

# PERMIT PROCESS

PHILIPPIANS 1.1-11 AUGUST 13, 2014

Tonight we're going to take a break from our series looking at spiritual warfare and instead sort of retreat from the front line of battle to be reminded of the wonderful plan that God has for us in Christ. We're here after a day of battle rallied together spiritually speaking and our Commander wants to encourage us from His word and remind us of the richness of His power. We're not fighting a losing battle. We serve an *able* God who walks with us through life and He has carved out a path for fullness for us in His grace. But, like any marching orders, it's up to us whether we'll obey and carry them out, or whether we'll ignore those orders and head down a different path.

Find your way over to Philippians chapter 1. This is a very quotable book of the Bible. I'm sure many of you find some of your favorite verses in these passages. Here, Paul (who can so often be very technical and theological and doctrinal) opens up his heart to speak very personally to his dear friends in Philippi. Of course, it wasn't just Paul speaking, but it was the Holy Spirit speaking eternal truth through him and, as we'll see, by extension He is speaking to us as well.

Let's look at our text starting in verse 1 and then come back to make a few observations.

**Philippians 1.1-11 - 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. 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. For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, 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.**

One of the things that catches my attention about this passage is the big, broad brush strokes Paul is using in his choice of words. "*ALL* the saints," "*ALWAYS* in *EVERY* prayer," "it is right for me to think this of *YOU ALL*," "*YOU ALL* are partakers," "how *GREATLY* I long for *YOU ALL*," "I pray your love may abound still *MORE AND MORE* in knowledge and *ALL* discernment." Paul is speaking big in these verses. It's not a meticulous dissection of some tiny doctrine, he's talking about big ideas and big plans that God has for His Church. But alongside that 'bigness' we sense a deep, personal element to what he's saying. He even says that he has a special place in his heart for these people.

Now, step back and remember that it's not just Paul talking to Philippians, but it's the Spirit talking to us. In His eyes *you* are significant and special and God has a big plan for your life that includes the power of grace and the transformation of your life. It includes spiritual abundance that fills up your life more and more as you walk with God. He has a destination in mind for your life. That's why He said 'follow Me.'

We may feel insignificant in different ways - in our worldly accomplishments or in some of our relationships, but always remind yourself that you are *significant* to God. He's gone to great lengths to declare that to you and prove it with His actions.

Paul describes it here in these verses and he is a man who speaks with authority. He was a great thinker. He was a man who was filled with the Holy Spirit and whose life God radically transformed and used. He was an apostle. He was selected to pen Scripture. And so as he speaks, we should listen. And there in verse 1 he opens this letter and says:

**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.**

Paul is writing to a specific group: All the saints in Christ Jesus. The initial audience was in Philippi, but if you are *in Christ Jesus* tonight, these words are to you as well. If you're *not* a Christian here tonight, if you're *not* born again, these words can not yet apply to you.

You know, we have people we know or people who impact our lives or this world who aren't Christians, and we'll want things for them or expect things of them that are Biblical, but if they aren't in Christ, we're getting the cart before the horse.

Take marriage. We love Biblical marriage. But we get upset with the world when they don't live up to the standard of Biblical marriage. But how can they? If you don't have Christ and you haven't had your life transformed, how can you live the kind of life God wants for you. The answer isn't to get angry with people that they aren't living up to what God says about marriage, the answer is to get those people *in Christ* so that Jesus can then *transform* them from the inside out, impacting their marriage and all their other relationships and their behavior and everything else.

If you're not a Christian, the beneficial promises of God cannot apply to you. If you *are* in Christ, they can. And so Paul is speaking to a large group here, those who are *in Christ*. And specifically he mentions the bishops and deacons.

Here's something I was reminded of from that little CC Paul put on there (it was TO: the saints, all the Christians, CC: the bishops and the deacons). I was reminded that a healthy spiritual life aspires to greater spirituality.

Paul told Timothy in First Timothy 3:1:

**1 Timothy 3.1 - If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.**

In First Corinthians chapter 12 we're told to "earnestly desire the best [spiritual] gifts." If our spiritual lives are healthy, we'll be hungry for more to do and more ways to serve God. A healthy spirit isn't dormant, it's operating and active in the ways God asks us to be active.

Now, to this group of spiritual people, Paul says, "grace and peace to you from God and the Lord Jesus Christ." And down in verse 7 he makes this interesting statement about grace when he says:

**Philippians 1.7 - ...you are all *partakers* with me of grace.**

To Paul, grace was something to be received and continued in. Now, grace isn't something we generate, it's from God. But it's clear from Scripture that grace is something we don't want to take for granted. It needs to be received and continued in. We need to *partake* of it, once for salvation and then perpetually as we live our lives before the Lord.

Listen to these 2 verses.

**1 Corinthians 1.4 - I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was *given* to you by Christ Jesus**

**Acts 13.43 - Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.**

In 2nd Thessalonians we read our daily hope comes through grace and in Hebrews we're told the heart is established by grace.

So we find that grace is *available*, but it's something we must *engage* with. We need to receive it from God and continue in it day by day so that the Lord can effectively work in our lives.

We can think about it this way: On Wednesday mornings we're studying through the book of Exodus and so a lot of my reading has been about the Tabernacle and how it was laid out and all that. The Tabernacle was an incredible place, thought up in the mind of God, planned by Him, so that human beings could interface with Him and receive atonement for their sins and be made right. They could go there and worship and experience God. But, you had to come in through the door at the front of the courtyard, and not just once, but perpetually. See, the Tabernacle was a little tent and all around it was this big wall of curtains, making a big courtyard around it. And in that courtyard was the bronze altar and the laver. And these curtains were about 7 and a half feet tall. You couldn't see over them, but you were welcome to come *in* through the door and experience God. He wasn't trying to keep people out, but He had a specific method and desire for how they would interact with Him.

Jesus said in John chapter 10:

**John 10.9 - I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go *IN* and *OUT* and find pasture.**

God wants us to have fullness and satisfaction in our spiritual lives and He has provided a way, by His grace, that we can do that, but we have to go through His way, we have to go through Jesus by loving Him and obeying Him and receiving Him and His word. We need to be partakers of grace perpetually as we live out this life.

Paul continues in verse 3:

**Philippians 1.3-5 - 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,**

There's a lot of talk about prayer in these verses. Paul was a pray-er. Just because these Philippians were Christians didn't mean they didn't need prayer. They needed it. We need it. We need to be

prayed for and we need to pray for others. I like how he words it here, he says “every time you cross my mind, I pray for you!”

Dan Finrock is a name some of you know. He’s been a Calvary Chapel missionary for many years and he goes all over the world teaching native pastors how to study the Bible without outside materials like commentaries and the internet and those types of things. I’ve heard him say before, “If you think of me, please pray for me, because usually that means I’m in some kind of trouble!”

We want to be *growing* in our prayer lives. And, as is the case with almost every aspect of our Christianity, our prayer lives should always be growing more outward-oriented, rather than inward-oriented. Paul thought of these other Christians, he thanked God for them, and then he made request with joy.

There are a few different ‘prayer methods’ out there. Probably the most famous one is A.C.T.S. And I think those can be good disciplines to help us not slip into a self-oriented prayer life.

**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 such a big verse with lots of thoughts packed into it. First of all, we need to remind ourselves that Paul wasn’t living the easy life when he wrote these words, he was unjustly imprisoned. Can you imagine being put in jail even though you were innocent? It happened to Paul more than a few times, as we saw last week. But, despite his circumstances, Paul was convinced that not only were things going to work out for *the Philippians*, but they were going to work out *for him* as well, because he knew that **GOD** was at work.

All over this planet, God is working. He has put in motion not only a plan for this world but also for *your* life. And those plans that He is working on have ultimate, definite conclusions. For the world, it is to return and eradicate sin once and for all, making right what we made wrong. For you and I, the plan is going to be individualized, but the ultimate destination is that we will be made complete in Him, conformed to the image of His Son. Are we following where He’s going? The question is not whether God is working, it’s whether we’re *cooperating* and allowing Him to make progress in us.

One of my favorite examples of that tension is right at the beginning of the life of Abraham. God calls to Abram, tells him what He wants to do in his life. And rather than obey immediately, Abram waited *five years* before he did what God wanted. God didn’t *want* to wait 5 years to get started, but Abraham wasn’t partaking of what God was offering. So the work didn’t progress. It seems to me that Isaac, the son of promise, could’ve arrived 5 years earlier had Abram cooperated with the Lord.

God is completing a work in your life, but we need to go through the *permit* process. Are we *permitting* God to do what He wants to do? When He moves and directs and prunes and shapes us, are we permitting that or are we resisting it? Paul was joyful and excited about what God was *definitely* doing in his life and the lives of the Christians in Philippi because he knew they were partaking in the grace of Jesus regularly and perpetually.

**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.**

Paul expressed that these people were in his mind and in his heart. And, of all people, Paul had good excuses to not be concerned with people many cities away. He was barely hanging onto his own life most of the time. He was starting all these churches and writing these letters and making disciples and a lot of other things, not to mention his incredible physical suffering. But here he says, “in my mind and in my heart, I think of you guys a lot.”

Our circumstances may get difficult. At times they may be downright dire. But that’s all the more reason for us to open our hearts to our brothers and sisters in Christ and really knit ourselves to them in love and fellowship. It’s not going to profit us to be isolated families or individuals. And, although being in a loving, fellowship relationship with people is not always easy, in the long run, it’s what we need and it’s what God wants for us because of the blessing it can be.

A good verse on how to be in that kind of Christian fellowship is Ephesians 4:2:

**Ephesians 4.2 - Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.**

Like the song says, “love will keep us together.” And we need to be together, supporting one another, praying for one another, part of each other’s hearts and lives.

**Philippians 1.8 - For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.**

Our God is an affectionate God. And that’s good news for us. He is affectionate *to* us. But His desire is also to be affectionate *through* us. It’s not a good thing that Christianity in our culture is more known for animosity than it is for affection. Now, of course, some of our bad rap is undeserved. Some of it is prejudicial or simply untrue. But, in all honesty, a lot of the criticisms of the church in America from the unbelieving culture around us is accurate and deserved. We shouldn’t be known for animosity or who we hate or what is repugnant to us. We’re called to shocking amounts of love and grace - the kind God showed to us is what He wants to show *through* us.

**Colossians 3.12-13 - Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.**

The Lord is radically affectionate and His desire is to multiply His affection *through* His people.

**Philippians 1.9 - And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,**

There’s a lot to learn about prayer in these verses. How to pray for others, how to pray for growth, how to thank God, how to seek God’s will in prayer. Those are things we should pay attention to in our personal lives.

But what we also learn here is that the grace of God, when we partake of it, explodes love in our lives. And that love doesn’t just *feel* things, it *does* things. This love that God is growing in our lives gets us moving and developing in our relationships and in our affection and, here we see, in our knowledge and discernment. Not just here and there but *more and more*. There is a limitless supply

of God's transformative power for each and every one of us. Jesus said that a time is coming when sin will be rampant and love will grow cold. But that doesn't have to describe us if we endure and abide in Jesus Christ. As we abide, we will bear fruit. Our knowledge of spiritual things will abound. Our discernment will abound. We will continually be worked on by God. Paul continues in verse 10:

**Philippians 1.10-11 - 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.**

It's such a great plan! The Lord has so much in store for us, even on this side of eternity. He says, "I want your lives to be *filled* with the fruits of righteousness. Love abounding *MORE AND MORE*. Locked in relationship with people who care about you as My grace and my affection working through your life."

It's easy for us to feel the pressure of those onslaughts we face each day, the battles we're facing as we live out the Christian life on this side of eternity. But when we come back to base-camp and take a look at what our Commander has said, I hope we're refreshed to see the victory and the plenty and the fullness of God's spiritual plan for us.

The question is this: Where are you at in the permit process of all this? Are you partaking of the grace that the Lord has made available? Do we believe God and follow Him? Do we let His mind be in us and His affection and His understanding and His desires drive our heart? Because if we don't partake of grace, there's no way we're going to enjoy His peace or that fullness of fruit or the kind of joy that can fill our hearts like it did for Paul, an innocent man in prison.

God is working. Let's permit Him to work the way He wants to in our lives and in our minds and in our desires and in our actions.