

Thank You For Finishing What You Start!

Philippians 1:1-11

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There is something about biblical gratitude that is interesting and even shocking. In the first five books of the Bible, nobody just says thank you.

The word used in Hebrew for thank you is *toda* and it does not appear in the five books of Moses other than five times in Leviticus as the name of a specific thanksgiving offering. Here is one example in Leviticus 22.

Leviticus 22:29 And when you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the Lord, offer it of your own free will.

Some translations translate that as, "offer a thank you offering to the Lord." So these five places in Leviticus are the only places that "thank you" is used.

Now this gives us the deep meaning of "thank you." It turns out that merely mouthing the words thank you is not part of God's biblical plan. Let me explain this here. It is preferable to do an action reflecting your gratitude.

In the biblical record, straight from scripture, Noah neglects to orally thank God for saving him from the Flood. Rather, his gratitude takes the form of building an altar.

Abraham never thanked God for his son Isaac, instead he circumcised his eight-day old son exactly according to God's command showing his obedience.

While the Israelites do sing a song of praise to God after their deliverance from Egypt, they never actually say the words "thank you" in Scripture.

Leah names her son Judah, which means "praise," to commemorate her feelings of gratitude rather than simply saying the words thank you.

Now there is something for us to learn from this. To the best of our abilities we should use an action to represent our attitude rather than just mouthing the words. Or, at the very least, specify the details about which we are grateful as we see demonstrated in Psalm 136.

King David says thank you to God but he does not stop there, he goes on for 26 verses specifying what acts of God he so deeply appreciates. Here are some of those verses:

Psalm 136:1 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 136:5 To Him who by wisdom made the heavens, for His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 136:7 To Him who made great lights, for His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 136:13 To Him who divided the Red Sea in two, for His mercy endures forever.

Psalm 136:23 Who remembered us in our lowly state, for His mercy endures forever.

Appreciating the people around us is one way of appreciating God as well. After all, imagine the terrible loneliness if God did not provide us with a world full of potential friends, partners, and companions?

I have often read Philippians 1 and overlooked what it says in the first part there. So today I would like to evaluate what this section is actually saying here. People often think of it as a mundane scripture, but we are to live by every Word of God, so let us take a closer look at Philippians 1.

The apostle Paul wrote a thank you note to the believers of Philippi for their help in his hour of need and he uses the occasion to send along some instruction on Christian unity. His central thought is simple: only in Christ are real unity and joy possible. With Christ as our model of humility and service we can enjoy oneness of purpose, attitude, and labor. This is a truth which Paul illustrates from his own life and one that the Philippians desperately need to hear.

So within their own ranks, fellow workers in the Philippians church were at odds, hindering the work in proclaiming new life in Christ, and because of this, Paul in the last chapter of Philippians exhorts the church to “stand fast, be of the same mind, rejoice in the Lord always, and in everything in joy and supplication with thanksgiving, let your request be known and the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ.”

What do you do when you pray? Perhaps you will answer, “I ask God for anything I really need, if I get desperate enough for something, or if I wind up in real trouble I pray to God about it.” Is this really what prayer is all about? We will read Philippians 1:1-7 here.

Philippians 1:1-2 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before we continue on here, I want to point out that an answer to that question, “is that really what prayer really all about,” comes in here in the opening chapter of Philippians.

Paul has just introduced himself to the Christians in Philippi and has greeted them in the name of Jesus Christ. His usual salutation is followed by his thanksgiving, his warm regard and prayer on behalf of the Philippians. He mentions how he prays for them beginning with spiritual needs and that is what he begins to say in verse 3.

Philippians 1:3-7 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

Now in Paul's mind spiritual realities always came before physical ones. He was not insensitive to material needs, at times he mentioned them, but he knew that these things were always less important than the spiritual things, for himself and also for all Christians.

Consequently, when Paul writes to the Philippians, he is thankful above all for their fellowship in the gospel. This should encourage us to give thanks for those things we easily take for granted and only notice when they are missing.

You will be pleasantly surprised to discover how uplifting it feels to appropriately deliver an appreciation.

Paul's thank you note is a great prayer and as a result it is an example of prayer in which we may pattern our own prayer life.

I find it interesting that the first words of Paul's prayer in his various epistles involves thanksgiving. Paul did this not only in regard to the Philippians church, where there was a lot to be thankful about, but also in regard to the believers in Rome that he had not met yet and to the believers in Corinth who were behaving badly as Christians and caused him a lot of distress and headaches.

In his prayers, Paul always thanked God for the evidence of spiritual blessings among Christians. And although Paul was sensitive to the problems in God's churches, he was even more sensitive to the mercies of God.

He knew people's hearts, he knew that there was no good in man that can totally please God, and he knew that Christians live a great deal of their lives in the flesh instead of in the Spirit. He knew that we all fall short of what God would like us to be. But Paul was also acquainted with God's grace and he glorified in it. He knew that God has provided wonderfully for His children for their salvation and continuing growth in the Christian life. Consequently, Paul was continually thankful for these things.

Do our prayers follow this pattern? We seem to be uneasy with prayer when it is nothing more than a string of requests, nevertheless we often pray this way, but it should not be so. Our prayers should be primarily spiritual prayers and they should be filled with thanksgiving.

In some of the world's languages giving thanks is the basic meaning of the word prayer. A very important Greek word for prayer is *eucharisteo*, which means to give thanks. One of the most important Latin words for prayer is *gratia*, from which derives the English word grace.

Originally "grace" had two meanings. On the one hand it meant grace in the sense of God's unearned and unmerited favor. It is the free expression of the loving kindness of God, and that is what the word generally means in English. But *gratia* also means thanksgiving. For example, some people refer to asking for God's blessing on a meal as saying grace.

The root meaning of the words and the example of Paul teaches us that our prayers should be filled with thanksgiving and more than this they should be filled with thanksgiving for spiritual things.

We must thank God for Christ, for His love, for His Holy Spirit, for the support of other Christians, for freedom of worship, and a host of other spiritual things. One of the standards you can measure your maturity in prayer is the amount of time in prayer you spend rejoicing in Him and thanking Him for the spiritual blessings He has given you through Christ.

The thing that Paul is most thankful for in regard to the Christians of Philippi is their fellowship with him in the gospel. He says, "from the first day until now," in verse 5. He is thinking of his entire relationship with them.

Now what does this mean? The word fellowship has been watered down in contemporary speech that it conveys only a faint suggestion of what it meant in earlier times. When we speak of fellowship today, we generally mean no more than comradeship, the sharing of good times or good things. But fellowship originally meant much more than just the sharing of something. It meant the sharing of something or participating in something greater than the people involved and more lasting than the activity of any given moment.

When the Bible uses the word fellowship it means being caught up in a communion created by God. Let me explain it in a different way. British universities are not organized in the same as American universities, with a central admissions office and various dormitories. Instead British universities are organized by colleges within the university and each college has its own structure, admissions policy, and its own distinctive traits. It governs its own students and it has the final say about how the college is run.

The affairs of the various colleges are conducted by the professors associated with it. They are called fellows, because they are men who fellowship together in the work of the college. They gather for meetings that will direct the affairs of the college. In these meetings, they share not merely what is of interest to just two or more of them, but what is held in common by them all. Their fellowship consists of their mutual interest of the college and the share that they have in it.

This is the way that the Bible regards fellowship. And it is this for which Paul was so thankful in the case of the young church in Philippi. They may have had things in common, but Paul is not speaking of these, he is thankful for their share in the gospel of God which is a divine fellowship. They were united, not on a social level, but by their commitment of the truths of the gospel.

Now we do not know much about the church in Philippi. We know that it was largely a Gentile church because the names associated with it are Gentile names. It was also a very heavily militarized city, a major military base for the Romans.

We know that the congregation consisted of a jailer, a violent man who would have killed himself in a crisis except he had been restrained by Paul, a slave girl who had been delivered of spirit, a business woman who traded in purple cloth from Asia, who had also been a Jewish proselyte.

Apparently there was little to bind them together by worldly standards, they had nothing in common from a secular standpoint. But they had one great thing in common and that was fellowship in the gospel of God. This brought them together and Paul says that they continued in the fellowship of the gospel from "the first day until now." They were loyal, they were faithful, and were even persecuted at times.

Now this must always be the bond between Christians. If you unite with other Christians on the basis of affluence, you will exclude the poor. If you unite along social lines, you will exclude those outside of your level of society, be it high or low. If you unite intellectually, you will exclude either the simple or the intelligent. No matter how you do it, the witness of the church will suffer, if you base it only on these secular aspects. How thankful we must be that God did not establish the fellowship of His children along these lines. Our fellowship is in the gospel of God.

In two other places in his epistle, Paul again mentions fellowship. In Philippians 2:1 he speaks of fellowship with the Spirit. What does this mean? If a “fellowship of the gospel” means a mutual participation in the gospel, a “fellowship with the Spirit” must mean a mutual participation in the Holy Spirit.

It does not mean a fellowship between spirits, as between your spirit and mine. It does not mean that we all receive a little bit of the Holy Spirit, like water being poured into a glass. It means that we *participate* in it. And because we share in the participation in the Holy Spirit, Paul admonishes the Philippians to strive to be of one love, of one accord, and of one mind.

In Philippians 3:10, Paul mentions a different kind of fellowship, a fellowship in the sufferings of Christ. There is a sense in which we can have fellowship or participation in His sufferings. As we come to know something of His sufferings, we can also come to know more about Him and become more like Him.

Sometimes God’s purpose in suffering is to stimulate the insensitive attitude, the lackadaisical attitude to awaken the self-satisfied person to the spiritual dimension of life.

People often reach for God in a moment of great mental and physical suffering, who would have never responded to Him in other circumstances. For example, the death of a loved one often causes someone to decide that they would like to turn to God and maybe even be baptized. But that does not necessarily mean that it is a genuine conversion, because later you find out that it is not something that they are going to do for the long term.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This is probably one of the three greatest verses that teach the perseverance of the saints. People lack perseverance generally, they start things and then drop them. As men and women we are always beginning things that we never actually find time to finish. But God is not like that, He never starts anything that He does not finish; God perseveres.

Now if God has begun something in your life then you have no need to fear that you will ever be lost unless you absolutely reject Him and turn against Him. Your confidence should not be in yourself—neither in your faith or in your early spiritual successes—but always in God. God is eternal, but human nature tends to change. Sometimes we overcome, but then eventually go back to doing it again.

God is the one who calls us as Christians, He is the one who leads us on in His way of life, and He is the one who will lead us into His Kingdom.

There are two more passages along with Philippians 1:6 that are the greatest expression of this theme in the entire Bible.

John 10:27-28 “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.”

That shows God's perseverance for us, His faithfulness to us and that He always finishes what He starts.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We have just read three guarantees that show God's perseverance and faithfulness to each and everyone of us.

The perseverance of the saints is also known in a less formal statements in literally dozens of other passages. David writes:

Psalms 138:8 The Lord will perfect that which concerns me; Your mercy, O Lord, endures forever; do not forsake the works of your hands.

In other word he is saying that the Lord will fulfill His purpose.

II Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

II Corinthians 4:14 knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

Hebrews 10:14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

The perseverance of the saints is also suggested by the images that are applied throughout the Bible. In Psalm 1:3, along with the following scriptures, the saints are compared to things with permanent foundations.

Psalms 92:12 The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

Psalms 125:1 Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

Matthew 7:24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock."

These passages teach that the One who has been born from above by God will never be lost. God never abandons His plans, He never begins a work that He does not finish.

People do not naturally seek God, they naturally reject Him, and if we are saved it is only because God comes to us first by grace.

Romans 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The term “justified freely” is in effect as the result of the redemptive and propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ who has settled all the claims of the law.

Paul wrote to the Romans that no human being will ever be justified in God’s sight by his own good works. For all works, no matter how good they may seem in man’s sight, fall short of God’s standard of righteousness.

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Furthermore, human beings do not seek God and we see that in verses 9-12.

Romans 3:9-12 What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written: “There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.”

So before God calls a person, he or she does not even begin to meet God’s standards of righteousness, and we do not know it unless God reveals our failure to us. Initially we do not understand His way of life and we do not seek the one who can help us. Still God comes to us, He opens our eyes, gives us the faith to believe and draws us to Himself.

Salvation is always God’s gift and before we were even a gleam in the eye of our earthly father we were beloved in the eye of our heavenly Father. He knew all about us before we were even born and He did so in order that one day He might make us like His Son Jesus Christ, in love, knowledge, holiness, and all His other perfections. That is why Paul can say what he says in Romans 8 of salvation, focusing every phrase upon God.

Romans 8:29-30 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Do you hear any doubt at all there? Did you ever stop to question why God saves people in this way? The answer is that God has saved us in this way so that no one might boast of himself.

Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

God will have no one in His Kingdom bragging about how he or she got there. Neither is it about God doing most of it. Granted, we must respond positively to His call, but salvation is a gift, it is not because of our faith. No one will be in His Kingdom who does not believe that salvation is entirely a gift from God.

In spite of ourselves, we are brought to safety, not by our own efforts or our own devices, but solely by the faithfulness of our heavenly Father. So where do works fit in? God has not saved us just to save us, He has saved us for a purpose.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

God will keep on whittling away at our carnality until He accomplishes His purpose in us. In verse 6, Paul says that God is determined to do a good work in us. What is that good work? The answer is not spelled out too clearly in Philippians, but it is spelled out very clearly:

Romans 8:28-29 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. [verse 29 tells us what that purpose is] For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Think about this. God is so delighted with Jesus Christ that He has called millions of sinful human beings to Himself in order that Christ might reproduce Himself in them and that this universe might be populated by millions in the image of Christ. The point is that we will be like Christ, we will reflect His character, and we will be conformed to His image.

Now the purpose of the sanctification process is to teach us to rely on God. God does not take great pleasure in forcing us to develop low opinions of ourselves. As Christians we often feel very low and not worthy at times, but God knows that we will never rely on Him until we realize that we cannot rely on ourselves as human beings.

God wants us to persevere and rise in righteous stature and this is His purpose in saving us. He wants us to rise to Christ's own stature, and in fact, He insists on it. He teaches us to spiritually climb by spiritually resting on Him.

Ephesians 4:13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

God will do it because He knows that it is the only way we will learn to trust Him, and to trust Him is the only way to spiritually climb and mature. Also He will keep at us, He will not let us quit. He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

This is the way that God works. Humanly we want to run our own life, pick our own goals, and choose our own purposes, but sooner or later God will cleanse us of that mindset. We must learn that He is determined to accomplish His purposes in us, so we must be willing to learn to rely on Him, growing in grace as He molds us into the image of Christ.

Philippians 1:4-8 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

This is what communion and fellowship with Jesus Christ and fellowship with one another should be producing.

There was nothing exclusive about the apostle Paul or his Christian greetings. Four times in the opening verses in Philippians, Paul reveals that he includes all the believers in his thinking, he leaves no one out. It does not matter if they are rich or poor, slave or free; he is inclusive of all Christians.

For example, he “prays for them all” in verse 4, he is “confident of them all” in verses 6-7, he “speaks well of them all, being certain that they are all recipients of God’s grace” in verse 7, and he “longs for them all” in verse 8. So we should ask ourselves if this describes our feelings for the brethren.

Paul’s remarks include all Christians, because he knew that all had been brought by God into a great and enduring fellowship.

Paul’s greeting is an example of Christian brotherhood. It was a new thing in Paul’s day. In the first Christian century, the world was filled with barriers, just as it is today. Barriers of wealth, race, education, culture, political stance. There was a barrier between the Jews and the Gentiles. The Jews were fiercely proud of their religious heritage, the Gentiles were equally proud of their intellectual attainments.

There was a barrier between the Romans and the Greeks. The Romans glorified in the strength of their empire and Roman law, and the Greeks viewed the Romans as upstarts, as members of the newly arrived rich. They despised Roman culture as inferior to their own culture and as an imitation of it. There was a barrier between the free person and the slave. There was a barrier between the elite class and the common person.

And all throughout human history there is Satan’s instigation and influencing people to feel that way. Human nature is naturally that way, and Satan just continually stirs it up. That is why society is getting as bad as it is.

All these groups in society were bound together by the chains of Roman rule. Roman, Greek, Jew, soldier, priest, slave, aristocrat, but there was no such thing as a brotherhood that joined them; there was no fellowship in the nation or empire of Rome. Fellowship was found first and only among Christians, and Christians were one. They confessed one Lord, they knew one’s salvation and all the barriers of the empire were there within the Christian church, but the Christian simply overlooked them.

Those who were truly converted met, not as antagonists, but as those who had been called out of darkness by Jesus Christ and made alive in Him. They loved one another and the world marveled at it.

One of the well-known pagan writers exclaimed, “behold how these Christians love one another!” So it was obvious to the world at that time; they witnessed the love shown by the Christians at the time.

What was true of the early church in its best days should be true of us today. However sometimes sadly it is not. If you are a Christian, you belong to God’s church and should be welcomed as a believer by believers. The same is true whether you are rich or poor, white or black, white collar or blue collar worker. In addition, you are to welcome other Christians as you would want to be welcomed.

You are called upon to love all your brothers and sisters in Christ and you are to pray for them all; be confident of them all, speak well of them all, long for them all, and you are to do so even more as you grow in Christian maturity.

Now to look at these verses more closely is also to see how we can attain Christian fellowship today. First of all Paul writes:

Philippians 1:4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.

That it is the kind of attitude that we should have when we pray for one another. It should be a joyful attitude, one of thankfulness for one another. Christians should gladly pray for other Christians.

Prayer is talking with God and it grows out of fellowship with God, and it is something we are told to do constantly.

Colossians 4:2 Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.

Ephesians 6:18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.

Romans 12:12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer.

Now of course this does not mean that we are to give ourselves to nothing but a constant repetition of prayers, or that we are to detach ourselves from life.

For one thing these statements were made by Paul and he was an active person, he was all over the Mediterranean world at that time. In addition, Paul's statements are generally set in a context that includes practical suggestions for Christian activity. Paul's statements do not mean that we are to retreat from life, they simply mean that we are to cherish a constant and growing fellowship between ourselves and our heavenly Father in which we bring all the details of our lives before Him.

God wants us to be detailed in our prayers, to tell Him what is really bothering us. He wants us to be detailed when we pray for one another and not to speak in generalities. This will change us if we do it. It will change the details of our lives, sometimes our whole direction. It will change our relationship toward other Christians.

You begin by coming to God about someone you dislike or are irritated by and God is glad to hear your views, if you are humble and honest with Him. God increased the fellowship by changing you, which is the most interesting part. When we go to pray to God about a problem we are having with someone else, what God does is changes our attitude toward the situation to be forgiving and humble.

Now one other thing that needs to be added here is that prayer of this type will draw you together with other Christians.

Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

They "continued steadfastly in prayers." Most divisions between true believers would be vastly improved if Christians would learn to pray specifically and constantly for one another.

The second statement in which Paul mentions “all believers,” is when he says that he is confident for them all.

Philippians 1:7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.

What does he mean by this? He is referring to what he has just said in in the previous verse.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now Paul not only prayed for the Christians at Philippi, he was also confident for them all. He knew that God was at work in them and would certainly accomplish His purposes in their lives.

This strikes at the heart of attitudes that divide us from other Christians. We separate ourselves from other believers because we believe that they are on the wrong track and that we are on the right one. They do things that we regard as worldly or they interpret some biblical prophesy differently and/or apply principles more liberally than we do and we completely lose sight that God is as much at work in them as He is in us.

We must have confidence in God’s work in other Christians, if we did, we would not see them as those to whom to separate ourselves, lest we be contaminated, but rather as those from whom we can actually learn from and whom we can help along in living God’s way of life.

This third statement in which Paul mentions “all believers” refers to God’s grace. He says in the KJV version:

Philippians 1:7 (KJV) Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

This seems to imply that the believers in Philippi were co-participants in the grace that was given to Paul. God gave Paul grace to be an apostle, to preach the gospel, to be able to present it clearly and they shared in it.

Now certainly Christians shared in the grace given to Paul by God, just as we all share in the grace given to one another, but that is not the teaching in this passage here. The Greek says literally here: “All of you being participants with me of grace.”

It is not that Paul’s grace is shared with them; it is rather that all alike from the great apostle to the most humble believer are participants in the grace of God. This truth very quickly helps us to overcome divisions among Christians because it is the truth that we are all sinners and all recipients of grace.

Now the fourth and last thing Paul says about “all Christians,” is that he longs for them greatly. It is not just enough to tolerate other Christians; you must enjoy their company and that could be the greatest challenge of all at times.

You must learn from them, furthermore this fellowship must be one that is constantly expanding to include other Christians, even those whom you have never met but with whom you are forever united in Christ.

There is a wonderful illustration of this expansion of Christian fellowship in the final chapter of Romans. Paul was in Corinth and had probably been working at this great letter to the brethren in Rome for weeks. Many of the Christians in Corinth may have gathered around to hear him as he dictated to his secretary. Now they were assembled to hear his final teaching.

Gaius is there, a rich man and believer in whose house Paul was living and Gaius had provided Paul with a slave to transcribe his dictation. Erastus is also there and he was an elected official; he is the treasurer of the city and also a believer in Christ. Then there were Paul's fellow workers, Timothy, Luthius, Jason, and Sosipater. There are slaves, Tertius, the slave who actually wrote the letter as Paul dictated it, and Quartus, a low-ranking slave of the household.

Now look what happens as Paul draws his letter to a close. He has finished one set of greetings, he has made some final remarks, and now he looks around at the group surrounding him and he sees they are all genuinely interested in the Christians at Rome whom they had never seen, but whom Paul is writing. He begins to include greetings from the Christians at Corinth by name. (He is writing from Corinth to the Christians in Rome.) We will read in Romans 16 here.

Romans 16:21 Timothy, my fellow worker, and Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my countrymen, greet you.

At this point Paul stops, but Tertius the slave keeps on writing as scribes sometimes did in antiquity. What he says is in verse 22, continuing on here:

Romans 16:22 I, Tertius, who wrote this epistle, greet you in the Lord.

Then Paul picks it up again with a reference to his host and the treasurer of Corinth. Continuing on in verse 23 here:

Romans 16:23 Gaius, my host and the host of the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you, and Quartus, a brother. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

At this point, Quartus, the least important slave is afraid of being left out and raises his hand and Paul adds quickly, "Quartus, a brother." All have been included, and all have expressed their greetings in the Lord to a group of believers none of them have ever seen before. Paul goes on to the end of the epistle in four more verses.

Now what a revelation of true Christian fellowship this is here. This is a good example for us, as Christians. You may not be an apostle like Paul, but you may be able, like Gaius to open your house to fellow Christians. You may not be rich like Erastus, you may be poor like Quartus or Tertius. You may have no house to open, but you can open your heart in kindness, encouragement, and prayer. Through you the love of Christ can go out to believers around you and to believers to whom you have never seen.

God is no respecter of a person's wealth or position, but He is pleased with the genuineness of Christian fellowship.

John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

One of the reasons why God has called us is for us to learn to be fruitful Christians. He has not called us merely that we might be free from judgment and enter into His Kingdom, but rather that the character of Jesus Christ might be reproduced in us.

We are to live in the flesh but not be of the flesh. We are to live in the world, but not to be of the world, and we are to do good works to glorify Christ, and by our example, help to bring many to faith in Him. We will read verse 8 of Ephesians 2 because it is stated in such a wonderful way here.

Ephesians 2:8-10 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

These verses say three things here. First, it says that God has saved us by grace. Second, it says that He has a plan for our lives and third it says that there are good works in that plan.

God is somewhat like a father who is raising a large family. He is pleased to have the family and He is delighted that you are a member of it, but He is not satisfied only with that. He also wants you to grow up to be a good citizen, spiritually speaking, and He wants productive children. He wants your life to be fruitful with good works and this is the message of Philippians 1:9-11.

Philippians 1:9-11 And this I pray [this is Paul speaking here], that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 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.

As a side note here "being without offense" also includes being just a genuinely nice person. If you are antagonistic, get irritated or angry with people often, that is not "being without offense."

In praying for the Christians in Philippi, Paul asked for three things here. He prays that their love might abound in all knowledge and discernment. He prays that their lives might be lived free of hypocrisy. And he prays looking forward to the natural result of the first two requests, that they might be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

There is an illustration of these three relationships in the area of electrical science, which I find fascinating. Anyone who has any acquaintance at all with electrical theory knows that the basic formula is volts times amps equals watts. Voltage is a measurement of pressure. Amperage is a measurement of flow, and wattage is a measurement of power; it is the product of the pressure multiplied by the flow of electricity.

Everything that Paul says can be expressed through this terminology: all good works depend on being filled with God's love, which is the pressure behind good works. Good works also depend on a channel where the amperage, that is the flow, can be high. Our lives must not be filled with resistors which impede the flow, or condensers which store it up for private use—they must be open. So here then is the spiritual equation: The love of God times a life free of resistance equals good works.

The first thing in Philippians 1 that Paul says the Christians need is abounding love.

Philippians 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.

The Christian must be filled with God's love and this must be a love according to knowledge. The word used here is a special Greek word, *epignosis*. This refers to advanced spiritual knowledge. In the New Testament the word is applied only to spiritual things, spiritual knowledge, and doctrinal knowledge. It is a knowledge that only comes to us through a study of God's Word.

Now the love that is behind good works must also be discerning. This word has reference to the understanding by means given by the Holy Spirit. How do we become discerning? We ask God for discernment and He gives it to us through His Holy Spirit, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we are able to discern spiritual things.

The Word of God is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and by means of God's Spirit, enables us to discern how love should operate. Finally, the love in which the Christian should be filled must be discriminating.

Paul says that we are to discern what is best. The word translated discern in secular Greek refers to testing something or someone. It is the technical word for testing money to determine whether or not it is counterfeit. It occurs in a political context for the testing of a candidate for office. This is the word used by Paul in Romans 12, when he says:

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may [test and] prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

Christians are to be renewed by the Spirit so that they may test and approve what God's will is, if it is good, pleasing, and perfect.

We know we must be motivated and informed by love. Without love we are only clanging symbols. But this was never intended to be a wishy-washy, undefined, sentimental love, nor a love that manipulates someone else. It is the love of Christ and therefore it must be a love governed by biblical principles and exercised with judgment.

The second prerequisite of a fruitful life is that our life must be pure and free of obstructions. It must flow. The word used means "oven tested." This does not mean that we must be perfect, because none of us are, but it does mean that our lives must be opened before God and others, there must be no hypocrisy.

In ancient times the biggest industry in the world was the pottery industry and the pottery varied in quality, just as anything else. The cheapest pottery was thick, solid, and did not require much skill to make. It is found everywhere in archaeological sites.

The finest pottery was thin, it had a clear color, and it brought a high price. Fine pottery was very fragile, both before and after firing, and would often crack in the oven. Cracked pottery should have been thrown away, however dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling in the cracks with a hard pearly wax that would blend in with the color of the pottery, and this made the cracks virtually undetectable in the dark shops.

However, the wax was immediately detectable when the pottery was held up to the light, especially the sun. It was said that the artificial element was detected by sun testing, honest dealers marked their fine product with the caption “sine cera,” mean without wax.

Paul is saying that the flaws and lies of believers must not be covered up with “wax.” Our lives are not perfect. In this life we will always have flaws, but we must not disguise them artificially.

We must be sincere. God’s love will not flow through a Christian whose life is a sham. Hypocrisy will stop the flow! Gladly, however, we may also say that God’s love will flow through an honest Christian, no matter how marred the vessel is. Paul says here in II Corinthians 4,

II Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

Also we look forward to the day when what has begun on earth, with all its imperfections, will be made perfect of the Kingdom of God. There we will be sterling examples of God’s fine workmanship, and what will be of the finest quality, thanks to our molders Jesus Christ and God the Father.

This leads to the fact that we must be fruitful Christians.

Philippians 1:11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

This does not refer to internal righteousness. Love, joy, peace, and so on, are the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of righteousness. It refers to what is seen externally.

The fruit of righteousness is the fruit that righteousness produces and this is seen in the innumerable acts of kindness and service to which everyone in Jesus Christ is called.

Now we are not only called to bear fruit, we are called to be fruitful, that is to produce a lot of good fruit. But how is this done? First of all it is done by depending on Christ. This is what Jesus was talking about in the last moments He spent with His disciples before His crucifixion. Jesus said,

John 15:1 “I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser.”

John 15:4-5 “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the

branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” [There is no doubt in that statement there.]

So there will be no fruit apart from a dependence on Christ. As an example here, an unconverted person practicing good works is like a child just after he has fallen into a mud puddle. Worried that his mother may be upset, he comes through the front door and tracks through the living room to the piano and practices a bit. Then he goes into the bedroom to pick up his toys. After that he goes to the bathroom, then he shows up in the kitchen. Everywhere he has been there is mud!

What does his mother do? Instead of praising him for his good deeds, she takes him to the bathtub and bathes him. Then he is sent again to play the piano, put away his toys. In the same way, the unconverted person must be washed of his sins in Christ’s blood before he can even begin to produce the good works that God the Father has ordained for every Christian. Every unconverted person is walking around with mud on their shoes and no matter what good work they do it is tainted.

Let me give another illustration here. When Lawrence of Arabia was in Paris with some of his Arab friends after WWI, he took them to see some of the best sites of the city, but they found little interest in these things. The thing that really interested them was the faucet in the bathtub in the hotel room.

Some time later when they were ready to return home to the East, Lawrence found them in the bathroom trying to detach the faucet. They said, “You see it is very dry in Arabia, what we need are faucets then we will have all the water we want.”

Lawrence had to explain that the effectiveness of the faucets did not lie in themselves, but in the immense system of waterworks to which they were attached. He had to point out that behind all this lay the rain and snowfall of the Alps.

Now many people are living lives that are as dry as the deserts of Arabia and they have the faucets, but there is no connection to the pipeline. They must see God through Christ.

Other people are also parched, but they are parched for another reason. There are impurities that choke the lines. These impurities must be cleansed in order to produce good fruit. This cleansing is an ongoing process and involves Christ dwelling in us and helping us, in the power of God’s Spirit to overcome sin, Satan, and the world.

This process also involved faithful study of the Bible because it is through the Bible that we come to know Jesus Christ and God’s way of life. The first psalm compares the way of the ungodly man, whose life is fruitless, with the way of the righteous man whose life is fruitful.

Psalms 1:3 He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.

Why is he like this? The answer is found in verse 2.

Psalms 1:2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Instead of finding happiness in society and the distractions of the wicked, happiness is found in the truth of God. The law and truth of God is not unpleasant, but it is such a delight that it makes us want

more and more and we want to internalize it as a way of life. So the more we study and understand it, the more we want.

Christ's parable about the vine and the gardener in John 15, makes one more point about fruit bearing. You not only need to be joined to Christ in order to be fruitful, you also need to be pruned. This is the way that Jesus' parable begins, He says:

John 15:2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit."

So our lives have many things in them that are not bearing spiritual fruit. They may be hobbies, habits, relationships, aspects of your occupation, they may even be things that you consider so precious that you feel you would have to die if they had to be removed. Yet we should be "pruned" and God will work to do it in us. Not all hobbies, habits, relationships require pruning, God may use them now in excellent ways.

God prunes our idols off, and we must make sure that we are not still clinging to them when He does.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

The cutting may hurt, you may even think that God is cursing you when He is actually blessing you. That is the way discipline works, it is initially unpleasant, but the result will be good for you because it will result in good works done by Jesus Christ in you to the glory and praise of God.

God's action in Christ, even discipline, is that of grace and our response should be one of gratitude and thanksgiving. As thanksgivings abound, so God is glorified!