

## Introduction

Last week we looked at vv. 1-2 from the book of Philippians. We continue this morning looking at vv. 3-8. Our Sermon Title and scripture reading this morning reflects beautifully,

### **Philippians 1:6 LSB**

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.*

The Greek verb translated “began” is used only here and in Gal. 3:3—both times in reference to salvation itself. When God begins a work of salvation in a person, he finishes and perfects that work. Thus the verb “bring it to completion” points to the eternal security of the Christian (*see notes on John 6:40, 44; Rom. 5:10; 8:29–39; Eph. 1:13–14*;

Last Sunday we looked at the language that Paul uses to introduce himself and Timothy to the Philippian church. He says that Both of them are slaves to Christ. Paul chooses this title because this sets the stage for the exhortations and affirmations that will follow in this letter.

Now there are **three big ideas** in this opening section: Paul’s greeting extends grace and peace **(1:2)**,

he gives thanks for them in his **prayers (1:3-4)**, and he is content—as he shows through his prayer for them **(1:9)**.

Paul's description of how he thanks God for the believers is one complex thought that stretches through **1:7**.

**Verse 5** describes the focus of Paul's thanksgiving: the Philippians' faithful partnership with him in his ministry of the gospel.

**Verse 6** elaborates on the big idea of giving thanks.

Paul does several things here to frame how he wants the Philippians to understand their situation. This same thing refers ahead to a key idea, drawing more attention to it. The idea is that God finishes what He begins, including the good work in their lives **(1:6)**.

When we come to a saving knowledge of Christ,

**Ephesians 5:1 LSB**

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, is our goal. To become Christ-like. And when we think of this work that Christ has begun, what exhibits this work the best in our lives? Love

Do you remember, you love everyone and it permeates through your whole life. It seems that nothing can affect you...

## **1. How Wide is Christ-like Love? (vv. 3-4)**

Paul's close relationship with the Father, whom he calls "**my God**," was not like the self-centered individualism

that is so common in contemporary "**spirituality.**"

Paul uses the same Greek word for "**all or every**" four times in verses 3 and 4.

He says, *"All my thoughts, always, and every prayer are for you all."* Paul **gives thanks** for every memory, every moment, every member, and every time they are mentioned.

Paul will say these words again when he talks about how sure he is about God's work in "**you all**" because "**you all**" share God's grace (**1:7**) and again when he talks about how much he wants to be with "**you all**" like Christ does (**1:8**). **By using these words, Paul opens his arms wide to pull in all of his children in Philippi.** He wants to bring together brothers and sisters who may have grown apart because of misunderstandings or different priorities. Paul's "**you all**" brings Euodia, Syntyche, and their supporters together again (**4:2**).

People who have been in churches for a while are used to Paul saying things like this, so we tend to nod and then brush off his words as empty platitudes.

After all, it's not natural to see unity in a group of people who grew up in very different places and learned to look at life in different ways. So when Paul, who was raised as a Pharisee in a strictly observant Jewish family, says that he cares for everyone in a church that includes a Gentile businesswoman from Asia, a hardened Roman jailer, and

other people with pagan backgrounds, we tend to take his words with a grain of salt.

It's hard enough to get along with people we have a lot in common with. It's even harder to get along with people who have different ideas about everything from food to philosophy.

So, was Paul just conveying a religious platitude when he began his thanksgiving with words that say, in effect,

*"I love you all—always and forever, holding on to my memories of you all and bringing your needs to God"?*

**No**, he did it on purpose and with a lot of heart. He was even ready to say that he was happy with the work of those preachers who thought that their success would make him sad:

**Philippians 1:18 LSB**

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice.

**Yes**, and I will rejoice,

Paul was ready to be happy as long as they really preached about Christ. He had been given the ability to **love everyone**, even those who were trying to hurt him.

## **2. The Source of Christ-like Love (vv. 5, 7-8)**

Paul uses the Greek word **koinonia** twice in this section.

This is the same word that is often translated as

**"fellowship"** or even spelt out in English as **"koinonia."**

It talks about the bond between people who share a special privilege or treasure and have something important in common.

The words "**fellowship**" and "**partnership**" are sometimes used in the New Testament to talk about a financial partnership or a sharing of material resources. Luke shows in Acts 2 , 4 how the Holy Spirit gave the early followers of Jesus in Jerusalem an **open-hearted, open-handed** spirit of generosity.

As a result, the wealthy quickly sold their possessions to help the poor, devoting themselves to "**fellowship**" by having "**all things in common**" (*koinos*) (Acts 2:42, 44; Acts 4:32).

At the end of this letter (Phil 4:10–20), Paul thanks the Philippians for their faithful partnership in giving and receiving, which is shown by their recent gift.

Paul starts the letter by talking about two things that he shares with the Christians in Philippi that go beyond their financial help.

Because of these gifts from God, Paul's friends have been willing to help him preach and keep him going while he's in chains. The Philippians would also grow in the wide, deep love that came from Paul's heart and embraced them all, even though they were fighting with each other at the time.

***The gospel, which is God's grace shown to us through Christ, is the source of love that stretches our hearts.***

Paul's brothers and sisters in Philippi are **his partners** in

spreading the gospel, not just because they give money to a cause, but because they hear the good news about what Jesus did out of love to save them from sin and death.

They had been Paul's partners in spreading the gospel "**from the first day**" (Phil. 1:5), when Paul and his team met Lydia and the other women by the river. When Paul's message reached their hearts because of that gospel (Acts 16:14), they became "*partakers with me of grace*" (Philippians 1:7).

Paul will explain what this good news is all about later in this letter. He will tell the story of Christ, who was "*in very nature God*" (NIV) and the same as the Father, but chose to become human and a slave, even to the point of dying on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8).

Paul will talk about how Christ will be praised by all of creation when he rises from the dead (Phil 2:9–11). The apostle will show how his own life was changed by Christ's obedience, death, and resurrection. This is what led Paul to accept God's gift of righteousness, which he did not earn but received as a gift by trusting in Christ (Phil 3:7–10).

Christ's death on the cross should do the same for us...This is where love is born, in Christ dying for you.

Paul loves these people so much and so deeply because he and his friends both believe in this good news and depend on Jesus instead of themselves.

Paul's self-confidence and pride have been **killed by God's grace**, revealing the wrongheaded pride that was hiding behind his good behaviour.

*This same grace has answered Paul's doubtful conscience by showing him that the gift of **Christ's righteousness** gives him a solid reason to be sure that God loves him. Paul is now free to love everyone who stands with him on Christ, the same solid rock that broke his pride and took away his shame. So, he thanks God for them and hugs them with the love he and they have both gotten from Jesus.*

Also, he is sure that as the Philippians think about the grace they have been given, their hearts will be set free to love each other without any reservations or competition. They might need help remembering how generous God's gifts of grace have been, so Paul will be happy to remind them that they have received encouragement in Christ, comfort from God's love, participation in the Spirit, affection, and sympathy before he tells them straight out to work on getting along with each other (Phil. 2:1–3).

If we are partners in the gospel, it is because we are partners in grace. The unstoppable Spirit of Christ has pulled us out of the pit of our self-centered self-reliance, made us face the ugly truth of our guilt and helplessness, and drawn us to trust in Jesus.

God's grace makes us thankful, and Christ's love makes us love, not just the Lord who saved us, but also those who with us need and have received his undeserved love.

If you are honest, you have to admit that it is sometimes hard to say, like Paul, to everyone in the church—those sitting next to us, in front of us, behind us, or on the other side of the sanctuary—*"I always remember you all with*

*thanks and joy, always pray for you, and always long for you all when we are apart."*

Did she treat you badly or not care? Is he too loud and out of tune? Do they think their kids are too antsy? When other Christians' sins and flaws stand out in our minds, it's because we've forgotten how amazing it is that everyone who follows Jesus is a partner in the gospel and a recipient of his grace.

To love our neighbours as much as we love ourselves, especially our Christian brothers and sisters, we need a source of love that is bigger and stronger than our own hearts.

We need "**the affection of Christ Jesus,**" which is given to us by the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

We get this by always looking up to the Lord, who has shown us compassion, and then outward to those who need to feel his compassion through us.

### **3. Basis of Paul's Prayer v. 6**

Paul uses a special method to show how important **v. 6** is. Paul is saying "*Listen to this!*" or "*Guess what?*" Paul is working to get his audience's attention. The words point to something important that comes next. In this case, it is the promise that God, who made life possible, will be true and finish what He started. He won't leave us alone.

Paul also doesn't call Him God. Instead, he says, "**He** who began a good work in you." Changing from the usual **God**



or **Lord** is risky because Paul's listeners have to figure out who he is talking about.

Paul makes us think about God in a certain way, and in this situation. Paul is doing this for a reason.

### **3.1 Good Work**

When you think of God, what comes to mind? What thoughts or things come to mind first? It could be just about anything.

Paul doesn't talk directly about God on purpose. He does this instead with an **alias** expression. This expression tells us that we can't just think about God in any way we want in this situation. Instead, we have to think about God in a certain way. By not using the expected name, Paul changes how we think about God based on where he is going with this passage.

Think about all the different things that come to mind when you hear the word "**God.**" Paul makes us think about the quality he wants to point out by using a phrase that isn't the usual one.

Even though things look bad, God is still in charge and working things out in Paul's life and in our own. Starting the "**good work**" wasn't a mistake that will lead to it being left unfinished.

To see things from God's point of view, we have to give up our own wrong views. Paul says in **v.7**, that this is the right

way to look at things, which suggests that the Philippians should also look at things this way.

### **3.2 His Prayer**

Paul draws attention to the important parts of his prayer in the same way he did in **v.6**.

He uses a forward-pointing reference, which is like saying **"Hey, I want you to understand this and then do it!"** in English.

Paul's prayer for the Philippians is the main point of this part of the letter, so it is the one that stands out.

He prays that their love will grow and grow, and he says this over and over again.

This is based on the idea that love already exists and looks at how it grows. This love is not just a warm, fuzzy feeling, it is based on knowledge and good judgement.

### **Conclusion**

As we've listened in on Paul's love letter to Philippi, have you heard it as Jesus' love letter to you?

Do you put your faith in Jesus' blood and righteousness instead of in what you've done?

That faith is what sets apart those who along with Paul are partners in God's grace and have partnership in the gospel. This kind of trust is a sign of the new life. It shows that the living God has started a good work in you, turning your

hardened heart "**inside out**" so that you can worship him with gratitude and love others with the love of Christ Jesus.

If you are a believer, do you catch glimpses of the Holy Spirit at work in you, quietly pulling out your self-centeredness and opening your heart to love everyone, even people you disagree with?

Do you find joy in knowing that the unstoppable God who started a good work in you will finish it, that he will amaze angels by making you a perfect copy of the pure love of his Son?

If your answer to these questions is "**Yes,**" then our Master's freeing command to you is:

"Live out the salvation I have given you, am giving you, and will give you fully when we see each other face to face. Live it with a love that **costs you**, that cares deeply and widely for others before you care for yourself, with a joy that laughs at suffering, and with faith that your Father's power will turn pain into perseverance and purity.

If you answered "**No, but I wish I could say yes,**" then I have such good news for you.

Jesus is still bringing people together so they can help spread the gospel and share in his grace. The start of a new life is so easy that it's hard to do. It means giving up the idea that you can do things on your own and realizing that God is the only one who can start a good work in you. It means asking God for the grace to shift the weight of your heart from yourself to Christ Jesus and believing his

promise that he welcomes everyone who comes to him with a sense of their need.

Ask Christ to start his lifelong work in you today. He will fill your life with joy and love that will change the way you see things. He will change your life forever.

Amen.