



Caring and Sharing

Philippians 1:3-11

And now the Prologue. Last week we dealt with the first few verses of Philippians – and it started like a typical Greek letter – from and to – and we see a hint of Paul’s Christian nature as well as his Jewishness as he wishes them grace and peace.

But now we have the Prologue. Classical letters had these as did plays and poems. There used to be a silly TV series called *Up Pompeii* where each week the useless servant played by Frankie Howerd never quite got to give the viewers the prologue. A Prologue an introduction that sets the scene and we see in this one how Paul introduces this as a letter of friendship to people who had shared in his ministry.

Sharing: it’s something we all teach our children to do when they’re young. They need to learn how to be sociable not selfish like sharing their toys, sharing their sweets, sharing the slide. And of course any of us who’ve had children know about the grumps and the tantrums when little Johnnie doesn’t want to share. But it’s all part of learning social skills that are such an important part of life.

But sharing isn’t just about not being selfish with what we’ve got. As we get older we learn to share with others, both in things we have in common with them, and also in their griefs and sorrows. It’s what we’d expect of true friendship. And this is clearly the relationship between Paul and the Philippians. And it gives us a role model for relationships in the church.

The most obvious thing about their relationship was friendship. They had a common bond – Jesus Christ as we discussed last time. But there was more than that – that bond had caused a friendship to build up between them.

It’s good to always remember that the essence of a church is fellowship. It isn’t a club which we’re members of. It isn’t an organisation. It isn’t a business. It isn’t a charity – as much as the Government is going to make sure we are one officially eventually. The world needs to make us that but that isn’t what scripture portrays church as – it’s a fellowship joined by a bond of friendship and love.

That so isn’t the case in many churches and I’m sure you’ve come across them in your time. I remember years ago that in Baptist Churches the Minister was always Mr Blah and everyone was really quite formal: Mr This and Mrs That. And all that was matched with a formality that didn’t look out of place in an office but the family of God? I think not.

And then there’s churches where there’s infighting. Ouch! And there will be the bright spark who says – well there’s disagreement in any family! The Philippians had disagreement too – but we see at the foundation they had this friendship with Paul which I would suggest was a foundation that protected them when they had to face decisions about their behaviour.

So yes, this letter has formality but there’s warmth in these words and their relationships gives us pointers to how ours should be with one another.

◆ Constant

3 I thank my God for you every time I think of you; 4 and every time I pray for you all, I pray with joy 5 because of the way in which you have helped me in the work of the gospel from the very first day until now.

Theirs was a clear bond of affection between apostle and Philippians which had endured. Their relationship was something that had been constant through all the events of Paul’s life over the previous few years. Wherever he had been, whatever he had been doing, they had been there for

him as much as they could have been over distance.

One of the big growth areas in the internet over the past few years has been the development of what they call social networking. You get together online with your friends and often it means that you get back in touch with friends you haven't heard of for a while. I've been back in touch with people I knew in my childhood or at college – a long time ago now.

That said, my most cherished friends are those who we've kept in touch with over a few years and who we've been through a few things together. There's a big difference between them and my old friends who I've rediscovered. That seems to have been Paul and the Philippians.

I believe that if we are to grow as a church, God is calling us to deepen the bonds of friendship that we have and make new ones within the fellowship of people who we don't know so well. What do we think of when we hear the names of people at MRBC? Paul thought of them and his heart was filled with joy. Let's pray that God will give us that kind of bond of friendship!

◆ Loyal

7 You are always in my heart! And so it is only right for me to feel as I do about you. For you have all shared with me in this privilege that God has given me, both now that I am in prison and also while I was free to defend the gospel and establish it firmly. 8 God is my witness that I am telling the truth when I say that my deep feeling for you all comes from the heart of Christ Jesus himself.

As you know we have a dog and what's so remarkable about a dog is how faithful they are to their master. They are always there and stick in there – particularly if they want a walk or it's feeding time! But actually, they'll be there even if it isn't. To dogs, it's instinctive to want to follow the leader of the pack, but human loyalty is so much different.

The mark of a true friend is loyalty. A loyalty that will mean they stick with you through thick and thin. Loyal friends live through disagreement and differences of opinion. They are there for one another and can speak with honesty because loyalty is borne out of trust.

The relationship of Paul and the Philippians was one of loyalty. Their loyalty to him and his to them wasn't one of obedience of teacher to disciples, or apostle to minions, or even the leader of the pack but was based on respect earned through being there for him and him coming through for them. Loyalty was borne out of knowing him and trusting him and him them.

This is an important one for anyone in leadership. We all value loyalty as leaders, but loyalty isn't something that comes through office, but is earned through mutual respect. That respect had come out of the way he had been prepared to risk his neck for them and out of the way they had supported him through thick and thin. Loyalty is earned, not got because you've got a job title – it's true in any walk of life.

◆ Loving

The bottom line was that they had an agape relationship – one of love. Agape is the love which puts the needs of others before mine irrespective of cost. We have a God who first loved us and gave His Son to die for our sins. That's the measure of agape. That's why the Lord's Supper is so important – because it reminds us that God's love for us is at the core of our faith. As a result of His love He showed us outrageous grace.

The Philippians actively kept in touch with the prisoner Paul despite his circumstances and despite the risk of guilt by associating with him. He was their friend and the risk showed the measure of their love.

Paul recognises that and prays a blessing for them. It reminds us and reminded them that God recognises when we show the same characteristics towards others that He has shown towards us. What is the blessing?

9 I pray that your love will keep on growing more and more, together with true knowledge and perfect judgement, 10 so that you will be able to choose what is best. Then you will be free from all impurity and blame on the Day of Christ. 11 Your lives will be filled with the truly good qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce, for the glory and praise of God.

Firstly it is that their love will grow. God's love resulted in Jesus going to the cross. That's the ultimate expression of agape. Maybe at the moment we're not prepared to grow that far and perhaps neither were the Philippians – but Paul prays that it may keep on growing which means it does go in that direction! But it's interesting what else he prays for: *together with true knowledge and perfect judgement, 10 so that you will be able to choose what is best.* Paul prays for perfect judgement so they make right choices. Why would Paul pray that for these people who were obviously pretty faithful to one another and him?

- kept from blame – avoid stupid faithfulness – honest friendship
- our lives may express the true qualities which only Jesus Christ can produce.

Prayer.

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