

No.1 'Thanking and Asking'

As we begin this series, briefly some background. Paul had visited Philippi (see Acts 16: 11-40), had left hurriedly, and now writes from imprisonment – most likely 'house arrest' in Rome (see Acts 28: 14-31). Paul does not include any reference in this letter to Jewish scriptures, or to there being a synagogue, suggesting that this forming church comprised Gentiles only, few if any Jews. Philippi was a Roman Colony, full of ex-military, very loyal to the emperor Nero, who was increasingly insisting he was a god and should be worshipped.

Whilst this letter contains teaching and correcting of Christian faith, it is evident from the start, and throughout, it is a letter of friendship, gratitude, celebration, and joy in sharing common purpose, love for Jesus and the Gospel. I am always challenged when I begin reading this letter – *have I (you) ever sent such a letter of simple encouragement to a friend? If not, why not?* I have the only one I have received 20 years ago, and keep as a treasure, for ongoing encouragement!

Read Philippians 1: 1 – 11

How much better it is to start a letter or conversation on a positive note! Paul seems positively 'bursting' with joy to tell them about his appreciation of them, his love and prayers go daily to them, although he



has not seen them for probably several years. We hear later in this letter that Paul appreciates the difficulties they are facing (as is he), yet he writes verses 3 - 8 before saying anything else. *What have we to learn from this?*

Let's dwell on 'joy' for a moment; one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22). Joy is not the same as happiness. How often do you hear, 'I just want (myself or someone else) to be happy'. Happiness is a mood, one of many; it comes and goes. 'To get the full value of joy you must have somebody to divide it with' (Mark Twain). True joy, once allowed to enter within, comes from God through Jesus, and remains present irrespective of mood. *As Christians, we need to ask ourselves whether people see the joy within us – in our conversation, our views - because it is attractive, something they might not have but want!* Read again verses 3 – 6. Notice – Joy – partnership - until completion. *We are in partnership with Christ doing what? Do you feel this partnership with our church? What more can we do to enhance our part in this venture together?*

Paul asks in prayer for his Philippian Church friends in expectation that they will become 'filled with the fruit of righteousness.' This is the hope of Jesus for us all, and he is the only source. *What information does this passage tell us about righteousness?*

Prayer May the peace of God which transcends all understanding, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.