

Philippians 1 (Part 2): 3-30 • Updates and Exhortations

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Philippians chapter 1 is essentially divided into four different sections. And for those of you who like outlines, I'm going to put one up on the screen for you to take a look at.

Outline of Philippians chapter 1

:1-11	Greeting, Thanksgiving and Prayer
:12-18	Ministry update
:19-26	Personal update
:27-30	Encouragement and exhortation

Verses 1 through 11 encompass essentially Paul's greeting, which we covered last week. Then thanksgiving and prayer—and that was the model that people used back in those days in writing letters, and Paul followed that model.

Then, verses 12 through 18, Paul gives a bit of a ministry update. In the following verses, 19 through 26, he gives a personal update to the people there in Philippi. And then, in the last few verses of the chapter, he leaves them with an encouragement and exhortation before he gets into the following chapters.

Since we covered the first two verses last week, let's begin reading in verse 3. The first section goes through verse 11. Follow along as I read here. Paul says:

“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. 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 (Christ Jesus, or) Jesus Christ (actually in that instance). ⁷ 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 defense and confirmation of the gospel.

⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ 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.” (ESV)

Stop there for a moment if you would.

What Paul is doing here is, he's getting, frankly, more personal with these people than he does with other—in his other letters. You can tell that Paul has a special affinity for these folks, and he tells them here in this opening section of the letter, you guys have been my partners; we've been doing this thing together, this work of ministry, this thing, and you guys have partnered with me through thick and thin.

Very few churches stuck with Paul like the Philippians, and he even credits them with sticking with him during his imprisonment. It's one thing when things are going all exciting; when life is exciting, ministry is exciting, and cool things are happening. And then the word gets to the Philippians, oh, by the way, Paul's in prison. And we know that he went to prison the several times that he did simply because of his work for the gospel, but they didn't always know what the ins and outs were. And I suppose, they may have—maybe some churches did, we don't know—reacted negatively to the fact that Paul was behind bars. Well, we'll start supporting him again when he gets out of prison, providing he gets out of prison because we're not really sure why he went to prison, and we don't want anything to ruin our good reputation. Paul speaks to these people with great love and care because of their devotion to him.

By the way, this is a side note, but when people went to prison under Roman rule, the Romans didn't see any particular reason to feed or clothe them. That wasn't—they didn't feel like that was their responsibility. They figured these people went to prison for the wrong reasons because they got on the wrong side of the law. And so, yeah, you kind of forfeited your right to have the state take care of you in any particular way. It was the responsibility of family and friends to bring food and clothing. You see that the support that Paul received even while incarcerated was life-changing. Anyway, you'll notice that he calls them his partners.

And then in verse 7, if you look with me there again, Paul says something interesting about grace. He says: *“It is right for me to feel this way about you*

all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all (look at this) partakers with me of grace.”

Now that's an interesting thing. We refer to grace in different contexts. You probably know that grace, in its essential definition, is favor from God that comes our way without having earned that favor. In other words, unmerited favor. In this particular case, Paul is talking about grace as it pertains to the power to do or the ability to do. In other words, grace from God gives us the ability to do.

And Paul is saying we, together, are partakers of the same grace for this ministry to which God has called me. He felt very much like they had received the same grace that he had received to do what he did.

Have you ever seen somebody's ministry and it seemed so out there as far as the things they had to do, maybe, the situations they had to endure, the gross stuff they had to deal with in their ministry, that you kind of looked at that and you thought, man, I don't think I could do that.

Well, the fact of the matter is, if you had the grace of God, you could because grace enables us to do. If you don't have the grace of God, then you're absolutely right; you couldn't do it because it takes grace for wherever God calls us.

But that's the interesting thing about when God calls us. If God calls you, sometimes we'll say, Lord, I'll serve you anywhere, just don't send me there sort of thing. Just whatever you do—in fact I don't know if you guys remember, there was a Christian artist, this is back in the day, Scott Wesley Brown. Does anybody remember Scott Wesley? I didn't—really? You're old. Anyway, I used to play him on Christian radio back when I was a disc jockey and playing Christian music up in Seattle. But he came out with a song called, “Please Don't Send Me to Africa,” and it was kind of that refrain that we all kind of had about, Lord, I'll go anywhere except there. And you might have your own little particular spot where you would rather the Lord not send you. Vail—I don't know. I'm kidding; I'm just joking—and all the Vailites are like, we're out of here.

If God calls you there, He'll give you the grace. Wherever God calls you, He'll give you the grace to do that ministry right in that place. And that's an encouragement. Remember that grace is the ability to do from the Lord.

Verse 9, he goes on and he says: *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment.”*

Now that's interesting. We probably would have expected Paul to say something like, and I'm praying for you guys that your love would abound more and more, and stop right there. But he doesn't stop right there. He says, I pray that your love would abound in knowledge and in discernment, and you kind of read that and you go, what do knowledge and discernment have to do with love? I mean, don't you just love? When you love, you love. And you don't even need to know why you love for sure. You just kind of go, I love. I mean, why did you fall in love with the person you fall in love with? I don't know, I just love them.

Well, this is interesting because even though it sounds a little unrelated, it's actually very related. Let me ask you a question: Have you ever heard of somebody having a blind love? Blind love is when you love someone or something, and you ignore the facts surrounding it. I'll give you a quick example of this.

We've had situations in the past where a woman will fall in love with a man, even though that man is well-known for having a violent temper, and her family and her friends will say to her, be careful, but nothing they say stops her from marrying that man. Why? Because she has a blind love. Her love is ignoring the knowledge of the situation, and she lacks discernment to recognize the danger that is there, and she goes ahead and marries him anyway and obviously suffers down the road. That's blind love. And you can see that blind love is actually very dangerous.

Now let me give you a church example because Paul is writing this letter to a church. A situation where blind love may come into place is where we see someone who is involved in some activity of sin, but rather than confronting them in love, our blind love gives us this sort of a sense like, no, we just need to wrap our arms around this person and just love them and da-da.

Well, that was actually going on in Corinth. You'll remember in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, there was a situation where one of the men in the fellowship, who, by the way, claimed to be a born-again Christian, actually had taken his father's wife—meaning his stepmother—as his own, and Paul wrote to them about this because their attitude represented kind of an attitude of blind love.

Let me show this on the screen. Paul wrote and said:

1 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV)

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife.

And what the church was doing, as we go on and read that passage, is they were boasting about it. They were—what would you boast about as it relates to a man having his stepmother? Well, they were boasting about their tolerance. They were boasting. See, aren't we just this wonderful, gracious, open-armed people sort of a thing?

Well, Paul went on to say, and we skip down a few verses, he said:

1 Corinthians 5:6 (ESV)

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

Your boasting is not good. (And then he asked the question,) Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

In other words, a little bit of sin can quickly work its way through the entire church. You see, in that case, the Corinthian church had love but they lacked knowledge and discernment, and it created a dangerous situation whereby they were actually enabling this individual to continue to walk in sexual immorality in his life. And in the end, in the final analysis, that's not love. When you enable someone to continue to walk in that sort of situation, that's not love. It starts off as love, but eventually, love has to say things that are difficult to say.

And this is an important word for us today because, see, we live in a culture today here in the United States of America that's trying desperately hard to convince us that tolerance and love are the same thing. If you tolerate me, that means you love me. If you don't tolerate me, that means you hate me. Well, actually, that's ridiculous. There's nothing true about that statement.

Jesus exemplified it so beautifully when He rescued that woman who'd been caught in the act of adultery and saved her from being stoned to death (that was love) and then turned to the woman and said, now, go and sin no more (that was

knowledge and discernment). And He was doing her a favor, and He would have done her no favors if He would have saved her from that situation and sent her on her sinful way. Do you understand? Jesus did not tolerate the woman's sin, but He loved her immensely and wanted very much to see that her life be spared.

I think you can understand the difference of what he's talking about here. Paul is praying for the church that their love would be full of knowledge and would also walk in discernment.

And there's a reason for it, described for us in verse 10. Look with me in your Bible. Here's why I want you to have love with knowledge and discernment: “*so that you may approve what is excellent, and so (ultimately) be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*”

Listen, if we're approving what is excellent, it goes without saying that we're disapproving that which is not excellent, that which is bad. And that's where discernment comes in in love.

We see parents stumble over this a lot. And what I mean by that is, I mean, as parents—I'm one too—we love our children just with an intent—I mean, we'd give our lives for them, right? And our kids grow up, and they get involved in some kind of sinful activity or sinful behavior, and our love overwhelms our discernment many times. Instead of confronting those things in love—and which is, we call it, tough love, and frankly, it's a good term—instead, what do we do? We just enable. I just love them so much. Well, a lot of parents love their kids so much, they're not even willing to tell them what they're doing is wrong. And that's, ultimately, a kind of love that is twisted and tweaked to the point where you're going to end up doing your child more damage in the end because you will only be enabling them.

Paul says, I'm praying for you guys that through this discernment of love, you will be able to approve what is excellent and allow those things into your lives, and therefore, be pure for the day of Christ.

All right, looking back at our outline, we come to the next section, which includes a ministry update from the apostle Paul. He says: “¹² *I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel (and he's talking about his imprisonment; we think that he's in Rome right now, in prison),* ¹³ *so (he says) ... it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ.*”

All right, now this is interesting. They heard that he's in prison, but they probably remembered that when Paul was there the first time in Philippi, didn't he get thrown in jail then, too? Yeah, he did.

Remember, Paul came—we talked about this last week—there was that girl following him around with the demonic spirit that was yelling after him, and so forth. Paul finally just had it, and he turned to the girl and spoke to the demon and said, come out of her in the name of Jesus, and the spirit did. But of course, that little girl was a slave, and she'd been used by her masters to do fortune telling, by which they earned a great deal of money. When they realized their ability to earn wealth from her was gone, they stirred up trouble, had Paul and Silas arrested and thrown in jail.

The Philippians are probably remembering this story in their mind, and they're also remembering that that very night at midnight, Paul and Silas were chained in the inner part of that prison, singing, worshipping the Lord, and God sent a powerful earthquake. Remember in the Book of Acts? And it says that through that earthquake, all of their chains fell off, and the doors of the jail flew open, and basically everybody got set free. And that's a pretty wonderful story to tell because it's like, wow, the power of God. And we like hearing stories like that, don't we, where there's this fantastic move of God, and chains fall off, and doors fly open, and that's great.

And here, the Philippians are learning that's not happening this time. Paul is in prison. Have there been any earthquakes there? No, not one. So, you mean Paul's still in prison? Yeah. You got to wonder, if some of the Philippians are asking the question: Where's the power of God this time? Where's the power of God this time? He's just languishing in prison.

Paul writes in this part of his letter to say, brothers, I want you to understand something. The power of God is still working powerfully, just differently. Instead of that incredible earthquake that set me free, through my incarceration the gospel is being preached to more and more people, and they are getting set free, but it's still the power of God.

See, there's that kind of that charismatic weirdness in all of us that just wants to see the explosive power of God in some way that we can look at it, and it'll give us tingles, and we can go, whoa, that was awesome. And Paul wants them to understand the power of God is still operational even when it doesn't come in this way that is going to just make our hair stand on end or something like that. But there's still a work of the Spirit; there's still a work of God that is going on. And he writes to tell them, you guys are not going to believe this, but you would

think that me sitting and cooling my heels in prison would kind of bring a screeching halt to the proclamation of the gospel? Well, it's just been the opposite. And the fact that I am here has become well-known, he says, to the imperial guard.

In other words, they're learning what is this guy—they're given the task of guarding the apostle Paul. How would you like that job? Right? Being the guard that gets put with the—that guy's as good as saved from the moment he is told what to go do. Anyway, these guys are coming; they're like, well, Paul, so what are you in here for anyway? What's going on? Oh, let me tell you. Paul starts talking to these guys about Jesus Christ, this prophet from Nazareth, who is in fact the Messiah, the Son of God who died on the cross for our sins, and that begins to spread like wildfire. And the gospel is—and Paul learns of it, he learns that these people are hearing the gospel and coming to faith in Jesus.

He writes the Philippians, and he says, don't despair, my brothers and sisters, thinking that—somehow that—because I'm in prison the work of the gospel is somehow hindered or held back, because he's making the point— and this is the thing that we need to really get from this—our circumstances, which look very limiting, do not limit God.

You with me? I think there's a lot of people who look at their lives and they think that somehow, some way because they feel limited, that somehow God is limited as well. I mean, you would look at the apostle Paul in prison, and you would say, well, that obviously means that this whole program is going to be on hold for a while because Paul's in prison. Oh no, no, no. Paul writes them to tell them that is in fact the opposite of the situation.

Makes me think of Moses in the Old Testament. God says to Moses, I want you to go to Egypt; tell Pharaoh to set my people free. And Moses throws out all these excuses about his limitations. I don't talk very good, sort of a thing. And God's like, who gave man his mouth anyway? You think that's a limitation for me? Pretty incredible for a man who said he didn't talk very well; he sure talked a lot. You read through the Old Testament.

Anyway, the point is, Paul is assuring them that when you and I—just about the time you and I think that God's power is being limited, it's in fact the opposite. It's a very important reminder for us as it relates to our own lives. You might be thinking, I don't seem to have any great gifts or abilities with which to use to serve the Lord. Just give Him your heart. Let Him take care of the rest. Let Him take care of it. You just do what—just be faithful. Let Him take care of it. Do you know how many people don't share the gospel because they feel like they're

limited in their ability to do so? Some people won't even pray for other people. I don't pray for other people to hear. And they've created these personal limitations. It's important that we understand that God is never limited.

Now in verse 14 and following, he explains how the Lord is also using his situation for good. He says here:

“¹⁴ And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵ Some indeed preach Christ (out of) envy and rivalry, but others from good will. ¹⁶ The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. ¹⁸ What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice...”

This is a really interesting section. Paul is basically saying that because he was put in prison, some of the brothers have been emboldened to go out and preach the gospel. But then he admits that their motives aren't always the best. Some of them are—some of them are sincere, and they want to just preach the gospel because they love the gospel, they love what Paul's been doing, and they want to continue the work. But others are doing it out of rivalry. In other words, competition.

Of course, we know nothing of that in Christian circles, do we? Competition, right? My church is bigger than your church. We have better worship at our church. I don't know if people ever come out and actually say those things, but they think them. And there's kind of this competitive sort of a thing. Which church do you go to? Oh, you should come to our church. By the way, that's called proselytism. It's not good. Proselytizing is not a good thing to do.

Here's the point: There were people who were competitive with Paul, and they were preaching the gospel out of that attitude of rivalry. Paul noticed that this was going on, and his response is, who cares? The gospel's getting preached! That was really all that Paul cared about.

As far as their attitudes go, hey, that's between them and the Lord. God will take care of that. Do you suppose that possibly it's still true today that some people do what they do in their ministry for Christ for the wrong reasons? Yeah, but ultimately, that is going to be between the Lord and them, and God will take care of it. Meanwhile, we rejoice that the ministry is taking place.

The third section that we're looking at here in our outline is the personal update that Paul offers. He begins in verse 19 here saying:

“...for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,²⁰ as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be... ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. (And then Paul makes this absolutely amazing statement:)²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

And then he goes on to explain that statement in verse 22. Look what he says:

“²² If I am to live in the flesh (and that doesn't mean live in sin; he talks about living in this body. In other words, if I am to live in this body, he says), that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

Stop there. Paul is literally talking to them about whether he's going to live or die. And basically, he's saying if I live, that just means I get more opportunity to serve the Lord and to harvest more fruit. If I die—here's the word he uses—that's gain. Gain.

Let me use a modern word that you guys will probably understand better. That's an upgrade. If I live, I live for the Lord and it's just another opportunity to serve. If I die, I get an upgrade. So, what do I want to do? Man, I don't know; I'm torn. I mean, if I had my druthers, I'd just soon go be with the Lord; I'd just soon take the upgrade. But I think it's probably best that I stick around for a while for you to help you guys. So, I think that's what I'll do.

Paul is fairly convinced he's probably going to stick around for a while. So, isn't that interesting? I mean, just the attitude. That's what I'm talking about. It's a great attitude. And we read these kinds of attitudes from time to time in the Word of God, and there are others sprinkled throughout the Scriptures, and we hear them, and there's something inside of our heart that reverberates with that kind of an attitude that says, yeah, that's a good attitude. To live is to serve the Lord. To die, that's an upgrade. Yeah, that's a good attitude. But at the same time, we recognize that it's not our attitude. It's Paul's. And we recognize that we should probably have that attitude, but we don't.

Does that ever happen to you when you read the Bible? It happens to me all the time. I read something in the Word, and there's a testimony in my heart, a

witness in my heart that says, yes and amen. But then there's also this voice inside my heart that says, but I'm not there. And I think that's an opportunity for all of us to kind of investigate our hearts and say, why am I not there? I mean, what is going on in my life? What's going on in my head? What are my desires all about that my attitude is not like Paul? To live is to serve Christ; to die is an upgrade. Why don't I feel that way? Well, maybe it's because I'm thinking more like the world than I am the Lord. Yeah, those are some important things to consider when we read those sorts of things.

Paul ends this third section by saying: *“²⁵Convinced of this, I know that I will remain (and he means, on earth, to minister) and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.”*

Then we come to the fourth section of the outline, where Paul ends this chapter with some words of encouragement and exhortation. He says:

“²⁷Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ (very, very similar statement in the book of Ephesians that we covered recently), so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.”

Isn't that interesting? The Philippians were obviously going through some kind of opposition from outsiders to their understanding and acceptance of the gospel, and Paul tells them that as they stand in the midst of that opposition and refuse to be moved, that is actually a signal to those who are opposing them that they (those who are opposing them) are destined for destruction, but that we who stand and stand strong are going to be saved. Interesting, isn't it? Very interesting. As we stand against opposition, it signals to those individuals that we are standing in the Lord.

So, Paul ends the chapter by saying in verse 29: *“For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, ³⁰engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.”*

Now this is an interesting passage. We're going to worship in just a moment, but this is very interesting as far as what Paul is saying. He's saying God has granted you the privilege of suffering for Him. He's given you His favor to suffer.

That's really odd because we don't usually think of suffering as something that somebody did for us as a favor, but that's essentially what Paul is saying here. And this is a very strange idea to our ears, particularly those of us who've been raised all our lives here in the United States of America, where we consider it our right not to suffer, and if we are suffering, then my rights are in jeopardy. And Paul says to the Philippians, God has granted you the privilege of suffering for Him.

I want to share with you where this was also spoken in the Book of Acts on the screen. We'll end with this. It says:

Acts 5: 40-41 (ESV)

... and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

... and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them (and I don't want to go too quickly over that statement; they beat them, and they knew how to beat people back in those days) and (it says, then they) charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, (look at this) rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.

What an incredible statement. When we get to the third chapter of Philippians, Paul is going to talk about his own burning desire to know the Lord so much that he says, I even want to know Him in the fellowship of sharing in His suffering. I want to know him that way, too. I want to know Him as the suffering Messiah by sharing, participating in His sufferings.