

God's Message to Us in Philippians

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Introduction

Today as we make our way through the Bible, book by book, we come to the book of Philippians.

- This is yet another epistle (or letter) of Paul.
- He was in prison when he wrote it—probably in Rome. It is thought that he wrote it in 61 AD, so probably about six years after he wrote the epistles to the Corinthians.
- Philippi was the first church Paul started in Europe... in 49 or 50 AD.
 - They had supported him financially as he went on from them. They had sent finances to him several times.
 - He had kept in touch with them.
 - We have records of at least two additional visits that he made to them.
 - One interesting fact about them is that they did not have a synagogue—only a prayer group of women that met by a river—and it was with these that Paul began his ministry there, preaching Christ to them at their prayer meeting.
- By the time he wrote this letter to them—about eleven years later, they had grown to have multiple deacons and bishops.
 - You can see how he addresses them in verse one: “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons.”
 - This reminds us that bishops and elders were not seen as distinct offices in the polity (church government) that was set up by the apostles.
 - Our Saviour never authorised individual men to rise up and become “the bishop at Philippi,” as we see soon after the apostles were gone.
 - No, the government the Lord Jesus established for his church by the apostles was in the hand of presbyters (or elders) who were also called bishops or overseers.
 - Whenever men establish positions in the church that Christ did not establish, it brings harm to the church.
 - As those who wish to follow the Bible, we wish to have a plurality of bishops or elders in every church.
- But the encouraging thing is that this church had grown from a few saints to a church that now had both bishops and elders...
 - They had grown even though they were in a place where there was not a Jewish community with a synagogue...
 - And in a place that was a Roman colony—looked at as piece of Rome in another place.
 - As a colony, the citizens of Philippi were all Roman citizens.
 - As such, they had great pride in being Roman and were naturally quite resistant to any outside religion coming in—perhaps one of the reasons there was no synagogue there.
 - But it is very encouraging for us to see that the gospel made progress here.
 - It encourages us that the gospel can bear fruit in the most unpromising places even with very humble beginnings—a few women and a converted jailor.

And in this particular letter, Paul has much to say about the progress of the gospel.

- He gives them instruction and counsel that is aimed at maintaining a fruitful gospel witness at Philippi.
- These instructions apply to us today.
 - In reading this epistle, we receive help in how to be a church that has an impact for Christ in Halifax and in Nova Scotia.
 - If we love Christ, we will share His desire to spread the gospel.

Paul's emphasis throughout this book is on the fellowship of the gospel—that is, working together for the cause of Jesus Christ as those who are rejoicing in Him.

- As this letter is given to us by the Holy Spirit for our edification and encouragement, I will direct its instructions to you.

I. First, learn from Philippians 1 what a good thing it is to have fellowship in the gospel with others.

A. You can see how Paul expresses thanks for the fellowship of the gospel that he has with the Philippians.

- Look at verse 3-5: **I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now...**

1. What a grand thing it is!

- a. What a delightful thing to be able to spread the saving grace of Christ to others so that they can go from the darkness to the light—
 - from being under the wrath of God to having communion with His Son and the hope of everlasting life.
 - Paul took great delight in this—and surely it is a delightful thing...
- b. But it made him even more glad to know that the Philippians were partnering with him in spreading the gospel.
 - He was not doing this work alone.
 - He had reached people in Philippi, and now they, in turn, had reached many more people after he left to go to his next field of ministry.
 - And not only that, but they had shared with him financially to support his work.
 - When something is important to you, it brings great encouragement to have others put their heart into the work and join you in it.

2. Knowing of their fellowship in the gospel also makes Paul glad because he knows that the Lord will continue His work in them.

- a. In verse 6-7, he says: **being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.**
- b. Paul believes that his prayers for them will be answered.

- The Lord will help them to continue to grow in His grace so that they will be without offense until the day that Jesus comes to judge the world.
 - What Paul has begun in Europe will continue to spread and bear fruit in Christ to the glory and praise of God.
- B. As those who have fellowship with Paul in the gospel, he reports to them about his own ministry, to encourage them... here were people that wanted to know...
1. They were concerned about him being in prison, but he tells them that his imprisonment has actually furthered rather than hampered his work.
 - In 1:12, he says: **But I want you to know, brethren, that the things *which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel...***
 - He explains some of the good that has come...
 - In verse 13, that he has been able to reach the whole palace guard—as a prisoner, he was preaching to the guards at Rome and they were believing.
 - In verse 14-18, he explains that his imprisonment has made other ministers more bold to preach the gospel.
 - and that even though some of them were trying to outdo Paul—you know how ministers can be—Paul is just glad that the gospel is being preached.
 2. He also expresses his confidence in verses 19-20 that he will honour Christ at his coming trial.
 - He is confident that through the working of the Holy Spirit in answer to their prayers and his prayers, he will not be ashamed of the gospel.
 - That would be the great temptation before the Roman tribunal—to clam up and not say all that he ought to say about King Jesus—but Paul believes that he will be delivered from such fear by their prayers.
 - It is such an encouragement for him to know that they are standing with him.
 3. He reminds himself and them that the only thing that matters is that Christ is magnified—as he says, **whether by life or by death** (vs 20).
 - He says that it doesn't really matter that much to him whether he lives or dies...
 - If he dies, he goes to be with Christ... if he lives, he will be able to keep on ministering the word to them... and to others...
 - He believes that he will live and he knows that that will make the Philippians glad.

TRANS> What a good thing it is to have fellowship with others as Paul does with the Philippians.

- To have others who care about the gospel, who are doing their part to spread it, and who are praying for you and encouraging you as you encourage them.
- This is how it is meant to be in the body of Christ.

II. Hear then the call to strive together in the fellowship of the gospel.

- The call is given in Phil 1:27-28: **Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries...**

- A. It is essential for us to stand together and to strive together if we are going to continue to bear faithful witness to the gospel.
1. As believers, we have this wonderful gospel that has saved our souls.
 - It is a most excellent thing!
 - It restores us to fellowship with God.
 - It renews our hearts so that we can serve God and truly love others instead of living in the darkness of selfishness.
 - It gives us the hope of eternal life.
 2. But the world and the devil are constantly trying to get you to be ashamed of the gospel.
 - Isn't it true? Don't you feel the pressure?
 - If you don't, it's probably because you have already given way under the pressure so that you hide away in fear.
 - They ridicule you for believing the gospel, and even more for talking about it.
 - They use different tactics, depending on the situation.
 - Sometimes threats; sometimes legal force, outlawing the gospel; sometimes they mock and call you foolish; sometimes they try to promote their drinking and their parties and their immoral conduct as something excellent that you are missing out on...
 - What they want is for you to cower away in fear and hide your light under a bucket.
 - And it is very, very, easy for us to do that.
 - It destroys our happiness in the Lord and it makes us cold and indifferent to Christ.
 - And it ruins our influence for the gospel of Christ in the lives of the people around us—most people don't even know that we are Christians—and if they do, they think it is just a private thing with us.
 3. This is why it is so important for us to strive together for the faith of the gospel.
 - We desperately need each other.
 - We need to constantly encourage one another to stand the faith—to continue in the faith,
 - to continue to remember how excellent Christ and His salvation are, how great the love of God in Christ is,
 - and how much our friends and neighbours and co-workers need Him.
 - When we stand together, we will not be terrified by our adversaries—we will not be weenies; we will be bold and they will be the ones who are afraid.
 4. We need to remember, as Paul says in verse 29, that it has been granted to us not only to believe, but also to suffer for Christ.
 - Your love to Him and to others is demonstrated by your willingness to suffer for His sake—to suffer all that the world throws at you—ridicule, exclusion, persecution, even death if it should come to that.
 - That was the conflict Paul faced, but the gospel really is more important and far better than escaping persecution.

TRANS> It's hard, isn't it? You need all the encouragement you can get.

- We need to help one another stand...

B. But most of all we need the encouragement that comes from looking at Christ.

- Philippians 2:1-11 is one of the most beautiful and powerful passages in the Bible.

1. In 2:1, Paul begins by saying, **If there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.**

- So tell me, is there any consolation in Christ? Is there any love to be found in Him, or any fellowship of the Spirit? Do you find any affection and mercy there?

- Of course! All of these in rich abundance!

- So we need to stand together as believers in the fellowship of all of these things that we find in our Saviour.

- We are not to pull away from Him because of fear of the world.

- These things are too excellent to bury or to draw away from.

- Life in Christ is a life where you stop living for yourself and start concerning yourself about others.

- Instead of being worried about what they might say about you or do to you for serving Christ and promoting Him, your sole desire becomes leading others to Him!

- Other people become more important to you than you are to yourself.

2. In 2:5-11, Paul tells of how Christ sets the excellent example for us!

- To Him belong rightly all the honours of deity... so that angels worship Him as the Creator...

- And so that He can appear to men with such authority that they melt in terror before Him...

- But He set all of that aside in order to do His Father's will and come here as a full human being... setting aside the honour that was rightly His.

- Phil 2:7-8: **but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.**

- The Philippians knew well why He did that!

- He laid aside all of His honour as God to die on the cross for us in order to atone for our sins... by doing this, He bore the punishment of His people for their sin.

- The cross tells us that sin is not okay at all—that rejecting God calls for eternal punishment that only the Son of God can bear.

- The glory and honour of God demand nothing less than that.

- And He Himself became flesh that He Himself might take away our sin.

3. And because the Son did this, the Father gave Him, even as the one who became man, the name above every name.
 - That every knee would bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord.
 - How fully the Father approves of Him—even in human flesh—He is the man who is what every man should be.
 - He is the man who does all for the glory of God that sinners might be reconciled to God and serve God.
 - In Him, we are restored to God—through faith in Him—and in this good news (this gospel) we stand together.
 - This is the glorious gospel that we preach and that we have fellowship in with Christ and with each other...
 - Is there any consolation here for those who suffer because of the gospel? Is there any love here in Christ? any fellowship of the Spirit? any affection and mercy?
 - Indeed! This is the gospel in which we stand!
 - This is the life into which we have entered in Christ.
 - This is the gospel in which we stand together so that not we, but our adversaries tremble.

C. Paul shows that by God's grace, you can now live as His people.

1. In verse 12-13, he calls you to work out your salvation with fear and trembling because God Himself is at work in you!
 - Phil 2:12-13: **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; ¹³ for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.**
 - Working out your salvation means living in the fellowship of the gospel with Christ and with each other....
2. He goes on to explain how in this glorious fellowship you will shine as lights in a world that does not know God.
 - Instead of complaining and disputing, you will cheerfully follow the Lord even through very hard times.
 - You will (v. 16) hold fast to the word of life—the gospel of salvation—rather than drawing back from fellowship in the gospel.
3. Paul sets forth several examples of those who do this...
 - a. He himself pours out his life as a drink offering for the gospel... (v. 17) and so calls them to rejoice with him in this (v. 18) rather than drawing back.
 - b. He speaks of Timothy who he hopes to send to them soon—who is a man that truly does care for others in the gospel...
 - c. And he speaks of Epaphroditus who is also a man that knows how to live in the fellowship of Gospel, caring for Paul, and for the Philippians too.

TRANS> We haven't time for too many details in this overview...

- So moving on to chapter 3, we find here that Paul gives us counsel about how we may continue in the robust fellowship of the gospel.

III. You are urged to rejoice in Christ.

- Look at Phil 3:1: **Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.**
 - It is exactly here that the world and the devil try to throw you.
 - If they can get you to think hard thoughts of Christ instead of rejoicing in Him, they have achieved their goal.

A. First, rejoice in Christ as your righteousness.

- In Philippians 3:1, it says: **Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. For me to write the same things to you is not tedious, but for you it is safe.**

1. He warns them against giving in to the pressure of what he calls “the mutilation,” which was the circumcision party...
 - the Judaizers who said that righteousness comes by getting circumcised and keeping the law instead of by faith in Christ.
 - Instead, they should rejoice in Christ who, as he spoke about in chapter 2, left glory and came in the form of a man and went to the cross for us.
 - If you stay thrilled with that—if you rejoice in Him as He is revealed in the gospel, you will have no use whatever for works righteousness.
2. But there will always be unregenerate people—I mean baptised people in the church who are unregenerate—and they will push for works righteousness.
 - The cross is so offensive to unregenerate people, especially religious people,
 - that they are always speaking with disdain about salvation by the cross and pushing for some scheme of works righteousness.
 - Many of them are ministers or people that are well known for their commitment and involvement in the church.
 - Works righteousness has many different expressions...
 - in the Roman Catholic church, it is righteousness by ceremonies.
 - in some Protestant churches today, it is the belief that God accepts good Buddhists or good Hindus or good Muslims even though they do not trust Jesus Christ for their salvation... this is presented as the only reasonable way for modern people to think...
 - in some so-called evangelical churches, it is righteousness by receiving affirmation from Christ that He thinks you are great and loves you rather than that you are sinner who must look to Christ for forgiveness.
3. Paul explains that if anyone could claim righteousness in the way that the Judaizers were pushing for—by circumcision and keeping the law of Moses—he could.
 - He was blameless as far as the law of Moses was concerned.
 - **“But,”** he says in Philippians 3:7-8: **“what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. ⁸ Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ...”**

- Paul knew that if he stood before God on the basis of his works, he would not be accepted.
 - The righteousness he claims is the righteousness that comes by faith in Christ.
 - Rejoice in Christ, the only Saviour, and you will be safe—
 - As long as you rejoice in the gospel, you will not be tempted to turn to righteousness by works.

TRANS> And that is not the only reason to rejoice in the Lord...

B. Rejoice in Christ so that you keep pressing on to glory.

1. Paul frankly admits that though Christ has made him righteous, he has not yet attained perfection...
 - You can see where he says that in verse 12: **Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.**
 - And because he knows he has not yet attained perfection, but is accepted as righteous in Christ, he is able to keep on growing... pressing forward...
 - Look at verse 13 & 14: **Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**
2. Do you see what he is saying?
 - If you have right standing with God by your own works—by anything but faith in Christ... you can't grow.
 - You are like a delusional high school football team that thinks they are already the best and don't need to make progress or practice or listen to their coach.
 - Real growth can only come when you admit that there is sin in your life.
 - And you can only admit that there is sin in your life (except in a superficial way) when you rejoice in the LORD Jesus.
 - When your eyes are on Him as the one who died on the cross for you, you see how far you have to go—how much growing you need to do—and you want to do it because you see how beautiful He is.

TRANS> So there are two ways to rejoice in Christ—as your righteousness and as your model. And there is a third reason to rejoice in the Lord.

C. Rejoice in Christ so that you will not be paralysed by quarrelling and anxiety.

- That's the instruction we are given in Philippians 4:1-9.
 - He begins by saying what he has been saying... **stand fast in the Lord.**
- 1. There were these two women in the church who were quarrelling, Euodia and Syntyche.
 - They were hard workers in the church, but they had apparently gotten focused on the work, and lost sight of the Lord for whom they were working!
 - Paul tells them to rejoice in the Lord instead.
 - 4:4 says: **Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**

- When you keep your eyes on how excellent Christ is, how precious His salvation is, it changes the way you look at your brothers and sisters.
 - You start to count them as more important than you are, the way Christ counted you as more important than Himself when He laid down His life for you.
 - You want to point them to Him.
 - You want to stand together with your brothers and sisters to encourage them to stand in the gospel, and to have their encouragement to you.
 - The pressures are on you and on them to turn from Christ, but you are fixated on His beauty, truly praising Him, and you gently encourage all your brothers and sisters to rejoice in Him too.
2. And worry? That becomes a thing of the past.
- You have this Saviour who poured Himself out for you on the cross.
 - When you rejoice in Him, you trust Him and put your life in His hands...
 - 4:6-7 says: **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 understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.**
 - Paul has been talking about this all along...
 - Remember in chapter 1 where he testified to how he was not worried about being in prison and about whether he was executed or lived on?
 - If he died, he went to be with Christ which was better than staying here for him, but if he lived, it would be to go on serving Christ which would benefit others.
 - And then he told them not to worry, but to stand together in the gospel.
 - And now he says not to worry about anything, but to pray, putting all your affairs in God's hands.
 - He goes on in verses 8 and 9 to call us to think on the right things... to control our minds—
 - We are to control our minds so that we keep on rejoicing in the Lord and keep on serving Him instead of quarrelling or fretting about things.
 - He calls us to follow his example in serving Christ with rejoicing.

TRANS> And we come to the last thing—Paul commends the Philippians for their fellowship in the gospel... which tells you that:

IV. You are to be commended for your fellowship in the gospel if you are supporting the ministry of the gospel financially.

A. In Philippians 4:10-20, Paul tells them how their support of him was (see the end of verse 18) **a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.**

1. They had sent offerings to him from time to time after he had gone away from them.

- He explains that he is content with or without support—sometimes he had it and sometimes he didn't,
 - but as far as they were concerned, it was a fine deed of theirs to support him—sometimes they were the only ones that did.
2. Paul uses the language of Old Testament sacrifices to show that this deed was pleasing to God...
 - This is one of the ways that they showed their fellowship with him in the gospel...
 - They were rejoicing in Jesus their Saviour, so they wanted to do what they could to promote the gospel.
 - They gave and they prayed with that in mind, and the Lord was pleased with this.
 - It showed that they loved Jesus Christ.
- B. God is, of course, pleased with you when you do the same.
1. He is pleased when you love Christ so much and are so delighted with how He gave Himself for sinners,
 - that you support missions, you support missionaries and pastors, you do what you can to promote the gospel to others, you stand together with your brothers and sisters when the world opposes...
 2. Financial support is truly a crucial matter.
 - When God's people do not support the ministry of the word and the spread of the gospel with their tithes and offerings, they reap what they sow.
 - By sowing sparingly, they reap sparingly.
 - But what a joy it is when they sow bountifully and reap bountifully.
 - How it helps them to rejoice in the gospel the way this whole book of Philippians calls them to.
 - God is pleased and they are able to stand together in the gospel for their Saviour and behold His grace and His love.

Conclusion: What a glorious gospel we have!

- We have fellowship with Jesus and His people in the gospel.
- Let's do all we can to stand together—to encourage one another to remember how great the gospel really is.
 - How full our joy will be if we do that.