

## **Because of the Gospel – Philippians 1:1-11**

**Main Idea:** God does not merely begin His work in the church—He actively sustains it until completion.

### **I. Thankfulness | Philippians 1:1-5**

The Epistle to the Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul near the end of his life while he was imprisoned in Rome, likely under house arrest during the reign of Nero (Acts 28:16-31). Though confined and awaiting trial, Paul writes not with despair but with remarkable joy and affection. **Philippians is among the most personal and warm of Paul's letters, addressed to a church he deeply loved and helped establish roughly a decade earlier during his second missionary journey (Acts 16).** The church in Philippi held a unique place in Paul's heart, as it consistently supported him through prayer, encouragement, and even financial aid long after he had left the city. **Philippi itself was a distinctive city within the Roman world. Located in Macedonia, it was the first city in Europe where Paul planted a church and was a Roman colony populated largely by military veterans and Roman citizens.** As a result, Philippi was deeply shaped by Roman values of honor, loyalty, status, and citizenship. Civic pride and allegiance to Rome were central to the city's identity. Into this context, Paul introduces a radically different framework for life—one rooted not in earthly status or recognition, but in Gospel partnership and heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20). **The Philippian believers were learning what it meant to live faithfully as Christians in a culture that prized power, reputation, and self-advancement.** Paul's opening expressions of thankfulness, therefore, are not incidental; they establish a Gospel-centered vision of life in which gratitude, humility, and shared mission replace self-promotion and cultural ambition.

Paul opens his epistle to the Philippians with thanksgiving that is both deeply personal and thoroughly God-centered. **Though separated by distance, time, and imprisonment, Paul's heart remains bound to this church through the shared reality of the Gospel.** His gratitude is not rooted in sentimentality or nostalgia, but in God's ongoing work among a church Paul planted ten years before the letter was written. With that in mind, He thanks God for them, recognizing that whatever spiritual life, endurance, and fruit exist in the Philippian church are the result of divine grace rather than Paul's effort (v.3). Paul's remembrance of the Philippians is inseparable from prayer. Each recollection of them moves him toward joyful intercession rather than anxious concern. This posture reveals a fundamental Gospel conviction: **God does not merely begin His work in the church—He actively sustains it until completion.** Thanksgiving, then, becomes an act of faith rather than a duty. It acknowledges that God remains at work even when circumstances suggest otherwise and regardless of what is received in return. As Scripture consistently teaches, thankfulness flourishes where trust in God and active participation in His mission are strong (Ps. 103:2; 1 Thess. 5:18).

Central to Paul's thankfulness is the Philippians' "partnership in the Gospel" (v.3). **The Greek term *koinōnia* communicates far more than casual fellowship or financial support. It refers to a common commitment to participate in the saving mission of Christ.** This partnership transcended geography, social status, and personal convenience. Though Paul had spent only a brief period in Philippi, the Gospel forged a bond that endured for a decade and beyond between him and the Philippian church. As John Calvin observes in his *Institutes of Christian Religion*, the unity of the church "consists in a mutual agreement in Christ alone."<sup>1</sup> **True Christian fellowship is sustained not by physical proximity or personality, but by shared allegiance and faithfulness to Christ.** This Gospel-shaped thankfulness stands in sharp contrast to a culture that values recognition, reciprocity, and visible success like ours. **Paul does not thank the Philippians because they affirmed him, honored him, or elevated his status. He thanks God because Christ was proclaimed, believers persevered, and the Gospel continued to bear fruit.** Such gratitude guards the church against pride and entitlement. It teaches believers to rejoice not in what benefits them personally, but in what magnifies Christ corporately.

#### **To Ponder:**

1. Where are you most tempted to measure faithfulness by recognition, results, or affirmation rather than by obedience to Christ?

---

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.1.2

2. Where might your prayers reveal a greater focus on personal needs than on thankfulness and intercession for others?

## II. Confidence | Philippians 1:6

Verse 6 offers one of Scripture's most encouraging words for believers—the assurance that “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” **Paul's assurance does not rest in the faithfulness of the Philippians, nor in his own pastoral investment, but in the unchanging character of God.** The same God who initiated the work of salvation and sanctification of His people will unfailingly bring it to completion. **Salvation, from beginning to end, is God's work—conceived in eternity, accomplished in Christ, and applied by the Spirit (Rom. 8:29-30).** Paul's confidence is especially striking given his circumstances. Imprisoned under Roman authority and nearing the end of his life, Paul refuses to interpret God's faithfulness through the lens of comfort, safety, or visible success. Instead, he interprets reality through the promises of God. **The believer's assurance rests not in personal achievements, but in divine fidelity (John 10:28-29).** This truth does not minimize the reality of struggle in sanctification. Rather, it provides the foundation for endurance. God's commitment to complete His work does not render human effort unnecessary—it renders it hopeful. Paul's refusal to take credit for anything that happened in Philippi is equally instructive. Despite being used mightily by God, Paul everything to divine initiative. This humility confronts a culture—ancient and modern—that craves recognition and visibility. **The Gospel frees believers from the need to secure their own legacy.** God's work does not depend on applause, affirmation, or acknowledgment. As the Puritans demonstrated during the Great Ejection in 1662, faithfulness often unfolds in obscurity, yet God's purposes are never hindered by human neglect or rejection.

### To Ponder:

1. How does Paul's confidence in the Lord challenge our tendency toward pride in success and discouragement in failure?
2. Where do you find it hardest to rest in God's promise to finish the work He has begun in you?

## III. A Life Worthy | Philippians 1:7-11

**Paul's confidence in God's sovereign work does not diminish the call to personal holiness; it strengthens it.** Assurance of grace must produce serious obedience. Paul's deep affection for the Philippians also reveal that theological clarity and genuine love are inseparable. He holds them in his heart, yearns for them with Christlike affection, and prays consistently for their spiritual growth. This affection is not sentimental weakness, but Gospel-shaped concern rooted in shared grace (v.7-8). Paul's prayer centers on growth in love that is governed by “knowledge and all discernment” (v.9). Biblical love is not blind acceptance or emotional indulgence. It is a love shaped by truth, guided by wisdom, and directed toward what pleases God. **Discernment is about being informed and watchful—that enables believers to “approve what is excellent”—not merely to avoid what is sinful, but to pursue what is most honoring to Christ. The goal of godly love is purity, blamelessness, and fruitfulness in anticipation of “the day of Christ” (v.10).** Paul consistently grounds ethical exhortation in eschatological hope. Because Christ will return, obedience matters now. Yet even this fruitfulness is not self-generated. The “fruit of righteousness” comes “through Jesus Christ” (v.11), preserving both humility and assurance. **This passage reminds believers that sanctification is not about earning God's favor but displaying God's work.** Love that abounds, discernment that sharpens, and righteousness that bears fruit all exist “to the glory and praise of God.” The Gospel not only rescues believers from condemnation; it reshapes their desires, priorities, and relationships until their lives increasingly reflect Christ Himself.

### To Ponder:

1. Where might you be settling for what might be permissible rather than pursuing what God explicitly approves?
2. What fruit of righteousness has been absent from your life? What can you do to grow in that area?