

## Philippians 1 – Unintended Results

It doesn't take long once you begin reading the Philippian letter to determine the love and sincere affection Paul had for the church at Philippi. He joyfully thanks God in his prayers every time he thinks of them, something he does regularly in his letters. However, the Philippian letter is different. Paul thanks God for the Philippians because they have been so loving and supporting of his effort to spread the gospel. To the Romans, he thanks God because of their widely known faith. (**Romans 1:8**) But they had problems. In **1 Corinthians**, he thanks God for the church at Corinth because of what God has done for them. They have been given grace. They have been enriched. God has imparted many spiritual gifts to them. (**1 Corinthians 1:4-7**) But they had problems that needed to be corrected.

In the Ephesian letter, Paul gives thanks to God in his prayers because of their *“faith in the Lord Jesus and (their) love for all the saints.”* (**Ephesians 1:15-16**) But, as the other churches mentioned, they had problems with disunity and difficulty living *“a life worthy of (their) calling.”* (**Ephesians 4:1**) The same seems to be true of the people of Colossae. (**Colossians 1:3-10**) The people of Thessalonica, just a few miles from Philippi, were praised because of their labor in the Lord, their love, their endurance through hardship, and their readiness to accept Paul's preaching as the very words of God. (**1 Thessalonians 1:3, 13**) But many of them had quit working and were simply waiting around for Christ's second coming. Paul had to deal with that as well as other misunderstandings.

As I said earlier, Paul thanks God for what they have done for him, in addition to their faithfulness to the gospel he had preached to them. It is the gospel that is the central theme of **Philippians 1**. Paul was in prison for defending and confirming the gospel. The Philippians have been in a “partnership in the gospel” with him *“from the first day until now.”* (**Philippians 1:4**) And his imprisonment had had unintended results. It had:

1. Advanced the gospel (**Philippians 1:12**)
2. Given him the opportunity to preach to the palace guards (Paul never missed an opportunity to preach!) (**Philippians 1:13**)
3. Emboldened others to preach more courageously and fearlessly. (**Philippians 1:14**)

And in spite of the fact that many preached out of *“envy and rivalry”* and *“selfish ambition,”* (**Philippians 1:15, 17**) Paul concluded it really didn't matter. *“Christ is preached. And because of his I rejoice.”* (**Philippians 1:18**)

Paul then compliments them again. In their *“partnership”* the Philippians are to continue to *“conduct (themselves) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.”* (**Philippians 1:27**) They are to continue to *“stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.”* (**Philippians 1:27**) He knows that they will do so even if he is not

allowed to be released and return to them. Even in his absence, he is ***“confident...that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 1:6) He is assured of their endurance and their firmness in defense of the gospel that he had preached to them.

It would be nice for all of us to receive a love letter from Paul because of our faith, love, endurance, and loyalty to the gospel of Jesus Christ. It would, as in the case of the Philippians, be nice to be found without serious fault. It was Paul’s prayer for the Philippians (and, again, he was confident his prayer would be answered) that their

***“...love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may 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.”*** (Philippians 1:9-11)

I’m certain that would be his prayer for you as well. It certainly is mine.

---Johnny Stephens