

Philippians 1:2-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/phil/phil-1/philippians-12-6/>

Paul extends favor and peace to the Philippians. He expresses how thankful he is in his prayers concerning them. They have financially supported Paul throughout his ministry, so he views them as co-laborers, and is confident that Jesus will continue to work through their faithfulness until His return.

Paul continues his salutation, adding the phrase *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

The word translated *grace* is “charis” and means “favor.” The context determines who is granting favor, and for what reason. This can be seen in Luke, which says:

“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

The word translated “favor” in this verse from Luke is also “charis,” so it could be translated “grace.” In this case, humans in Jesus’ community were attributing favor to Jesus as a boy because he was growing in stature and wisdom. In this case the “grace” or “favor” was being attributed due to a value judgement of Jesus’ life and character.

Another instance of the Bible’s use of “charis” is in Luke 1, when the angel addresses the Virgin Mary:

“And coming in, he [the angel] said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you” (Luke 1:28).

“Favored one” here is a translation of “charitoo,” the root of which is “charis.” Thus, in his salutation, by stating *grace to you*, Paul is wishing favor upon these Philippian believers whom he serves in his capacity as a minister of the gospel.

Paul also wishes *peace* upon them in addition to wishing *grace*. It seems probable that Paul here has in mind the Jewish idea of Shalom, which is translated from Hebrew to English as “peace.” “Shalom” is used as a Hebrew greeting to this day. It has a deep and holistic meaning, being derived from a root word that indicates wholeness or completeness. The significance of “Shalom” is not limited to the mere absence of conflict. It is quite broad, and can apply to prosperous circumstances as well as spiritual well being. Therefore, in wishing the Philippian believers *grace and peace*, Paul is wishing their lives to be full and complete in the broadest possible terms.

Paul continues the opening to his letter by saying *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*. We can get an idea from this letter and Paul’s other writings how the Philippian believers had *participation in the gospel* together with Paul. We will

learn in verse 29 of chapter 1 that it had “been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.” Their suffering on behalf of the gospel, even as Paul suffered, would be a *participation in the gospel*. Paul will also say they have “always obeyed” (Philippians 2:12).

The Philippian believers were also Paul’s earliest and most consistent financial supporters (Philippians 4:15-16). Paul made a particular point in 1 Corinthians 9 that he had earned his own support (likely through tent making) rather than raise financial support. As we will see in chapter 4, the Philippian believers sent financial support to Paul without being asked. This would be another example of their *participation in the gospel* together with Paul.

Paul states that their *participation in the gospel* is the reason that he is *always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all*. Paul is joyful both because the Philippian believers are living faithfully, enduring suffering as good soldiers of Jesus, as well as participating together with him by providing for his finances. This brings Paul *joy*, as that is the very purpose of his stewardship in the gospel of Christ.

Paul’s prayer is rooted in faith, as he states that he is *confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus*. We can discern from the context here, as well as from other prayers of Paul in his letters, that Paul’s primary prayer for the Philippian believers was that they would continue to grow in faith, and endure faithfully until the end of their lives. Paul wanted them to have the same sort of reward that Jesus gained for living faithfully, as he will describe in 2:5-11. To see his spiritual children live faithfully is Paul’s great reward (Philippians 2:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:20).

Paul stated that Jesus began a *good work in you*. Standing alone, this phrase could refer to the fact the Philippian believers had come to faith in Christ. When we come to faith, Jesus lays out good works for us to walk in by faith (Ephesians 2:10). Scripture also promises that God will cause all things to work for good to those who are in Christ, the “good” being to conform us to the image of Jesus (Romans 8:28-29). However, in this passage the immediate context better lends itself to interpret the *good work* God began in the Philippian believers to be their *participation in the gospel from the first day until now*. The *first day* likely refers to the first time the Philippians believed in the gospel. That is when their participation in the gospel began, and it has remained until the time of the writing of this letter. Their example of steadfastness is what gives Paul confidence that they will stick with him, and with the gospel.

This *good work* of participating in the gospel is something Paul *is confident* Jesus will also *perfect*. To be conformed to the image of Jesus is something scripture promises as a certainty (Romans 8:28-29). It seems that here Paul is speaking of something that is uncertain. Paul explains in the next section why he is *confident* the Philippian believers will continue their participation in the gospel: they have continued to give gifts of resources to Paul while he is imprisoned, causing them to be *partakers* of the “grace” or “favor” given to Paul for his suffering. By supporting him, they share in the grace he receives from God because of his suffering for the gospel’s sake. Paul is saying “Given the commitment you have shown so far, I am confident you will continue sticking with me, and with the gospel.”

The word translated *perfect* comes from the root word “epiteleo,” which means “to execute to full completion.” Paul’s prayer for the Philippians is connected to a firm belief that the *good work* Jesus began in them—participating with Paul in his gospel ministry—will continue until Paul’s ministry is completed. Further, he believes Jesus will continue to *perfect* this *good work* in them even *until the day of Christ Jesus*. This *day* refers to a future event, when the current age will end, and when Jesus will judge the deeds of all believers, to give rewards for our obedience (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Paul likely has in mind a confidence that the Philippians will continue on past his lifetime, and continue to stand for and perpetuate the gospel even after he is gone, for the duration of their own lifetimes. As Paul will tell us in chapter 2, there is an immense reward that comes through living a life of humble obedience. Paul will lay out a vision that continuing to participate in the gospel is following the example of Jesus. In spite of the cost, even to loss of life, Paul will argue that this is the path we should follow in order to advance our highest ultimate self-interest.

Paul’s confidence in this reality is what makes him glad to encourage his disciples to embrace suffering for the cause of Christ. Paul is entirely convinced that it will be completely worth it. He will unpack this more in Chapter 2.

Biblical Text

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, ⁵ in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 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 Christ Jesus.