



Week 1: Gospel Partnership

Chapter 1:1-11

So far...

We've set the scene for the book of Philippians. Paul is writing to a diverse church that he himself planted. He's going to spur them on to live lives just as he did - Gospel centred, Christ centred. He wants them to hear and obey the call to lay their lives down for something greater than themselves - for the cause of the Gospel across the world.

Gospel Partnership

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." (1:3-5)

Throughout the letter to the Philippians you can tell that this is a church that Paul loves with all his heart. He longs to see them again, and is constantly remembering them in all his prayers even when he is apart from them. Why does he have this heart for them? In part it's because they had stood side-by-side with him in the cause of the Gospel from the day they were first converted until now. Their hearts were knit together in a common purpose, and they shared Paul's greatest burden that the Gospel would be preached in all the world. This clearly wasn't the case in every church Paul planted, and he commends the Philippians for their focus and commitment to the cause of the Great Commission.

The Bible sees this kind of partnership and unity as a huge thing. The truth is, we can't expect to achieve much at all when working by ourselves, but it's when God's people come together as 'one man' rather than a bunch of divided entities that things will really begin to happen. Even Paul himself knew that it wasn't all up to him and his small team to reach

the whole world with the Gospel, but he rejoices when churches join him in this great endeavour and see fruitfulness themselves.

Of course what this all means is that we as God's church must make sure we don't become isolated from each other but rather remain a tight-knit group of people in the area we have been placed. This kind of closeness and unity brings many challenges and difficulties along the way simply because we can be so selfish and independent, but we must learn to combat these for the sake of the Gospel. This is a large part of what the book of Philippians will help us to do - lay aside our self-centredness, and unite together with God's church, for the purpose that He would be glorified in our Gospel partnership.

For Discussion:

How can we promote Gospel partnership and unity in our own church, and then locally, nationally and even internationally?

Other Verses for study:

- Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
- 1 Corinthians 3:1-9
- Ephesians 4:2-16
- John 17:20-23

Security and Hope

"...I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." (1:6)

Paul follows up His thankfulness for the Philippians partnership in the Gospel by affirming his confidence in their eternal security. Paul is certain that they will continue on the path they have begun on and will reach the end of their race. I'm sure we can all identify with the insecurity we can sometimes feel when we see our own weakness and sin, and begin to doubt that we're strong enough or good enough to keep going, and Paul wants to address this in the minds and hearts of this young church.

It's so important that we grasp the focus of what Paul is saying here - who is it that will finish the work in this church? It is God's power, strength and wisdom that will take them to the end of the race, not theirs. Paul has great confidence in the endurance of the Philippian church because he's seen the grace of God at work in them and through them, and he knows that God always finishes what He starts. Once God has begun to change someone, He never gives up until that change is complete & they are with Him in glory. He's not like us, who so often leave a trail of unfinished projects behind us - He

Abounding Love

"...I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more" (1:8-9)

As Paul sets up the content of his letter to this church who he clearly loves dearly he prays for them in such a way that it clearly points to the message he wants to bring to them, and love is at the heart of it. How are this church to become the people the God wants them to be? Most simply expressed it can be summed up in this one word 'love'. Love, Paul says, will cause this group of God's people to become 'pure and blameless' and will fill them with the 'fruits of righteousness', while making them ready for the day when Christ will return, and bringing God glory in the process.

All this immediately begs the question - if love is so important, do we really know what it is? The truth is it is really easy for us to get caught up on one aspect of love when we think about it - the part that involves our feelings and emotions. No wonder then, when we hear the Bible say that we must love even our enemies, we may try really hard, but end up frustrated and failing because we just can't bring ourselves to have warm fuzzy feelings for those who may have hurt us and treated us badly. If that seems impossible for us, it's probably because it is - we can

never give up in the middle of something, and so when He has called someone to belong to Him, and to be changed to be like Jesus, that call is permanent.

We know this isn't a truth that can allow us just to sit back and do nothing - it's the truth of God's work for us and in us that will drive us to love and serve Him, but this truth should give us incredible confidence and rest. If it was up to me or you to get to the end of this race in one piece, there is absolutely no doubt what would happen - we'd fail straightaway, but Paul knows it isn't up to us at all. As we strive towards the finish line in the race of our lives we can do so with utmost confidence that if we fall, God will pick us up, if we wander off course, He'll bring us back into line - He'll do whatever it takes to get us to the end of the race

For Discussion:

How can we become more gripped with the security we have in Christ, and what fruit will this bring in our lives?

Other Verses for study:

- Romans 8:31-39
- John 10:9-13, 27-30
- 1 Peter 1:3-5

influence our feelings by what we do, but there's just no way we can control them. There must be something more to the love that God wants from us.

Thankfully for us there is - in fact, when the Bible speaks about love it is rarely in terms of feelings, but rather in terms of actions. You don't truly love someone by simply feeling warm feelings towards them - you truly love someone by what you do. The Bible says that God's love towards us was shown when Jesus acted on that love and laid down His life for us (Romans 5:8), and this is the love that He calls us to, both within the church and outside as well. Where this doesn't make love easy - far from it - it makes it something we can control. We can choose to love anyone regardless of our feelings towards them - these are the radical choices that the book of Philippians will call each one of us to make.

For Discussion:

Have a think about the relationships in your life - what does real love look like in each one of them?

Other Verses for study:

- 1 Corinthians 13:1-13
- Luke 6:27-36
- 1 John 3:1, 11-18