of the Lord in other fields.

B. The Faithfulness of God (Vs. 6)

Paul could thank God for the Philippian church with great confidence as he understood that God was the One accomplishing the work in and through them. “He mentions two days in these verses – the first day (begun) and the “day of Jesus Christ.” And he says that between those two days, God, who began the work on the first day, and who will perfect it on the last day, is maintaining and building it up step by step.” (F.B. Meyer) Paul knew:

1. God had Commenced the work in them (Vs. 6a)
 - a. ‘confident’ = means fully persuaded. The word is translated ‘persuaded’ multiple times in the N.T. The word is in the perfect tense which speaks of a settled persuasion of mind.
 - b. “begun a good work” = a reference to the work of salvation. Only God could commence the work in their hearts through salvation. A man becomes a Christian because God has begun a good work in him, not because he is doing good works for God (Eph. 2:8-9). This “good work” involves salvation past (justification), present (sanctification) and future (glorification).
2. God would Continue the work in them (Vs. 6b)
 - a. “will perform it” = means accomplish, bring to completion. Also translated ‘perfecting’ (2. Cor. 7:1), ‘finish’ (2. Cor. 8:6), ‘accomplish’ (Heb. 9:6; 1 Pet. 5:9). “Our word ‘telescope’ is based on this Greek term. God will thoroughly bring to a purposeful end any work which He has chosen to do.” (Gromacki) Phil. 1:13 “For it is God which worketh **in you** both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” “He not we, is ever the main emphasis of the New Testament.” (King)
 - b. “until the day of Jesus Christ” = this is a promise we can lay hold of in faith, a promise we can rest upon. God will continue the work he started in us the day we were saved, all the way through until Christ’s coming. 1 John 3:2 “Beloved, now are we

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the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is.”

- c. F.B. Meyer: “We go into the artist’s studio and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvas, and suggesting great designs, but which have been left, either because the genius was not competent to complete the work, or because paralysis laid the hand low in death; but as we go into God’s great workshop, we find nothing that bears the mark of haste or insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete. It is easy to pray for a soul when you know that God also is at work perfecting it.”
- d. Challenge: Are you cooperating with the work He is trying to do in your life? Do not underestimate just how committed our Heavenly Father is to ensuring we become like His Son Jesus Christ. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:29)

III. THE REGARD INSPIRING PAUL’S THANKSGIVING (VS. 7-8)

Paul’s thanksgiving welled up out of his deep, spiritual affection for the Philippian believers.

A. The Seat of his Affections (Vs. 7)

1. His estimation of them was proper (Vs. 7a)
 - a. ‘meet’ = proper, fitting, right, just. The word is most frequently translated ‘righteous’ in the New Testament. It was right for Paul to think this way about the Philippians.
 - b. ‘think’ = “has to do with having or developing a certain ‘mindset’ including attitudes and dispositions.” (Fee)
 - c. ‘heart’ = the heart “refers to the deepest center of human consciousness, the seat of both the will and decision-making, as well as of the emotions.” (Fee) No doubt many of us in our humanness would be more inclined to say “I have you on my nerves” than “I have you in my heart”!
2. Their participation with him was precious (Vs. 7b)
 - a. “my bonds” = a reference to Paul’s present imprisonment.
 - b. “the defence and confirmation of the Gospel” = Paul was in prison and due to stand trial for the Gospel’s sake. The word ‘defence’ comes from the Greek word ‘apologia’ from which our word ‘apologetics’ is derived. It refers to “a logical, legal presentation of the truth (Acts 22:1; 1 Pet. 3:15).” (Gromacki) Paul was defending the faith before the tribunal of the world, Nero’s throne. The word ‘confirmation’ means to make stable, to establish, settle. Paul’s defense of the Gospel would serve to further establish its credibility and truthfulness.
 - c. “partakers of my grace” = means “common with” or “sharers with”. They were joint partners with the Apostle in the defense of the Gospel and sharing in the same supply of God’s grace to stand for it. The word is a form of the word ‘fellowship’ in Vs. 5.

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Both Paul and the Philippians were experiencing sustaining grace in the midst of their respective trials.

B. The Source of his Affections (Vs. 8)

1. The Witness of God to Paul's Affections (Vs. 8a)
 - a. 'record' = one who bears testimony, witness. It is the Greek word 'martus' from which our word 'martyr' is derived. Paul is making a solemn, personal statement. "This is one of several oaths in Paul's letters where he wishes to emphasize a point that usually has to do with his own thinking or feelings. God must serve as witness, because this is a matter of the heart and only God can know his heart in this way." (Fee)
 - b. Paul uses a solemn oath to add weight and authority to what he was about to say. This was necessary as only God was a witness to the inner heart affections of the Apostle. "One person cannot look inside another person to see his emotions. He was emphasizing that God knew how affectionately he thought of the Philippian believers, even though they could not see the seat of the emotions." (Berry)
2. The Witness of Paul to his Affections (Vs. 8b)
 - a. "long after" = means to greatly desire. Also translated "earnestly desire" (2. Cor. 5:2), "desire greatly" (1 Thess. 3:6), "greatly desire" (2. Tim. 1:4), 'desire' (1 Pet. 2:2). The word was used of the athlete who strained at the finish line to finish first (Gromacki).
 - b. "bowels" = the inward parts, the internal organs of the body, including the heart, liver and intestines (See Acts 1:18 for literal use of the word). "Symbolically and spiritually, it came to mean the seat of the emotions, with stress upon the feelings of love, compassion and tenderness." (Gromacki) Here we see there is a three-way bond between Paul, Christ and the Philippians.
 - c. "of Jesus Christ" = this was more than human sentiment. This was the love of Christ shed abroad in the Apostle's heart. "Christian love is not something we work up; it is something God does in us and through us. It was not Paul's love channeled through Christ; it was Christ's love channeled through Paul." (Wiersbe) This was not "individual emotion, but Christ's longing, as if the very heart of Christ dwelt in Paul. The Apostle's heart beat as one with the heart of Jesus Christ." (Wuest) "The Apostle had got so near the very heart of his Lord that he could hear its throb, detect its beat, nay, it seemed as though the tender mercies of Jesus to these Philippians were throbbing in his own heart." (Meyer)

Conclusion: Are you a thankful Christian?