

20220501 Philippians 1:1-6 Under Construction



Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 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; (Philippians 1:1-6, NKJV).

Prayer

This morning we're going to study scripture that tells us that we are each a work in progress. God isn't done with us yet. On Wednesday night we began our study of the Book of Philippians. This is a book about joyful living. It is one of my favorite books in the Bible. I probably quote it more than any other book in the Bible to this congregation. You have heard me say many times, *"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 1:6b, NASB), *"To live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21b, NASB), and *"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13, NASB). These are just a few. And in chapter two, there is also a beautiful portrait of the mind of Jesus Christ as a humble servant who *humbled Himself and became obedient to the cross* (see Philippians 2:5–11). Scholars think it was used as the lyrics of the most ancient hymn in the Bible.

Philippians has been the book of the Bible that has taken me through the most difficult days of my life. It has sustained my joy in the most unhappy of times. During the years when I lost my business in a hostile take-over, I would claim God's promises again and again reciting truth to my soul. *"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. ⁶ Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷ and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7, NKJV).* Oh yes, there is much to learn about Christian living in this.

Last Sunday we listened intently as Pastor Kevin Broyhill gave a wonderful message on joy and joyful living. He reminded us that happy living and joyful living are two completely different things. We learned that joy is not the absence of trouble but the presence of Jesus. Scripture doesn't tell us that we'll always be "happy." Scripture tells us that each day that we live is a day to have joy. The psalmist tells us, *"²⁴ This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it."* (Psalm 118:24, NKJV).

Happiness revolves around things that happen; it's all about our circumstances. And the fact of the matter is that a lot of bad things happen. These may affect our happiness, but they should never affect our joy. Happiness is connected to the word "happenstance." Happenstance is stuff that happens. That's sometimes called fate, a fluke, a chance, or a coincidence. In the book of Philippians, Paul tells us that our joy is not a matter of chance, fortune, luck, or fate. Our joy is a matter of Jesus. It was Jesus that met Paul on the road to Damascus. It was Jesus that convicted Paul's heart of sin.

Paul had been a very religious sinner. He had wanted to serve God with all of his heart, so as a religious Jew he had done his best to persecute those Jews who had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus as Messiah. When they rounded up Stephen and stoned him to death for his faith in Jesus, the Bible tells us that the murderers went and laid their cloaks at the feet of Saul of Tarsus. This Saul of Tarsus was radically transformed when he had a face-to-face encounter with Jesus. God turned Saul into Paul the Apostle, the very one who brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the unbelieving Gentile world. That's you and me. We can only imagine how miserable a person Saul must have been as he persecuted the people of God. When he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, the Holy Spirit entered him, and planted a seed of joy within him that would grow into a totally changed life. It was that Paul that penned this letter which we now study. The book of Philippians is a book of JOY.

Joy is a badge of divine ownership. It is the mark of a believer. A gloomy Christian is a contradiction in terms. A gloomy Christian is a Christian who is not walking in the Spirit. Nothing has hurt the Church and the cause of Christ more than the idea that believers are sour, dour, sullen, sad, angry, conflicted people. Nothing could be further from the truth of who we are in Christ. I have no idea why some wardrobe consultant suggested that pastors and priests should wear black clothes. It makes men of God look more like undertakers than instruments of joy. Nehemiah said it well to believers, *"Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."* (Nehemiah 8:10b, NKJV) When a believers go through trials and difficulties, the only thing that can strengthen us is indeed the joy of the Lord. That is our strength in times of trouble.

On Wednesday we studied Acts chapter 16 together. We went back through the story of how Paul first met the people in Philippi around 51 AD. He wouldn't write this letter that we're reading until around 62 AD when he was sitting in a jail cell in Rome. This book is both a thank you letter and a love letter written by Paul from a heart filled with joy to the faithful Christians in Philippi.

Wednesday, we read that Paul was out on one of his missionary journeys when he came to Derbe and Lystra and met Timothy, whom he would later call



“my son.” Timothy had a Jewish Christian mother and a Greek dad. We read that the Spirit prohibited Paul from going to “Asia” which refers to that western side of what is now Turkey. Instead, Paul took a ship from Troas to Neapolis and made his way up to Philippi. There he met Lydia, a merchant of purple (a dye merchant) who listened in as he shared the gospel. Lydia accepted Jesus and became the first European convert to Christianity. Things

then sort of went south and Paul and Silas were thrown into jail. The text in Acts chapter 16 tells us that at midnight, while Paul and Silas were singing praises and preaching in jail, an earthquake came that shook the jail doors loose. We all know the story. The jailer was about to take his own life because he was responsible for the prisoners and thought that they had escaped. When he found Paul and Silas still sitting in the jail, he fell at their feet and asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

Well Paul eventually left Philippi and was thrown into jail many more times. And when we take up with today’s text we see him writing a full-on church. All of this had happened in the twelve years or so since Paul was in Philippi. He addressed pastors, teachers, and deacons; all of which make up a functioning church.

Servants – In the first few words of Philippians, he refers to himself and Timothy as “bond servants” of Jesus Christ. This is *doulos* in the Greek, and refers back to a Hebrew law that provided a mechanism for a slave to become a life-long servant of a person that they had grown to love. And that is EXACTLY what Timothy and Paul had done. They were life-long servants of Jesus Christ whom they had learned to love.

Saints – Paul addresses the letter to the “saints.” That’s the Greek word *hagios*. Saints are not just people that do outstanding deeds for the Lord. All of us in this room or reading this page are “saints” if we have chosen to believe in the finished work that Jesus did on the cross. We are saints because of our standing in Christ. We are positionally righteous before God. We are holy and set apart to the Lord. Paul then addresses this to the “bishops” among you. I think that it is a shame that this word was translated by the King James translators as “bishop.” It conjurs up ideas of ecclesiastical hierarchy; with an important muck muck coming to town with

1 Peter 5:1-2

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder...Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be...

a giant hat and a golden shepherd’s crook. An *episkopos* in Greek (rendered “bishop” in King James English) literally means an “overseer.” That’s a supervisor (using the Latin words). This is one of the three functions of the man which we now call a pastor. (Those three functions are all found together in 1 Peter 5:1-2) I believe this is

synonymous with an elder and a pastor (shepherd). This refers to a man who has three

functions in a church. He is a *presbuteros (elder)*, *poimen (shepherd)*, and *episkopos (overseer)* (1 Peter 5:1-2).

Deacons – Paul refers to the *diakonos* (deacons). It is also translated servant, but it means “to minister by serving.” It is a functional servant who is a doer. It is not an elder. It is not a person with a particular spiritual office. But a biblical deacon must be trustworthy, so they are qualified as mature, tested, and Spirit lead believers. They are by nature handlers of the assets of the Church so they must have character that inhibits them from self-interest and self-dealing (running off with stuff). Additionally, their wives must also measure up to certain qualifications. *“¹¹ Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.” (1 Timothy 3:11, NKJV).*

“Grace and Peace”- In verse two Paul extends “Grace and peace in God our Father.” We should take note that grace is first because unless you know the grace of God, you’ll never know the peace of God. When you know the role of the grace of God in your salvation as well as your process of sanctification, you are at ease. You are at peace, resting in the Lord.

Thanking God for them and making requests with joy for them - Paul and Timothy were joyful because they had decided that they would be bondservants to Jesus Christ as their master. It is interesting that joy can’t be found by directly going after it. You don’t go “get joy.” It is a by-product of going after Jesus and His will for your life, instead of chasing after self and self-pleasure. The more you do as you please, the less pleased you’ll be with what you do. Just look at the trial of Johnny Depp and Amber Heard this week. These are two self-absorbed people who couldn’t be more miserable. They are suing each other for millions of dollars. The more you submit yourself and your will to Jesus, the more you will know the true peace of the Lord, and hence, you will be filled with the joy of the Lord.

Paul then says, *“⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 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; (Philippians 1:5-6, NKJV).*

You and I have a “fellowship” in the gospel. That means we’re in a “joint-venture” with God and with each other. We are a “community of faith.” From the first day we came to Christ until today we are joined at the hip with others on this journey. We’re each doing our part and we are all part of the body of Christ. If we can each stay out of the way, and stay obedient to the Lord, He will do great things in us and through us. The text clearly tells us that it is **He** that has **BEGUN** this work in us, but He is not yet finished. It is an on-going work. Many of you feel discouraged because of the problems and imperfections in your life. What you’re looking at is an “unfinished” work. God is not done with you yet. He’s certainly not done with me as well.

I have purchased many paintings from Russell Cushman. I’ve even watched him paint some paintings. When he first starts for a long time it just looks like blobs on a canvas. Shapes begin to come together and eventually it is a masterpiece. God wants to do the exact same thing in

you. You don't feel much like a masterpiece. And you aren't. You are HIS workmanship. You are a work in progress.



Russell starts with an empty canvas. He has an idea in his mind of what the painting will look like. You can see the little photo of the dog in the picture to the left. As Russell progresses through the work, he moves from the ideal of what can take place on the canvas to the very finished work itself. That is EXACTLY what God does in your life and my life. We are a WORK IN PROGRESS. Russell works away at that picture. He never throws it out. He patiently works to put the color, hues, and other variables of art on to that canvas to make a masterpiece. And that is what God does for us.

God saved you. Let's talk about this process called salvation. You are saved in sort of three time zones so to speak. You experience salvation in your past, your present, and your future. When you came to a saving knowledge of Jesus, you were **justified** (made to be righteous) before God. All of your sins were paid for by Jesus' death on the cross. After that, you entered a stage of **sanctification** (that's where you are now). This means that as you submit to the Lord, and walk in the Spirit, you are becoming less like your fleshly you and more like Jesus. That is sometimes referred to as your "Christ-Likeness." Lastly, will be your **glorification**. This won't begin until you experience an earthly death (unless you're raptured before that) and find yourself with the Lord. It is there that you'll have a glorified body, and you'll be free from the influence of sin. That "glorification" is God's final removal of sin from the life of the saints (i.e., everyone who is saved) in the eternal state (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17)¹.

So let's settle in on sanctification. That is what Paul is talking about here when he says, ***"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"***. (Philippians 1:6, NKJV). Notice that he says that it is HE that has begun a good work in you and it is HE that will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

I have said over and over that ours is not a white-knuckled faith. You don't have to "try harder" to be a good Christian. It will only result in guilt and frustration. The work that is to be done in you is the work that God will do in your heart and life. You and I are a work in progress. You are not perfect. You are forgiven. I was talking to Sandy the other morning and I told her that now that I am 66 years old, I am seeing this whole business of Christianity in a distilled form.

¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/glorification.html>

We well understand that we were not saved (**justified** before God) by our own works, because we were saved ONLY through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But, in a similar way you are not **sanctified** in your walk by your own works. This passage clearly tells us that it is HE that will “complete it” in your life. This is the Lord taking the pressure off. You didn’t have to perform for your justification. And you don’t have to perform and “do better” or perform for your sanctification. Well, you’re wondering, “Pastor, are you saying that I don’t have to do anything? I thought I had to pray harder, read my bible, come to church, and do holy stuff.” Well those things come by resting in the Lord. Yes, you will do these things, but you will do them out of love for Him and not out of a laundry list of “to dos.” I get up in the early hours of the morning and spend time in the Word not because I need to check it off of a list. I do it because the God who created me, who holds me, and Who loves me wants to spend time with me. I don’t do these things because I HAVE to. I do these things because I GET to.

The Christian life is not a sprint. IT is a marathon. It is a growing work. It is not a finished work. It is an inside job before it becomes an outside work. He will work IN YOU before He works THROUGH YOU.

Well, the big secret answer is that as you deepen in your love for Him you will have an appetite and a desire to do a lot of things that enrich your relationship with Jesus. Sanctification, Christ-likeness, and all of the fruit of the Spirit is a by-product of that pursuit. The things we do don’t have anything to do with a “performance;” they are the things of a relationship. They all have to do with obedience. God is at work IN and THROUGH each of us, regardless of the career we have chosen. So again, what is the work that He does in you and me? First, He makes us aware of our lost condition. That pushes us to be hungry and we long for something different. Then he puts His joy in us. Then He begins the lifelong process of making us holy in a sanctified way. His growing work is **gradual**, and it is **guaranteed**. Whatever God starts, He will finish. He’ll be done with you when you’re sitting with Him in your glorified body. Part of the Big Idea to you today is be patient with yourself because God is patient with you.

How many of you have unfinished projects at home? It might be a piece of furniture that needs to be redone or an old tractor or combine that needs to be brought back to life. It might be a horse that needs to be trained. You may give up on your projects, but God will never give up on you. He will work in you and on you until the day of Jesus Christ. That means, He’s going to work on you until you’re DONE. God won’t give up on you. He is going to complete what He started in you. So what do you need to do?

Be thankful. Be confident. Be aware of His work in and through you. Be patient. You are an area that is under construction.

Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese- Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.