

Philippians 1v1-11

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[0 : 0 0] So last week you might remember that we began with an overview of the whole of Paul's letter to the Philippians. So last week I read the whole book of Philippians and if you remember I gave you an overview, like a four-part overview of the letter of Paul to the Philippian church.

Now I was told last week that there was a lot of information to take on board. So this week I'm hoping to sort of slow it down a little bit and I'm going to start by repeating some of the things I said last week so that you can remember maybe some of the things I said last week. So I said that there were essentially three themes and one central instruction in Paul's letter to the Philippian church. Okay and here they are so that you can remember them. Number one is that Paul's letter to the Philippian church is one of the warmest, most loving and affectionate letters in the New Testament. Paul really loves the Philippian church and the Philippian church really love Paul. They're partners with him in gospel ministry, they send him money, this is sort of a thank you letter for the money that they've sent and they are deeply concerned for Paul and Paul is deeply concerned for them.

He loves them dearly. That's the first one. The second thing is that there's a particular kind of suffering that the Philippian church are facing. You might remember this from last week. The city of Philippi is a proud Roman city in the Roman Empire and they are being called out as saying, listen, if you follow Jesus, you are not really proper Philippians. You're not really proper Roman citizens.

And so Paul tells them actually, listen, don't worry too much about that kind of suffering, the suffering that you have, that you saw I had, that carries on because your citizenship is not so much of Rome, but your citizenship is in the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom that Christ is building through faith. See, you might remember I said last week that he swallows their pastoral concern with an even bigger truth. Okay. They're really worried about their belonging to Rome and he swallows it up with this bigger idea that you're actually citizens of glory. Okay. So that's, he really loves them.

He's concerned about citizenship. The third one is this about a sort of a concern that he has about jealousy in the life of the church. So he is concerned that there are people in the church who are conducting themselves in a way which makes it evident that they are operating out of a jealous heart and spirit towards one another. There is rivalry in the church.

[2 : 5 9] So much so that even some of the good actions in the church, some of the preaching that's going on in the church is going on because those preachers are hoping to make it difficult for Paul who's in prison.

They may be thinking, oh, great. You know, this, this super famous preacher, he's locked in prison right now. So this is a chance for me to make a name for myself. He's kind of out of the way. So, you know, so let me big myself up as I, as I preach. Now, Paul says he rejoices because he wants the gospel to go forwards. But this idea that it is driven by jealousy or by rivalry. And he calls out, especially, Euronion and Syntyche, doesn't he, and asks them to agree in the Lord. We considered together last week how jealousy and rivalry are a particular struggle of churches that are growing and thriving and doing good stuff. In churches that are dying and declining, there's not much to be envious of and jealous of. But in this church in Philippi, which is going so well, there is so much for them to be envious of and jealous of. And so it's a warning to them. Some commentators would even suggest to you that the whole letter really is aimed at Euronion and Syntyche, which is an interesting thought that you can chew on if you'd like to. So those are the, those are the sort of three themes. And then the central instruction, which is, is hung around this great hymn on the nature of the Lord Jesus Christ in chapter two. This letter sort of revolves all around this, around the Lord Jesus' self-sacrifice. Jesus gave up himself. He gave up the glories of heaven to be born as a man. So Jesus unites himself to weak human flesh, is born as a baby, lives and dies for our sin. Self-sacrifice. And it's for the salvation of others. And therefore, God gives him the name that is above every name. And that kind of self-sacrificial service for the eternal well-being of others to the glory of God, that is the call on all of our lives. It's what, it's what Jesus does. It's what Paul does. It's what Timothy does. It's what Epaphroditus does.

It's what the Philippian church are called to do. And it's what you and I are called to do. To love others above ourselves, sacrifice ourselves for other people's eternal well-being, for the glory of God. And we thought, didn't we, that that self-sacrifice is for the good of others, not just in a sort of general sense, but in an eternal salvation sense. We are really deeply concerned about one another's spiritual well-being and the plight of the lost. And so we give up ourselves that others may hear the gospel, grow as Christians, and we do that for God's glory.

So those were the things we looked at last week, okay? So love, citizenship, jealousy, and this central idea of self-sacrificial service for the eternal well-being of others to the glory of God. Now, we're going to look this week really at verses 3 to 11 of Philippians chapter 1.

And I've put them on the front of your handout with some odd formatting, which hopefully, maybe give you an idea of the structure of these verses. But let me read them to you, and then we'll have a look at them together. Verse 3 of Philippians chapter 1.

[6 : 12] I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you since I have you in my heart, and whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Now, let me just start with essentially a few really obvious observations from those verses, which will hopefully just help us tease out some of the lessons for us.

So if you keep your eyes on those verses, and I will just point out some things which you could have noticed, but are worth us just stating because they're going to be helpful to us as we think about what these verses mean for us.

[7 : 38] So notice first, very obvious observation. Verses three and four, notice this is Paul recording a prayer. In fact, it's a prayer he always prays for all of them. He's always praying this.

So he's introduced this idea that he is praying, but having introduced that idea, it's not really until verse nine that he actually tells you what he is praying about. So having introduced the idea that he's praying in verses three and four, then verses five to eight are really essentially a sort of interlude.

Oh, before I tell you that, let me tell you something else, says Paul, effectively. Well, you know, that's how all of our minds work, isn't it? We say something and then, oh no, let me just tell you this first. And that's what Paul is doing here. I'm praying for you, all of you always, with all sorts of joy, great joy.

I'm praying for you. Oh, but before I tell you what I'm praying for, let me remind you of something really important. And so verses five to eight are really a statement of Paul's relationship with the church and of what God is doing in them.

So notice verses five and seven are both about their partnership in the gospel. So look at verse five. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[8 : 53] And then verse seven, it is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart, whether I'm in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

Both the word share there and also partnership in verse five are both the same root word of canonium, fellowship, togetherness.

Paul's prayer for the Philippians is a reflection of their togetherness with him, their fellowship with him. They share with him in his ministry. They are partners in the gospel.

How are they partners in the gospel? Well, I think in the letter it's because they're giving to him, because they're concerned for him. And so he says that whether he's in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, they are partners, fellowshippers with him.

They're working alongside him. They are team members, if you like, fellow workers. And that he suggests in verse six is evidence that God is at work in them, that a work has begun.

[9 : 50] It's yet to be completed, but it will be completed because God is faithful who finishes what he started. That's the introduction to the prayer. Listen, I'm praying always for all of you because, listen, you guys, you're like you're with me.

You're on my team. God is at work in you. He's carrying it on. And then what does he actually pray? Well, verse nine is really then an expansion on this good work that God is doing, because Paul is praying that God would complete and do what he has set about doing in them.

So he says, and this is my prayer, verse nine, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

He prays for growth and change, growth in knowledge, literally full knowledge. And we'll think about that some more in a moment. It's not so much knowledge of facts to pass a test, is it? Knowledge that makes possible, verse 10, to live the Christian life, the knowledge that means that you can be able to discern what is best and be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, a life that involves discerning the right thing to do and doing it, knowing that there's a coming day, a day of judgment, the day of Christ.

Now, that's just some really obvious observations from the text. Now, let me just give you some applications and some lessons for us. I'll try and pull it together in some sort of coherent manner.

[11 : 21] And there's opportunity for questions and also some discussion as well. So first, you notice that the Christian life means gospel partnership. Christian life means gospel partnership.

It seems to me that Paul takes the Philippians church's partnership with him in the ministry, their giving of money, sending of Epaphroditus. He sends that as evidence that they are Christians.

In other words, their interest in the work of the gospel is evidence of God's work in them. You cannot see what's going on in their hearts, but you can see what they're interested in.

So the fact that they are interested in Paul and his ministry to the extent of sacrificing money and sending Epaphroditus almost at cost of his life is evidence that God is at work in them.

Their concern for gospel work is a sign of gospel life, spiritual life, which has been started by work of God, which is ongoing. Now, if you were to ask Paul, how do you know that the Philippians are truly converted?

[12 : 19] How do you know that there's a work of God in that church? Well, the answer in these verses is because they're concerned for Paul and for the work of the gospel. Work actually, which is interesting, is not happening on their doorstep.

A work that they have absolutely no positive kickback from themselves, but a work they care about just because they care about Jesus and his glory. That's really encouraging and quite challenging, isn't it, if you think about it.

It's encouraging because you can say that the desire that we have to pray for, to give to, to show concern for the work of the gospel beyond our front door is evidence that God is at work. Praise God for that.

You see that in the life of our church. Praise God because that's not self-generated. That's evidence of God at work. Praise him. But also the absence of that concern is an evidence that God's not finished with us yet and there's still work to be done in our lives.

Really practically as well, let me just try and land it really, really practically. I think it means for us that one of the most useful things that we can do for our own assurance is pray for others.

[13 : 21] One of the most useful things we can do for our own assurance is pray for others. Let me encourage you, if I can, to pray widely for the work of the gospel. Pick up one of those London City Mission leaflets from the table or the Open Doors Prayer News and pray for churches beyond our own.

It is good for you as well as good for them to do it. It is what God is doing in us. It is evidence of his work. It is a cause of rejoicing. It's an act of self-sacrifice, not praying for my own good or my own gain, but showing concern for others ahead of myself.

That's what Jesus does. It's what Paul does. It's what Timothy does, Epaphroditus does. And it's what we're encouraged to do. That's the first thing. Secondly, Christian change is evidence of Christian life.

So concern for gospel work is evidence of Christian life. Christian change is evidence of Christian life. Paul's statement in verse 6 is meant to be reassuring, isn't it, for the Philippians. Listen, guys, God is at work.

And God is the kind of worker who always finishes what he starts. That's great, isn't it? God's not finished with me yet, as the sign goes. Praise God that he is still at work and he will complete it.

[14 : 29] But notice that that implies that the Philippians have change built into their Christian lives. I wonder if you've thought about that. Change, transformation is part of the Christian life.

Let me try and play devil's advocate with this, if I can, for a moment. I think there's a version of the Christian life which is very popular amongst keen evangelicals, which is that the Christian life is sort of really the accumulation of truths or facts.

And when you've got them all, you've done it. Right. So once you understand the basic truths of the Christian message, you've nailed it. You can carry the label godly and you have done it.

You know what needs to be done. Now, clearly, knowing Christian doctrine is a good thing. It is important. But notice in these verses that that's not really what Paul is talking about, is he?

The good work that God has started you is not simply about getting your head straight. So I tried to show this in the structure of the passage on the front sheet. You can ask me about it later because I'm not going to bore you with it now.

[15 : 33] But in the structure of the passage, verse 9 is the explanation of verse 6. So the good work that is begun in you, that is being carried on to completion in the day of Christ, is described in more detail in verse 9 about love and discernment and purity and blamelessness.

The change that God is doing in our lives that is built into the Christian life is really not just about getting your head straight with facts. It's not less than that. We need to understand the truth and we need to understand it clearly.

It's more than that, though, isn't it? It's about getting your heart straight. It's about transforming your loves and your desires, your passions and your concerns. It's about a work which in one sense will never be finished until we arrive at the day of Christ.

In other words, it's not so much simply an intellectual transformation as it is a moral transformation. Those are opposites to one another, are they? You know, good doctrine should lead to good Christian living.

But very often, especially in churches like ours which are concerned for sound doctrine, we can stop short of what Paul is thinking about here and think we've arrived at destination godly just because we can recite the church's doctrinal statement.

[16 : 45] But that's not true, is it? I think one of the most profoundly worrying things about my own Christian life and about the Christian lives of others as I observe them is that it can be possible for people to know Christian doctrine really well but remain unchanged by it.

And Paul is concerned that that's not true for the Philippian church. He wants them to be transformed in their desires, their loves, their purity by the truth of the gospel.

That change, he says, is built into the Christian life. Now again, let me try and land that really practically. There's no point just sort of talking about ideas. Let's land this really practically. It means, doesn't it, if you're a Christian this evening and someone says to you, how are you doing as a Christian?

You should be able to say, I should be able to say, oh, thank you for asking that question. Let me tell you about this particular area in my life where I know the Lord has his finger on this.

He's changing me in this way. He's teaching me this. I've been really conscious and aware of the fact that I really need to grow in patience or in love for other believers.

[17 : 56] I know really that I've been worried and anxious and the Lord is pointing out to me that really I need to grow not in just an intellectual understanding of his sovereignty but in a sort of appropriation of that, a kind of bringing that into my life so that I can sleep at night and I can rest in him and trust him.

Thank you so much for praying that I would change. Please keep praying for that thing because that's where the Lord is at work in my life. And let me say, if you can't say that, if you can't answer like that, then please go away and pray about that and think about that because I think this is how the Christian life works.

I think this is Paul's understanding is that actually the Christian life works by God changing us and transforming us. This is built into our Christian lives. I remember once asking an old chap in another church, not here, and I said to him, you know, what have you learned or what have you changed your mind on recently?

And he looked at me as if I'd, you know, landed from outer space. And he goes, I don't think I've changed my mind for 40 years.

I was like, you know, there's something wrong here, isn't there? The Lord is changing us and transforming us and molding us and shaping us. And if we can say that for ourselves, okay, so if we can say, oh, the Lord is changing me and transforming me in this way, we can also say it for others in the church.

[19 : 30] Let me try and say this to reassure you, right? Verse six and verse nine are true for other church members. God is more concerned with transforming the immaturity in the church, more concerned about that than you and I are, right?

He is the one at work in others too. So we can pray for fellow church members, can't we? We can pray, Lord, would you teach us this corporately? Would you help them in that way?

So let me just ask you, you know, just think for a moment, how are you changing? What is it that God is doing at you in the moment now? Where are you being transformed?

What sins are being particularly drawn to your attention at the moment? Where in God's providence has he led you? What is he teaching you in life there?

How is what you're learning about the Lord transforming how you're living for the Lord? Those are good questions for us to think about and ponder.

[20 : 32] Next then, Christian living is taking hold of what you already have. I slightly answered my own question, but I want you just with the person next to you for a moment to give yourself a break from my voice.

I want you to describe how change happens as a Christian. See, I know that's a slightly odd question. So try and put it more simply. How do I become more and more mature as a Christian?

Have a think about that with the person next to you. How do I become a more grown up Christian? What does that look like? How does that work? If you find yourself on your own, you can think about it on your own.

Okay. Some of you are probably relieved that I've interrupted others. You might have been able to go on for ages, but anyone want to share their answers? How do we become more mature as a Christian?

Describe if you can. That process, what does that work? Now's your chance to say what the other person was saying. If I'm listening closely to those who know me well, then I upset them or do things wrong.

[21 : 58] Are they actually taking on board criticism? Yes, certainly. Taking on board criticism, Sandy's saying. So as people who know me well and love me and are concerned for me as they point things out to me.

Yeah, seeing that. Yeah, for sure. Yeah. Anything else? Yes. Yes. Yeah.

yeah yeah yeah yes let me try and repeat that for the sake i was trying to listen to it so i can repeat it for those listening on zoom so the idea that as i as i sit down and read god's word every day i'm praying that the lord would point out to me things that need to change that so i suppose a bit like what sandy was saying you're saying that process is not only asking other people who know me well but actually it's asking the lord as well isn't it as he changes me yeah yeah yes and he changes me by his spirit yeah yeah so other people around us get to see the change in us yeah yeah um now let me let me try and sort of come to the answer to that question a little bit the other way around okay so let me try and show you something which i think is essentially makes no logical sense in verse nine but which when you understand it i think helps explain the answer to the question that we've been asking or at least impart the answer so let me let me look at verse nine with you and let me point out that it makes no logical sense verse nine let me read it to you this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight paul is praying isn't he that they may take hold of progressively more and more of something um this is my prayer that may abound more and more okay so he wants them to grow in this love but he's asking that it might grow more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that that they might be you might think that they might know more they might have more insight but actually when you when you look at those words it doesn't quite work like that so if i'm saying i want you to grow in something i can't ask you to grow in something that you already fully have right so let me try and give you a silly example i was trying to think in my study this afternoon of some examples i couldn't think of any good ones so here are some bad ones right i can't ask that you might take hold of more fingers or more toes because you've already got a full amount of fingers and toes right so you've already already got them you know you might say may you abound more and more in in money or in success or in a level results or something that you don't have but what's happening in verse nine is that he says that they may abound more and more in two things that they already have first is knowledge but the word literally there is epinosis which means full knowledge in other words you've already got full you already know everything there is to know you already have full knowledge and the second is depth of insight which is literally all insight in one sense paul is saying that he wants them to abound more that they love to abound more and more in in two things that they already fully have that they're already in full possession of which is knowledge which they've already got and insight all insight which they've already got so there's a sort of crazy logic of the prayer that the christian life is abounding in more fullness in love that comes from more fullness of something that you already fully have this is how christian change works in paul's theology christian change happens by increasingly grasping hold of what you already have fully been given in the gospel of the lord jesus christ he is asking for us to receive what we fully have been given in the lord jesus christ here's paul's answer to the question that we started with christian change is becoming more and more who you already

are right christian change is becoming more and more who you already are in the gospel to put it technically sanctification in paul's theology is the realization of justification so sanctification this process of christian growth is the is becoming who justification has already made me to be a full saint in every sense of that word fully holy and perfect with full knowledge and full insight i know everything that there is to know in christ in that sense and what is going on in my life is i am becoming more and more the person who i already am in the lord jesus now of course well that's completely logical in one sense it makes total sense in of the christian life doesn't it if christ is given for our salvation how can we essentially be given any more than the lord jesus christ if we are fully adopted into god's family how can we be more adopted if we are in receipt of the spirit how can we be any more full of the lord we can't but christian change is about taking the transformation of the gospel and appreciating and seeing its effect in every areas of our lives let me we've been up here with ideas haven't we let me try again try and land this really practically we often assume don't we that change in our christian life will come from learning something new maybe you maybe you've got a particular struggle in your life and what you really think is what i really need to do is i need to find an expert on that particular area who can help me with that because there must be some new key to to that area in order for me to grow in that you know maybe you're struggling with some kind of addiction of some kind or you're struggling with some kind of relational difficulty or you're struggling looking after grandchildren or children or parents or whatever it is and you think sure there must be some nugget of information that will help change in that i think what's happening in philippians is paul is saying listen everything you need to know is given to you in the gospel of the lord jesus christ which you know take that and you will be transformed by that increasingly becoming who you already are in the gospel and that is the process of christian change becoming who i already am in the lord jesus christ the working out of what's been planted in us that's why the fruit language of verse 11 is so useful isn't it it is the the blossoming of what christ has done in me it is me becoming who i am because of what he has done okay finally then christian praying is asking for what will happen or what will always happen anyway again whether you see this dynamic here but paul is praying for what he's certain will happen which i guess is kind of counterintuitive isn't it he's asking god to do what he's promised to do he's asking god to carry on what he knows god won't leave alone anyway he's asking that god will do what god has committed to do now why would paul bother doing that why would you ask for what you know you will receive well it seems as if paul is persuaded that asking for it will be the means by which the philippians will receive what is promised in other words god's promise is certain and god's promise is kept by his people asking for it to be kept why is that necessary well again because i think it's the shape of the christian life isn't it the christian realizes that everything that they have is given to them by god and so we pray for one another and for ourselves that god would do for us what he has promised to do for us that he'd finish what he promised us not to leave that he'd give us more of all that he has already given to us that would increasingly see what he has promised we will see to the glory and praise of god which means these are the things that we should pray for one another as well gospel change that comes from a gospel life abounding in what we already have for love and purity and blamelessness to shine through us for the glory of god let me pray and

then i'll take some questions and roll close together we pray heavenly father thank you that in the lord jesus christ you have given us all that we need thank you that you have begun in us a good work which you promise to carry on to completion on the day of the lord jesus christ thank you that it's not so much about finding new tricks but it's really about realizing that what you've done for us in jesus is everything that needed to be done that you have made us new people please we pray might we increasingly be who we already are in the lord jesus father we want to be a church which abounds in love purity blamelessness doing what is best until the day of christ please lord do that work amongst us for the sake of your glory help us to be a community of people who delight in being transformed by you and help us to pray for that for one another in jesus name amen any questions or comments before we sing our closing hymn charleston yes is it a bit like knowing about god but not knowing him yeah that is a good that is a good summary yeah yeah it's possible to know facts about god but not know him and the bible is full of those warnings isn't it charleston yeah yeah yeah so uh discernment is comes in verse 10 doesn't it yeah so it's depth of insights full insight and full knowledge in verse 9 and the discernment of what is best i think i i my presumption there is that it is so that we might live well and blameless i think in the in the sense there is so that you know people look at that they've done the right thing there that was the that was the right thing for them to do so i i i think the sense in verse 10 then is that our lives are increasingly shaped by the priorities and values of the gospel which we know fully and have full insight into in the lord jesus christ yes yes go on what do you what do you mean realized only in obedience what do you mean yes yes okay yes so that's uh yes uh yes if someone says that they know something but they don't do it then do they really know it yeah yeah yeah yeah no i think that's true but i by i think his concern here is it's not so much that they it's not so much that there's a lack in what god has given them it is that there there needs to be the the the process of transformation is taking the fullness of what god has given them and increasingly that shapes what they're doing so they are they are made new by the lord jesus christ they are fully his they belong to him that in christ they have full knowledge and and full insight and and living the christian life is is increasingly shaping what you do around who you really now are so that in one sense you should be able to look at what it is that you're doing with your life and say do you know what i i look at what i'll just use you for example i i can see i can see what clifford is doing in his life and it is only explicable because of what christ is doing

[34 : 48] and has done for him does that make sense absolutely yes absolutely and it's a lifetime pursuit because we will spend our lives becoming who we already are yeah yeah yeah great