

STUDY GUIDE

LETTERS FROM PRISON: PHILIPPINES (Week 2)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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Philippians 1:6-11

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. 7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (NASB)

Background

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Philippi during his first Roman imprisonment, approximately **61 AD**, which is 10 years after he started the church there. Many commentators call this letter the “Epistle of Joy.” Since we know that Paul was locked in a prison cell when he wrote this letter, it is safe to say that joy is NOT related to circumstances. Joy is a gift from God to those who believe in Jesus. Joy is produced by the Spirit in people who, focused on eternal purposes, obey the word of God in the midst of trials. (See [Galatians 5:22](#) for more on the “fruit of the spirit.”)

Utterly Convinced

In verse 6 Paul writes an profound statement:

*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.*

Paul is saying that he is utterly convinced, fully persuaded (greek word is peitho, pronounced pa-tho) that God will perfect, or complete what He starts. In this context, Paul is specifically writing about salvation (see also [Galatians 3:3](#)), meaning that God always finishes that act of salvation.

Today, in a world crowded with many voices and with the prevailing school of thought that we cannot know God in a real sense, it may be difficult to believe Paul’s statement. But, if the Bible is to be taken literally, for what it says, then we must wrestle with this statement. We can either celebrate it or deny it, but we cannot water it down.

Questions for Reflection

1. What are you “utterly convinced” of today?
2. How did you become convinced of it?

Paul does not come to his conclusions without reason. He specifically writes:

7... it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.

Paul is saying: I know that God has worked in you because I have seen you partake in this work with me in supernatural ways (See [Philippians 4:15](#) for one example). It is as if Paul is writing a defense of the Philippians’ faith and proclaiming: “I

have evidence of your faith! I have facts to back up my statement.”

Later, in verse 8, Paul prays that the Philippians will continue to grow in this “real knowledge” of God. The definition of “real knowledge” is:

REAL KNOWLEDGE - *The Greek idea of knowledge was a contemplation of reality in its static being; the Hebrew was primarily concerned with life in its dynamic process, and therefore conceived knowledge as an entry into relationship with the experienced world which makes demands not only on one’s understanding but also on one’s will.*

Knowledge then is when an objective fact becomes part of our experienced reality. It goes from the head to the heart and becomes *real* knowledge. Paul is praying that the Philippians will not just know facts about Jesus but that they’ll experience Him!

Questions for Reflection

3. If someone spent time with you, would they see evidence that God is working in you?
4. Would that person be utterly convinced that God began a work in you?
5. Discuss a time in your life where you had an experience with God that took head knowledge and made it real.

God Finishes What He Starts

Most of us leave things unfinished more often than we would like to admit. Whether it is this morning’s dishes, a book, an art project or a non-profit organization, many of us have started on things, only to leave them half-finished. Paul says that God is not like that when it comes to us and the saving work He is

doing in us. Paul says that he is utterly convinced that God will perfect, or complete, the work that God began.

We can find great comfort in this because (1) we often don’t finish what we start and (2) we *cannot* finish what we didn’t start. While God certainly wants us to be obedient to His word, He does not need our help in the salvation process. In another letter in the New Testament, Paul warns us against even trying to finish what God starts:

Galatians 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? 2 This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

Paul is reminding the Galatians, and us, that we cannot earn our salvation and that following the rules is not what it takes to be a part of God’s Kingdom. Paul says that salvation is God’s work.

Questions for Reflection

6. Do you ever find yourself trying to “earn your way to heaven?”
7. How can this passage in Philippians bring you peace this week?

For Further Study

God’s beginning work: Phil. 1:29, 2:13, John 1:12, Acts 11:18, 2 Thes 2:13, Titus 3:5, James 1:18.

God’s continuing work: John 3:16, John 4:14, John 10:28, 2 Tim 2:19, 1 Peter 1:4-5.