

Fellowship in the Gospel *Philippians 1:3-8*

Good morning.

When I first sensed the Lord's calling me to enter into full-time ministry, I had a lot of zeal and hope for all the Lord would do through me, to further His kingdom.

Because I truly loved Jesus and I was not getting into ministry for financial gain, I naively thought my ministry would be blessed with very little resistance from other people.

After all, I was sure that every person who attends church has pure motives, they are not self-seeking, and they are only attending church to Glorify the Lord.

After several years of full-time ministry, I entered a master's degree program. To complete my degree, I had to complete a large writing assignment.

The topic I chose for my paper was, "*The Pros and Cons of a Pre-Established Congregation*".

My thesis statement stated, "The reason for this subject, *Is specially designed to encourage and educate the person who feels God nudging their heart to enter into the ministry.*

This is to warn, encourage, and prepare the person of God about the joys and pitfalls of a congregation that had been in existence before they joined in, to do the work of the ministry."

Please open your Bibles to *Philippians 1*, as we continue in our verse-by-verse study of Paul’s Epistle to the Church at Philippi.

Last time we only studied two verses from *Philippians 1*.

Within two short verses, there was so much for us to study; including the introduction of the authors, the gifts we received from the Trinity, and the background of the Church at Philippi.

The *Book of Philippians* is often known as the “Epistle of Joy” because of the attitude Paul maintained when he wrote this letter, even though he was under house arrest while writing it.

Paul mentioned the word *joy* at least **ten** times in the four chapters of the *Book of Philippians*.

We have learned many times before that happiness usually depends on **happenings**, but *joy* is based on a relationship with Jesus, regardless of our circumstances.

This morning, we find ourselves in the portion of Paul’s letter where he expresses his thankfulness for the Philippian saints’ fellowship with him and fellowship with the work of the Gospel.

I. The reason for the letter.

Read *Philippians 1:3-5*

Notice while Paul was in prison, he wasn’t focused on himself, rather his mind was on others.

Vocational ministry can be trying at times. Someone has said that being a lead Pastor can be one of the loneliest jobs ever.

I want to read you a portion of a letter written by a minister who was looking for some advice from another minister.

The minister wrote, *“I’ve been blessed to be in the same local church for twelve years. It’s a very good church.*

I feel more and more lonely as time passes, mostly because I feel myself becoming more cynical, cautious, and superficial with new people.

What would you say to a Christian who is growing relationally jaded?”

One of the things, any person who serves Jesus must guard against, is being worn out or becoming jaded in ministry because of the sins or actions of other people.

If we allow the complaints or actions of other people to determine our outlook on the Lord’s work, which He has called us to do, we can become defeated and jaded as a result.

Paul said in ***Galatians 6:9 let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.***

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. NKJV

Similar to ***Philippians 4:8*** where we read about the praiseworthy things we are to meditate on, I believe our **attitude** toward ministering to others is about where our focus is as well.

Though I have had many trials throughout my years in vocational ministry, there are still many people, about whom I could say the same thing that Paul said, in *Philippians 1:3*.

“I thank God upon every remembrance of you.” As Paul remembered all that the Philippian Christians had done for him, he was very thankful to the Lord who had worked through them.

The Philippians consistently supported Paul both financially and prayerfully, so when Paul would pray for them, he had a deep sense of **joy** towards those believers.

John Walvoord said, *“Paul’s heart was filled to overflowing as he reviewed in his mind how God had worked in Philippi in leading them to salvation,*

...in forming the church, his own sensational deliverance from jail at Philippi, the subsequent development of the church, and their kindness to him on many occasions.”

Question: *How do you want to be remembered by others you have been in fellowship with?*

When Sandra and I left my mentor’s church in 1997, in order to move and start Bible College, Pastor Larry gave us a book, and *Philippians 1:3*, is the verse he wrote on the front cover.

When people think back to the times when they served the Lord and fellowshiped with you, *do you want to be remembered like these Philippian Christians were remembered by Paul?*

And then notice, “*always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy.*”

Paul prayed for the Philippians with joy. Paul felt overwhelming joy as he prayed for them because prayer was one way Paul felt he could repay the Philippians for all they did for him.

But Paul also understood the power of prayer and he understood to whom he was speaking as he prayed. Prayer is so important for the life of a believer.

Paul said it brought him joy to pray and request things from God for these saints. When we pray, we are speaking to the Creator God of the universe, and nothing is too difficult for Him.

Prayer is not about changing God’s mind; it is about aligning our will to His. Remember the words of Christ, “*Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done*”.

We receive perfect peace and abundant life when we change our perspective and see things the way the Lord sees them. Prayer gives us eternal vision and changes our hearts.

When we realize how big, mighty, and merciful the Lord is, we can easily trust Him in all our situations, as well as for our family, knowing He Loves them more than we could ever.

Paul references his feelings of joy, even though he was in prison with his execution coming. He was not only thankful for their support, but he was also thankful for *fellowship in the Gospel*.

Fellowship is a word we sometimes hear in church when we talk about having a pot-luck dinner or going bowling with other people from the church, but that is not what Paul meant here.

Fellowship in Greek is the word *koinonia*, which means *association, community, communion, or joint participation*.

The Philippians “partnered” with Paul to spread the Gospel through prayer, their friendship, and their financial support.

It is so important for Christians to be like-minded with the foundational truths and the call of the Gospel. If people have differing goals and beliefs in a church, there will be disunity.

Amos 3:3 Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction? NLT

Morgan said, “*It is a glorious revelation of how life in fellowship with Christ, triumphs over all adverse circumstances.*”

The Philippian saints remained in perfect ***fellowship*** with Paul in the Gospel ministry from the first day until the end of his life.

II. Jesus finishes what He starts.

Read ***Philippians 1:6***

There is a two-fold explanation for the ***good work*** Paul was referring to here in ***Philippians 1:6***.

First, Paul was probably referring to the ***good work*** of the Philippians joining him with the **fellowship** of the gospel and their church’s faithful giving to Paul’s ministry.

The Lord put on their hearts to assist Paul and the Lord led them to continue until the end of his ministry. Jesus began the **good work** in them, and He saw it through until it was completed.

Paul was confident that the grace of God was able to finish the **good work** Jesus began through these believers.

The word **grace** in Greek is the word *charis*, where we get our English word charity, and it means *goodwill, loving-kindness, or favor*. **Grace** is also the merciful kindness of God.

Grace is the Lord exerting holy influence upon souls. It turns us to Christ, keeps, strengthens, and increases our faith, knowledge, and affection. It enables us to exercise Christian virtues.

There is cooperation between believers and the Lord when it comes to fulfilling His call in our lives. It amazes me how the Lord has called His followers into a **partnership** with Him.

Our PART: *Philippians 2:12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

God's PART: *Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. NKJV*

Warren Wiersbe said, "Salvation includes a threefold work: 1. the work God does for us—salvation; 2. the work God does in us—sanctification; 3. the work God does through us—service."

Warren Wiersbe said, *“This work will continue until we see Christ, and then the work will be fulfilled.”*

“It was a source of joy to Paul to know that God was still working in the lives of his fellow believers at Philippi.

After all, this is the real basis for joyful Christian fellowship, to have God at work in our lives, day by day.” (Wiersbe)

The second explanation for the **good work** in **Philippians 1:6** has to do with our **salvation**.

1 John 5:11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.

1 John 5:12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. NKJV

The age-old question of, *did God draw me, or did I accept Him?*

Jesus said in **John 6:44**, ***No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. NKJV***

But Jesus also said in **John 12:32**, ***And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”***

John 12:33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die. NKJV

If Jesus began the **good work** of saving you, He will complete it. Some people want to argue whether the belief that someone who is once saved, makes them always saved.

There are verses like this one in *Philippians* but, then there are verses like those in *Matthew 7* that seem to give some pause.

Matthew 7:22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

Matthew 7:23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!' NKJV

The best answer I have ever heard was this: Once saved, always saved **IF** the person was truly ever saved!

2 Corinthians 13:5, Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. NKJV

The *good work* the Lord gives us will be fully complete on the day of Jesus Christ when we are finally completed in Christ, and we will receive a glorified body as proof.

1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed —

1 Corinthians 15:52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1 Corinthians 15:53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. NKJV

III. Chained for the Gospel.

Read *Philippians 1:7-8*

Because of the faith he had witnessed in these believers, Paul said in *Vs. 7*, “***It is right for me to think this of you all***”.

The Philippians had shared in Paul’s **suffering** and shared in the cost of the Gospel so, Paul was confident that the Lord was working in them and would finish the work He began as well.

Paul’s thankfulness and joy for the Philippian church was settled in his heart because they were with Paul during his trials, so they shared in the same grace from the Lord as he did.

Notice ***Philippians 1:8, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. NKJV***

Adam Clarke said Paul was basically saying, “*I call God to witness that I have the strongest affection for you...*

...and that I love you with that same kind of tender concern with which Christ loved the world when he gave himself for it.”

Paul not only told these Christians, that he loved them, he proved it over and over again. These Christians also **showed** Paul how much they loved him as well.

1 Corinthians 13:13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. NKJV

1. Abide = to remain, in reference to place; to sojourn; tarry
Jesus said in John 15:5 "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. NKJV

2. **Faith** = a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God, generally with the included idea of **trust**.

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. NKJV

3. **Hope** = a joyful and confident **expectation** of eternal salvation

Romans 5:5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us. NKJV

4. **Love** = *Agape* is an unconditional, giving **love** that **loves** without changing and without expecting **repayment**.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. NKJV

Notice, “**But the greatest of these is love.**” *Why?*

C. K. Barrett said, “*Love is an activity, the essential activity, of God Himself, and when men love either Him or their fellow men they are doing (however imperfectly) what **God** does.*” (Barrett)

In heaven we won't need **hope** because we will be with our **blessed hope** Jesus Christ.

Titus 2:13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

Titus 2:14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. NKJV

In heaven we won't need ***faith***, because ***faith*** is believing what the Lord has said and the word of God is fulfilled as our eyes will see what we only see by faith here on earth.

IV. Practical Application.

Paul was not only thankful for the support from the Philippian believers, he was also thankful for their ***fellowship in the Gospel***.

Fellowship in Greek is the word *koinonia* which means *association, community, communion, or joint participation*.

The Philippians “partnered” with Paul to spread the Gospel through prayer, their friendship, and their financial support.

It is so important for Christians to be like-minded with the foundational truths and the call of the Gospel. Paul loved these believers at Philippi, and they blessed him.

Some say Paul loved the Philippians so much because they were faithful when it came to financially supporting Paul's ministry but money was NOT Paul's motivation to love these saints.

The Philippians had shared in Paul's suffering and shared in the cost of the Gospel so, Paul was confident that the Lord was working in them and would finish that work as well.

Philippians 4:15 Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. NKJV

After Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, he called the elders of the church together at Miletus.

In **Acts 20**, Paul warned the elders about outsiders coming in and disrupting the flock as well as people from inside of the church trying to gain personal followers instead of followers of Christ.

As he concluded his warning to the Ephesian elders, Paul said, ***Acts 20:33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.***

Acts 20:34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

Acts 20:35 I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" NKJV

Paul was communicating his true motives and heart for Christ's ministry. It was common for Jewish rabbis to practice a trade, and while in the ministry.

Paul maintained a vocation so that he did not need people to financially support him. **But...**

By the time of *Acts 18:5*, it seems Paul gave himself full-time to proclaiming the gospel and no longer worked in tentmaking.

But Paul was not in the ministry for personal gain but for God's glory instead so, he could ask these Christians to support the ministry with a clear conscience.

In *Acts 20:35*, Paul was telling these Christians that ***it is more blessed to give than to receive.***

As Paul was writing to these very generous believers, he was chained to a Roman guard, while he was under house arrest.

If there ever was a man who could say, imitate me as I imitate Christ, it was the Apostle Paul. He put his money where his mouth was, so to speak.

David Guzik said, “*Without a heart of sacrifice there can be no real effective, eternal ministry — and it should be a glad sacrifice, knowing the blessedness of it all.*” (David Guzik)

From grateful hearts, the redeemed ones of the Lord should serve the Lord with our time, talents, and treasures as we partner in the ministry of the gospel.

Hebrews 6:10 For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints. NKJV

Our treasure. The Philippians “**partnered**” with Paul to spread the Gospel through prayer, friendship, and financial support.

The Lord has been so good to Living Faith Fellowship and I rarely bring up money. But as Christians, we should partner with the Gospel through prayer, friendship, and financial support.

Our time. There are 168 hours in a week, *how many of those hours are you giving to **serve** the King?*

This is not a legalistic thing, but a question to cause us to check our priorities.

Our talents. Someone has said, “*Every believer is created for ministry, gifted for ministry, authorized for ministry, and **needed** for ministry.*”

We are told to reach the lost (***Go and make disciples***), and then assimilate them into the life of the body of Christ.

God’s church is to be manned like a battleship, not like a cruise liner. On a cruise liner, a crew is hired to serve the passengers. On a battleship, everyone is part of the crew and has a mission.

When people think back to the times when they served the Lord and fellowshiped with you, *do you want to be remembered like these Philippian Christians were remembered by Paul?*

Paul was thankful for their ***Fellowship***. ***Fellowship/Koinonia*** is an *association, community, communion, or joint **participation***.