

Philippians 1:1-11

The Connection of Grace

Paul and Timothy, bond-servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no greater connection that we can have in this world than the connection of Grace. Grace establishes our identity. Grace provides our hope for to live each day. Grace provides our purpose for life. And yet, we know so little of Grace. We rarely discuss Grace. Grace says that what we have in life is sufficient. Grace says that we are free from sin. Grace says that even in the midst of our failures the very failures become victory.

What makes this personal for each of us is that Paul clearly wants to emphasize the equal status that we have before God. Paul connects himself as a fellow bond-servant with Timothy who Paul considers his spiritual son. He includes the elders and deacons as a part of “all the saints.” This seems to point to the end of the letter where he has to tell the leaders to serve together. When we understand that we have an equal need of Grace it impacts our acceptance of our spiritual community.

What is my understanding of Grace (Eph. 2:8)?

- How can I grow in my knowledge of Grace?
- How can I help my spiritual community to grow in the knowledge of Grace?
- How does my knowledge of Grace make me forgive?
- Do I discipline myself to be forgiving or will it just happen as I grow in knowledge?

Question from Wiersbe

- Why is forgiveness one of the most difficult but significant evidence of genuine love?

Remember the Fellowship

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

Every time Paul thought of the brothers and sisters in Philippi, he prayed for them. Later we will see what he prayed. The content of the prayer is not the point here. It is that his natural response to remembering the participation (fellowship, sharing the burden) was to pray for them. The word “remembering” points to a response from a memory. There are many responses we could have from remembering. Paul’s response was to pray in thanks.

Paul’s praying was an impulse and dynamic. It was not based on a prayer request. It was his first response to what he knew of their needs.

- What is your usual first response when remembering your spiritual brothers and sisters?

- How can prayer become our first reaction every time we think of our spiritual brothers and sisters?
- What makes you thankful for your spiritual brothers and sisters? How would having constant prayer of thanks for your “fellowship” impact your relationship?
- What keeps you from remembering with thanks your spiritual brothers and sisters?

Question from Wiersbe

- How can praying for other Christians (especially those with whom we have some friction) improve our fellowship with them?

Remember the Future

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.

If we remember that Paul was writing to a wide range of people, we will be even more impacted by this statement. There some in Philippi who were not getting along. There were some that did not appreciate Paul. There some who with whom he was very close. He was confident with all of them that God would take that initial good work of salvation and bring it to perfection. This was his goal. This was his driving force.

In our relationships we hope for so many things. We strive to achieve so many things. And too often those things slow down the good work. We lose hope with our slowness to grow and change. We stop trying because at some point, we just accept that we are not perfect and what we are is good enough.

Paul was always pointed towards perfection in himself and in others. But it was not changing himself or others. It was his complete confidence that God would make it happen and he simply had to do his part. This gave him hope, direction, and confidence.

- What would make my all of us perfect? Is this the perfection that we will see in the day of Christ? Do I need to change in my definition of perfection?
- Have I given up on positive change and am just ready to accept what is?

Questions from Wiersbe

- What is the “spiritual lubrication that keeps the machinery of life running smoothly”?
- What is the difference between spiritual fruit and religious activity?

Remember the Foundation

For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul felt close to the people in Philippi with whom he had history. They had been through many challenging times together. Paul said that they were “partakers” of the Gospel which

means a partner or a companion. These were not just people sitting together in the pews. They were people who believed as Paul did on the impact of Grace and the privilege of sharing that Grace with others even in the face of rejection and persecution. This partnership was the foundation of their relationship. This is what he remembered.

- How would you define our partnership in the spiritual community? What holds us together? What is the greatest thing that we have in common?
- How can having that foundation of Grace enable us to encourage and help each other even in the most difficult times?

Remember the Focus

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul started with talking about praying but he never actually said yet what was the content of that prayer. Here he expresses that prayer. This prayer includes what he saw as the result of Grace in their lives. This is how we move towards perfection. There were so many things that he could have prayed and yet this is what he prayed. And the elements of this prayer will show up again in this letter. This prayer expressed the foundation of our spiritual community.

The foundation of this prayer is in growing in knowledge and spiritual perception which he will talk much more about in this letter. With full knowledge of Christ and spiritual perception we will be able to “test” what is valuable in life. Without that knowledge and discernment, we will be focused on the human and temporary. This results in being “sincere and blameless,” a life without guilt. That would be an amazing feeling. This comes from this growing understanding of Grace which fills us with the righteous behavior not based on self-control but God Control.

- What is my daily prayer for my spiritual community? What would keep me from that prayer?
- How will praying this prayer daily change my spiritual community?
- How will praying this prayer change my attitude towards my spiritual community?

Question from Wiersbe

- What is the difference between spiritual fruit and religious activity?

I pray that your love will keep on growing and that you will fully know and understand how to make the right choices. Then you will still be pure and innocent when Christ returns. And until that day, Jesus Christ will keep you busy doing good deeds that bring glory and praise to God.