

**Sermon 2:**  
**Joy In Partnering Together for Christ**  
**Phil 1:3-8**  
CRCC 1/29/17

**Intro**

~Read vs 3-8~

Paul writes to the church in the city of Philippi (modern day Greece) in the early 60's AD. The overarching theme of the book of Philippians is *joy in a Christ centered life*. As we said last week when we introduced this letter, Philippians is a book that teaches us: 1) joy is *only* possible in a Christ centered life, and 2) joy is *always* possible in a Christ centered life.

The theme of Philippians chapter 1 deals with *joy in the practice of Christian living*. How we live as individual Christians will determine the level of joy we experience. But joy in the Christian life is not experienced through a self-centered attitude, but through a Christ centered attitude. Further, this focus on Christ centered living cannot be done alone. Joy in living for Christ requires a shared life with other fellow Christians. Experiencing joy in your walk with Christ apart from your relationships with Christ's people is foreign to the Bible. But the fullest experience of joy in your relationships with other Christians will be tethered to a joint partnership that seeks to exalt Christ and proclaim His gospel.

What could possibly cause a wealthy businesswoman (Lydia) to seek fellowship with a slave girl formerly possessed with demons? Why would a Philippian jailer seek fellowship with the prisoners he was guarding in his cell? What would prompt him to bring these prisoners, Paul and Silas, to his home, wash their wounds with oil, and expose

them to his family? What would then cause him to continue fellowship with the slave girl and wealthy businesswoman after Paul introduces them but then is forced to leave town?

Some 11 years has passed since the conversion of these people and the forming of the Philippian congregation. In that decade Paul had only passed through Philippi briefly on his 3<sup>rd</sup> missionary journey. Sure this congregation had remained in touch with Paul sending him money from time to time. But it was something bigger than Paul that kept this little growing congregation together over the past decade. That something bigger was the gospel! For the Philippians indeed “blood ran thicker than water”, but it wasn’t the blood of physical family connections, it was the blood of Christ that washed their sins away and joined their hearts together in a partnership in God’s family. Paul was just one part of that partnership.

Paul speaks about the depth of fellowship that existed between himself and the Philippians in vs 3-8. In these verses he reveals that the gospel was the hinge on which his relationship with them turned. Indeed, that is still true today. The gospel is the hinge on which relationships in the church turn. Without the gospel we have no reason to gather together as a church and praise God in worship, study Scripture, pray for one another, weep with one another, and rejoice with one another. But with the gospel we have every reason to do these things. The basis of fellowship for Paul and the Philippian congregation was the gospel. And the basis of our fellowship at this church is the gospel.

One of the key words in this passage is the word “partnership” found in v5. It’s the word often rendered fellowship. Christian fellowship is really a supernatural phenomenon. People who have nothing in common find a

common life in Christ. Being a Christian means entering into a gospel partnership with others to share in the work of Christ. Since we belong to those who belong to Christ, we are to work together for His cause. Where there is no giving, no caring, no loving, and no sharing, there is no true fellowship (Ferguson, 8). A correct understanding of the gospel will recognize that Christ not only drew us to Himself, but has also drawn us to one another.

It was Paul and the Philippians joint partnership in the gospel that caused their relationship to overflow with joy. The gospel was the key to their fellowship. The gospel was the key to their joy. What sustains our relationships of joy with fellow brothers and sisters in the church when tension and conflict surface? It's our partnership in the gospel! What causes us to help our brothers and sisters in their time of physical and especially spiritual needs? It's our partnership in the gospel! What is it that compels us to sacrifice and serve one another as well as allow others in the church to serve us? It's our partnership in the gospel. Everything is centered around the gospel. And when the gospel is the focus, joyful relationships abound in the church. This is the central lesson to Paul's words in vss 3-8.

**Proposition:** In Phil 1:3-8 Paul expresses his thanks to God for his relationship with the Philippian congregation. The key to Paul's joy filled relationship with the Philippians was their joint partnership for the cause of Christ. And if you desire to have joy filled fellowship with your fellow brothers and sisters, then you must adopt the *3 characteristics* true of Paul's joint partnership with the Philippian church.

Surely Paul had a good relationship with other churches. But there was something different about the Philippians. At the end of this letter he

actually calls them “my joy and crown” (4:1). We could say that this congregation was his “crowning joy” in ministry. No doubt it was their gospel-centered attitude that made all the difference in the world to Paul. And we can have the confidence this morning that our joy filled congregation can experience an even deeper joy of fellowship as we seek to adopt the characteristics we uncover in vss 3-8.

*Trans:* Partnering together for Christ involves the first characteristic that marked Paul’s joy filled relationship with the Philippians, which is...

### **I. A Partnership *In* Gospel-Centered Ministry (3-5)**

Paul begins the letter in v3 by saying: **I thank my God in all my remembrance of you.** The word **thank** (εὐχαριστέω) was used by Jesus in the feeding of the four thousand when “*He took the seven loaves and the fish, and [gave] thanks*”(Mt 15:36). We could say that Paul viewed the Philippians as important to him as his daily bread. Every time he remembered the Philippians he thanked God for them. Paul writes this letter during a very difficult part of his life. He was imprisoned in Rome facing possible execution. It turned out that he was released from this imprisonment, but he did not know for sure that that would happen at the time of his writing. He was under house arrest chained to a Roman soldier (Acts 28:16, 23, 30). He was unable to do the things he loved like preaching, starting churches, and strengthening other churches. But he could pray and every time he remembered the Philippians it caused him to pray for them.

Indeed his relationship with the Philippians was a great cause of joy for Paul as he says in v4: **always in every prayer of mine for you all**

**making my prayer with joy.** The word for **prayer** has the idea of making requests. Its hard to think that Paul would have offered vague prayers of blessing for this church. He knew these people by name. He had been in their homes. They had served him physically as he served them spiritually. Joy is often absent from us because we don't take the time to pray for the specific needs of others. We focus on our problems and pains. But as Paul sits in prison he does not focus on himself, but prays for the Philippians needs. This caused him to have joy. Perhaps he prayed that God would protect the Philippians from the civil authorities of Philippi that had beaten and imprisoned him 10 years prior. He surely prayed for the matters Epaphroditus brought up to him. He was consumed with their needs.

This wasn't a perfect church, but no church is. Paul accepted them as they were. A person who lacks joy will think and talk negatively of others, have no desire for the well being of others, and never pray for others. But Paul's joy is evident isn't it? It was wrapped up in all the fond, positive memories of the Philippians.

But what I really want you to see is the key that helped Paul to maintain a spirit of joy when he remembered the Philippians. It's found in v5 where Paul gives the reason of his joy. He says: **because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.**

Now that word **partnership** (κοινωνία) is important. It means "fellowship" and refers to sharing or holding something in common. Now the word fellowship is used wrongly by Christians today who associate fellowship with an atmosphere of happiness coupled with a few good laughs while eating good food at a Sunday afternoon potluck. But that idea of fellowship is something that even unbelievers can experience. Biblical

fellowship is unique. It's a shared vision that calls for our joint commitment to the gospel to the glory of Christ.

That is what made Paul's relationship with the Philippians so joy filled.

They were partners with him in the cause of the gospel, as he says in v5, **from the first day until now**. The Philippians commitment in partnering with Paul was continual. They were not like the Ephesian congregation who eventually left their first love (Rev 2:4). Paul smiled as he remembered how God opened Lydia's heart to believe in the gospel that day by the river. He remembered the hospitality she showed him and his companions in opening her home to them. Perhaps tears filled his eyes as he remembered the providential earthquake that caused the jailer to wake up to the gospel and believe in Christ. He remembered how the gospel softened this jailer's heart on the spot and how he cared for Paul and Silas, tenderly washing their wounds with oil. He fondly remembered the little slave girl who was no longer demon possessed, but was now his sister in Christ.

From the moment of their conversion- **from the first day until now**- the Philippians eagerly entered into a partnership for Christ with Paul. They rolled up their sleeves, had some skin in the game, and supported Paul in a joint effort to advance the gospel. The Philippians did this in very tangible ways. Surely they prayed for Paul, but they did far more.

First, they sent money to him when he was ministering to the church in Thessalonica so that he could devote himself to full time preaching. In chapter 4 he tells them, *"Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia [the province on which Philippi was located], no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except*

*you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again” (4:14-16).*

Second, they had also done this for Paul when he ministered in Corinth as Paul reminded the Corinthians, “And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need” (2 Cor 11:9).

Third, the occasion of his letter was the result of Epaphroditus visiting him at the request of the Philippian elders, taking a long journey to give Paul a gift from the church and keep him company while in prison. Paul calls him a “*messenger and minister to my need*” (2:25). Concerning the gift, he says in 4:18: “I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God”.

Fourth, they revealed that their desire was not simply Paul’s needs, but the advance of the gospel and the needs of other churches around the world. As I mentioned last week, Paul holds the Philippian church up as a model of partnering in the gospel since they gave beyond their means (being poor) with an abundance of joy to the offering Paul was collecting for the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:8). The Philippian congregation was largely Gentile, but they viewed themselves as partners with the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who they didn’t even know. They shared their money with them, which was surely a form of fellowship even if they didn’t know them by face or name.

What do we learn from this? A sign of true love for Christ and the gospel will be seen in the degree of sacrifice we are prepared to make for the sake of its advancement. It will include financial sacrifice, but it will go beyond this. True love for Christ and the gospel involves a reorientation

of our entire lives so that we position ourselves to do our very best to partner with other Christians for the advance of the gospel.

The basis of joy in Paul's relationship with the Philippians was their joint desire to see Christ's name proclaimed and exalted. That must be the basis of fellowship for our church. We must give ourselves to the advance of the gospel. Fellowship may include good laughs and good food. It may include fun times doing things together. But the basis of relationships in this church will not be based on the superficial if they are to abound with joy. It's our partnering together in gospel-centered ministry that brings true joy. I will give some tangible ways this can be seen in our own context later.

*Trans:* But for now let's move to a 2<sup>nd</sup> characteristic of partnering together for Christ. In order to experience the joy of Christian fellowship we must have a partnership of gospel-centered ministry. But our partnering together for Christ must also involve...

## **II. A Partnership *With* Gospel-Centered Expectancy (6)**

We find in v6 a favorite and comforting verse for many Christians. Continuing his thoughts about his joyous relationship with the Philippians, Paul says: **And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.** It's clear that Paul is speaking about salvation as a **good work** of God since we know that God is completely sovereign in salvation and is always responsible for beginning its **good work** in us. You know this to be true about your own conversion. Lydia knew it was true when God opened her heart unexpectedly and sovereignly on a Sabbath day she



undoubtedly thought was routine as she headed to the river to pray. Or think of the jailer who wasn't planning on being saved when he headed off to the jail for nightshift duty with the keys of the cell in his hand. His conversion was just as surprising as the earthquake that accompanied it. God was orchestrating all these events. We know, don't we, that "*as many as were appointed to eternal life believe [d]*" (Acts 13:48). Since God is sovereign in beginning salvation in us, we can rest assured that He will also complete it in us!

But please notice carefully that Paul is not talking about *his own* salvation, although he of course is included among the saved whose salvation will be made complete someday. Paul's focus is on the Philippians. And this is critical for us to see. His confidence is in the Philippians salvation. He says, **And I am sure of this**. One of the things that filled Paul's heart with joy was not only his recollection of their past salvation conversion, but also of their future salvation completion. Because Paul knew God was preserving them, He had the confidence that they themselves would persevere.

Now we can never know for certain whether someone is saved. Only God knows that. But if we are not careful we can live with such a prideful spirit where we start to believe that there are very few people truly saved like us. This stems from frustration with the lack of spiritual progress we see in others. This is dangerous. God gives us signs that people are saved. And one of the signs that Paul (who couldn't see into their hearts) observed was their love for Christ and willingness to sacrifice for the advancement of the gospel. So Paul says that he knows that the same **God who began a good work in the Philippians would bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ**.

The **day of Jesus Christ** is not the day of our death when we enter the presence of Christ, but the day of our resurrection when we are transformed into the perfection (image) of Christ. On this day, the work of salvation will be complete at the same time for all Christians. It's a reminder to us isn't it, that we are all saved at different points and mature at different paces, but we will all be perfected in a moment at the same time (I Jn 3:2). Since salvation is all God's work it's completion is just as certain as if it already happened. Romans 8:29-30 promises us: *“For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom he justified He also glorified.”*

The Philippians good work in partnering with Paul to advance the gospel did not result in their salvation (that's impossible to believe), but their good works had resulted from God's good work of salvation (that's imperative to believe). The Philippians failed along the way as this letter bears out just as Paul did and just as we do as well. But God's work on us will never fail right up to the day He makes us all perfectly like His Son.

This is important to remember not just about yourself, which is usually how we apply v6, but also to see it as applying to your brothers and sisters in Christ. We are used to thinking: “The work Thou has in me begun, shall by Thy grace be fully done”, and rightly so. But we must also think: “The work God has in my fellow brothers and sisters begun, shall by God's grace be fully done.” You must be willing to admit and rejoice in God's good work of salvation in others, even when their immaturity and

sinfulness causes you to shake your head. Choosing to remember and focus on the kindness and goodness of others does not mean you deny or overlook their weaknesses. You simply choose to look past them. Sin should never be ignored or minimized, but this darkness should never overshadow the light of the gospel that has shone in others nor diminish your confident expectation that the church will be presented as a pure bride to the Son at the final resurrection. The brothers and sisters you sit next to this morning are included in the Bride. Do you live with this gospel-centered expectancy of others perfection, or do you view your fellow Christians with contempt? Your joy in relationships with other believers is tied to how you view them. As we mentioned last week, do you view them as saints, set apart to God? Do you have faith that God is working on them as He is working on you? They are not perfect just as you are not perfect, but someday all who are in Christ will have their salvation completed.

On the other hand, a person who constantly focuses on the faults, failures, and slights of others will be a joyless Christian. Bitterness, resentment, and anger toward others are not works of the Spirit, but works of the flesh. A regular pattern of such a joyless spirit on the part of a professing Christian toward other Christians may reveal someone who is not truly saved.

I was close to my dad's dad- as close as you can get being one of 20 grandchildren and almost as many great grandchildren even when he was still living. Calvin's middle name (Clair) was taken from his first name. He was a very gifted artist. He could paint or draw the likeness of someone and you would think you were looking at a photograph. I remember visiting him one day, and as I entered the front door of my

grandparents home, I saw black and white pictures of FDR and Winston Churchill sitting on top of the china cabinet. But as I got closer, I realized they were not photos, but images created by my grandfather on pieces of slate with charcoal. They were almost perfect representations. After both he and my grandmother passed, I was offered an unfinished painting of his that was found in a closet in the backroom. It was not his best piece of work. In fact, it's unfinished. But I hung it with pride on the wall out of the love and joy tied up in my relationship with my grandfather. It's not a perfect painting and he was not a perfect man. But someday we will spend eternity together as perfect image bearers of Christ. I have deep-seated joy in that.

We should view our brothers and sisters in the same light. We are unfinished works of God. But someday we will be complete. There is a freedom to have joy as we relate with one another because with the confidence of knowing that even with the presence of sin and conflict, someday all of that will be gone and we will be complete. Do you live with this gospel-centered expectancy?

*Trans:* Joy at the deepest level is experienced between Christians when they partner together for Christ. Partnering together for Christ is a partnership in gospel-centered ministry. And it's also a partnership with gospel-centered expectancy. But notice finally it's also...

### **III. A Partnership *Of* Gospel-Centered Loyalty (7-8)**

These are probably the most moving verses Paul ever wrote. Sometimes Christians think its wrong to express their feeling for one another. Not Paul. He didn't buy into the Stoic philosophy of the day that downplayed

emotions because it was viewed as making oneself vulnerable. And he probably wouldn't have bought into the showy machosim today that is not true masculinity. He in essence says, "I don't care what others think when I say this": **It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart.** The word **right** (δίκαιος) is a word that can mean "just". Paul is saying that it is morally right, and only just for him **to hold [them] in [his] heart.** Why? Because, says Paul, **you are all partakers with me of grace.** Some commentators take this to refer to the **grace** of salvation that all Christians share in Christ together. And that is possible, but that's rather general and I don't think it's what Paul means because of what else he says. He says, they were partakers **both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.**

You don't want to miss what Paul is saying because it is beautiful. Paul often referred to his apostleship as a **grace** received by God (Rom 1:5; 12:3; 15:15; I Cor 3:10; Gal 2:9). And the Philippians had become **partakers** of such **grace** because they supported Paul's apostolic ministry without fear and unashamedly as he says, **both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.** Paul had an apostolic calling to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. And therefore, it didn't matter to the Philippians if Paul was in prison *for* preaching the gospel and thus not free anymore to preach it and see conversions, or out of prison freely preaching and giving a **defense** of the gospel and confirming it's truth persuasively to lost souls. The Philippians were loyal to Paul even when identifying and supporting a prisoner of the Roman empire placed their whole church at risk of imprisonment and persecution. They supported him even when his

ministry appeared unfruitful. Their stand with Paul has been likened to the stand taken by many during WWII who hid Jews during the Nazi rule in Europe. We tend to idolize Paul, but he was not always appreciated by believers in his day. While Paul was in prison, travelling preachers passed through Philippi and he would have been easy to forget. Some of these preachers were viewed as more eloquent than Paul by the Corinthians (2 Cor 10:10). And some of them even preached out of rivalry with Paul (1:17). But the Philippians stuck by him, and Paul stuck by them. They were not fair weather fans of Paul, nor was he of them. Their friendship in Christ was marked by unflinching loyalty. Paul had them in his heart and they had him in their heart.

In v8 he again confirms that this love came from Christ Himself. And He calls God to the witness stand to confirm it: **For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.** Though they are with one another in spirit, Paul desires to be face to face with the Philippians. This is a reminder to us of the importance of face-to-face contact with believers. There is something artificial if the only time you see your pastor is on a simulcast on Sunday morning. There is something unnatural and unchristian about not desiring to have face-to-face contact with the body of Christ.

Paul yearns for the Philippians with the very heart of Christ. The word **affection** (*σπλάγχχνον*) literally means “bowels”. The bowels were seen as a metaphor for deep feelings of love. Today we speak of loving people with our hearts. Paul is telling the Philippians that his love for them is the very love of Christ. The love we have in our hearts for fellow believers continues in good times and bad because God put it there. For true believers, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the

Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5). Loyalty to one another never runs out because our love never runs out.

Now how does all of this come together? Paul’s relationship with the Philippians is really a model of how joy filled relationships in the body of Christ are sustained. Partnering together for Christ results in joy. This involves a partnering in gospel-centered ministry, a partnering with gospel-centered expectancy, and a partnering of gospel-centered loyalty.

What do these characteristics look like in a local church.

First, realize that fellowship is not centered around events. Partnering in gospel-centered ministry is the key. Paul does not talk about the good times they had at the arena, though they may have enjoyed those times. He doesn’t mention the parties or good food that they shared, though they undoubtedly experienced this. The basis of their relationship was tied up with the gospel. Joy fills our hearts when we interact with one another about how the gospel working in our own souls, our marriages, our children. Joy becomes a reality when we see neighbors, friends, and strangers coming to church hearing the gospel and getting saved. Joy is seen in joining together to sacrifice our finances, time, and energy to do all we can to effectively proclaim the gospel in our community.

Second, realize that partnering together involves sharing our lives together. It’s a partnership in gospel-centered expectancy. It involves seeking godly counsel from one another, praying for one another, and even confessing our sins to one another. It involves learning from God’s Word together, bearing one another’s burdens, and forgiving one another. It means we actually care about one another. It’s being hopeful and encouraging about what God is doing in our lives.

Third, we need to realize our bond is thick in Christ. This is a partnership of gospel-centered loyalty. We are to fight and sacrifice for one another for Christ's sake with a gospel-centered expectancy that someday we will know one another as perfect beings as hard as that is to imagine. We aren't to give up on one another. This is putting Christ at the center of our lives because its basing our fellowship around the gospel of Christ. Nothing glorifies God more than His people sharing life together in the name of Christ as they proclaim together the salvation of Christ.

So do you want joy out of your relationships in life? Then center your life around the church: give, share, participate, sacrifice, grow, love, forgive. There is not true Christian fellowship, and thus not true joy, apart from these things. Joy comes in living a Christ-centered life. But living a Christ-centered life cannot come at the cost of avoiding relationships with Christ's people!