

On Guard for the Truth

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Before the weather got in our way in such a remarkable way, we had started a study from the book of Philippians and we're still in the opening beginning parts of introducing this study of such a wonderful familiar book of God's word which we intend to teach verse-by-verse over the months to come, and I invite you to turn to Philippians for our starting point here this morning.

We said the last time we were together, that Paul was writing to the Philippians as those who were partners with him in the Gospel. He wrote to this local church to thank them for their partnership in the Gospel and to help them grow in grace and to grow in joy so that they would be even better partners in the Gospel, even more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and I think it's key to see that theme kind of dominating this letter. This is a letter that is often a great encouragement to individual Christians and rightly and justifiably so, but Paul is writing here to a body of believers, he's writing to a local church seeking to encourage them and to strengthen them as they stand alongside Paul in the sake and for the sake of the Gospel. That's really an important point to recognize from the start in my opinion, because it's showing us that here in the book of Philippians we see revealed that God's purpose for a local church is for the individuals to come together in service and in furtherance of a higher cause than themselves. We come together as a body of believers and we are edified and hopefully encouraged by one another on a personal level for sure, but what we always want to keep in mind is, is that we are to gather together for a purpose that transcends our individual lives, that transcends our individual place in the world, our individual importance. We come together for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We come together with our individual gifts, with our individual contributions, realizing that we are serving together for something that is greater than us, something that has gone before us, something that will live after us. We come together for transcendent purposes and we need to see that and understand it if we are going to maximize our effectiveness together as a local church.

We love the fact that God's word ministers to people and encourages them on an individual basis, we love the fact that the reality of God's word and the work of the Holy Spirit is such that we're confident, I'm confident, that as you sit under the teaching of the word of God, that it is going to benefit you personally, and we embrace that, we love that, but what we want to see as we go through this little bit of an overview of the book of Philippians is that we experience that as something of a side benefit, as something as an

overflow of the greater purpose for which God has called us together. God calls true churches, he calls true Christians into bodies of local believers so that they could serve together as partners in the Gospel, and because we are serving Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel, we realize that our individual pursuits are somewhat subordinate to a greater goal that we all share love for, responsibility for, and that we earnestly seek in what we do, and so that mindset would help us, would deliver us from the prevailing sentiment that animates most people in their search of a church, "What can this church do for me? What can this church do for my position in life? What do you have to offer me as an old person, as an unmarried person? What do you have for me in this or that?" And coming with this sense of, "What do you have to give to me?" Rather what we realize as we come together is, is that we're coming together for something that's beyond all of us, something that's greater than us, it's transcendent to us. Sure, of course we hope that as we gather together that our individual needs are met together, but that there is a transcendent purpose of a local church that we need to see, that we need to understand, that we're serving Christ and we're serving for a cause that transcends what I get out of it. Okay?

That's really important to understand and I think you see these things clearly as you contemplate Philippians from an overview fashion. Paul wrote to them as partners in the Gospel. He wrote to them as partners. We're sharing together in a cause that transcends our individual lives. And last time when we were together, we did an overview look at the first two chapters of Philippians and while I was tempted to simply preach that message because I realize that, you know, that things tend to fade with a little bit of time, I'm not going to do that, but I do want to remind you of what we said, what we said about what it means to be partners for the Gospel, to be in a Gospel partnership together.

Well, we saw, first of all, that Paul expresses Gospel partnership, first of all in terms of gratitude for one another. Look at chapter 1, verse 3. His gratitude is the opening words out of his mouth as he gets to the body of the letter after his brief introduction. He says in verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." That is the framing sentiment that is in his heart as he writes to this church that has supported him and helped him in the Gospel. He says, "I want you to know I'm grateful for you. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." Paul, why are you so thankful? Why are you so joyful as you write to these people? Well, he says it in verse 5, he says, "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now." He says, "You have been with me as I have been a servant of Christ proclaiming Him as an apostle of Christ," Paul says, "From the time that you met me and were converted, you have been with me, you have participated in this with me. I have drawn strength and comfort and encouragement from you. I am grateful to you," he says, "and so I thank God every time I remember you in my prayers, I'm remembering you with a spirit of gratitude." Then he goes on and expresses more about that in the verses that follow that we looked at last time.

He goes on later in chapter 1 and we saw something really crucial, something again that is countercultural to our day and age, something that swims against the utter tide of superficiality, of selfishness, and of self-seeking in church involvement. Paul expresses

and shows us that a partnership in the Gospel is based on a real genuine commitment of heart that transcends time and transcends the ebb and flow of life, so much so that he says in verse 21, remember he's writing from prison, and he says in a personal way, he says, "Personally for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." We'll look at this in coming weeks, but he says, "When I die, it is going to be gain for me because when I die, I will be with Christ and that will be the fulfillment of the purpose that God appointed for my salvation. When I die and with Christ I'll leave this body of sinful flesh behind, I'll leave behind all of these persecutions and discouragements, and I will be with Christ in perfection with Him and I will be with my Lord forever."

So to die then for a Christian is gain because of what you gain, even though you're leaving behind loved ones and other things and so you might think that Paul's just of a mind that he just wants to die as quick as he can and get to heaven. When he gets there, it's going to be the best thing for him. It's going to be the fulfillment of everything that God appointed for him before the foundation of the world so why would you wait? Let's go now. Well, Paul says, "I can't do that. I can't take that mindset." You look at verse 22, he says, "if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. I'm hard-pressed from both directions." He says, "I want to stay. I want to go." Why would you want to stay? He says, "I have the desire to depart and be with Christ for that is very much better." But look, beloved, at what persuades him to stay, what it is that makes him stay and be willing to stay in the flesh even though it would be better for him personally if he departed to be with Christ. He says, "to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake." He says, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith." He says, "For me, heaven can wait." It's a stunning statement. He says, "I can wait on heaven because it means that if I'm with you a little while longer, it will benefit you. You will grow in joy. You will grow in the progress of your faith and God has a purpose for me to be with you." So his level of commitment to the Philippian believers was so deep and so profound that he says, "I'll take staying with you over going to heaven right now. I'll get to heaven eventually, for now I'll wait, and it will be a joy for me to help you in the progress and joy of your faith."

Beloved, do you see what a profound level of sacrificial commitment that is coming from the very depths of his being? If we're Christians, if you're a Christian, somewhere in your heart there is a desire to be with Christ in heaven and when you think about it rightly uncluttered by the demands of the day or the problems of this season in life that you may be going through, you recognize that to be with Christ would be the supreme desire. You can understand what Paul is saying here. You can identify with that. We're not afraid to die because we realize that when we die, we will pass from this realm into an infinitely better realm where we leave these things of this fallen world behind and we're with Christ, we're with the one who loved us and gave himself up for us and that will be perfect. Nothing will be better than that. And somewhere in your Christian heart there's a recognition of that.

Paul says, "I've got that desire and it flames within me, but I'm willing to wait because I'm committed to you, because I love you," he tells the Philippian church, "and I desire

your betterment even though heaven right now would be better for me personally." We see this great commitment to them in this partnership for the Gospel. For their sake, for the Philippians' sakes as you read through the letter, you see that they have been generous in their contributions to Paul, one of the few churches that actively supported him. Time and again they supported him and they sent help for him in his ministry and Paul commends them and congratulates them for that, and this letter is written probably some 10, 12, 14 years after the founding of the Philippian church, somewhere in there. Their church had been in existence longer than Truth Community Church had been in existence and they had been with their founding apostle in spirit and in contribution from the beginning, there had been no lapse. Beautiful. Beautiful expression. The believers in Philippi supporting Paul, Paul saying, "My heart is with you. I'll stay with you for your progress and joy in the faith."

What I want you to see, beloved, is that in a true biblical church there is that kind of mutual concern, that mutual commitment, a spirit of self-sacrifice that says, "Do you know what? I'm happy to put your needs ahead of mine because we are serving together for a greater cause of the Gospel and in the Gospel God works so as to build up and to mature His people and that maturity in faith, the joy that comes from growing in Christ together, comes as believers come together and serve together in a mutual commitment that transcends their individual preferences." That's really a big deal. That really starts to redefine what we look for in a local church, it redefines what our expectations were. We realize that we come not simply to get, though we've been conditioned that way for some almost 40 years since the launch of the seeker-sensitive movement in Chicago at Willow Creek, and people have been conditioned, "What do you have for me?" Then leadership goes out into the community and says, "Tell us what you want from a church and we'll give it to you." That's turning the whole spirit of Christianity on its head and it's a crying shame.

What we need to see is that as we come together under God's word, as we start to see the way life and love in a church work, we start to let that transcend and to transform our thoughts about the whole reason that we exist as a body of believers. Why do we exist? It's so that we could be partners together for the Gospel; that we could be partners in the proclamation of Christ in an evangelistic sense to those outside our walls, in an edifying sense to those within our walls as we all serve together in different ways. We have a common purpose that unites us that far transcends our individual desires and agendas, and when that comes together and clicks in the mind of a congregation, clicks in the mind of a body of believers, then special things start to happen that I think that we're on the verge of, somewhat beginning to see and experience with each other seven years into what we're doing here, and I, echoing Paul's sentiment, thank God in all my remembrance of each one of you as we have started to share in this together.

And so Gospel partnership is based on gratitude, it's based on a mutual commitment, and if you're going to be partners, there needs to be a spirit of unity. Gospel partnership is based on, is premised on, needs unity within the body for it to succeed and Paul makes a big point of that.

Look at chapter 1, verse 27. As he's thanked these believers for their partnership in the Gospel, as he has expressed his commitment to them in the Gospel, he moves on to a matter that we'll see more in the future but it seems as though there were fissures of division that were starting to manifest themselves in the life of this body and Paul is looking to protect the partnership of the Gospel, recognizing that division would be a threat to this service together in the Gospel. We can't be together if we're divided, right? And so Paul calls them in verse 27 and he says, "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." You see, the Gospel is at the center of it. He says there is this surpassing transcendent Gospel and our lives and our ministry together underneath that greater umbrella of the Gospel, needs to be worthy of it.

What does he have in mind when he talks about this worthy life in response to the greater surpassing Gospel of Christ? It's a call for unity. He says, "so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." One spirit. One mind. However many believers there were in Philippi at the time, dozens, scores, I don't know, coming together and all having a common mind, a common purpose that is animating their involvement in this service of the Gospel, and he says that is what is worthy; Gospel partnership means that we need to be unified together.

So he goes on in chapter 2, verse 1, and he says, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." You cannot miss the theme of unity in the book of Philippians, and he goes on and he establishes the example of Jesus Christ as the humility that produces unity in verses 5 through 11.

So that's by way of overview. Gospel partnership based on mutual gratitude, based on mutual commitment, based on a unity of spirit that recognizes that we come together to serve a purpose that is great than any one of us, we come together for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When that's clear, then a lot of other things that might otherwise be problems fall into their place. When humility and unity are seen as transcendent values, transcendent goals that are to be sought and pursued and lived out, then all of a sudden the individual petty complaints that might rise up from time to time diminish in importance, and when we have the big picture of partnership, of gratitude, commitment and unity in mind, then those have a way of drowning out the things that might otherwise divide us. It's a wonderful thing that Paul has given to us by inspiration of the Holy Spirit in this book of Philippians.

Now, that was all kind of review. Now we'll pivot to new material for today. I like that word "pivot." I use that a lot, don't I? Pivot, hinge, and I use the word "now" a lot. Not to speak about a moment in time but simply to say, "I'm gonna talk about something else now." Now we'll pivot. Join them all together at once. You don't know how good that makes me feel inside. Now we'll pivot as we hinge on to something else.

All of this, all of this statement about Gospel unity, Gospel partnership, assumes something really important. It assumes the true Gospel. It assumes the actual content of the Gospel message that is consistent with what God has revealed. Church ministry, stated differently, church ministry happens in the context of proclaiming truth. That's the positive side of it. The negative side is this, is that those who promote error whether inside or outside of the body, those who promote error are a threat to Gospel partnership. If you attack the core of what the Gospel means, then there's no Gospel to have a partnership over. The truth matters. Truth matters in church ministry. That's why we have a detailed Confession of Faith that we hold to here at Truth Community Church. It's why we try to teach in detail and to teach in particulars because the truth matters.

So when you think about what it means to have a Gospel partnership, yes, gratitude, commitment, and unity are the core or at the core of that, but like a woven garment together, there is also a fourth aspect which we could call a partnership of truth. A partnership of truth. You see, a local church doesn't simply come together around shared social concerns or shared common human interests. The reason that we come together as a body of believers here at Truth Community Church is that we share convictions about what that truth is. We have defined it carefully in our founding documents. We say we stand for these aspects of truth, for this view of biblical theology, and we come together as members in a church saying, "That's what I believe too. That's important to me. That's transcendent to me. I want to be a part of a body of believers that exists to advance that because it's important to me and, therefore, I want to partner together with others who that's important to also." So it is a partnership of truth that is involved and we see this as we move into chapter 3.

Now let me remind you that as Paul was writing this letter, he was dealing with opposition. He had opposition, people were trying to get him riled up while he was in prison, he was in chains for the Gospel. Paul was a man who knew what it was like to have opposition and to have his personal opponents and as he writes to this church in Philippi from a distance in the city of Rome, he realizes and he understands probably based on the reports that were brought to him with the gift that the Philippian church had given to him, he finds out that the Philippian church had their opponents also. They had those that were working at cross-purposes to what they stood for in this partnership for the Gospel and you see that as you turn to chapter 3, verse 1.

Look at it with me. Again, this is just an overview message. We'll go through all of these verses in detail later on. We just want to see the big picture so that we have a context in which to understand and to always relate the details back to the bigger picture. That's a very important part of Bible teaching, in my opinion.

Chapter 3, verse 1 says,

1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.

So he's been talking about this joy and Gospel partnership, but then in verse 2 there is this jarring contrasting statement to them that is like an alarm going off in the middle of an otherwise pleasant discussion. He says in verse 2,

2 Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision;

He says, "In the midst of this Gospel partnership that we enjoy together, there is something that is urgent for you to be aware of and to be on guard for. You need to be on guard for the truth." Notice that three times in this one verse, chapter 3, verse 2, he says "beware." Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision." There's a danger here that you need to be careful about. There is something for you to be on guard against that is a threat to everything that we stand for, everything that we've been working together for. And the fact that he refers to them as those who belong to the circumcision, it suggests that there is a Jewish nature to these opponents. Apparently, apparently they were claiming to be Christians and finding a voice in the church but they were teaching things which were contrary to the Gospel, calling them back to Jewish ritual as necessary for salvation, calling them back to a legalistic view that says, "You must jump through these hoops to find your acceptance with God, and if you do not do them, you cannot be accepted by God." This Jewish stuff you see repeatedly in Scripture is very dangerous to deal with. It is not anything to be played around with because it does have the potential to greatly confuse people and to cloud and obscure the Gospel of Christ itself.

So Paul here is warning them against the Jewish influence that seems to be gaining something of a foothold in the church and so he teaches them. Now what he does here is just really brilliant, it's just really magnificent, and let me just back up for a moment and say this. We will look at this next week as we look at Paul's testimony, again, as part of our introduction to the teaching on Philippians. But Paul was uniquely providentially prepared to say the very things that he's about to say in chapter 3 because Paul was a Jew above all Jews before his conversion. Paul had Judaism down to a science. Paul was the superior Jew in terms of outward conformity, and what he does here in order to warn the Philippian church against the infiltration and the infestation of these Jewish influences is he warns them, he says, "You've got to be on guard against these people of the false circumcision. Beware. Be on guard for the truth because this is a threat to our Gospel partnership." Then what he does is he points to his own testimony, his own life experience, to illustrate the reality and the truth of what he is saying.

He says in verse 3,

3 for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,

He says, "This is the reality of the Gospel, the reality of the Gospel is faith alone in Jesus Christ, that glories in him, that glories in the Holy Spirit, and does not trust in any way in anything that we do to achieve a righteous standing before God." He's saying that our

reconciliation with God, your righteous standing with God is secured for you in totality by the Lord Jesus Christ and is received by faith, not by anything that you do by way of Jewish heritage or Jewish ritual. Let that sink in for a moment. That's really important. He is drawing a sharp contrast between these Jewish influences with what the truth is about the Gospel. Then he goes on and he illustrates, he makes his point by pointing to his own life that has been established from his birth.

Look at verse 4. He said,

4 although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more:

"I'm a Jew to the nth degree," he says. "I was,

5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.

What's he saying? Paul says, "You want to talk Jewishness? My Jewish credentials are impeccable. No one's Jewish credentials compare to what mine are by birth and by conduct prior to my conversion. If anyone was of a mind to trust in Jewish influences, I would be the guy because I've checked off all the boxes in my pre-conversion life."

What does he say about it? It's stunning. I like that word too, don't I? He dismisses it all with a wave of his hand. He says in verse 7,

7 ... whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.

He just dismissed everything about his Jewish heritage as having any value in reconciling him to God or earning favor with God. He dismisses it and he says, he expands on it in verse 8. He goes further and says,

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, 10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; 11 in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

He says, "You guys want to talk Jewishness? I've got it in spades. I've got everything Jewish that anybody could ever want, and do you know what it means to me? It's like

looking at a pile of garbage of smelly refuse." He actually uses an even more graphic term than what I'm going into right now. He treats it as dung. He says, "All of that stuff to me is dung compared to Christ, compared to the surpassing value of having Christ, having his righteousness not my own, knowing him, knowing the power of his resurrection, being in fellowship with him, one day to attain to the resurrection of the dead from him. That's valuable. That's real. That's what really matters. That's what counts. That's what's true." He's not simply giving his testimony just to give his testimony as though this were conversation, he's making a profound point about the truth of the Gospel. Christ has put an end to the Jewish shadows. Christ is the fulfillment of everything that the Old Testament pointed to and, therefore, our love, our commitment, our faith is in Christ, not in participation in external rituals of shadows that now have gone away because of the surpassing greatness of the light of Jesus Christ having been revealed, having been crucified, having been resurrected, having ascended into heaven. Nothing compares to that and that's the truth that we proclaim, Paul says, and that's what we cling to, and we don't let anyone suggest that there is any other way or any other access or anything else that is needed to have full forgiveness and reconciliation to God other than this loving faith, this submissive faith in Christ himself. If you have Christ, you have all and you don't need the shadows anymore. It's beautiful. It's wonderful.

So Paul says, "I've laid aside the shadows for something better." Look at verse 12. He says,

12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect [I'm still growing in Christ], but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

He says, "The only thing I care about is gaining Christ. All of this other stuff I've forgotten about by comparison. This is what God laid hold of me for, was for the sake of Christ, to know Him, to be in Him. To inject ritual and legal obedience as a means of attaining that is to poison the well in a way that it will kill you if you drink it."

So Paul says, "In light of my experience, Philippians, I want you to have the same goal and imitate the same example that I do." Look at verse 15. He exhorts them. He says,

15 Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; 16 however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained.

And he goes on and he warns them that the Jewish legalism is a threat to the Gospel partnership that they have enjoyed so he says in verse 17,

17 Brethren, join in following my example,

What example? The one he's just been talking to. The one that dismisses all of the Jewish legalism for the sake of true faith in Christ, pursuit of Christ, Christ himself. "Join in following my example that I've just told you about in the prior 15 verses."

17 ... join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. 18 For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their appetite, and whose glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

Earthly externals, earthly desires rather than on Christ himself, the person of Christ himself, and Paul tells them, he supports that call with his statement in verse 20, "For," he said, "this is why you should follow my example. This is why you should set those other things aside and not be preoccupied with earthly things."

20 For [for this reason] our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

He says, "Beloved," he says, "Beloved, our mind, our goals, our preoccupations are not tied to this world. What we exist for, what we are waiting for is the revelation and the coming of Jesus Christ from heaven. That's what we're waiting for. That's our hope. That's what we proclaim. That's what matters. You have already," he tells them – oh, beloved, hang onto this because this really matters, this is important – he says, "You already have Christ. You have the goal of the Gospel. Don't depart from that to go back to what these false teachers are calling you to, they're calling you away from Christ. You don't do that. You have the ultimate goal, you have Christ, and we're looking forward to his coming rather than going back to Jewish shadows which I, as the ultimate Jew," excepting the Lord Jesus here, Paul speaking, "I as the exemplary Jew, I've abandoned it. Why would you go back to it when together we have Christ?" So this Gospel partnership is a partnership in truth and we together are to be on guard for the Gospel.

Beloved, there is always going to be threats to the Gospel, right? Paul dealt with it in this Jewish form, the Reformers dealt with it in the 16th century in the Catholic form, of course we're still fighting that battle today but that's another story for another time. We're going to be fighting battles for the truth here in our age too, people that want us to pursue matters pertaining to social justice instead of proclaiming the true Gospel, people that want to gear the church toward entertainment and superficiality rather than the truth of the Gospel, fill in the blanks with whatever the current and latest controversy is on social media about things related to the Gospel. It's going to be a part of it. When we come together as a local church committed to the Gospel, we realize that truth is the reason that we exist. We exist to proclaim this truth, to defend it, to refute those who contradict it, and together in the scores, hundreds of people that in one way or another identify with

our church, that's why we exist, it's for the sake of something transcendent, bigger than you and me; that this truth would be proclaimed and defended in a way that is clear and that God by his grace, we hope, will be pleased to bless for the conversion of souls and for the edification of the saints. That's why we exist. That's why things are kind of simple here. It's by design lest we get distracted from what the goal is in a partnership for the Gospel.

So at the end of chapter 3, what is the conclusion then? Paul says, "You know, I count it all but rubbish in order to gain Christ. We're waiting to receive a Savior from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. We're waiting for Him, Himself. We're waiting for Him, not a new doctrine or a new something old that has passed away." You see, it's not simply, it's not just about, it's not just about doctrine, it's doctrine that leads us and points us to the person of Jesus Christ so that we rest in him, that we love him personally, that we're devoted to him personally, that he is the highest affection and aspiration of our hearts. That's the point, that ultimately it would all be to the glory of Christ and as it says in John 3:30, our whole perspective on being together in ministry together for the Gospel, is that he, meaning the Lord Jesus Christ, must increase and we, and I, must decrease because we're gathered together for him, not for us. And because that is such a lofty goal, because that is in true furtherance of the eternal purposes of God, because that is worthy of the sacrifice that Christ made, while we do it imperfectly, what I'm talking about is the single intention of heart for Christ, to love him, to know him, to serve him, to glory in him, to proclaim him, because that is so transcendent and excellent as a purpose for an individual to exist is for him and for his glory alone, because that's so great and transcendent then what do you do? Chapter 4, verse 1, you reject false teachers and you stay true.

Chapter 4, verse 1, Paul says,

1 Therefore [summing it all up], my beloved brethren whom I long to see,
my joy and crown, in this way stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.

Stand firm. "In light of everything that I've said to you in this prior three chapters," they weren't chapters in Paul's time, we know that, but in light in everything that has preceded in what we now have as three chapters, he says, "therefore just stand firm. Stand firm in what I've taught you," Paul says to the Philippians, "Don't be distracted away from the truth of the Gospel by false teachers," and he's going to circle back, he says, "and don't let lesser matters divide you in a way that would distract you from the furtherance of this partnership that we have in the Gospel." It's very lofty. It's very lofty what he says.

So we could conclude here this morning by adding a fifth and final aspect to the nature of Gospel partnership: gratitude, commitment, unity, truth. We realize that fifthly and finally, this is just a label that I'm using as an overview for the final chapter, it's a partnership of application. A partnership of application. These are not theoretical truths. This is not just for academic badminton, "I think this. I think this," bouncing it back and forth as though there weren't eternal things at stake. No, these things apply to daily life.

So in verse 2, Paul had obviously gotten a report of a conflict within the church, and he calls people out by name. He says,

2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.

Personal conflicts, then, must be resolved for the sake of the greater unity. Your personal conflict within the body of Christ is of subordinate importance to the greater concept of this partnership for the Gospel. Your personal conflict is a threat to unity, which is a threat to the Gospel partnership. Therefore the greater weight of the Gospel, the greater weight of the importance of unity in a Gospel partnership comes to bear upon you and says, "This needs to be worked out. We need to resolve this," Paul says, "for the sake of the Gospel." It's not simply, "You guys stop fighting with each other." He's saying this is in a broader context, this is in a bigger context and you can't separate out your conflict from the bigger things that are at stake here that we share in common, and the things that we share in common and we share in unity become a driving force and motivation to work this out for you to have a platform to exercise humility toward someone else in the greater way that he'd already talked about in chapter 2 about how Christ humbled himself for our salvation.

So all of this ties together. These chapters are not isolated units like so many silos on a farm field. These come together. These are unified in their message and in verse 3 he says, he calls upon others, probably a leader in the church, and he says,

3 Indeed, true companion, I ask you also to help these women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel, together with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Even as he's correcting them, it's full of joy and affirmation and confidence, gratitude and commitment as he looks to bring apostolic direction to bear on what was happening at the time.

So he now circles around. He said what he has to say and now he's putting a final concluding thought on it. He says in verse 4,

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Paul having expounded these great themes of Gospel partnership comes and deals with them on a pastoral level, deals with them at the level of their personal anxieties, the things that trouble them in heart. They had evidently lost their joy somewhere along the line and so he wakes them up and says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. Of course you can rejoice, the Lord is near. This Lord which we proclaim, this Lord who humbled himself

in his Incarnation, this Lord who gave his righteousness for our sake, this Lord who is coming again, rejoice in him." And that influences every thought in life.

So he sums it up for them all with a context for Gospel partnership. How does this work in the realm of our minds? Verse 8,

8 Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. 9 The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, [Paul says] practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.

And he goes on in the rest of chapter 4, we won't look at it today for the sake of time. He thanks them for sending their gift. He expresses joy again over their Gospel partnership and he promises them that just as they have ministered to him, God will minister to them in return.

Look at verse 19, he says,

19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

He he closes with a few closing personal notes.

Now, one final point here. What will be the spirit, the animating disposition of believers like this in Gospel partnership, sharing in this kind of gratitude and commitment and unity and truth? What's the spirit of that? Do you know what it is? It's joy. Joy. A deep sense of well-being that is grounded in Christ and in his truth. And let's just survey this really really quickly and see how this theme of joy permeates and is woven through everything that Paul has said. I want to highlight this for you and then we'll bring it to a close.

Look at chapter 1, verse 3 and verse 4, he says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." Verse 18, "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice." Joy. Joy. Verse 25, "Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again." Joy in the faith. Proud confidence. Christ is coming again. Chapter 2, verse 2, "make my joy complete." Verse 17, "even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." He goes on. Verse 28, "I have sent Epaphroditus, so that when you see him you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in

high regard." Chapter 3, verse 1, "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Chapter 4, verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!"

Rejoice. Joy. Understand that there is well-being and wholeness that attends your existence as a Christian and find your gladness in Christ. He's not talking about an artificial display before men with plastic smiles on a Sunday morning where people pretend that everything's okay when it's really not, and it's really just a matter of keeping people at their distance. That's not real. Paul's talking about the real thing, a real inner contentment grounded in Christ produced by the Holy Spirit as we make Christ our focus and his Incarnation, death, resurrection and atoning sacrifice, his ascension, his coming again, is that upon which we set all of the affections and hopes and aspirations of our heart. When that's true, you rejoice.

Apparently, the fact that Paul has to state this as a command many times over in this short letter, tells me something. It tells me that these Philippians had probably lost their joy. It's possible for a Christian to lose his joy, not because he's lost his salvation but that he's lost his perspective, he's lost his sense of the reason for his existence. Even more, more importantly, he's lost sight of Christ. So Paul calls them back to Christ and says, "As you remember Christ, rejoice."

I trust that in the weeks to come as we go through Philippians together, we're all going to grow in joy and grow together in the sense of Gospel partnership which we are privileged to share together as a gift from our Lord Jesus.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, make us people like this, make our body a body like this, a body known for its proclamation of Christ, a body known and experienced in a spirit of gratitude and commitment and unity and truth applied to our hearts with power by Your Holy Spirit. Father, we understand that as we pursue that, the results are in Your hands alone. Father, where there is visible fruit of this or not, we pray that You would please Yourself in an accomplishment of the spiritual virtues that we have discussed here and that as we go through Philippians in the weeks and months to come, that our focus would be refined, narrowed to the exclusive wonder and glory and surpassing worth and value of our Lord Jesus Christ, and as it was said in John 3, Father, so may it be true of this church, of us individually, in our families, in our individual hearts, God, we pray one prayer as we close, may Christ increase and we decrease. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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