Philippians 1:1-11 – Partnership!

1. Introduction

a. The birth of the church in Philippi is recorded in Acts 15 and 16. Paul's letter was written some 10 years after those events, in around 61AD. It was written while Paul was a prisoner awaiting trial in Rome. He was allowed to live by himself with a soldier to guard him. This means that he was chained to his guard the whole time.

   i Paul lived there for two years at his own expense welcoming anyone who came to him; although he was fettered and guarded and watched continuously he had a degree of freedom that permitted him to have his friends visit, and to have his own home. This was where he wrote this letter to the church at Philippi. Despite the passing of time, from the start we feel the warmth in Paul's heart towards these people, several of whom he mentions by name, indicating that they have remained near and dear to him.

2. The greeting

Philippians 1:1-2 *Paul and Timothy, servants [bond-servants] of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: [2] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

a. There are two things to take note of here. First, Paul includes Timothy in his greeting. Timothy had made his way to Rome in order to be with Paul, but he was not the co-author of the letter. Paul's wants to honour Timothy: he sees him as an equal, a co-labourer in the gospel, although Timothy is a younger man. There is no hierarchy in Paul's thinking, he doesn't see himself as superior, so he gives Timothy equal status with himself. Also Timothy had been with Paul in Philippi when the church was birthed, and had visited it at least twice more since, and so the Philippians were quite familiar with him.

b. The second significant thing is what Paul doesn't say. In most of his letters Paul reminds his readers that he writes with the weight and authority of an apostle – especially where he is bringing a rebuke or giving direction. But not so in this letter, Paul is writing from his heart, a letter of love, full of friendship, gratitude and confidence in them. He addresses the letter to "all the saints in Christ Jesus in Philippi," indicating the very personal nature of this letter and the affection that Paul wishes to lavish upon them.

   i "In Christ Jesus" summed up the source of their lives. "In Philippi" was the sphere in which they lived. What these people would accomplish as citizens in Philippi would be determined by who they were as Christians.

c. Paul outlines four distinct phases that govern our lives in Christ.

   i First, when we were without Christ. We were aliens and strangers to God, far-off and without any hope or inheritance of our own. We were under the control of the God of this age, driven by forces of which we were largely unaware, living a futile and unfruitful life.

   ii Secondly, when we became "in Christ" – we entered into his life by faith in his work and in his person. We knew him and became part of him, and began to live our lives to please him.

iii Third, we entered into partnership with him, speaking for him, labouring for him and with him. We lived our lives on his behalf, and he became the focus of every activity.

iv Finally, we will see him face to face, we will be with him for ever, all things will be made new. We will have our resurrection bodies and our minds will be renewed.

d. Paul identifies as a bond-servant, which would resonate with many of his readers as many either were, or had been slaves. A bond-servant was a servant or slave who had been freed because his redemption-price had been paid, but they had chosen to remain in the service of their master.

i The reality for us is that we were slaves to sin and in bondage to the god of this world. The price that was paid for your salvation – the blood of Jesus – that is what has bought your freedom. Now you are forever indebted to the one who has bought your freedom and is now your master. Paul identified himself as a bondservant of Jesus, and so must we.

e. Paul blesses them with grace and peace that comes from God. Grace and peace are a bit like the nitrogen and oxygen that makes up our atmosphere. We need them both and they are freely available. There's another reason Paul uses this form of greeting. "Grace" is the customary greeting among Greeks, whereas in the Hebrew world the greeting would be "Peace." Paul combines both Jewish 'peace' and Gentile 'grace' in one salutation.

3. I have you in my mind

a. Today we will see Paul expressing his care for the Philippians in three ways. First, in verses 3-6 he says "I have you in my mind." Then second, he says in verses 7-8 "I have you in my heart." Then third, in verses 9-11 Paul says "I have you in my prayers."

Philippians 1:3-5 *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.*

b. Paul begins in a very personal way by referring to "my God." Paul focuses in on the closeness of his relationship with the one God of the universe who has made himself known through the person of Jesus. We will see this phrase again in chapter 4 when Paul affirms that "My God will supply all your needs."

i Because he was addressing a church that was functioning in a polytheistic culture, Paul was affirming for them the very personal and intimate nature of their relationship now with the one true living God.

c. Paul cared deeply about the saints – even those who had come to faith outside of his ministry. It's been a while since Paul was last in Philippi, but he has a deep affection for every member of this congregation. One thing is clear in these verses, Paul is a happy, joyful Christian. His present circumstances may have been difficult, but he was jubilant and joyful, and generous in his affection towards the saints in Philippi. Every time he thinks of them, he thanks God for them.

i Whenever Paul remembered them, he thanked God for them. We're encouraged in the scriptures to cultivate a heart of thanksgiving. How? Every time one of us in the fellowship comes to mind, turn it to a prayer of thanksgiving for them.

ii How important it is for us to remember the good works and the good memories in which God has allowed us to participate, as these memories serve to increase gratitude in our hearts, instead of ungratefulness and even grumbling!

d. Paul here introduces the theme of joy that is like a thread that is continually woven throughout this letter. The word ***joy*** or ***rejoice*** occurs 18 times. What gives Paul such joy every time he remembers and prays for them? The pleasure in Paul's heart is because this is a church that has become mature and remained faithful. It's the only letter we have in scripture where Paul isn't writing to correct bad teaching or rebuke bad behaviour. Here we see what it looks like to be mature in Christ, we have a picture of what a maturing church looks like and what maturing people do.

e. Paul says "always, in every prayer" – there is a constancy in prayer, he prayed for them regularly and often. Paul was undoubtedly an excellent preacher and teacher, impacting multitudes through those gifts, yet he understood that he could reach far more and achieve much greater impact through his prayers. He understood what a powerful weapon prayer was in his armoury, and he used it to the full.

f. Paul's commitment to prayer is because of their partnership with him in the gospel. The word for partnership is "koinonia," which is often translated in the New Testament as "fellowship." Paul uses this term to describe his relationship with the Philippians – for him fellowship was true Christian partnership, sharing the same vision of getting the gospel of the kingdom to the world and investing personally to make it happen.

i They did this from day one – and now, some ten years later they are still as committed to the task as they were then.

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*

g. This is one of the greatest and most often quoted promises in the bible. This is a continuation of what Paul has just been saying. He's commended them for their consistency in faithfulness right up to the present moment. Now he looks to the future and expresses his confidence that this will continue until the day Jesus returns, whether Paul is around to uphold them in prayer or not. Paul understood that although they had got many things right, they were still a work in progress. God hasn't finished with them yet. There is a goal to be reached, but that goal hasn't yet been attained.

h. Notice where Paul's confidence lies. The final responsibility lies not with Paul or the Philippians, but with God. Paul knows that God always finishes what he starts. He never gives up on anybody. God is always the prime mover, and what he initiates he sees through to the end. Charles Wesley recognised this:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay, Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray — I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

i. Paul is saying we are all, if we know Jesus, in the hands of the One who can change us. Sometimes we don't want to be what God wants us to be, but God knows how to bring us into

the circumstances that will make us willing to be made willing, if He needs to. If it depends on us, then we can't depend on it. God is at work in his people, changing us – there's no greater promise than this. Thanks be to God who is able to keep us from falling.

i This verse is the fulfilment of another promise that is found in Ezekiel 36:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*

j. We were all born as rebels, running away from God, and we're all in desperate need of God taking the initiative to begin his good work in us. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God reached out and initiated the good work of salvation - and he continues it and guarantees its completion.

k. And yes, there is a point of completion. On the day of Jesus Christ – the second coming of Jesus – his work in us will be completed. Whether we die first or are still alive when Jesus returns, the work will be complete. We will be glorified and rewarded and receive our resurrection bodies, and we will see him as he is.

4. I have you in my heart

Philippians 1:7-8 *It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. [8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

a. The Greek for this phrase “because I hold you in my heart” could also be translated, “because you hold me in your heart.” The Philippians had a large place in their hearts for Paul, and at this time especially with reference to the two particulars mentioned here, first, his defence of the gospel, and second, in his confirmation of the same.

b. We will discover later in the letter, the Philippians gave Paul both financial and practical support during his time of imprisonment, which he acknowledges here. He says they are partakers of grace with him, conveying a sense of companionship and friendship, which is why he speaks of holding them in his heart. His longing, and strong yearning to be with them again mirrors the same intense strength of feeling that David expresses in Psalm 42:

Psalm 42:1 *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.*

c. When Paul writes, “I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus,” it’s because he was there with the people. When he says, “I thank God in all my remembrance of you,” these are the people he remembers – he knows them intimately. This is why he’s yearning for them with the affection of Jesus Christ.

d. "God is my witness," he says, that it is not my natural affection for someone who has been kind to me, but the affection I have for you is Jesus’ affection through me – it’s Jesus’ affection being reflected in my heart. This is the secret of loving the unlovely. If anyone is a brother or sister in Christ we are expected to love them. Some people are easier to love than others, but the bible doesn’t say we should only love the ones we get on with. We are also called to love the ones we don’t get on with, the ones who wind us up or irritate us.

i So how do we do it? Begin to think how does He who lives in me look at these people? What is His attitude? Is it resentment, bitterness, anger because of their actions? Or does He see them differently than I do? Then act on that basis. If you do there comes a sense of affection for those who were so hard to love.

e. Seeing others as fellow-partakers of God's grace humbles us and puts us all on the same level. If we remember that we're all partakers of God's undeserved favour, we'll give one another more room to grow and become mature. We'll be more patient and forbearing with one another.

5. I have you in my prayers

Philippians 1:9-11 *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

a. The first thing Paul prays for the Philippians is an abundance of love, an abundance exceeding the requirements, overflowing or overdoing. It means to have or to be more than enough, to be extremely rich or abundant. Like a fountain that you drink from – when you have drunk from it, it doesn't stop, there is always more. Paul's not saying there is not love in the Philippian church already, he is praying for a significant increase in that love that comes from God.

b. Paul doesn't just pray for an abundance of love in isolation. The bible makes a distinction between the head and the heart. Love must be in line with God's truth as revealed in his Word. The bible says that the heart can be deceitful and it needs to be directed. Paul wants their love to be schooled by both knowledge and discernment.

c. Love not only needs to be fed and nourished, it also needs to be taught if it is to function in a biblical manner. Christian love is not blind; it is enlightened, instructed and directed by the scriptures. Paul shares two ways in which love can be properly directed. First, we need knowledge, and second, we need discernment. We must add to love the knowledge that comes from a right attitude and application of the Word, together with the discernment that comes from being led by the Holy Spirit.

d. What does Paul mean when he says we need knowledge? There are two words for knowledge in the bible – one is the knowledge you get by learning facts, and the other is the knowledge gained by experience. Paul is speaking of knowledge that comes from practical experience of the Word of God and that has become personal knowledge. It is the Greek word ***epignosis*** that refers to intensive or deep spiritual knowledge, especially of the knowledge of God and of Christ. Since God Himself is love, to grow in the true knowledge of God is to grow to understand what true love is.

i We can't know love by looking at our culture. We can only know what love looks like by studying the character of God, especially as revealed in Jesus, God in human flesh.

e. Discernment is the ability to judge between what is good, avoiding that which is ungodly and unbiblical. Thus we are able to understand, interpret and apply truth skilfully. Discernment related to love requires us be trained to hear the inner voice of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth. For it to be effective, real love needs to be channelled.

f. There are four consequences that will ensue when love is exercised in context of knowledge and discernment. First, so that **you may approve what is excellent**. You will put the proper priority on things, prioritising the things that matter most, not spending your time on trivia. Mediocrity is what happens when life gets out of focus, out of perspective, and when love is not exercised with knowledge and discernment. When it is, we will approve what is excellent.

g. Secondly we will be **pure and blameless**. Pure in Latin it means "without wax" and in Greek it means "sun-tested". Both of these come from the same idea. In the ancient world pottery would sometimes develop cracks. To pass these off as perfect, unscrupulous merchants would fill the cracks with wax to hide the crack. To test for purity they put the item out in the hot sun for a while and if there was wax, the sun would melt it and the crack would become visible, so it was "sun-tested". Paul is saying that the Christian life ought to be one without hypocrisy, without cracks, without wax, constantly exposed to the light that is in Jesus so that it is continually Son-tested.

h. The third consequence, we will be **filled with the fruits of righteousness**. This is the growth of character, evident when our lives become honest and sincere. It is a process of growing in righteous character and deeds. As the word “fruit” implies, this is a process, not something instantaneous. It is the life of Jesus working in and through us that produces the fruit.

i. Finally it will all culminate in **glorious praise to God**. The glory of God is the ultimate goal of all our actions. Everything we do works to an end, whether or not we are conscious of it. Therefore, we must do all that we can to ensure that the ultimate end of all that we do is to glorify God.

6. Conclusion

a. Partnership to Paul implies a wonderful linking of lives with others for the sake of the gospel. Paul always links his joy in others with his joy in Jesus. His delight in other people is coming out of his delight in Jesus, and it is aiming at their deeper and greater delight in Him.

b. The last couple of years have revealed much about us, for good and for bad. Trials expose us, they confront us, and they purify us, and God has given us trials of various kinds. Who knows what the next years may bring? We need, as much today as ever, this strange marriage in Paul's ancient prayer that our love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

c. Practicing love and discernment is not just about winning an argument or being on the right side of history, but about being right before God for eternity. We want to bring glory to God in all that we do, and if we want to make a real difference in dark days like these we need real love filled with real knowledge and discernment in the very real pressures and complexities we have been given.

d. As we continue through this letter Paul is going to give us much more fuel, much more wisdom and revelation that will help guide us through the complexities of 21st century life. As we do, let’s resolve once again that in all that we do, it will be to the praise and glory of God.

Philippians 1:6 *And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*