

Learn to Give Thanks for Brothers and Sisters — Philipians 1:3-8

Introduction and Outline

- Bible reading: Psalm 122, Philipians 1:3-8
- Paul customarily begins by giving thanks for his readers. This thanksgiving is warm and full of saintly love. Today we will learn from Paul's expression how we should better love brothers and sisters in the church and be grateful for one another
- Outline:
 - Title: Learn to give thanks for brothers and sisters
 - 1. The occasion for thanksgiving - Every Memory (verse 3)
 - 2. Companion of thanksgiving - Supplication (verse 4)
 - 3. Reason of thanksgiving - Sharing in the gospel (verse 5)
 - 4. Motivation of thanksgiving - Hope of faith (verse 6)
 - 5. Relationship of thanksgiving - Partakers of grace (verse7)
 - 6. Source of thanksgiving - Affection of Christ (verse 8)

The occasion for thanksgiving - Every Memory

- "**remembrance** ": Or "memory". "I thank my God in my every memory of you". Paul is thankful for every memory of the believers in Philippi. - Choose what to remember! (See Philipians 4:8)
- Analogy: A fly flies over a desert and it finds a corpse; a bee flies over the same desert and it finds a flower. Because that's what they want to find! Do you want to find the corpse or the flower on your brothers/sisters? No matter what you want, I guarantee you can find it.

Companion of thanksgiving - Supplication

- "**in my every prayer for you all**": Thanksgiving and supplication are elements of prayer. Thanksgiving is to thank God for the grace we have experienced, and supplication is in order to see more of His grace. Thanksgiving in Paul's letters is always accompanied by supplication. The content of the supplication is in verses 9-11, and the focus is on the spiritual growth of the reader.

- **"always offering prayer with joy"**: Prayers focus on lack and need. When we focus on these things, it is often not a joyous mood. Paul can pray with joy because he fully trusts in God's faithful provision (vv. 5-6).

A thankful person will say the glass is half full when he sees a half glass of water, while an unthankful person will say it's half empty. The same is true of the lives of brothers and sisters. Thankful Christians can always see the work of sanctification that God has done in others, and unthankful people always see only the unsanctified part.

- **"Always", "for you all"**: the same root, denoting the wide scope, appears repeatedly in this paragraph, expressing the scope and intensity of Paul's thankful prayers. Remember to pray specifically for those brothers/sisters whom you do not love enough to be thankful for!

Reason of thanksgiving - Sharing in the gospel

- **"in view of your participation in the gospel"**: Literally, "sharing in the gospel", and the word "sharing" is where we get "fellowship" from.

The foundation of Christian fellowship/sharing is the life of the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:9), and so the word is also used for partaking in the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16) where we share in the abundant life of the Lord Jesus.

In Philipians, this kind of fellowship is particularly focused on the work of the gospel (Philipians 4:15-16).

- **"from the first day until now"**: When the gospel first came to Philippi, on the very day Lydia was converted, she immediately opened her home and showed hospitality to the missionaries (Acts 16:15). Later they used her home as a church meeting place (Acts 16:40). These little things Paul kept in mind and became a constant source of thanksgiving.

I often hear new believers say: I just believed, so I don't need to be in a hurry to serve. Philipians' participation in evangelism was "from the first day"! Those who truly know the preciousness of the gospel should have an unquenchable desire to serve.

- **"Gospel"**: Paul's thanksgiving is gospel-centered. A gospel-centered vision runs through the book (v 1:27).
- **"Until now"**: Not just a momentary zeal at conversion, but a continuous commitment. From the very first day, the work of the gospel was accompanied by persecution of the enemy (Acts 16:19-24, Philipians 1:28-30). Yet despite many difficulties, they have remained unwavering in their commitment to gospel ministry from day one "until now."

Theological point: The Perseverance of the Saint (Matt. 10:22)! It's not the decision you made ten years ago to become a Christian but the continuous commitment to the gospel ministry that proves God has really begun the good work in you (verse 6)!

Motivation of thanksgiving - Hope of faith

- **"For I am confident "**: Not a new sentence, but a causal clause that explains the motivation of Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippians!
- **"until the day of Christ Jesus"**: Paul's motivation for thanksgiving is neither the past nor the present, but the future — the day when Jesus Christ returns to judge the world and bring God's glorious kingdom. All unbelievers will be punished for their sins, and all believers will be fully sanctified to live forever with the Lord in glory.
- **"Good work"**: This term usually describes the work of believers (e.g. Ephesians 2:10), and verse 5 also refers to the good works the Philippians have done for the gospel. Here Paul goes deeper and says the reason they can do this kind of good work is because God has done a good work in them! The good work of believers shows the good work of God. Without God's good work, "All have turned aside, together they have become useless" (Romans 3:12).
- **"will perfect it"**: Unlike us who often make unfinished projects. God has absolute sovereign will, unlimited power, resources, and wisdom, and once the work of his salvation begins, it will never stop (see Romans 8:30)!

This good work, with respect to the individual, is called progressive sanctification; and with respect to the entire work of God's kingdom, is how God uses the collaborative effort of every progressively sanctified believer to work together for the progress of the gospel until all of the lambs He chose before eternity past have entered his kingdom!

An important mindset for thanksgiving for brothers/sisters is to realize that we are all half-finished products. We're all in the process of being polished by God. We are not what we will be, but we are not what we used to be!

Relationship of thanksgiving - Partakers of grace

- **"For it is only right for me"**: Literally "it is only righteous". We must give thanks for our brothers and sisters. Not doing so is a violation of God's righteous standard!
- **" I have you in my heart"**: Intentional remembrance. The focus of the "heart" in the Bible is often not the emotion, but the mind (Proverbs 4:23, Mark 7:21, etc.). Paul was always giving thanks for them in his prayers, intentionally bringing to mind their acts of faith and love in the Lord, their faithful participation in the gospel ministry, the grace of God they shared with Paul, and the wonderful works God had done on them. It was these remembrances that filled Paul's heart with love for them!
- **"you all are partakers of grace with me"**: Another mention of the "fellowship" or "sharing". From salvation, to working together for the gospel, to suffering together for the gospel, we all share the grace of God together.

- **"defense and confirmation"**: Legal terms that refer to defending oneself in court and proving one's innocence. Here Paul is not doing so for himself, but for the gospel. Paul is "appointed for the defense of the gospel" (v. 16), and this is the responsibility of every Christian (the word "answer" in 1 Peter 3:15 is the same word rendered "defense" here).
- **"imprisonment"**: The biblical use of "defense" is often associated with persecution (cf. Luke 21:12-14; Acts 22:1; 26:1, 8, 23). Through help and prayer, the believers in Philippi suffer and work together, and share the Lord's grace with Paul!

Source of thanksgiving - Affection of Christ

- **"For God is my witness"**: Paul's love was completely sincere, without the slightest exaggeration or flattery!
- **"with the affection of Christ Jesus"**: "affection" renders a Greek word that refers to bowels, the softest, most delicate internal organ most easily moved by emotions. As such, it is used to refer to emotions, the deepest ones. The heart of Christ is full of compassion and love. His compassion covers all our weaknesses and needs. We are to know "the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ" (Ephesians 3:18).
- Paul loved them "with the affection of Christ"! Only those whose life is united with the Lord can do it. For Christians, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).
2 Corinthians 5:14-15 "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

When the love of Christ motivates us to live for the Lord and to love one another, we become the channel through which the love of the Lord flows. May SLCCC be a church full of the Lord's love!