With this lesson today, we begin a series of four lessons in the study of Philippians. What a great epistle this is—the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Philippians! It has been called “Paul’s love letter.” There is a great deal that is said in this wonderful writing that is, certainly, extremely valuable to us today. In fact, it is an encouraging epistle which, if read and studied carefully, and if followed in terms of its teaching, may bring the same encouragement to us today.

The book of Philippians is a most encouraging epistle. Before we look at Chapter 1, let’s provide some background into the writing of this great epistle and to look at the city itself, the history of it, and so forth.

The city of Philippi was one of the major cities of Macedonia. It was located in northern Greece, near the seacoast some eight or ten miles from the port of Neapolis. The location of the city was on the road from Europe to Asia, and this made it a strategic location for preaching the gospel. Paul generally selected such sites for the beginning of his work. Philip of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great, who assumed the throne in 360 B.C., conquered the town of Krenides and introduced colonists into this city and renamed it “Philippi” after himself. The province of Macedonia was later captured by the Romans and divided into four districts. The battle of Philippi in 42 B.C. was one of the most decisive battles in history. It was here that Marc Antony and Octavian defeated Brutus and Cassius and decided the future history of the Roman Empire. After Philippi became a Roman colony, Latin became the language of the people; Roman coins, laws, and customs prevailed; and the city flourished under Roman rule. Only a few Jews lived in Philippi, and there was no synagogue there. There was a school of medicine in the city; and this is interesting, since Luke the physician seems to have lived there. Today all that remains of the city are a few ruins.

Now, Paul first came to Philippi around 52 A.D. on his Second Missionary Journey. Acts 16 relates the story of this visit. It was the first city in Europe where Paul preached. During his Third Missionary Journey, Paul revisited Philippi and other churches of Macedonia. This was around five years after the first visit. There seems to have been a closer bond of love and affection between Paul and this church than between Paul and any other congregation. This church supported Paul financially on several occasions, as the book itself depicts (Phil. 4:15-16; II Cor. 11:9). The Macedonian churches had a reputation for liberality (II Cor. 8:1-5); and, although poorer than many others, they were more liberal. As we mentioned a moment ago, someone has called Philippians “Paul’s love letter.” More affection is shown for the brethren there, more commendation. They stood by Paul, they supported him in times of need.

Paul did not try to be a burden to the Macedonians, but he was grateful for what he received at their hands. They exceeded his expectations. The secret to this kind of giving is seen in II Corinthians 8:5; Paul said, “first they gave their own selves to the Lord.” That’s important. Attitudes are very important. Because of their love for the Lord, they were willing to sacrifice. It is no wonder Paul loved and appreciated this church so much.

So, with this brief background in mind, let’s briefly highlight Chapter l of this study today. “Paul and
Timothy,” it begins, “servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus that are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons...” Here we have the inclusion of the elders, also called bishops, and deacons who served under the elders, and every Christian, also called “saints.”

You know, “saint” is not a special term reserved for a few who have been elevated to sainthood. All Christians, if they are Christians, are saints; saints are Christians. Here Paul includes all Christians, as well as the elders, the overseers of the flock, and the deacons, the servants who served under the elders.

And he said, “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you, always in every supplication of mine on behalf of you all making my supplication with joy, for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel from the first day until now” (Philippians 1:2-5). What a compliment is seen in verse 5! Paul said, I am thankful for your fellowship—that is, your joint participation, your sharing—that is literally the meaning of the word “fellowship.” You have had a part in the gospel from the first day until now.

You know, that is the way it should be if we are Christians. From the time we become Christians, our labor begins and it never ends. Our joint participation, our sharing, is something that is continual and constant. Then Paul said, “being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ...” Paul expressed here the desire to finish the course. That is critical, isn’t it? It is fine to begin, it is commendable to live the Christian life, but it is all for nought unless we finish the course. Paul said, I have confidence that, through and in Jesus Christ, you may continue your faithfulness, even until the day of Jesus Christ—that is, until he comes again.

Then, there are some ingredients that are mentioned in verses 9-11, the verses we will highlight in the remaining time together today, because I think they are vitally important verses. They are verses that give the ingredients for remaining until the day of Christ. Paul in verse 6 expressed his desire that they remain faithful until the day of Christ, and in the verses that follow, particularly verse 9-11, he provided the ingredients that would enable them to remain faithful. What were they? Prayer, love, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, being without offence, and being filled with the fruits of righteousness. All of those ingredients are ingredients that are needed by anyone in any age who seeks to live for Christ.

Look at what the verses say, verse 9 beginning: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment; so that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

Prayer is mentioned, love, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, being without offence, being filled with the fruits of righteousness. All of these things are the ingredients, the inspired ingredients, we might say, that will enable one to finish the course until the day of Christ, or unto death, as the case may be.

Prayer—how important it is! Love, oh, without it all else avails nothing! First Corinthians 13 points this out so vividly, does it not, as Paul said, “if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me
nothing”? And in this epistle, in verse 9, he said, “I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more...” Look at the superlatives there—that it may “abound”—that’s an excessive amount; and then he added to it, “yet more and more”! Can we ever manifest too much love for God and Christ or for each other? Think of the love that God himself manifested to us through his Son Jesus Christ. Think of the love of Christ in giving himself for us—the sinless Son of God dying for sinful man! Paul said that love needs to abound yet more and more.

But love without knowledge is nothing. Love needs to be tied to knowledge and also to discernment—meaning perception or understanding. So, we need all of these qualities, all of these ingredients.

For what purpose? Verse 10: “so that ye may approve the things that are excellent.” The word “approve” here means “to judge after examination.” So, to be able to properly judge after examining something takes knowledge, discernment—perception or understanding, tied to love.

Beyond that, he said, “that ye may be sincere and void of offence unto the day of Christ.” “Sincere” here literally means “clear or pure.” Literally it is that which, being viewed in the sunshine, is found clear and pure. That describes the life of Christian. It should be the kind of life, when viewed in the light of day, is found clear and pure, with nothing to hide.

Finally, “being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ.” That is an interesting qualifying expression: “which are through Jesus Christ.” It may be that a lot of people do a lot of good in this world, a lot of right things; but, unless those right things are by and through Jesus Christ, they do not effect, or bring about, eternal salvation. So, the key to fruits of righteousness is that they must be those that are by and through Jesus Christ—that is, as a result of being a Christian and living for Christ. “Through Jesus Christ”—that is the key phrase.

And for what purpose are these fruits of righteousness to be seen—“unto the glory and praise of God.” That gives our motivation for serving. We’ll look at more pearls from Philippians next time.