

# “THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL”

## PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11

REV. CHARLES R. BIGGS

**Sermon Summary**: Living in the fellowship of the Gospel is to have been graciously and powerfully apprehended by the Lord Jesus Christ (3:12).

Living in the fellowship of the Gospel means to live a life in spiritual union and communion with Christ and other believers by His Spirit in the closest manner possible for human beings.

Living in the fellowship of the Gospel is to understand and experience God’s love in Christ for yourself in such a way that you demonstrate joyful prayer, affectionate grace, and confidence in the work of Christ for yourself and others.

**Philippians** is a book characterized by gracious love and affection; it is a letter of Paul to “close friends”; Paul is filled with joy and gracious, affectionate love even though he is in chains for His faith and the Gospel (1:7).

**Here’s the tone in just the first verses: “Thanks”/ “Joy”/ “Grace”/ “Heart”/ “Feel”/ “Yearn”/ “Gospel Affection”/ “Love”/ “Glory”/ “Praise” and it continues.**

Whereas Ephesians was mostly didactic, Corinthians are admonishments and rebukes primarily, Philippians is joyful, sweet, friendly, affectionate.

**Date: Early 60s**. Most think Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote Philippians, but there is some dispute. Most date it early 60s AD before Paul’s death.

**Philippi was a “leading city of the district of Macedonia...A Roman Colony” (Acts 16:12); Philippi was considered a “mini-Rome”.**

Philippi was named after Philip of Macedon (Alexander “the Great’s” father). It was a Roman colony in Macedonia. All the residents had the privileges and blessings of being Roman citizens; they were special.

The Church at Philippi that Paul planted was planted by the power of God working through prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel of grace.

The congregation was made up of different types of folks, but primarily Gentiles. Look at Acts 16: The founding members of this congregation were- A

businesswoman, a young devotee to the occult who was a slave, and a Roman jailer.

***Both religious types as well as non-religious types came to believe; even a devotee to the occult, hostile to the truth of the Gospel! We should never underestimate the power of the Gospel! Let us never be ashamed of it! It is indeed the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Romans 1:16).***

***God unites the most unlikely folks to become those who share in the “fellowship of the Gospel” the closest union and communion that human beings can share.***

**The Fellowship of the Gospel** (Read Phil 1:5, 7)- Greek word “*koinonia*” [koinwni, a |]

***What does the Bible mean by “Fellowship”?***

- Define “fellowship” in the older use of the term; like in Tolkien’s ‘Fellowship of the Ring’; what does this mean? If you were studying in England and someone said that another was a “fellow at Oxford” what would that mean?

A **fellow** in the broadest sense is someone who is an **equal or a comrade**. The term fellow is also used to describe a person, particularly by those in the upper social classes. It is most often used in an academic context: a fellow is often part of an elite group of learned people who work together as peers in the pursuit of knowledge or practice.

- Greek word “*koinonia*” [koinwni, a |]- Translated “communion” as in “Communion of the saints”/ “participation” as in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17.

ESV uses “partnership” (v. 5) and “partakers” (v. 7).

- ***Koinonia generally connotes a variety of close relationships involving mutual interests and sharing.***
  1. “Fellowship” is a verb. We tend to think about fellowship as something we do.
  2. “Fellowship” is also a noun. Fellowship is something we are and share as well.
- My definition of KOINONIA or “Fellowship”: A close and intimate friendship in Jesus (I realize family as a relationship can also be used, but I am seeking to find something even closer than blood relations can be, especially if you have unbelieving family members; we don’t tell everything

that is deep down in our souls to our family, like we do our closest and intimate friends, etc).

- **“Gospel “Partakers” or “Gospel Partners”**- We are recipients of God’s salvation in Jesus; we are joined together by Christ’s Spirit for the advancement of the Gospel in both word and deed. As the Apostle John put it:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 John 1:3** “...That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, **so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ.**

- Believers have a “partnership”/ “participation”/ “FELLOWSHIP in the Gospel” by the Spirit.
- Believers have a close and intimate friendship in Jesus. We are the closest of friends as Christians.
- What defines Christians is a FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL.
- What is the closest communion that human beings can experience together?
  1. Illustrations: We might think of blood relations; intimacy like in marriage; even bodily communion like in those born “conjoined” as twins (or as “Siamese Twins”).
  2. Illustrations: Business partners, family involvement, blood relations: same purpose, same goal, striving together; sharing of self, same direction, a “one-mindedness” (this is one of Paul’s purpose in writing this letter).
  3. But nothing as great and as close as Spirit-ual union and communion with Christ’s flesh and blood and each other. Spiritual union and communion with Jesus and each other.
  4. Benefits and blessings from the Holy Spirit; gifts of the Spirit.
  5. “One body” (Lord’s Supper)
    1. Like a family, but so much more than a family as a congregation and church.
    2. We are partakers of one body together (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 2:42 And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.**

- **Jesus said that the world would know us by the fact that we love one another. How are we doing as a congregation?** Does the world know that in our relationships here at our congregation we are the closest of “friends” and “comrades” united with Christ for one main purpose and goal of glorifying God and make the Gospel known?
  - Do we love one another at KCPC?
  - The integrity and message of the Gospel is negated by disunity in the church. How are we doing? Honestly.
  - Let’s seek God for help.
  
- The Apostle Paul shows great affection to the other believers in Philippians 1:3-11:
  1. Because they have a fellowship in the Gospel and are ***partakers of God’s grace*** (Phil. 1:5, 7).
    - Because of God’s work in them (Phil. 1:6).
    - Because of God’s work in Him! (He was showing true Christian ***selflessness*** because he is in chains, imprisoned probably at Rome.
    - Because of their commitment to the Gospel (and its advancement) both in good times and bad (Phil. 1:7).

***“...Both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel” (1:7b).***

### **Fellowship of the GOSPEL**

#### ***Gospel 101: What is the Gospel?***

1. Living according to the Gospel is a process of pressing on to apprehend daily the surpassing worth of Jesus Christ and realizing more and more how we’ve been apprehended by Him (Phil. 3:12, Hansen).
2. God inaugurated or started or began the work of grace in us (1:6).
3. We were not seeking after God; no one seeks after God.
4. We were blind; we were naked; we were lame; we were deaf.

5. God in His grace *inaugurated the work in us*: Because of grace, we believed; we had eyes to see the beauty and glory of Christ; we were clothed with the righteousness of Christ by faith; we were given the ability to come to Him as he drew us; we were able to hear the voice of God in the Savior.

6. Wonderfully summarized with Lydia in Acts 16:14:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Acts 16:14** One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. *The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*

7. You've been saved:

1. Acted upon by God's Sovereign and regenerating Spirit; you've been made alive from the dead; you are a new creation in Jesus.
2. United to Jesus Christ and each other in your effectual calling through Word and Spirit.
3. You are no longer condemned and guilty before God's judgment but are the "BELOVED of God" those "loved of God"

8. This is the FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL. Because of God's grace to you in Jesus, you belong to this *KOINONIA and enjoy a friendship deeper than the blood relationships of brothers and sisters on the basis of your mutual participation in the saving work of Christ announced by the Gospel!*

9. Yet God's Work is not finished until Heaven- -until He completes it on the DAY OF CHRIST JESUS.

1. This means there should be growth in grace throughout the Christian life.
2. Jesus saved us to serve.
3. Jesus saved us from our sins; he saved us from the guilt, pollution and power of our sins; sin should no longer have dominion over us.
4. We should live as new creations in Christ Jesus! We should no longer live in sin if we are truly Christians.

M'Cheyne's wisdom: "Nothing is thriving in my soul unless it is growing. 'Grow in grace'."

- How does Paul specifically pray for believers in 1:9-11/***This truly reveals the Apostle Paul's heart for the Christians:***

***ESV Philippians 1:9-11: And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.***

Paul realizes that for believers to truly understand what has taken place in their lives, it takes a better knowledge of Christ (that was Paul's main aim: "To Know Christ and the power of His resurrection"- Phil. 3:10ff).

1. Knowledge of Christ leads to a greater knowledge of God's love for you; knowledge of God's love for you leads to a greater love and service to others ("You will know my disciples because they love one another, etc" Jesus says).
  - We must have a knowledge; we are confessional people and we must seek to know what we believe.
  - However, we must also have not mere knowledge for the sake of knowledge, of affectionate, grace-saturated, and Gospel-directed hearts of service toward others.
  - We are ONE and united together by God's Spirit in this special FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL.
  - We are to grow in love and knowledge and discernment together.
2. Love with discernment helps us to know prayerfully specifically ***how we might*** love and serve others. ***In light of grace, we should ask: "WHO can I serve and HOW can I serve? What is my best ("most excellent") use of my gifts, time, resources, etc.?"***
  - ***Go to a Bible study, but don't merely become a consumer; seek to serve. Get knowledge of the love of God in Christ for you in order to strategically serve others.***

- All of God’s children have been given gifts and graces for the edification and building up of the church (Eph. 4:11ff; 1 Cor. 12:12ff). Do you think of how you can edify and encourage others in their faith? (Romans 1:11-12). Do you seek fellowship with others in order to encourage them and to serve?
  - When you think of going to a Christian event of any kind (prayer meeting, worship service, softball game) do you think of how you can strategically and purposefully and prayerfully edify and encourage others and be of service to them in their Christian growth? Why or why not?
3. All of our service must be motivated by the Gospel; not self-righteous religious reasons; not mere acts of duty; not merely because we “must”; ***but because He loved us first!***
  4. There will be fruit; you will know the tree by the fruit it bears. We are Christians all because of grace, but we must also seek to produce fruit in light of God’s love and in reliance on His grace, empowered by His Spirit!
    - Our goal is to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ”. Paul will teach us later to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling because it is God who is working in us...” (2:12-13).

**Paul’s Prayer is a prayer to better understand our FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL.**

***How would a better understanding of our FELLOWSHIP IN THE GOSPEL look in our congregation?***

**How would we demonstrate the love of God in Christ for us?**

Paul will teach the Philippians and us to “imitate him” and so it is important to learn from what the Apostle Paul does as a representative of what Christian love looks like (see Phil. 3:17; 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Thess. 3:7; 1 Cor. 4:16; 1 Cor. 11:1)!

There are at least three things that the Apostle Paul teaches us about better understanding the FELLOWSHIP OF THE GOSPEL.

**THREE THINGS: (1) JOYFUL PRAYER; (2) AFFECTIONATE GRACE; AND (3) CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST.**

### **Joyful in prayer (1:3-4)**

- Are you honestly joyful in prayer for others when they come to your mind? Why are you? Why not?
- Not drudgery; not something that “puts us out” to have to think and pray for others. We pray for our family (hopefully!); our dear Christian brothers and sisters are just as close if not closer than our family in our union and communion with Jesus.
- Prayer for others is because of God’s love and grace to you; this leads to more and more joy in us as we get to see the changes that God performs in our brethren- -especially here at this congregation!
- Notice the Apostle Paul’s gratitude and thankfulness to God for His work in the other Christians (1:3-5- “...*Because of your fellowship in the Gospel*”).
- What will make us joyful in prayer? Realizing that we are all recipients of God’s grace and mercy.
- All believers are those for whom Jesus laid down his life and died; how can we be divided when His precious blood has united us.
  - How can we be unforgiving and divisive when we have been shown mercy NOT BECAUSE OF ANYTHING WE HAVE DONE, but because of God’s commitment and unfailing love to us in Jesus.
  - Pray for others in this congregation; pray for others in the church; thank God upon every remembrance and you will find your fellowship will be concretely cemented in a profound way.
  - Even those who irritate you a bit, will come to be those you hold dear in your hearts, because you have spent time serving them through prayer! When you pray for those who irritate you—you’ll actually find loving and patient character change in yourself (and often realize how it was ‘you’ who needed to change).
    - Pray to see the good in others.
    - Pray for others’ strengths to be accentuated and their weaknesses covered by love.
    - Pray to see God’s working in others.
- The content of your prayers should be expectant and hopeful like the Apostle Paul (1:9-11)! There should be love, hope, confidence in Christ’s ongoing work.



- What if all of us at KCPC would commit to praying Philippians 1:9-11 regularly for each other? What if we had more love, more love with knowledge and discernment of how God loves us and how we can show love for others. Think of how our love and joy would increase!
- Devote yourselves to joyful prayer in light of what Jesus has done for you and wait for the Holy Spirit to work!
- Barth wrote: “Only in prayer to God can there be this consistent gratitude, for prayer with a Godward perspective focuses on God’s gracious work in human lives no matter how fallen and needy.”

### **Affectionate Grace (1:8)- “The Affection of Jesus Christ”**

- Are you affectionate toward others because of the Gospel? Do you share yourself with other believers in a way that is wisely vulnerable and honestly transparent, especially in this congregation?
- How do you honestly feel about me and others in this congregation? Do you feel affection, thankfulness, joy in your remembrance?
- How might this reveal your own understanding of lack of understanding of the Gospel?
- **Affection** here means “tender mercies” or literally “bowels” (like in “bowels of mercy”) or the “inmost feelings”.
- **Affection:** *“I love you from my innermost being; from the depths of my heart and being.” This is Christian love.*
- Paul said that he not only shared the Gospel, but also shared himself (1 Thess. 2). This is hard, but have you asked God to show you how to do it?
- Notice how Paul speaks at the beginning of his letter to the Romans:

***ESV Romans 1:11-12: For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you-<sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine.***

- “I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you...” (1:11). Others-directed and focused: “I may impart...”
- “We may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith...” (1:12). Recipient of encouragement from others.

- Do we seek the mutual good of others both in our public and private duties or lives?
- Do we seek to edify others? Do we seek mutual edification of this kind?
  1. How about before and after worship?
  2. During the week?
  3. When we see each other?
  4. Do you share yourself?
- **Having trouble seeing others with affection?** Be honest! See each other through the cross; see me through the cross. Confess this when you pray for one another and seek more love and affection toward one another:

***“I see you as one for whom Jesus died... You are IMPORTANT TO HIM... Therefore you are my closest relation and IMPORTANT TO ME, TOO. Like many things in the Christian life, I don’t have to feel this necessarily, but only believe. However, the affectionate feelings will grow.***

**Confidence in Christ’s Work in You and Me! (Phil. 1:6)-**  
Corporate, congregational focus in v. 6.

***“I am sure of this...”***

***What are you sure of Paul?***

***“That He who began (inaugurated) a good work in you will bring it to completion at the Day of Christ Jesus.”***

**Assurance of God’s Work (Focus on Philippians 1:6,11)**

- Do you have real confidence in Christ that people change as they walk with Jesus? Do you have confidence that Jesus is changing you?
- Often we treat other Christians as if “they will always be that way”- -I dare you to join the adventure of God’s love and powerful sanctification in others’ lives!
- People can change- -they can truly change; you are made a participant in that as you pray for them, and show them affection from your hearts.

- When Paul and Silas began Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey, they came to Philippi in Macedonia. Just previously there had been a split, a division, a blemish on the work of God in this world. Just previous to the 2<sup>nd</sup> journey, John Mark's ministry had caused Paul and Barnabas to split up.

***Acts 15:35-41: ...Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. <sup>36</sup> And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." <sup>37</sup> Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. <sup>38</sup> But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. <sup>39</sup> And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, <sup>40</sup> but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord. <sup>41</sup> And he went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the churches.***

- Yet after a few years, and the obvious prayers and affectionate grace and encouragement of Barnabas, the "Son of Encouragement", the Apostle Paul could say:

***ESV 2 Timothy 4:11 Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.***

- People really do change. Be assured of God's Work and stop giving up on folks!
- The Apostle Paul could say about Himself: "Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the chief- -the worst offender."
- Do you believe this?!
- The reason why so few people ever see the life-transforming work of God in Christ is ultimately due to a lack of confidence in Christ Jesus and the powerful inaugurating work of God in the lives of sinners!
- The reason why we don't grow better in our union with others is because we are so quick to move on and distance ourselves for folks who we give up on, lacking confidence in God's good work toward them (Phil. 1:6).
- Have you done this? Go and find them, begin again to pray for them, show them the affection of Christ Jesus (1:8). Show the affection of Christ Jesus because He has shown affection and love and grace toward you.

***Go find your “John Marks” who may be useful to you now!***

- Someone irritating you now? Go pray for them, write their name down, and begin to pray with thanksgiving for this precious soul for whom Jesus died!! Jesus died for them; let this motivate you.
- Jesus died for you, and he will also forgive you for your carelessness, lack of affection, lack of joy and unbelief that is at the root of all of your problems!
- **What day in your life should your entire life intently and diligently and deliberately be focused on?**
  1. The Day of Christ Jesus (1:6, 10)- Our Goal; our end, or rather our new and glorious eternal beginning.
    - No more sin and suffering; listen again: no more sin and suffering.
    - No more struggle against God and loving others.
    - No more unforgiving spirits; no more angry pettiness toward others.
    - COMPLETION implies “incompletion now”
    - This should help us to see each other as “works in progress”. I challenge you to see if you can go one day (then try one week) speaking only about God’s work in others; speaking affectionate words concerning other Christians (even those who may irritate you); strategically plan to use your mouth in service for joyful prayer, affectionate grace, demonstrating your true faith and confidence in God’s good work begun!
  2. Our Christian service should always be oriented toward the DAY—the BIG DAY OF CHRIST JESUS.
  3. A focus on the Gospel, a seeking after more love from God prayerfully will cause us even now to be **“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...”** (Phil. 1:10).

Prayer: Father, grant that through the sermon series on Philippians that you would mature KCPC as a congregation. Deepen our relationships, our

repentance, our humility, our hope, our joy, our knowledge and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

CRB