

Foundations: Christ at the Center

Philippians 1:3-11

Vine & Branch Community Church

January 1, 2023

We should know a few things about the book of Philippians as we get started:

- Philippi was founded by its name-sake **Philip of Macedonia** the Father of Alexander the Great.
- In many respects, it was a retirement community for Roman soldiers, and as such, it was well known for its **patriotism** and **nationalism**.
- Thus, Paul faced opposition to his teaching of Jesus God and true King of the world (vs. Caesar) and Jesus' Word as authoritative and final.
- Despite this, a community of Jesus followers formed during Paul's visits, who, following his departure, faced ongoing persecution and hardship as a result of their culturally cross-grained faith in Jesus.
- Even in their hardships, the Philippians expressed their gratitude and faith through their lives, and by helping support Paul's missionary trips. On at least two occasions they sent Paul both financial and relational resources to support Paul's efforts to proclaim the message of Jesus to other regions (4:14-16).
- This letter to the Philippians is one that was sent back to the Philippians along with Epaphroditus to say thanks (and more) for their generous giving. This letter also provided encouragement and instruction for their new found faith.
- Many of Paul's other letters develop a single idea and carry it throughout the letter. This letter to the Philippians is structured differently; In it, Paul organizes the letter around a central point, and the rest of the letter points back to that central point [diag]. That central point is a poem. It is a section often called the "Kenosis Passage" Kenosis is the Greek word meaning "to empty self."
- This Kenosis passage incorporates language from both Genesis and Isaiah, and is a beautifully condensed version of the Gospel story. (This is worth committing to memory).
- Located in 2:6-11: *"Who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."*

What I find super interesting about this letter is that Paul's primary **encouragement** is for the Philippians to live with **joy, holiness, and unity** (partnership) in the face of their circumstances. To do that, Paul urges, the Philippian believers to keep Jesus **CENTRAL to the way they LIVE!** To emphasize that point, **Paul makes Jesus the CENTER of HIS LETTER!**

On November 1st I met with a group of 14 people as a cross-section representative group from our church to consider the upcoming years teaching. Then mid-November, I took that information along

with input from the elder team, spending a few days on the Tecumseh trail praying for us and planning the teaching for this upcoming year. While there is a sense that we can't go wrong in whatever we are studying in God's Word, we get to consider where the Lord has us, where we are going and what truth will help us along that way. The consistent input was this idea of focusing on the absolutes, essentials, or FOUNDATIONS of our faith.

At first, I thought that this idea of Foundations would be a series we would do. The more I studied and prayed I realized that Foundations would be a theme of our learning together in 2023. So we are going to be starting in the beginning of Genesis, then moving to the first part of Hebrews, which correlates with Genesis, then into James focusing on application of what we have learned. Then we will return to the middle part of Genesis, then into the first part of Romans, then application of those truths through both Philippians and into Galatians. We will end the year in a couple Psalms of gratitude, then a look at what it means when we pray, "Thy Kingdom Come!" (See handout).

During my mini-retreat, as I was considering all of this, I was drawn to **pray** Paul's prayer for the Philippians **for our church**. I ended up doing this a few times and saw in a deeper way God's desire for His people to find grounding in His truth.

So, Paul's opens his letter first with an **expression of Gratitude** for the Philippians (1:3-8), then a **prayer for them** (1:9-11).

GRATITUDE (1:3-8)

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And 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. ⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul expresses an affection and a joy for the Philippians partnership in his personal life and the spread of the Gospel (1:3, 7, 8). As I was reading/praying this section I couldn't help but **share both Paul's gratitude and affections for this church**. After 11 years of bi-vocational leadership at V&B, 2022 was my first full year in full-time shepherding at V&B. As I sat in the woods and reflected on our church its history, and you... I was filled with **similar gratitude and affection in our partnership** in The Gospel.

Many times; I sit in a coffee shop/restaurant, or in my pole barn, leaned up against a car in a parking lot, sit in front of prison glass, or on a tail gate on a job site... people are **thanking me for my time**. More often than not, my response to them is some heartfelt variation of, *"Our time together is a **gift for you and for me**, and that gift of time has been financially purchased by a group of people who love God and the both of us!"* That church is YOU! So thankful for our partnership in the Gospel. And I am filled with gratitude for you as well as a desire *"for Christ to be formed in you"* (Gal 4:20).

Likewise, in Philippians Paul finds gratitude as he remembers the Philippians gifts that allow him to do ministry! He also finds motivation to pray for them and confidence in, their relationship with God, *"He will bring it to completion the work he has started in you at the day of Jesus Christ."*

PRAYER: (1:9-11) Paul's prayer for the Philippians is where we will spend most of our time today, especially as it points back to the main point ➡ Kenosis = *"self-emptying"* (2:6-11). Paul's prayer is that the Philippians would fill themselves up with the *self-emptying* life of Jesus.

⁹ *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,*
¹⁰ *so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,*¹¹
filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Often times I have heard that Philippians is about joy in all circumstances. But it is actually primarily about Jesus as the center; following his example and teaching, and joy then is the result, along with holiness and unity! So, Paul opens with this prayer looking toward Jesus' life. His prayer is for the Philippians to be like Jesus. Again, the rest of the letter fleshes out three main outcomes of this kind of mindset/living:

- JOY – a deep satisfaction and peace regardless of circumstances,
- HOLINESS – acting like God would act on earth = JESUS
- UNITY – or partnership working together to put God's attributes on display

IOW: Joy, holiness and unity can only be had if Jesus life & Teaching is kept CENTRAL in our community.

We get insight into HOW to keep Jesus central through Paul's prayer for the Philippians (v. 9-10), *“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,*¹⁰ *so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,*¹¹ *filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*

There are Three things I want us to take from Paul's prayer:

1. **Prayer for one another:** love would abound in Knowledge and discernment....
 - Pray this for passage for each other
2. **Lens to View our Learning:** Looking to specifically apply what we learn to our relationships
 - As we work through foundational truths; not just for learning, but look to application
3. **Measurable outcome:** Our learning here should result loving skillfully

What Paul is saying is that *our love abounds more and more as a result of knowledge and discernment.* And, he uses some specific words here; Knowledge is the word “*Epigonosko*” = *experiential* knowledge -as Augustine has said, “*knowledge that comes out our fingertips.*” And DISCERNMENT meaning the **specific application to circumstances.**

IOW: what Paul is praying for is a Knowledge that springs into action and knows exactly how to apply our **love** to our siblings in Christ in **various circumstances with skill and precision** = “*Love abounding more and more!*” The result (1:10) we “*approve what is excellent.*” And, remember Paul roots that prayer in the Kenosis poem of the life of Jesus. IOW: our ability to love skillfully and excellently is directly tied to our knowledge of the love of Jesus... with me? (John's account of Jesus loving both the Pharisee's and the adulterous woman because he skillfully applied love through knowledge and discernment!)

The result then that we are “*pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.*” Summary: experiential application of knowledge gained by Christ (it has come through Him) causes our love to grow exponentially. The result is an increasing purity and blamelessness in our lives that cheers Christ upon His return!

Many of you, like me, grew up with a theology of Christ return that was bent and warped into dread. Like all of the evil one's deceptions taking a good thing and Christ-centered thing and making it a bad thing and a me-centered thing. The return of Christ is not about us, but HIM. Because that is true, we ready ourselves through our love abounding with K&D, therefore we wait expectantly with Joy!

Likewise, the Apostle John says we can wait with “*confidence.*” 1 John 4: 17, “*By [Abiding in Jesus] love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.*”

And the GOAL of all of this is at the end of Paul’s stated prayer, “*To the Glory and Praise of God!*” We do all of this; Listen to God’s Word, adjust our life to it in faith SO THAT we can JOYFULLY put God’s attributes on display! How? where does all this start? **It starts with our love abounding through knowledge and discernment.**

Team, this is why we are going to be working through the FOUNDATIONS of our faith in 2023, So that our love can exponentially increase through our **knowledge and all discernment** that is rooted, built upon and realized in Christ.

Applications:

1. We should pray this way for one another
 - a. Memorize this prayer and the kenosis passage
2. All our learning should focus on applying the life and love of Christ to our relationships!
 - a. Memorize the books of the Bible
 - b. Start a reading plan
3. Measurable outcomes
 - a. Discuss with one another, applications of all we are studying; How does this laser focus my ability to love like Jesus