

3–5 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

It was not uncommon for authors of ancient letters to thank a particular deity in the opening of their written communication.¹ Here we see Paul using a similar opening in his epistle to the Philippian believers but with this obvious emphasis, that there is one and only one true God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of Israel. He makes this emphatic by stating that the God he thanks is “my God” (Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου), which not only designates the one true God but also emphasizes the personal and salvific relationship a believer has with God through faith in Yeshua and the indwelling Holy Spirit. We find Paul using this same phrase, “I thank my God,” as the opening of three other epistles: Rom 1:18, 1Cor 1:4, and Philemon 1:4, so it would seem that this was a favorite way of beginning an epistle directed to a specific messianic community in which he had ministered.

Some have suggested that when Paul speaks of “my God” he is likewise emphasizing his calling as an Apostle of Yeshua and the authority that this office entails. As one specifically chosen by the risen Yeshua and appointed to go as His apostle to the Gentiles, Paul acknowledges that his ministry and service to the believers in Philippi has as its goal to exalt Yeshua and to help nurture those within the believing community to serve and honor Him. This is accomplished by being consistent and vibrant witnesses of His redeeming work of saving sinners.

...in all my remembrance of you – Though the Greek literally has ἐν πάσῃ τῇ μνήμῃ ὑμῶν, “upon all the remembrance of you,” the definite article “the” is rightly taken to have a possessive force and thus “my remembrance” is an accurate understanding of the original. Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving flows first from his contemplation or “remembrance” of the work of God that took place in Philippi as the gospel of Yeshua was given and received. Paul uses μνήμῃ, *mneia*, “remembrance” six other times: Rom 1:9; Eph. 1:16; 1Thess 1:2; 3:6; 2Tim 1:3; Philemon 1:4, which highlights the fact that one of the constant aspects of his service to the Lord was to engage in regular prayer for the communities in which he has ministered. Here we find an example to follow, for as we fellowship together in our respective communities, we pray for one another and rejoice with each other for the work of God that is evident

1 See HELLERMAN, Joseph H. *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Philippians* (B&H Pub., 2015), p. 18. Here after: EGGNT - Philippians

within the lives of those who fellowship together. As we share the life of faith together, we have great cause to rejoice as we see God’s work within each of us, causing us more and more to conform to the life of Yeshua and thus to give Him glory and praise. As Calvin notes:

We must, also, take notice, what things they are for which he gives thanks to God, — the fellowship of the Philippians in the gospel of Christ; for it follows from this, that it ought to be ascribed to the grace of God.¹

Paul presents a good model for all who are “in Messiah,” that we ought to consider our fellowship together in the local assembly of believers as a true blessing and therefore a cause of true thankfulness to God for each other. Here, in the opening of this epistle, Paul presents a true model for us, reminding us all that our fellowship together through the grace of Yeshua and the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh ought to produce a growing sense of thanksgiving to God for the gift of true fellowship in Yeshua.

4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, –

Just as Paul writes “my God,” so here he speaks personally of “my every prayer.” This emphasizes, once again, that the mention of Timothy in the opening verse is to indicate that Timothy was a companion and helper to Paul, but that in the position and authority of an Apostle of Yeshua, Paul speak for himself and is clearly writing this epistle primarily as a communication between himself and the Philippian community.

Here Paul emphasizes the joy that he has for the manner in which the Philippian community continues to progress and to remain firm in their faith and service to Yeshua, to one another, as well as himself personally. He affirms that he is regularly (“always” πάντοτε, *pantote*) in prayer regarding the Philippian community. Moreover, in the Apostle’s consistent prayer for this believing community, he experiences joy as he remembers the vibrancy of their faith and as he petitions the Almighty for His continuing work and blessing within their community. Later, in this epistle, Paul will bemoan those who had once professed faith in

1 Calvin, John. *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Calvin Translation Society, 1851), p. 25. (Hereafter, *Commentary on Philippians*.)

Yeshua but who have turned from the faith and become “enemies of the cross of Messiah” (cf. 3:17–19). Not so with the messianic community in Philippi, for they continue to live out a vibrant faith in Yeshua.

Here we see a true model for all who are in leadership positions within a local community. Such prayers are not only seeking God’s hand to overcome problems or difficulties within the community but also to rejoice in the evident work of the Lord in the lives of those who make up the community. We see that Paul’s thanksgiving was “joyful” because he was “confident” (v. 6) and knew that his assessment of their maturing faith was “proper” (v. 7) on the basis of how they had ministered to each other and particularly to him.

Thus, in Paul’s inspired words, we are given a picture of the goal for which every local community should strive, namely, that as leaders and members of the community meet together, pray together, worship together, serve each other and pray for one another throughout the week, the result will be joy, not sorrow. When we see the Lord working in the lives of one another, we are all encouraged to grow in our own resolve to honor our Lord by truly loving one another as He intends us to do. As MacArther notes:

The Holy Spirit prompts believers to appreciate others’ love, generosity, and compassion and to forget the rest (cf. 4:8; 1 Cor 13:4–7). On the other hand, a person who constantly focuses on the negatives, faults, shortcomings, and slights of others is a person not controlled by the Holy Spirit, and is perhaps an unbeliever. Bitterness, resentment, a critical spirit, holding grudges, and the like are works of the flesh, not of the Spirit.¹

We likewise are reminded by Paul’s words in our text how important prayer for each other truly is. As we seek to honor the Lord within our community, and in so doing, to let people outside of the community recognize His work among us, we must be constant and fervent in our prayers for one another.

5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now.

The word “participation” translates the Greek *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*)

1 MacArther, John. *The MacArther New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Moody Press, 2001), p. 20.

which carries the basic sense of a

close association involving mutual interests and sharing, association, communion, fellowship, close relationship.¹

The ESV and NIV both translate: “because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

The point of the word *koinōnia* is one of working together, having a singular goal, and “joining hands” to see that the goal is achieved. And what is that goal? It is “the gospel” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, *to euangelion*), literally, the “good news.” Sometimes a community of faith may become so consumed with the many functions which make up the community, that the core truth by which the community itself exists may cease to have the central place it deserves. And this core truth is the gospel itself, that through the work of Yeshua in His death, resurrection, ascension and intercession, we, by faith in Him, having been made new and given the gift of the indwelling Ruach HaKodesh, are to be witnesses in all aspect of our lives of the great salvation He has given to us.

Thus Paul in this verse states the very means by which he is confident that the believers who make up the faith community in Philippi are genuine believers in Yeshua, for they continue to participate in the gospel of Yeshua, both in their own community as well as providing for Paul who was commissioned by Yeshua Himself as an Apostle for the furtherance of the gospel.

What is more, they supported Paul’s endeavors in the gospel “from the first day until now.” That is, the Philippian community was consistent in their faith and living out the gospel, both by maintaining their own life of faith in Yeshua as well as assisting Paul in taking the gospel to other regions. Here we see that the mark of true faith is that of perseverance in the faith, not being side-tracked by false doctrines or selfish ambitions, but remaining faithful to that which the scriptures teach.

6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Messiah Yeshua.

The word “confident” translates *πεποιθώς* (*pepoithōs* < *πείθω*, *peithō*) which is a perfect active participle indicating the cause for Paul’s “joy” (v. 4) and therefore has the force of a present participle in the sense that the faithfulness of the Philippian community in regard to the gospel is

1 BDAG, “κοινωνία,” p. 552.

a constant witness of their own faith and growth in the Lord.

... of this very thing – What constitutes Paul’s confidence that the believers who made up the community were truly born from above is that their actions give a true witness that their faith in Yeshua is genuine, i.e., a gift of God.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:8–9)

The important phrase to compliment our text here in Philippians is “not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” The real issue in understanding Paul’s meaning in this phrase is the demonstrative “that” (τοῦτο, *touto* < οὗτος, *houtos*). In Greek, a demonstrative must agree in gender with the word it modifies. So when we begin to ask what is “not of yourselves,” we obviously look in the preceding context to find the answer. The word “grace” in the Greek is feminine gender, and the word “faith” in the Greek is also feminine. However, the demonstrative “that” is in the neuter gender. The best explanation of Paul’s words here is that the neuter demonstrative can be used to refer back to an entire clause or to the previous context in general.¹

Further, in the English translation of “it is the gift of God,” the English words “it is” are not actually written in the Greek but, as often, are expected to be supplied as an ellipsis. If we were to translate the entire verse woodenly it would be: “For by the grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of you, the gift of God.”

Thus, the best understanding of the grammar is this: Paul is stating that the cause of our salvation is the grace of God and that we receive His salvation by faith, and neither His grace nor our faith is something which begins with ourselves. Both His grace as well as the faith to receive His gracious offer of salvation are gifts which He gives.

Moreover, that all who will constitute the innumerable host of people redeemed by God’s grace, were chosen before the very creation of the universe and given to Yeshua as those He would redeem, is clearly taught in the Scriptures.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless

1 See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pp. 334–35; Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 342–43.

before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3–6)

Add to this the fact that Yeshua Himself promised that He would lose none of those given to Him by the Father.

This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn 6:39)

... *that He who began a good work in you* – The exercise of saving faith in the one who comes to Yeshua is the result of God’s work, not something the individual manufactures himself. Surely it is a cooperative experience, for when God draws the sinner to Himself, He likewise gives the one drawn to the Gospel the faith to believe. What God begins He always finishes.

God does not forsake the work which His own hands have begun, as the Prophet bears witness, (Psalm 138:8; Isaiah 64:8) we are the work of his hands; therefore He will complete what He has begun in us. When I say that we are the work of His hands, I do not refer to mere creation, but to the calling by which we are adopted into the number of His sons. For it is a token to us of our election, that the Lord has called us effectually to Himself by His Spirit.¹

Thus the very unshakable foundation of Paul’s confidence is nothing less than the truth of God’s saving work made known through Yeshua and lived out by those who are His. This is what Paul is pointing to when he writes “I am confident of this very thing,” for his confidence rests upon the very words of Yeshua Himself.

So in our current text, we see a beautiful description of the believer’s role in persevering in the faith coupled with divine preservation giving the child of God both the desire and ability to persevere and to grow in saving faith. This, then, is the foundation of Paul’s confidence in the faith of the Philippian believers, for they have demonstrated their faith in their living out the gospel, and this is coupled with the surety of God’s promise to redeem all whom He has chosen and given to Yeshua.

1 Calvin, *Philippians*, p. 26.

... will perfect it until the day of Messiah Yeshua. – The word “perfect” translates the Greek ἐπιτελέω (*epiteleō*) which is made up of the preposition *epi* and the verb *teleō*, meaning “to complete.” The added preposition gives the sense of “to complete something according to a plan or objective.”¹ Thus, by writing that God would “perfect it,” that is, the work that He had begun, means that God has a plan and that He will bring His plan to fruition and completion—nothing can stand in His way of bringing about His holy will.

The phrase “until the day of Messiah Yeshua” (ἄχρι ἡμέρας Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ) could better be understood as “at the day of Messiah Yeshua,”² that is, the completion of God’s plan of salvation for all whom He has given to Yeshua will commence at the day of Yeshua’s return, when He comes to rule the earth and to bring earth’s history to its ordained conclusion.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1Thess 4:16–17)

1 BDAG, “ἐπιτελέω,” p. 383.

2 See Hellerman, *EGGNT–Philippians*, p.25.