

Philippians 1

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[0 : 00] And turn to Philippians chapter 1. And we're starting a new series today in Philippians. And they go from the most shallow and superficial to the deepest and the most intimate.

So level 5, that's the outer circle. That's the circle of superficiality. The writer calls it cliché conversations. We've all had cliché conversations.

I mean Christians are very good at clichés. And that's level 5. Then you've got level 4. Level 4 is when we talk about other people. That's gossip. We talk about good gossip and bad gossip. Level 3 is where we communicate ideas. Level 2 is where we share our feelings. And level 1 is the most personal and intimate level of communication.

Based on openness and honesty. And it may surprise you to know that that is where the Apostle Paul is at. He's at circle 1.

[1 : 34] As he writes to the Philippians. And what may surprise you is because lots of people have got the wrong idea, haven't they, about the Apostle Paul. They imagine he's a rather difficult bloke. Unpopular sort of fella.

A bit of a cold fish. But nothing could be further from the truth. Look at verse 7, for example. Look at verse 7. Look at what he says there as he writes to the Philippians. He's saying, isn't he, it's right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

He says, I long for you with the affection, with the strong affection of the Lord Jesus. And the proof of that is his prayer.

The proof of Paul's love is his prayer. Nowadays, on the church in London, it prizes love, doesn't it? It prizes love and it despises prayer.

I don't think it's unfair of me to say that. We're all into love, aren't we? We want to be a loving church. We want to be a welcoming church. People are very, very keen on that.

[2 : 42] You ask the churches in Ealing. They all want to be loving, welcoming churches. But there aren't very many churches where there's a prayer meeting.

And even where there is, it's often very poorly attended. We live in a day that I think the church prizes love, despises prayer. But in the New Testament, if you loved, you prayed.

His heart goes out to them. He loves them. And so he prays for them. And as you look at this passage, you'll see that he prays in three directions. First of all, he looks back to the past with thankfulness.

He looks back to the very first day they believed, verses 3 to 5. And he's filled with gratitude for what he calls their partnership in the gospel. Look what he says in verse 5.

Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. We're talking probably about 10 years. Paul has planted the church in Philippi. It's a very small beginning.

[3 : 47] It's just a couple of women meeting by the riverside to pray. That there wasn't even enough men to have a synagogue. And yet that is how the gospel came into Europe.

Very small beginnings. And yet 10 years down the track, Paul looks back and he says, I look with gratitude, with thankfulness for your partnership in the gospel from that very first day up to right now.

What does that look like? What is this partnership in the gospel? In the Greek, the word is koinonia. It's often translated, isn't it?

Fellowship. And that's misleading because fellowship for you and I, it kind of means the warm fuzzy. It says that the fellowship of the ring. Or fellowship tea.

Fellowship tea and coffee after the service. Maybe you think of it as hanging about with your Christian friends and enjoying their company. And we call it fellowship. But that is nothing like what Paul is talking about.

[4 : 46] There's nothing warm and fuzzy at what Paul means by partnership. Paul and the Philippians are partners in crime. They're partners in crime.

Paul is in prison for the crime of preaching the gospel. And the Philippians are partners with him in that. They are accessories in that crime. They've aided and abetted the preaching of the gospel. And they stand with him. They share in it, in his imprisonment. They share in the shame of it, in the pain of it, in the discomfort of it. They are partners in crime.

And it's an active partnership. This word, *koinonia*, in the first century did commercial overtones. So, remember James and John, the sons of Zabatine, they decide to go into the fishing business. And so they go and they buy a boat and they go into business together. They're locked in together. They're locked in together. And that's what the word *koinonia* means. It's a working relationship.

[5 : 50] It's a financial partnership. So again, in 2 Corinthians, Paul uses this word to describe how the Macedonians gave sacrificially. These Macedonians, they gave to relieve the famine for the poor believers in Judea.

They gave sacrificially to help others. They gave out of their poverty even. And Paul calls that *koinonia*. This word, partnership, fellowship, it's got no hint of tea and cakes.

And Paul thanks God for them because he says, you Philippians, you have invested in the gospel. You've invested yourselves in the advance of Christ's kingdom.

You've rolled up your sleeves and you've got involved in this gospel enterprise. And you see, they're not only involved, are they? But they're committed.

What's the difference between involvement in a church and commitment to it? It's the difference of your breakfast.

[7 : 00] It's the difference, isn't it, between bacon and eggs. And so let's think if you were bacon and eggs for breakfast this morning. And the chicken, he made a contribution, didn't he? The chicken made a contribution to your breakfast.

It laid an egg. But the pig, the pig gave himself for your breakfast. There's a difference, isn't there, between involvement and commitment.

And you can be involved in a church, you can be on the fringes of the church. But to be committed to the enterprise of getting the gospel out to the world, that requires sacrifice.

And these Philippians, right from the very beginning, they are committed to the enterprise of getting the gospel out into the world. Of seeing churches planted. Philippi was a bridgehead for the gospel into Europe.

The reason that you are sitting here in Ealing this morning is because of Lydia and the Philippian jailer. And others like them who joined the team.

[8 : 05] Do you remember what it says? Paul went over to Macedonia. He heard this cry, come over and help us. And he went to Macedonia. And we're told he met Lydia. She was in the fashion industry.

She was a wealthy woman. And she had business interests in different parts of the empire. Homes in different cities. And we're told that the Lord opened her heart. Cracked open her life.

And she gave attention to Paul's preaching. And the Lord opened her heart. And when the Lord opened her heart, what did he do? He opened her home. And the church began in Philippi, in her living room.

And her home in Philippi became the place where Christians gathered together. And they were converted. And it became the headquarters for the advancement of the gospel into Europe. And that's the reason why many of us are sitting here today.

And Europe needs to be re-evangelized again, doesn't it? The point I'm making is this. They were stakeholders, not spectators. That is how we ought to think of ourselves when we become Christians.

[9 : 19] You are a stakeholder. A partner, not a passenger. They sent money. In some ways, Philippians is Paul's thank you letter. Philippians 4 functions like a receipt, really.

He thanks them for their financial contribution. It's a thank you letter. They sent money, but they also sent their own minister, Epaphroditus. To be with Paul in his imprisonment.

Nobody was chuffed about that. But he went and he was glad to go. And Paul was so glad of his company. And they prayed for Paul. Look what it says in verse 19. Paul is saying, I'm in prison.

I'm in chains. My life might even be threatened. But I know you've got a hold of the other end of the rope. Through your praying and through your prayers, this will turn out for the furtherance of the

gospel.

That's what partnership means. Let me just try and apply this to us here. I don't think, in my 20 years here, I don't think I've ever been more overwhelmed.

[10:34] I'm more excited at the possibilities that lie before us. It's quite a remarkable year last year. We've grown. And we're really thankful for that.

We don't really know why we've grown, but we have. It seems in the country there is a window of opportunity. There are opportunities to plant churches.

There are great guys coming out of Sanry who would be keen to plant churches. We haven't got the money, but they're there. There are great opportunities for the gospel.

And so I'm asking you, and I'm asking this congregation, are we going to be involved in that? Are you even aware of that? Are we going to be committed to that?

Are we going to financially and prayerfully get stuck in in the work of advancing the gospel? And there's a great work to be done, but it needs all hands on deck.

[11:37] If we're going to accomplish what Christ has for us, are we up for that? You might be new to the church. I remember reading of Catherine Booth.

Catherine Booth was the daughter of William Booth, who was the founder of the Salvation Army. And Catherine Booth was the leader of the Salvation Army in France. She was a pretty formidable woman. She was known as La Marichelle.

And one day she's on the train in her full Salian gear, in her uniform, and she's traveling on the train, and there's a man sitting opposite her, slightly nervous. She got into conversation with that guy.

And he obviously thought he should say something to her. He recognized the uniform, that she was religious, and he said, I go to church every week, I never miss.

And La Marichelle looked at him with amazement, and she said, you go to church? You go to church every week? Is that all you do for a lost and fallen world?

[12:41] You go to church? 97% of the population of England, probably more, is on their way to Hal.

But we go to church every Sunday. And we do church the way we like it. We don't think about all the people who are not here.

You see, there's gospel work to be done, isn't there? But there are two people willing to do it. And so we need an assistant minister.

We need someone to help with training. We need someone who can kind of compensate for my numerous witnesses, and obvious witnesses.

We need someone to help with buildings, who knows how to work the heating. We need to build more Sunday school rooms. There's no room. We need to train more workers for the harvest field.

[13:44] Do you realize that 10 people tithing is enough to start a church? We don't really major on tithing. It's not a requirement.

If you're going to join IPC, then you can 10% of your income. It's not a bad rule of thumb. 10 people tithing, whether they're pensioners or multimillionaires, or kids with their pocket money.

10 people tithing is enough to start a ministry, to start a church. Just think how many churches we could start in this country, in this city. If people were committed like these Philippians, to be committed financially to the advance of the gospel, because isn't that the one great thing that we're here for?

When you say, oh, that's just wishful thinking, it's kind of vision talk, it's impossible pipe dream.

Look at verse 6. Paul looks back with thankfulness, and he's seen it.

He's seen a church that started in a little prayer meeting by the riverside, and it's become the bridgehead for the gospel into Europe. And in 10 years, he's seen the gospel go through a continent.

[15:01] And he's thankful. But then he looks forward. He looks forward, secondly, and he's confident. Look at verse 6. And I'm sure of this, I'm confident of this, that you began a good work, and you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Do you sometimes wonder where things are going to be five years down the track? Ten years down the track.

Do you sometimes look at our country and tremble for the cause of Christ in the world? And sometimes you look at your own involvement and your own commitment, and you wonder, well,

what have I got to contribute?

How can God possibly use me? You may well have been let down by leaders in the past. You may well have been hurt by other Christians. You probably are frightened by the rising tide of opposition and pressure to all things Christian in the UK.

[16:06] But can you see, our confidence should not be in ourselves. And our confidence should not be in the church as an institution. Our confidence should not be in our political leaders, should it?

And their friendliness towards us. Our confidence needs to be in God himself. And in the gospel, confident of this very thing, that God, who began a good work in you, will complete it.

You see, God is not a God of half measures. When he starts something, he finishes it. He never does things by halves.

The work which his goodness began, the arm of his strength will complete. His promise is yea and amen and never was forfeited yet. So he looks back and he is thankful and he looks forward and he is confident.

And so that's where I find myself today. I look back and I am thankful for your partnership in the gospel. I'm grateful for what God is doing here.

[17:20] There is a work of God going on, isn't there? And I'm confident that what God will continue, what God has begun, he will continue because it's his work and not ours.

and it's not depending on any one person or personality, it is God's work. And so Paul prays for these Philippians and he prays for them in the present.

Thirdly, he prays for them in the present for their progress in the gospel. He's confident, not complacent. He's not complacent, he prays for them in the present and then look what he prays for. He prays for three things. Verse nine. And here is my prayer. Here is my prayer for you Philippians that your love may abound more and more with all knowledge and all discernment.

What does that mean? I think it can become a cliché that our love may abound more and more with knowledge and discernment.

[18:32] Sometimes I think it's helpful to turn them the other way around and almost think what they don't mean. Think of the opposite of what they mean. Paul is not saying and he's not praying for the Philippians to abound in ignorance and insensitivity.

He's not praying for them to abound in stupidity and ham-fistedness. He's praying that their love may abound in knowledge and depth of insight.

What does that look like? Remember what the apostle Peter said to the men he's writing to in 2 Peter?

He talks to Christian husbands and he says the same thing. He says love your wives and literally it's love your wives according to knowledge. The ESV puts it in a slightly different way.

Love your wives in an understanding way. It's actually love your wives according to knowledge. knowledge. Your love husband needs to abound in knowledge of your wife.

[19:44] She's a woman. She's not one of the blokes. So don't treat her like one of the blokes. Love her as a woman. Love her as she is the woman that God has given to you.

And let your love abound to her according to your knowledge of her. And so Paul is saying the same thing to the Philippians. It's a lovely example of a quotation from a surgeon.

Listen to this. It's a surgeon who performed surgery on a young woman. He writes this to the surgeon. He says I stand by the bed where a young woman lies.

Her face post-operative. Her mouth twisted in palsy. Clownish. A tiny twig of the facial nerve the one to the muscles of her mouth has been severed.

She will be thus from now on. The surgeon had followed with religious fervor the curve of her flesh. I promise you that. Nevertheless to remove the tumor in her cheek he had to cut out the little nerve.

[20:50] Her young husband is in the room. He stands on the opposite side of the bed and together they seem to dwell in the evening lamplight isolated from me private. Who are they?

I ask myself. He and this wry mouth I have made who gaze at and touch each other so generously greedily. The young woman speaks.

Will my mouth always be like this? She asks. Yes, I say it will. Because the nerve was cut. She nods and is silent.

But the young man smiles. I like it, he says. Kind of cute. All at once I know who he is. I understand and I lower my gaze.

One is not bold in an encounter with a god. Unmindful. He bends to kiss her crooked mouth and I am so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers to show her that their kiss still works.

[21 : 53] Beautiful, isn't it? Isn't that what Paul is talking about? Wouldn't it be great if church was like that? Wouldn't it be great if we had that kind of relationship with each other?

But how can we relate to each other with such sensitivity if we don't know each other? That's why the Lord's Day is such a blessing. It's why Lord's Day evening worship is such a blessing. We get to spend more time with each other to hear God's word. It's why house groups are vital. It's why hospitality of opening up our homes and welcoming people in to see us warts and all. They get to know us. They get to know us and that is how we're to abound in love and knowledge and depth of insight. I wonder, is that how we envisage church?

Is this how we pray for one another according to knowledge and depth of insight? Is that what we want for ourselves and for each other? But can you note it's not an end, is it?

[22 : 58] It's a means to an end. He's praying that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment. Verse 10, so that you may approve what is excellent. You see, Paul is the spiritual father of this church.

He's the church planter. He's 10 years old. If you're a parent, isn't it, you want what's best for your kids. And children, when you're little, your mum and dad, they tell you this is what's best. You don't know, believe it or not, little ones, what's best for you. And so your mum and dad have to make decisions for you. But if they're still making decisions for you when you're 30 years old, there's something wrong, isn't there?

Either he hasn't grown up, or you've not parented him very well. And Paul is concerned for these Philippians. He doesn't want them to be dependent on him.

He doesn't want a spirit of dependency on him in that congregation. He wants them to grow up so that they can make decisions for themselves.

[24 : 10] So that they will be able to discern what is best. They'll be able to prove what is excellent. It's amazing that some people, they operate in the world of business, where they find themselves working most of the time, and they've got great maturity.

They're able to make great decisions. They've got real responsibility. But when it comes to church and their Christian life, intelligent, qualified people who simply just want to be told what to do. And they want to be told what to think. And simply go with what they're told. They don't want to think about it too deeply themselves, but that's not Paul's vision.

Paul's vision for a church, a growing church, he wants his dear Philippian converts to abound in love and in knowledge and discernment so that they may approve what is excellent.

And again, that's not even an end in itself, is it? Look at the end of verse 10. And so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[25 : 26] He's wanting the best for them. He's wanting that they make wise and godly decisions. He's wanting them to discern what is best. But don't mistake that with perfectionism.

I think as a church, we need to aim, don't we? Someone's saying this for me this week. We need to aim for excellence. That's a good thing in preaching, in music, in welcoming, in everything. And we should aim for excellence. That's a good thing. But when the pursuit of excellence becomes an aim in itself, it becomes an idolatry. We see it in ourselves, don't we?

So think of, think of the perfectionist housewife who insists on keeping the house spotless so nobody knows even where they can sit down. Or think of the perfectionist parents who make their kids a misery by insisting on standards of excellence that are just unrealistic.

Think of the preacher who won't go into the pulpit unless his sermon is word perfect. We don't believe in 100%ism.

[26 : 42] Of course, we want to do our best and we want to give ourselves as much as we can and we want to trust God 100%. But for some people and for some people probably hear that unless they can do something with 100%, they won't do it.

Maybe that's why some of you aren't involved in church life. Because you think, well if I can't do it perfectly, I just don't want to do it. There are other people who could do a far better job than I can. And you're a perfectionist. And perfectionism is idolatry. So repent of it. And get involved and get stuck in. It's all on hands on deck.

And so we need to ask ourselves, why am I doing what I'm doing? Why are we aiming for the best? Why are we not satisfied with second best? Why are we doing this for our own glory?

Our own praise, that's ideology. See what it says there in verse 6. Paul talks about the day of Christ. Look what it says. And I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work and you will bring it to completion on the day of Christ.

[27 : 48] And then again in verse 10, so that you may approve what is excellent and be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. That's the motivation, isn't it?

It's not for our reputation. It's for the glory and praise of God. It's the day of Christ which we're looking forward to. Verse 6 and verse 10 says, that is how you live. Live for that day when Jesus will come again.

And he will judge the living and the dead. That is the next event in God's diary. You've probably got dozens of things in your calendar this week, haven't you? You've probably got hundreds and thousands of things in your calendar for this year, but God has got one thing in his calendar.

And that is the return of Christ. That is the great next event which is going to take place. And we don't know when it will happen, but it will happen. And we don't know if it's in the far future or the immediate future, but it is going to happen.

And you and I need to live our lives in the light of that day. That's what faith is about, isn't it? What is faith, according to Hebrews 11? It is the substance of things hoped for.

[28 : 58] So what's our hope? Our hope is that Jesus is coming back. To bring in the new heavens and the new earth. That is our hope. And that is going to happen sometime in the future, but faith brings that day into the now.

It informs our decisions now. It affects our motivations now. Faith is the evidence of things not seen. There is something we will see in the future, but not yet.

He will come with all his holy angels and every eye will see him, but not yet. By faith, we have the evidence that it's going to happen, and so it informs every decision.

It has a bearing on what we do with our time and how we spend our money and where we spend our leisure. Do you remember what Jesus says, how it affected Abraham?

Abraham said, Jesus said, Abraham saw my day from afar and he was glad. It was thousands of years down the track for Abraham, but Abraham is the father of faith.

[30 : 08] And Abraham knew that that day, this day, is coming. And so it impacted him emotionally. He rejoiced to see that day, even though it was in the far distance.

And that's how we're to live our lives. John Payton was a Presbyterian pioneer missionary. He went to the New Hebrides or Vanuatu.

And as he was preparing to go to the New Hebrides, an elderly Christian friend came there, came to him and said, John, don't go there. The cannibals, the cannibals, you'll be eaten by cannibals.

And John Payton replied to this man and he said this, Mr. Dixon, you are advanced in years now and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms. I confess to you that if I can live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I'm eaten by cannibals or by worms.

And in the great day, my resurrection body will rise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen redeemer. Do you get the point? How much does that day dominate this day for you?

[31 : 22] Only one life will soon be passed. Tick, tick, tick, tick. Life goes like that, doesn't it?

only one life will soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Investing in people's lives, bringing the gospel to them, only what's done for Christ will last.

So let me ask you a couple of questions as I finish. Are you a partner? Are you a partner? Are you a partner or a passenger? Are you committed to putting your energy and passion behind the work or are you just along for the ride?

Why is Paul so confident of these Philippians that they're going to make it? How can he be so sure that the work God began in them is actually going to be completed? Well, it's because of their partnership in the gospel.

You can see how committed they are to the gospel. But there's a real work of God going on in their heart. They've rolled up their sleeves, their financial and prayerful and practical partners in the job of getting the gospel out and seeing the church built.

[32 : 45] And they're partners in crime, aren't they? Even willing to go to prison if necessary. So I'm asking you what place does the gospel have in your life? I'm going to finish with a quote from Don

Carson, a Canadian theologian.

Pretty lengthy but it's worth it. Listen to Don Carson, he says this, I'd like to buy about three dollars worth of the gospel please. Not too much, just enough to make me happy but not so much that I get addicted.

I don't want so much gospel that I learn to really hate covetousness and lust. I certainly don't want so much that I learn to love my enemies, cherish self-denial and contemplate missionary service in an alien culture.

I want ecstasy, not repentance. I want transcendence, not transformation. I would like to be cherished by some forgiving broad-minded people but I myself do not want to love those from different races especially if they smell.

I would like enough gospel to make my family secure and my children well behaved but not so much that I find my ambitions redirected or my giving greatly enlarged.

[33 : 57] I'd like about three dollars worth of the gospel please. that's fine. Thank you. Thank you.