

Unity in Prayer,
Philippians 1:11

1 Thes. 5:14-28

Ephesians 1:15-23

Congregation: Proverbs 15:5-9

Last week we had a little break in our starting journey through this book, so I think it would be beneficial to visit a bit of where we left off so that we can get back into the flow of this book, I think it is important to hit on a few high spots before we move forward. So let us start this morning by reading our passage in Philippians 1, verse 1-11

I don't want to spend a lot of time in this, but I think it can be beneficial. First we see here in the first verse that Paul refers to himself and Timothy as bond servants. We already went through the few different views of the translation of the word to servants when in actuality it means slaves. This is an important distinction because a servant is anyone who serves, but a slave is not just a mere servant but is owned.

There is so much theological meat here, about being a slave to Christ, what that means, and why that is so. Quickly, the reality is that no one is truly free, we are either a slave to the world or we are a slave of Christ's. The stark difference is that the world brings with it misery, death, and destruction, to which we are slaves to, and have no escape from unless we have been purchased, paid for and ultimately adopted by God through his Son, who paid by the shedding of his own blood on the cross..

While it is completely proper to use the term slave of Christ, for we recognize that nothing we have is of our own, we are not mere servants who have decided to sacrifice ourselves to Christ for payment, but rather we were in chains, lost in sin with no way out, and Christ purchased us with his blood setting us free from those chains of sin leading to death. I think the best way to get a picture of this type of thing is to think of the actual practice of slavery, we have gone from a master who drives you to destruction, who works you to death, but it goes even further than that, we are convinced that this is a great life and we are free to do what we want, except our wants are always self serving, and wicked. We are a slave to selfish desire, slaves to sin, and we seek comfort and joy in the empty pleasures of this world, Yet we have been bought by a new master who is gracious, merciful and kind who not only frees us from the chains, but makes us a part of his family, we now enjoy true peace and comfort and we now have a father who provides and offers us comfort beyond anything that this world has to offer.

So while we are now adopted children set free from slavery, we want nothing more than to please our new father, and give praise to him who saved us from our wretched existence. So in a sense we have become slaves with a new master, but instead of ruled by fear, depression, anxiety, doubt, and despair, we serve our father out of love and an understanding that we owe him all for what he has done for us.

In the second verse we see something else here that has great doctrinal and theological meaning. Paul says speaking to all the believers in Philippi, "Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. So this may seem pretty straight forward, but yet it has a powerful meaning buried within its subtleties. "God our Father, AND the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul does not put one over the other. Both here, are equal, God, and Christ. He does not say, Grace to you from God our father, and also his created Son Jesus. God, and Christ here are on equal footing. And while it may be argued

that the doctrine of the trinity is never explicitly mentioned in scripture...it is talked about throughout the entire bible and this is one place that we can see as evidence as such.

This seems rather normal fair here in modern Christianity. But think of how this language has an effect on a Jew, or anyone says that they believe in God, and that Jesus was just a prophet, or a good teacher, or his created Son. As I said, this little subtle verse is just steeped in theological importance. Now, it makes sense why John says that anyone who denies the Son, denies the father and his a spirit of Anti-Christ. Let us turn over real quick to 1st John chapter 2. Starting verse 22.

“Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also. Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that he has promised us- Eternal Life.”

Notice again here, John does not put one over the other, but both are equal. In fact he says you can not have one without the other. And if he abides in you, what do you have? Eternal life. This eternal life isn't just a promise that you will live forever, But brings with it a present, current aspect. If you abide in Christ, you will have eternal life abiding with in you, for this eternal life is Christ abiding in you. Quickly, lets look over at the opening of 1st John and we will see here there is more to this promise of eternal life then living forever in either heaven or hell,

Verse 1. “ That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our own eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of Life. John saw Christ, the Word of Life, he had fellowship with him, traveled with him, ate with him, prayed and worshiped with him, and he says in verse 2 of chapter 1. “the life was manifested and we have seen, and bear witness and declare to you that eternal life, which is Jesus Christ, which was with the father and was manifested to us, that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Once again, we see...equals, God and Jesus. And we see that this eternal life that we have been promised has both a future, and a current fulfillment. Those who are adopted children of God, those who's lives are hidden in Christ, have Christ abiding with us, the Eternal life, the Word of Life.

Moving on to the next few verses here, we see that Paul says that he prays for the church at Philippi, and he rejoices in them as he says in verse 5, “For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” This same fellowship that we just read John talking about, around the gospel of Christ, And he goes on to say, being confident in this very thing that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This pretty much was my main focus last time we read through here, what blessed assurance is this. That God who calls us, who works in us salvation will not leave us, will not forget about us but will continue working in us until the day of Jesus Christ. Paul is likely referring here to the day when Christ shall return and gather all those who are in him to himself, but I think in the context here we can actually apply this to our lives now.

Each and every one of us will eventually have our own day of Jesus Christ. While our souls

maybe eternal, our physical bodies are not. One day this body will die, and we will see that Day of Jesus Christ, So I think Paul is saying...I rejoice, and I am confident that since Christ has done a good work in you, since Christ has quickened you, made you alive, has bought you out of slavery of sin, and made you children of God, that you will continue, you will persevere, in faith, in Christ until the end.

As many of you know of the circumstances here the past few weeks, this right here was my hope, and this right here was my guide of operation. Just as Paul said, I too was confident that if the holy spirit was present, that he would do his work and all things would once again return as it was. My only real concern was how long that was going to take, but praise God it ended up being a very short trip.

God promises that he will not lose any of his children, that all that he draws to himself will come to him and none will be lost. If you have this good work in you, then it will continue until the day you die. God's children, the Saints in Christ.. will persevere until the end.

Another thing we notice here, in these verses is Paul's prayer for them. Verse 4 he says, "Always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with Joy. Paul's writing of this book serves multiple purposes, he writes to inform them of his personal circumstance, he reports that the gospel is spreading, he writes to give spiritual encouragement and to express that he is thankful for the ways that they have helped reinforce his mission.

Paul sets forth an example for us, he says in verses 3 and 4. "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy." As we read this morning in Thessalonians, Paul exhorts them to rejoice always, and pray without ceasing giving thanks in everything. I think we all tend to have routines, we have our times of prayer. At the start of the day, before meals, before bed are all common times that are observed for prayer. But do we like Paul pray often, constantly, and without ceasing?

Before the birth of Jesus, the Old Covenant laws set forth specific times, and dates and places for offerings, but now that Christ has come and has established a New Covenant we no longer offer these ritual sacrifices but instead as Paul said in Romans, we present our bodies as a living sacrifice, to be holy and acceptable to God which is our reasonable service. One way we can do this is through prayer.

If we make it a habit to be more diligent in prayer, to focus our idle thoughts, and spend even those little moments we have praying and worshiping God I guarantee it will change your outlook on the day. James says to count it all joy when we fall into various trials. We often become so caught up in the trial we focus on ourselves, and our suffering and not looking to who God may use it. I think that if we make it a practice to be focusing our hearts and minds on Christ, that when these trials, or tough times come we will already be in a state of worship and praising God which will help to give a different perspective.

This is something that we all fall short on, and can be one of the most difficult things to accomplish. What we see here in Paul's prayer is an example to us how how prayer should be. Not only should it be constant and never ceasing we also can take a few other things from Paul's prayer here. In verse 1 we see who he is addressing in this letter, to all the Saints in Christ who is in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. Then in verse 4 he says that he prays for them all with Joy.

Paul makes it a priority to pray for his fellow brothers and sisters. That is something that should

always be apart of our prayer habits is to be mindful and to pray for each other.

Next we see that Paul is praying with affection. We see in his writing that Paul misses these brothers and sisters. He is often thinking of them, and rejoicing in their fellowship together in Christ. In verse 8 he says “ For God si my witniss, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

This is actually quite a challenge set forth to our prayer life. Paul isn't just praying for people in this church because he has been asked to by some organized prayer chain, but out of true and honest compassion and care for them. Not that praying for those we do not personally know or have been requested to pray for is wrong or anything, we should make sure that we are definitely praying for those who are in our local church bodies.

By Paul's example here we should be longing for our fellow church members. The local body is the the gathering of God's people, they are our brothers and sisters. As Paul says in Galatians that all of the law is summed up in this, to love your neighbor as yourself. If we are to love those who are not even a part of the body of Christ as we are to love ourselves we should most definitely be loving those who are a part of Christ's body gathering together in the local assembly.

As I said, this is actually quite a high standard that is set, and should challenge us not only in our prayer life but in our life together and toward each other. C.S Lewis gave some good advice for this. He said “The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love them.”

Notice also that Paul says here that his longing for them with the affection of Jesus Christ. This shows us 2 things, one is the amazing affection that Christ has toward us, Christ gave his life for the church, he loves the church, and longs for her. Secondly this affection that we have for one another comes through Christ himself.

There is a unity in the body of believers that can not be found anywhere else outside the church. There is a level of unity to be found in the world. People gather around like personality, there can be unity found in sharing the same interests, and hobbies. But in the church we see a unity around Christ, which supersedes all of these other things. The church is made up of all walks of life, people from different backgrounds, different races, different social status who all have various interests, hobbies and personalities. This unity around Christ takes people who would otherwise be at odds with each other and share a common love for their savior, and for each other because of Christ.

Which brings us to the 3rd example we find here in Paul's prayer in verse 9. “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.” We should be praying for this love to grow for each other, and for Christ for they are bound together. 1st John 4:20 “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. “

Love for God demands that we have a love for one another, and both of these must increase. An important part of this increase of love is to grow in knowledge and discernment. It is through the reading of scripture, the gathering together in worship, fellowshiping together around the cross of

Christ, praying together and for each other. These are all ways that we can grow in knowledge, discernment and love toward each other.

Blake White says, “ You will find that growing in the knowledge of God is fuel for the fire of worship. And it never runs out. The more we love, the more we learn, and the more we learn, the more we love.

The fourth example we see here from Paul, is that we should pray so that we can approve the things that are superior. Verse 10 continuing on from verse 9, “And this I pray” “That you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. “

If we are growing in love, and in knowledge it means that we should be able to determine what really matters. Unlike Israel under the old testament laws, we have freedom in the new covenant of Christ. because we are not under the law, we need something else working in us, we need a spirit filled discernment so that we can determine all things that are excellent, and from God. Paul writes in Roman's 12. “ do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

This renewing of the mind, being focused on Christ, being in prayer with out ceasing is how we can approve the things that are excellent and to be sincere without offense until the day of Christ. We should always be striving forward, to be more like Christ, We should be growing in love, and in purity because we are filled with the righteousness of Christ imputed to us. This imputed righteousness is our standing before God, we are sinners, God is Holy, we are unrighteous and God is righteousness but he has provided an alien righteousness for us through his Son Jesus Christ.

If we skip a head a bit, Chapter 3, verse 9 Paul says “That I may gain Christ, and be found in him not having my own righteousness which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith.

Discerning right, striving to be holy and pure does not come from operating under a list of rules and regulations. Instead of flows outward from a changed heart, which finds its right standing before God in the death and resurrection of Christ. Tim Keller puts it this way. “ Religion operates on the principle of I obey, therefor I am accepted by God. The basic operating principle of the gospel is I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ therefor I obey.” And we obey and are filled with the fruits of righteousness as Paul says in verse 11, to the praise and Glory of God.

This Prayer that Paul has for the Philippian church stands as an example to us for how we are to pray for each other. That we pray with genuine care and affection, we pray that we may grow closer together bound in the love of our Savior, seeking knowledge and discernment so that we can approve that which is excellent and be found without offense when the day of Christ comes.

Let us go from here today, determined to have our prayer life reflect that of Paul's. Praying constantly, remembering each other, rejoicing in God together, and growing in love toward God and each other.