

# Our Partnership In the Gospel

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] We'll read from the book of Philippians. The first 11 verses of the book. The first 11 verses of the book. Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,! To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons, grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart.

For whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[ 1 : 3 3 ] Amen. Come, brother, and preach it again. It's once again good to be with you all. I enjoy my trips back here and the opportunity to minister and to fellowship with you all.

It's a treat for me. It has been a long time since I have done a post-fellowship lunch Sunday afternoon service. I do remember them.

I remember that you are full and that you are happy and that you are sleepy. Me too. So I will try to remember and be sympathetic to that.

I won't be long, I don't think, this afternoon. But I do want to point you to some truths from Philippians chapter 1 and reflect a little bit together on Paul's partnership with the Philippian church.

Maybe you know something of the blessing of a really close friend, someone that you know well, someone who understands you. You understand them.

[ 2 : 4 6 ] You have a connection with them. You've been a mutual help to one another. You've been there for them and their need and they have been there for you in your time of need.

When their name pops up on your phone, it brings a smile to your face. Like, ah, that is my friend. I wonder what they have to say today.

Whether it's something witty or something difficult that they have to share, you're glad when their name pops up on your phone or in your inbox. When you think of them and you do often, it brings you joy because of the fellowship, the closeness of friendship that you have with that person.

You pray for them regularly. You thank God for them. It's not that you're unthankful for other friends, unwilling to help others out. You pray for others. But there's something special about certain people.

And I don't think there's anything wrong with that. You don't need to apologize for that. I think we see it in David and Jonathan's friendship. I think you see it even with Jesus and certain ones of his disciples to whom he was closer.

[ 3 : 54 ] And I think we see it also in Paul's relationship with a particular church. And it's the Philippians. Paul often in his letters thanks God for the churches to whom he's writing.

He tells them how he thanks God for them and their prayers. And so this isn't one individual that brings Paul joy, but a church that he seems, especially here in chapter one, to be especially affectionate for.

He loves the church at Philippi. This is a church he had a hand in establishing and planting. And there seems to be a closer affection for them than at least is expressed in the letters to some of the other churches and other places.

And I want to think together just a little bit, reflect together a little bit about that affection and the partnership that he shared with the Philippians and the gospel and what that looked like. And then talk about the foundation for that.

So let's talk about the affection and the partnership that he shared with the church at Philippi. And then, again, the foundation that it's built on. So one of the themes of the letter to the Philippians, and you probably know this, is joy.

[ 5 : 11 ] Rejoicing. Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice. You'll find that in Philippians. It's a theme here. The joy that marks this whole letter and should mark our lives was something Paul experienced as he thought about the Philippians.

Look again at verses four and five. Or we'll start at verse three. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine, for you making my prayer with joy. When he prayed for them, it brought him joy.

Just thinking about and praying for the Philippians. He was so close with this church family that he considered them partners. Sharers.

The word is used several times, or the same root word is used several times here in chapter one. And it's the word fellowship, or that's at the root of it. They were fellowshippers. They were partners together.

Sharers in the grace of the gospel. And then he says this in verses seven and eight. And the NIV reads a little bit different than the ESV, but you get the same gist.

[ 6 : 16 ] He says in verse seven, it's right for me to feel this way. And again, NIV had think there. It's right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart.

For you all are partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. And I think the order of that is totally flipped around in our different translations.

But don't miss that. I hold you in my heart, for you are partakers with me. And then he says, for God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

He loved these people. He doesn't use that kind of language with other churches that I yearn for you with the affection of Jesus Christ. He was, he had some strong feelings for the church at Philippi in a good way.

He loved these people. And I think that affection is closely connected with the partnership that you see in verse five and verse seven. Because of your partnership or fellowship in the gospel.

[ 7 : 19 ] And again in verse seven, you are partakers, fellowshippers with me of grace, both in his imprisonment and his defense in confirmation of the gospel. Paul's, Paul's preaching the gospel.

He's defending the gospel. He's confirming the gospel. And that likely has landed him in prison, probably in Rome when he's writing this letter. And he is thankful for their willing to partner with him, even when he is imprisoned.

Fellowshippers with Paul of grace. He held these partners in the work of the gospel near and dear to his heart. Paul wasn't like, I'm the minister and all of you are the ones to whom I minister.

He said, we're partners in this work. We are fellowshippers. We are partakers together in it. And they had helped Paul, which is what we want to see. Now, there's all sorts of common causes that can bind people together.

You can be bound together because you're fans of the same team, because you have the same hobby, because you live in the same town, because you speak the same language. But deeper than all of these bonds is the fellowship of grace.

[ 8 : 22 ] It leads to genuine gospel partnership to propagate that gospel. And if need be, to suffer together for the gospel. As we've even talked about this afternoon with our brothers and sisters in the Far East, even praying for them this afternoon is partnering with them in the gospel.

Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians, how that prayer, when you pray, say, I never get to do the work of missions. I'll never be able to. When you pray, you're doing that work. You're partnering with them.

You're fellowshiping with them in the gospel. But look at how that fellowship, that partnership had played out in different ways between Paul and the church at Philippi. They've got this bond, and it's surrounding the gospel.

Jump over to chapter 4 with me. Chapter 4, verses 14 through 18. Yet it was kind of you, remember, he's talking to the Philippians, it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians, that word share there, that's fellowshipper.

It was kind of you to fellowship in my trouble. We think about fellowship, and we think about fellowship lunch. Like, that's not trouble. That's happy. Paul says, you fellowshiped with me in trouble.

[ 9 : 35 ] When I got in trouble, you didn't bail on me. You didn't run the other way and say, we like the gospel until it hurts. And it hurts now, so we're going to just, we're going to back. Nope. Nope. They had fellowshiped with him in grace and good things, and they were fellowshippers with him in trouble.

Verse 15. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel when I left Macedonia, no church entered into, here's our word again, partnership, fellowship with me in giving and receiving, except you only.

Even in Thessalonica, you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I've received full payment and more. I'm well supplied having received from Epaphroditus the gifts that you sent, a fragrant offering, acceptable and pleasing to God.

So the Philippians, by the very practical means of financial support, they had given him money, had participated in the gospel. And so when you get together for your thrilling member meeting in January for three hours on a Saturday morning with donuts and coffee to motivate you to get there.

Right? We do it too. Like if it's not broke, don't fix it. We had one of those meetings too. But when you vote to send money to the Vaughns in France and to the Favs in France, and I don't know who all you financially support on the mission field anymore, but when you do that, that may feel cold, that may feel sterile, you mark a yes on the ballot and you move on.

[ 11 : 07 ] When you do that, you're partnering with them in the gospel. You see, Paul uses that word fellowship here when he talks about receiving a financial gift from them. He loves it.

He's thankful for it. When you have financially supported Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw, when you sent money to help us buy a building, when you saved the chairs that used to sit in this room so that they could sit in our sanctuary, you were partnering with us in the gospel.

You might have seen an unsightly stack of chairs in the closet and thought they were taking up space and collecting dust, and you were partnering with us in the gospel. So he's thankful for this contribution, and that deepens our bonds together.

It leads to great joy. I guarantee you that David Vaughn is excited to come here this summer and to minister to you and to see the people that, though he only sees them once every so many years, that partner with him.

You share that bond of grace, that fellowship of grace. They had received grace, and they partnered with Paul in telling others about that grace as he labored in Macedonia or Thessalonica and now on into Rome.

[ 12 : 26 ] But I don't think we stop with financial support when we think about the saints at Philippi fellowshiping with Paul in the gospel. They had helped Paul when he was there, when he started the church, and you can read about it in Acts 16. Lydia showed Paul and his companions hospitality.

She had them into their home, into her home. The jailer did the same for Paul and Silas, washing their wounds and feeding them. They had also apparently shared in suffering for the cause of Christ. Chapter 1, at the end of the chapter, verses 29 and 30.

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him, but also suffer for his sake. Engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had, and now hear that I still have. Suffering for the gospel is being a partner together in the gospel with him.

They had prayed for Paul earlier in chapter 1, verse 19. For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, this will turn out for my deliverance.

Paul believed that the prayers of the Philippians were effective. He viewed it as partnership, companionship, fellowship, in the gospel.

[ 13 : 31 ] And when they sent that gift to Paul in Rome, did you notice he said that it came from Epaphroditus? Received from Epaphroditus. Look over at chapter 2, and look at how he talks about Epaphroditus.

Chapter 2, verse 25. So they hear that Paul is in prison in Rome. They get together a gift. They gather some money, maybe some other things. We don't know.

And they say, we need somebody to go. And they send Epaphroditus to Rome, and he tracks Paul down, and he delivers this gift to Paul in Rome. That's partnership in the gospel.

And look what he says about Epaphroditus, verse 25 of chapter 2. I've thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and fellow worker, and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.

See how he views this representative of the church at Philippi? He's encouraged. He's a brother. He's a fellow worker. And he's sending Epaphroditus back now.

[ 14 : 34 ] It's a long story. Epaphroditus got sick. The Philippians heard about it. Epaphroditus is in Rome. And they were worried about him. And then Epaphroditus was worried that they were worried about him. You can trace all that back and forth because you've experienced things like that.

So Epaphroditus is worried about the people because they're worried about him. And he's like, from Rome, I'm fine. So Paul says, I'm going to send him back. And he'll be an encouragement to you. So verse 29, Receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men.

And then he tells us they had reason to be worried for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. So God used the church at Philippi to be such a great blessing in the life of the Apostle Paul.

What a joy to be able to pray for and to be prayed for, to help and to send gifts. That's what people who are fellowshippers in the gospel do. And so you can think about that with your relationship with missionaries on the foreign field.

In some ways, that's why I'm preaching here today. And Pastor Jason is preaching for us down in, if he's still preaching, they're in trouble. He preached for us this morning.

[ 15 : 44 ] But why he preached for us at Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw. Because we are partners, we are fellowshippers together together in the gospel.

And that builds affection. We love you all. We thank God for you that Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen doesn't, the ministry of this church doesn't stop at these walls.

It went to China today. It went to Warsaw today. I don't know when your financial support goes out, but when you gather on Wednesday nights in prayer, your fellowship in the gospel goes far beyond the walls of this church.

And that deepens the bonds of affection and joy that we have. And then occasionally you can send someone over to one of those countries and John goes to Switzerland and to France and he encourages the Vons and the Favs and the Wengers and the Zerkers by sending an actual person and Epaphroditus to go and to be a blessing to them.

Does that resonate with you all? Does your understanding of fellowship extend that far? Not just a nice chat over lunch, which is part of it. And I enjoyed that with you all today. But more than that, cooperation together because we have been recipients of the same grace.

[ 17 : 00 ] We've received, we want others to experience it. And so rather than going solo on our own, we partner together with others so that we can reach to the ends of the earth with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, dear people, if God has blessed you with those for whom you long with the affection of Christ, like Paul talks about here in chapter 1, those for whom you're deeply thankful, those who bring you joy, thank God for individuals like that, for churches like that.

Praise Him for such. We often are good at focusing on the negative. And it seems that those relationships that cause the most trouble and sorrow demand the most time and attention. But in the midst of struggles and difficult relationships, remember to thank God for the abundant blessing of like-minded, partnering saints, fellow shippers in the gospel, fellow recipients of grace.

Be thankful that we can worship each Lord's Day with like-minded saints. I said it extends beyond these walls, but it happens within these walls too. Thank God for each other, the people that are sitting around you, saints for whom we pray and with whom we pray and those that we help and have received help from.

Be glad that that extends within these walls and beyond these walls all around the globe. Now, maybe you notice we've skipped over a little bit or a verse in particular.

[ 18 : 25 ] We're here in chapter 1 again. We've talked about His affection. But notice verse 6. And I'm sure that He who began, I'm sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And here is the foundation for this partnership. It's not just, it's not just, man, we're both Cubs fans, so we really get along. That bond can break in an instant. This is built on something much firmer.

So what's the foundation for that affection and that partnership in the gospel? Well, it's the work of Christ. These Philippians that he's so closely connected to, he can't help but see the hand of God in it.

He has seen what the human heart left to itself produces in his own life. It had produced persecution of the church, persecution of Christ himself. But when God works in that heart, remarkable things can happen for those who receive the grace of God.

And Paul's seen that in the Philippians. He's certain of it. I am sure of this. There was apparently such obvious and plentiful fruit in their lives that Paul was confident that this was nothing less than the saving work of God.

[ 19 : 38 ] How was Lydia saved? Back in Acts 16, the Lord opened her heart. He began the work. Paul had seen that Philippian jail a cry out wanting salvation.

And so, from the first converts in Philippi to the day Paul is writing from his chains in Rome, there had been this vibrant partnership in the cause of the gospel. And that was one aspect of the fruit of God's work in their lives.

What else could it be? It can only be the work of God. It's a fellowship of grace. That's the nature of grace. It doesn't start with us. And so, the foundation for the gospel going to Rome and to Macedonia and to Thessalonica and their partnership and the foundation of all of that is the grace of God.

It's a fellowship of grace. It's His work from first to last. I'm convinced that He who began a good work in you, not because you're such good people, but because God did a work in you, I'm convinced of these things.

So when God does that work of grace in an individual, in a group of individuals gathered into a church, it's a good work that He has begun. He takes the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh.

[ 20 : 45 ] He opens the eyes of the blind. He sets the captives free. He sets His love on His children from all eternity, not because of their good works, but because of His good will. It begins with God.

And so Paul's thankful for the Philippian saints, but it's to God that His gratitude is directed. Do you see that? In verse 3, I thank my God. He's thankful for the Philippians, but he's giving thanks to God because it's God's work.

And that's what we should do. When you see that work of grace in each other, when you see people who partner together in the gospel, it should cause you to thank God. It should cause you to worship. Thank you, Lord, that you've given me a small place in this and that I see this going on all over.

Praise God. But not only does it begin with God, it ends with Him. When He began, He will finish. He'll bring the work of grace to completion. And what a comfort that is.

We don't get in by grace and then have to stand by works and really hope that we can do it. He began it and He will bring it to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

[ 21 : 49 ] That's the return of Christ. And the work isn't complete until He comes again. Even if we die and are glorified, we still don't get our resurrection bodies until Jesus comes back. And He's going to come back.

And we're going to get our resurrection bodies. I'm really excited about that. And you should be too. He's going to finish that. Brothers and sisters, if you're here today, afternoon, tired as it is, I understand, but you're a recipient of grace, brothers and sisters.

And Jesus is going to finish the work. You're going to have a resurrection body one day. See Paul's confidence. He's going to complete it.

It's certain. And that's reason for our confidence and for our peace and for us to praise and worship our God. Confident, not in our faithfulness, but in His.

His work is the ground of our joy and our salvation, but also the joy that we have because we're partakers and fellowshiping with others who have partaken of the same grace.

[ 22 : 55 ] All of that originates with God. So we can be sharers in the gospel because of His grace from beginning to end. The Philippians' work and partnering with Paul in the gospel was reason for praise, but only insofar it was as a result of God's work of grace in them.

It's a beautiful pattern. God works. The saints He's working in work and produce fruit and work together. And that's reason for thanksgiving and joy and the partnership of grace that those saints enjoy.

We see it in Philippi and I believe we see it in our churches today. We partner. Nobody named Epaphroditus here, but thank you for sending Jason down to Warsaw today.

I'm not Epaphroditus, but it's a privilege to partner with you in the cause of the gospel. I know the missionaries you support and pray for are very thankful to God for your partnership in the gospel.

Will that continue to be true of the saints at Grace Fellowship Church in Bremen and Grace Baptist Church in Warsaw? We pray God will make it so and will continue by His grace to work to that end.

[ 24 : 12 ] Go to your next business meeting when you're voting to send money to the ends of the earth or receive new members into that fellowship of this church. Go with joy that you get to go and you get to vote and be a part of that.

It's not just dry, dusty work of church business. It's gospel partnership work that we're doing. May it continue to be true here. God is working in you and He's going to finish that work.

So what fruit is being produced? What demonstrations of fellowship of the gospel are present in your life between individuals, as churches, between churches and missionaries? Do you see those marks of the gospel present in your own life?

Where you do, give thanks and praise to God. And where you don't, strive for them by God's grace. God's work of grace is a gracious foundation for sweet partnership and affection.

It grows. The affection feeds the partnership and the partnership feeds the affection and it's not a vicious cycle, it's a beautiful one. Ah, we work together and we appreciate one another more.

[ 25 : 17 ] And the more we appreciate, the more we work together. all flowing out of, built on the foundation of God's work. Now that leads to a wonderful prayer for these people for whom He has such great affection.

The prayer in verses 9-11 is beyond the scope of our attention this afternoon as far as preaching on it. But let me conclude today by reading it. And what Paul prays for these dearly beloved partners in grace is my prayer for you.

Grace Fellowship Church, verses 9-11. Amen. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for that partnership in the gospel. We thank you for your foundational work of grace without which we have nothing.

So we give thanks to you. We praise you. We thank you for that fellowship that we enjoy. We pray that it would grow still deeper and that we would deepen and grow in our affection for one another as fellow workers for the cause of Christ.

[ 26 : 31 ] We thank you for that privilege of serving you. Keep us, guard us, finish the good work that you have begun in us, we ask. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.