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Read Philippians 1:1–11 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

SALUTATION

1:1 From Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and deacons. 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you 5 because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. 7 For it is right for me to think this about all of you, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel all of you became partners in God’s grace together with me. 8 For God is my witness that I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And I pray this, that your love may abound even more and more in knowledge and every kind of insight 10 so that you can decide what is best, and thus be sincere and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

COMMENTS:

The customary letter introduction is shown in vs. 1–2. As in others letters of Paul (1 Cor. 1:1, 2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Col. 1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philemon 1) he often names a co–worker with him in this salutation. The one mentioned most often is Timothy listed here.

This indicates that the person named was present with the apostle and that he also stood in a close relationship with those to whom the letter was written. This is easily understood here because Timothy had partnered with Paul in establishing the congregation at Philippi.

Paul identifies the two of them as “bondservants” of Jesus. I think the NET–2 translation which chooses the word “slave” rather than “servant” captures better how Paul identifies himself. Often he felt the need to defend his position as an apostle, but not here. Here Paul is loved and respected. He is not under attack.

It is strange to many that at this early stage in the life of the Christian Church he would refer to overseers (epískopos) and deacons (diakonoi). An elder (presbúteros) bishop (epískopos) are two names for the same official, which implies that the official function of overseers or elders existed from NT times (see Acts 20:17, 28).

Bishops and elders are never joined together in contrast to bishops and deacons, which are separate classes of officials. In Phil. 1:1, the translation uses the def. art. before bishops and deacons, but in Gr. there is no def. art.: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with bishops and deacons.”

Reference is made here to those saints who were functioning as overseers (bishops) and those who were functioning as servants (deacons). I believe those who say an elder denotes the dignity of the office, and a bishop (or overseer) denotes the duties and authority of the office are correct.

Now we turn to Paul’s prayer for the church. Almost every pastor has discovered that some people are a joy to serve the Lord. They have also know some that make joy for difficult to find. As a child I remember hearing this story. A young child was asked what they had for Sunday dinner. He replied, “Roast preacher.” Shocked the questioner asked, “What do you mean?”

The boy said, “When my family sits down, dad and mom begin to complain about the pastor’s sermon.” I thank God that I have been blessed to serve those who added to my joy in the Lord most of the time. Paul certainly had that experience in Philippi. Every time he thought of them he was moved to a prayer of thanksgiving.

He was most thankful for their participation in sharing the gospel. I don’t think anything demonstrates our appreciation for the gospel as much as our desire to share it with others. Paul often felt he had to be a self-supporting missionary so no one could accuse him of personal gain.

This congregation sent him self with out being asked. They did it out of love for the one who brought Christ to them. Knowing what a difference it made in their lives, they others to share the same blessings of the grace and mercy of God.

Then he commends them. He says I have seen God doing a good work in you and through you and he will continue that until he returns. When he finishes preparing a place for us, comes and gathers some of one by one, but we await the day when he returns in power and glory and all the holy angels with him and he will scoop all still living and raise up all from the grave.

Then he reminds them of a truth too often forgotten. Paul, the missionary pastor, says I was in the same boat which held you. I also needed grace. Pay special attention. Paul saw GRACE even in his imprisonment for the opportunities it gave him to defend the confirm the message of the gospel.

He professed that his love for them as a great as Jesus. Then he tells them what is the focus of his prayers. He wants to see their love abound even more. Paul is reminding us that you can never love God too much. You may have misdirected love, but God’s love for you and your love for God should always top the list.

Healthy love will direct your love properly and give you insight to demonstrate love properly. One key question is are you trying to show love in a way that pleases you or that helps the person who is to receive your love.

Paul is concerned that the Philippians Christians may be blameless when Christ returns. We need the righteousness which comes from God. Then God will get the glory and praise due him.

REFLECTION QUESTION: Too often we only see God’s grace when something good is happening in our lives. Paul’s recognition of grace even in his imprisonment, is a reminder that sometimes God is using trials and tribulation to strengthen us or our faith for what is coming. God is not good only when we like what he does. Faith believes that God cares about us all the time and knows how to bless us even we are up to our neck in difficulties. Read Romans 8:31–39 and then pray for God to help you remember: NOTHING can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.