

“Abounding...still more”

Philippians 1:1-14

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Philippians 1:1-14 *1 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 I thank my*

God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete [it] until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which [are] by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. 12 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things [which happened] to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

Philippians...Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, is the only letter of Paul's that we have that was written with essentially no attempt to correct the behavior of the reader, no overt charge to change the practices of the receiving church. Rather it is in many ways a quintessential snapshot of mature Christian living. The model of things as they are supposed to be, with each of us in our departure from spiritual adolescence. This is more than just a lofty goal, but a genuine portrayal of the grown up Christian.

What *is* our life supposed to look like as a “grown up” believer? The Book of Philippians will serve as our ‘template.’ Not to make us some cookie cutter clone, but as the pattern of the spiritually adult life as a child of God. The key word in this matter is “mature.” The “design” of the individual that has indeed grown up out of spiritual childhood.

Back in the book of Acts, chapter 16, we have the record of the birth of this church and it's first member...a woman named Lydia. This woman apparently was savvy as to the basics of faith, but unlike so many around her, she wanted more. Such a desire can in many ways be a dangerous obsession, taking one down a long and windy road with unseen harbors at the end of the line! Lydia seemed determined to know this God in a greater way than just a social compliance...more than just a moral creed and pietism that was...*and is yet*, so prevalent amongst the religious populace. She apparently had a small group/community bible study going on, as well as a real heart to be more than just a church-going pew sitter.



In a wonderful manifest of God's knowledge and love, He sought Lydia out and found her. He found her, because frankly, she wanted to be found! God has a reputation of locating such "needles in the haystack." There was the Roman Centurion "Cornelius," the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8, and Dorcus at Joppa, amongst others. Those who were inexplicably living and seeking for God in a dry land. In such situations it seems God always shows up.

Lydia was open to the moving of God, and God was faithful. And so out of all the places on earth Paul the apostle could have been that day...of all the millions of people that he could have run into that day, God made sure that He put her in Paul's way. God is eternally and supernaturally faithful to us. He will never deny a hungry heart! If you are truly seeking God, I assure you that He will find you!

The church in Philippi began on the heels of Paul's blessed meeting with Lydia, but also through some fires. That is the draft...the "methodology" that we generally see when birthing a church community. Paul cast out a troublesome demon from a slave girl and received a subsequent jailing for having done it. It was classic church planting! Great blessings and big trials!

Yet God was not deterred, and Paul was subsequently freed. Not by an attorney but by a perfectly timed earthquake. Paul gained not only his freedom, but the jailer and his family also found salvation through the move of God. Thus the church in Philippi was born out on the front lines, like all great church fellowships have been. Great churches are not birthed through a how-to guide book but by a war. Satan moved to block, and God moved to counter. It was inexplicable. God chose this little place...off the beaten track and without even a synagogue, to begin a mighty work for the furtherance of the Kingdom.

The book of Philippians is known as the Letter of Joy. In it, we find the **Art of Contentment**. That which this world seems hopelessly unable to attain, though most of our lives are lived out in the pursuit of it! Clearly these people brought Paul joy, which is all the more ironic in the fact that Paul was in prison during the writing of this letter. During this same imprisonment he also wrote the letters of Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon. Apparently Paul did his best work while jailed. Maybe it was the only time he slowed down enough, thus God arranged for these occasional "holidays" so He could get the epistle letters for future generations.

Obviously, Paul's joy was not due to his circumstances! Things were not good *...at least in the flesh*. He wasn't living out the American dream. He wasn't experiencing the "easy street" of comfort, health, and prosperity. And yet he...in those circumstances, penned the "letter of joy." We are then compelled to ask: What was it that brought Paul this contentment? Perhaps we need to reconsider what contentment even is?

Chapter 1

1:1-2

Paul writes this letter without his usual official greeting. Apparently, He didn't feel he needed to remind this church that he was an apostle or that he was writing on directions from Christ. No doubt that was because they knew it already. There was an obvious bond between Paul and this particular church that was special. There was a familiarity and a unity that existed which precluded the need for formalism.

Writing from a first century prison, this was in many ways a difficult time for Paul. Yet seeing his world through the lens of the letter before us, we find that he was anything *but* discouraged! Believers, the beginning of this issue of contentment acknowledges the mandatory fact that we cannot not depend on this world to bring it to us. Our contentment...that which Christ brings us, runs deeper and is generated by other things. And unless

we acknowledge that singular aspect, we are doomed...right out of the gate... in verse one of this letter.... to fail to ever realize such peace and satisfaction...

Paul calls himself a “bond servant,” or a bond *slave*. This is a biblical term which describes an individual that was in servitude because of a debt. People often placed themselves there voluntarily, and sometimes stayed long after the debt was paid. Paul said that such was the case with himself and with Timothy. It was all so much more than just a “punch-in-and-punch-out 9 to 5 job.” He was “indentured.” He believed himself to be “owned” because of the debt he owed. It was an all-encompassing “full life” thing for him. Therefore we must acknowledge that this commitment is no doubt the first aspect of ‘contentment’ that is front and center in this letter!

Paul writing to these Philippian believers, calls them “saints.” Such a title is not according to the world’s vernacular, but in the heavenly use. If we are born again, in the eyes of God, we are positionally a ‘saint.’ That’s true of us too...even though in reality we usually feel far from such a designation!

Paul does begin with his classic line: “grace to you and peace from God...” Paul always delivered these “blessings” in that order, because it is in that order that we also receive them. Grace is the foundation and peace is the result! In fact, with the exception of the epistle to the Romans, every one of Paul’s letters begins and ends with “grace.” Thus Paul is constantly emphasizing that the Christian life *begins* with grace, is *lived* by grace and *ends* with grace. Nowhere in that mix is any reliance on self or works.

1:3-5

This affection Paul reflects here was more than just words. The same affection that ultimately took Paul to prison was the same affection that took Christ to the cross. When we hear that word ‘affection’ it tends to conjure up good feelings and pictures of bunny rabbits and picnics. But this is not that. This ‘affection of Christ’ was clearly manifested in a real and tangible way, as it was also for Paul. It was more than just an emotional response. The language is unique here. It was *Christ love*, and Christ love is a “love-at-all-cost” action. Paul *loved* these people. And it was a *proved* love, a love which this world knows very little about...

Paul began this section with an important phrase... “I thank my God.” He wasn’t just *the* God...albeit that aspect is not to be marginalized, but moreover He was *Paul’s God*. He was knitting himself together with all that God was and all that God stood for. This is the step many of us have yet to take...to claim ownership...to plant our feet.

Verse 4: No matter what they did to Paul, they could never stop him from praying, and he never did! In a day when programs, publicity, and promotion characterize much of the Lord’s work, it should be emphasized that without prayer no lasting work will be accomplished for God. We can do everything right in this church and still ultimately fail in His work by failing to be a praying congregation.

Verse 5: “...for your fellowship” The New American Standard version renders the word “fellowship” as “participation.” The scriptural use of this word clarifies just what is meant. Many of us attempt to participate on some external level with Christian fellowship without truly understanding just what is meant by it! Trying to be a part of ‘fellowship’ without any real skin in the game... without really engaging in others’ lives. Of course, this tacit involvement never works! When we fail to “get into the pool” ...we fail to involve ourselves in the lives of those we say we are fellowshiping with. What we get then is just a secular club of some sort.

1:7-8

Paul held these people in His heart. He loved them more than he loved himself, and even more than he loved his freedom. That kind of love does not come naturally in us...it is a by-product of the Holy Spirit's presence in us and in what we do. Therefore it is a bond of unity that many of us will never experience; not just because we simply do not care enough about others, but because we also do not have that precursory bond of love with a present Spirit of God in us.

In our great love for Him, exists our great love for our brothers and sisters...those in our community and those outside. When I fail to love others as I should, I must know in my heart it is because I fail to love Jesus as I should. The churches that Paul planted were known for the priority of fellowship in their local communities and between churches. They did not bite and devour one another...that's reserved as a rather modern phenomena.

They also shared with each other...both in the blessings and the battles. Paul knew that they were with him, even as he was in chains. They had not washed their hands of Paul because of his legal issues! They were in it for the long haul. This was true love...a love that overlooks the shortcomings, and loves anyway. Such is key to true fellowship. There must be a unity that is bound together in God...not always in commonality of interests, or age, or tastes. But one where God Himself is the glue. This is the bond that binds us to the believers in India and the Philippines. Even though there are many miles between us, we are one in Christ.

These folks were "partakers with him in grace." I wonder if we can say that about those around us in the pews this morning? Do you really know these people? If they don't know you, is it because you have rejected community and are living in a worldly selfish spirit?

See for Paul, He was daring enough on this subject to claim that "God was his witness." So if this issue bothers you, ask yourself, "what would God say about it?" He sees all and knows all. ARE these people around me my brothers and sisters? Because we are commanded to operate in unity and in body. When we try to 'go it alone,' it is in our pride and in our selfishness...neither of which are attributes of the one we say we follow!

1:9-11

Paul is never satisfied that the love they have for each other is ever enough. He wants their love to "overflow": to *continue* to grow more and more! They had to realize that they *had* never and *would* never reach some finish line when it came to loving each other. A sure sign of Christian maturity is the clear reflection of a person who is becoming more and more like their Lord. This is one of the "litmus tests" of our faith: do you love your brothers and sisters around you more than you did last year? Last month? Because if love is the supreme attribute of God, how can we say we know Him and we are one with Him when we fail to express that love toward others?

1 John 4:20-21 reminds us that if someone says, "*I love God,*" and *hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.*

John 13:35 reminds us that "*Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*" Let's be brave and flip that verse then! Our *lack of love* for one another proves also that we are **not** His disciples.

Paul wanted his brethren to keep growing in their faith, as long as there was breath in their bodies. To not remain children, but to **grow on** to maturity and to all that God had for them. He knew this would only come about with an understanding of what is really priority...of what really mattered. If they grew in this way, the spiritual fruit of their lives would multiply also. They would be as Christ is!

We can be so critical of others, when we instead need rather model Christ and His love in front of them. Paul is not saying here that we should ‘look the other way’ when it comes to sin. But often the answer is not to criticize, but rather to “approve the things that are excellent.” To give example of righteousness and holy living, and to continue to love others until they get there.

He wants us to be “sincere.” The original language means “real through and through.” Not just “Christian plated.” Rather that we would be real and honest about who *we* are and the truth of the faith walk! We can slip into a Teflon Christian mode where everything just rolls off of us and that’s not what he is saying. We are being called to love and to love in truth. To do it all “to the glory and praise of God!”

“One day Billy and Ruth Graham were driving through a long stretch of road construction. They had numerous slowdowns, detours, and stops along the way. Finally they reached the end of all that difficulty, and smooth pavement stretched out before them. This sign caught Ruth's attention: "End of construction. Thank for your patience." She commented that those words would be a fitting inscription on her tombstone someday.

As a matter of fact, those words fit all of us as believers, because in this life we are ‘under construction.’ When we accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we begin the lifelong process of spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit works in us to remove our selfishness (Php 2:4-note), to renew our thinking (Ro 12:2-note), and to develop qualities in us that are more and more Christ-like (Col 3:5-noteff). Paul described this process as a work of God. He said, "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

V C Grounds said “As we travel heavenward, let's cooperate with God's construction of our lives. When His work in us is complete, ‘we shall be like Him’ (1John 3:2-note), perfectly conformed to our Savior's likeness.”

1:12-14

Paul no doubt only understood a fraction of the truth of this statement. For if it had not been for his ‘jail time,’ one would have to wonder if we would have got all of those letters that make up a great part of the New Testament!

Paul was able to realize what few of us do in such times of trial. And that is that God can and will use times of difficulty for the furtherance of His kingdom and glory. We know that Paul ministered to his guards as well as to the local church where he was being held. We know also that he took the time to write letters to the churches that he had started. Paul understood well that “*all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*” (Romans 8:28)

No doubt we have all had our doubts about that verse in times of crisis when we see no overt purpose or good which could arise from our pain. Often though, time has a way of manifesting what we did not at the time understand. And even if we never do on this side of eternity, this can and must be an opportunity to manifest our faith. Will we trust Him even when we do not see or do not understand?

The secret to contentment begins with this “singleness of mind’ toward Christ. If you have “other God’s” in your life or if you are trying to be a believer without giving absolute lordship of your life to Christ, then this issue will always be a struggle.

Besides the opportunity to witness to his guards and to the ‘powers that be’ politically at that time, there is the witness of how Paul dealt with his imprisonment served to embolden the other believers. They were less fearful in their daily testimony because of his witness.

“...***bold to speak the word.***” The language there doesn’t mean ‘church preaching’ but rather the witness of their personal lives every day in the secular world. This call is not for the pastor and evangelist, but for all of us. When we see such an example, we tend to stand up with the one and be counted!

Once we make up our minds to obey God completely, it's easy to think that life will go more smoothly. When it does, we think this proves that we're in God's will. If we run into problems and pain however, we tend to think that both we and what we're doing are out of God's will. Rather than question our measuring stick, we question our dedication, and sometimes even God Himself. The reality of history is that the gospel advances on disaster and suffering, whether we appreciate that fact or not.

When Christ is your life, a jail cell can become a mighty pulpit. And if that is true...and Paul proved that it was, we are left to wonder why such then so often seems impossible in our normal and comfortable living! How is it that Paul not only “made the best of” a bad situation, but further, seemed to thrive in the midst of it? No other explanation can be made, except Paul allowed God to be first place in his life. Few of us are so willing, because most of us simply do not think it is necessary, in order to be a child of God.