

In the book of Philippians, Paul greets the church at Philippi along with their elders and deacons. He begins in chapter 1 with a prayer asking God's spiritual blessings and peace on them. ***(1) Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:***

In most of Paul's letters, he begins with a statement of his apostleship; however in this letter he did not as Paul was writing to dear friends, but he does introduce Timothy. The church at Philippi knew Timothy, but perhaps they were not aware that he was with Paul in Rome since Paul was in prison at the time of this writing.

The letter was written to the saints. Saint means one who has been set apart to glorify God. Saint is a common name for Christians in the NT and is used more than sixty times. When one obeys the gospel, he is taken out of the world of darkness and set apart in Christ. ***Colossians 1:13-14 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: (14) In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins:*** A saint is different from other people. The person who loves God with all his heart and is seeking to live in accordance with the word of God is different from the person of the world who is not committed to God. They were "saints in Christ Jesus."

The epistle was also addressed to the leaders of the church, the elders and deacons. Bishops and elders are interchangeable terms as Titus 1:5 refers to elders and then are called bishops in verse 7. Bishops means overseers. Overseer means one who superintends or manages. In the NT the terms bishop, overseers, shepherds, pastors, presbyters, and elders all refer to the same group of men who were overseers of a single local congregation. Deacons were servants that helped the elders in whatever capacity they were assigned.

Now let's imagine that we have a time machine and we zapped the apostle Paul into our community. He has his friend Timothy with him as they spend a few weeks with us here at Blodgett. He got to know us in an individual way and we all loved him and his love for the truth. But finally he left for another place and after he left he wrote us this letter.

To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Blodgett, with the bishops and deacons: He introduces his letter to us by referring to us as saints in Christ Jesus. How exciting it is that we, members of the church at Blodgett, are called saints. A saint is someone that is holy or sanctified. This could not happen under the old Law of Moses. ***Hebrews 10:4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.*** This happens by the blood of Christ. (*Colossians 1:13-14 already noted*) How exciting it would be to get a letter from Paul.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. This was an unusual greeting in that Paul uses the Greek greeting “*grace*” along with the Hebrew greeting “*peace*.” Together they have a distinctive meaning to the Christian. Grace is the unmerited favor of God and all the blessings bestowed upon his children. Peace is a state of mind that includes the total well-being, which makes for man’s highest good. The greatest peace is the reconciliation of man to God through the blood of Christ.

Now in our letter, he sends to us his wishes that we have the peace from God our Father and from Jesus Christ our Lord. Perhaps he noticed such peace when he was here with us – that peace that passes all understanding. It’s a peace received FROM God our Father. We can’t have peace WITH God until we have peace FROM God.

Now we get into the comforting part of this letter. Paul tells those in Philippi that he remembered them always in his prayers. ***(3) I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, (4) Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, (5) For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;*** I remember you for your fellowship in the gospel. Fellowship means joint participation; sharing together. Paul was expressing his appreciation to the church at Philippi for their commitment to the gospel. The church there had supported Paul in the sharing of the gospel from the beginning of their relationship until the present. They helped Paul when he was in Thessalonica (Philippians 4:16). While he was in Corinth, the church in Philippi supported him so that he would not be a burden to the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 11:9). Some ten years later

the church in Philippi was still supporting Paul even when he was in prison. Paul was appreciative of their support.

What a blessing it would be in the letter to Blodgett to know how special we are to Paul, and that he remembers us always because of our commitment and willingness to sharing the gospel. Now there are many ways to share the gospel. It can be done by supporting missionaries that are willing to go into the mission field. This is what the church at Philippi was doing with Paul. It can be done through mailing Bible correspondence courses. It can be sitting in someone's living room doing a one-on-one study or by inviting people to our assembly. Regardless of the method, I hope Blodgett will be noted as a church for its fellowship in the gospel.

(6) *Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:* The second reason Paul was thankful to the Christians in Philippi was the fact that they were growing in spiritual maturity. Paul was confident God who had begun this work would bring it to a completion. The Christians at Philippi were demonstrating their obedience to God by living the Christian life and by helping Paul preach the gospel. They were growing spiritually and because of this commitment to growth, the work of God will continue until the day of Jesus Christ. This refers to the second coming of Christ.

As we continue to reading our imaginary letter, we find him saying he is confident that Blodgett will continue to grow and mature until the end. How would you feel if you knew that Paul was praying for our spiritual growth? He writes to the saints at Blodgett and says grow to the end.

Paul was also thankful to the Christians in Philippi and their support of him, and it was right for Paul to be grateful. This is what love does. **(7) *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 defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.*** The church in Philippi was partakers of his grace. By God's grace, Paul was selected in a miraculous way to be a preacher to the Gentiles. Being partakers of his grace simply

means that the Philippians were also a part of this preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul would acknowledge their coming to his defense in confirming the gospel and to his defense when he was in bonds. Because of this unwavering support, Paul had them in his heart.

It was important to Paul that the Philippians know the depth of his love for them. **(8) *For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.*** As God is my witness, I long for you in tender mercies of Christ Jesus. This was the type of love that the NT taught. ***John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. (35) By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.***

What a boost it would be to our spirits if we were to read that Paul appreciated our commitment to serving the Lord and that he longed for us with the tender mercies of Jesus Christ. Even while he was in prison, he was thinking of us and was praying for us.

(9) *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;* Paul prayed a heartfelt prayer for the Philippians. How encouraging it must have been to know that Paul had them in his prayers. They had love for God, love for Paul, and love for one another. Paul prayed that this love continue to grow. He prayed that their love would grow in knowledge and judgment (discernment); that they will be able to exercise good judgment and discern between good and evil; between right and wrong. True love grows in knowledge. If you fall in love with something or someone, you want to learn all you can about that thing or person. So I pray that you grow in knowledge. Love is not just a sentimental feeling; it has knowledge and judgment associated with it.

Maybe in our letter Paul would tell us that he was praying that we might continue to grow in the love of the Lord. This would be a complement as it implies that we love one of another. Yet he is also praying that we grow in knowledge and judgment. Notice the warning given in Hebrews 5. ***Hebrews 5:11-14 Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. (12) For when for the time ye***

ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. (13) For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. (14) But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. The Hebrew writer is saying, “*There comes a time when you need to grow up spiritually.*” This is what Paul meant when he prayed that we might abound more and more in knowledge. The end of Heb 5:14 addresses the idea of growing in judgment; discerning both good and evil.

Now as the Christians in Philippi grew in knowledge and judgment, the ability to discern between right and wrong, then they would be able to approve good things and would be filled with righteousness. They will do things according to God’s will which will result in bearing the fruits of righteousness, i.e. the benefits of doing right. ■
(10) That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; (11) Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Maybe to us Paul might say, Blodgett, be sincere in your behavior without offense. I am praying your life be filled with righteousness and well-doing. Put others first; approve things that are excellent unto the glory and praise of God. That is your primary purpose – to praise God.

Does that describe you? Are you a Christian?

Invitation