

Deep Partners in Christ
Philippians 1:3-8
Sunday, October 20th, 2024
By Ryan Perry

Scripture:

Philippians 1:3–8

[3] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. [6] 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. [7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. [8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Let's Pray

Introduction

How many of you remember doing group projects or partner work in school? Now, how many of you actually liked it? I know I didn't.

And the reason I didn't like group projects or partner work is because I was often stuck with people that I didn't know very well and I usually didn't care about the subject matter. On top of that, there was always one person (admittedly sometimes me) who didn't pull their weight or do their work.

Because the reality of partner work is that it's usually a group of people who aren't connected and don't care about the topic.

But this morning, we are going to be talking about a different kind of partner work or partnership. A partnership where each person is deeply connected and should have a high level of care and investment in the work that they are supposed to be doing.

The partnership that I am talking about is the deep community partnership that we all have in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And as we will see through Paul's opening words to the Philippian church:

- It's a community partnership that is meant to be active.
- It's a community partnership that should give us confidence in God.
- It's a community partnership that should fill us with joy and gratitude.

So no matter how you feel about partner work this morning, hopefully, you will be able to see the beauty and richness that exists in our partnership in Christ.

And that this partnership will stir within each of us a desire to be an active member of the body of Christ, will give us confidence in God's work in our church, and will overflow with joy and gratitude as we grow more into the image of Christ.

But let's begin this morning by looking at what it means to be partners in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. The gospel has made us deep partners in Christ (V. 5, 8)

Philippians 1:5, 8

[5] ...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Now, I have to admit that my preferred mode of preaching through a passage is to walk through it verse by verse. Meaning, that I would normally start with verse 3 and then go to verse 4, and so on.

However, this morning it is important for us to start in verse 5 because everything that Paul is going to say to the Philippians in this section of scripture and beyond is built upon the foundation of their "partnership in the gospel."

But what does it mean to be a partner or to have a partnership in the gospel?

The word "partnership" in this passage is a Greek word that you may be familiar with. It's the word *koinonia*.

If you aren't familiar with that word, it is the same word that is also translated "fellowship" in other places in the New Testament.

Like in Acts 2:42:

*[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and **the fellowship** (koinonia), to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

But unfortunately, when we use the word "fellowship" in the church today what I think generally comes to mind is a shallow form of socializing or getting together.

We come to a Sunday morning service, a meal, or even a small group and we exchange pleasantries with people and call it "fellowship."

But the biblical meaning of the word goes much deeper. And when we begin to unpack "*koinonia*" or "fellowship" we actually find that at its most basic level it means "sharing a common life" together.

This means it is first and foremost about a community relationship and not primarily about an activity.

And this kind of relationship isn't merely a neighborly one where you wave to your neighbor when they're outside but otherwise don't talk to them. Rather, it is a relationship that involves a deep community and family connection with one another.

This is why Paul often refers to believers using the term *adelphos* or brothers (which refers to both brothers and sisters in Christ). Look with me at the following verses:

Philippians 1:12

*[12] I want you to know, **brothers**, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel,*

2 Corinthians 8:1

*[1] We want you to know, **brothers**, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia,*

In fact, Paul uses this term roughly 130 times in his letters. Because he knew that believers were a part of a new community, which is meant to be a deeply connected family of God.

We also see the depth of this family connection when Jesus elevates the family of God above earthly families in Mark 3:34-35.

[34] And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! [35] For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

He does this because our connection with one another isn't merely a genetic connection that we share with an earthly mother, father, or sibling, and is more than a shared connection around an interest like biking, hiking, knitting, or football.

Instead, we are a deeply connected community and family because we all have been transformed to the depths of our being by the power and blood of Christ on the cross.

We have been given a new life and citizenship by Christ who set us free from the power of sin and death.

This is why Paul says to the Philippians that their partnership (koinonia) “**is in the gospel**” and it has been “**from the first day until now.**”

Because when Paul preached the gospel to Lydia, the jailor, their households, and others in Acts 16, and they believed, they became participants in and members of the deep community and family of Christ.

A family to which Paul himself feels so connected that he says in verse 8 “**that he yearns for them all with the inward affection or love of Christ.**”

Application:

Now, I recognize that the word “family” can carry some baggage for people. Especially if you come from a family that isn't that close or maybe you have family members who have left deep wounds on your soul.

But I want to encourage you this morning, that no matter how you have been hurt by your earthly family, or even by other believers, that God has made each one of us part of his heavenly community and family.

And because he has done this, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, the church is meant to be the place where we experience our deepest levels of community and family connection as we share our common life together in Christ.

So let me ask you:

- Do you consider yourselves part of a deep and connected community and family here at LEFC?
- Do you see your deep need to be a part of this intimate community of faith?
- Are you working to build those deep and lasting relationships within the body of Christ?
- Do you seek to love the church with the same deep love and affection that Paul has for the Philippians and that Christ has for you?

And as much as I am asking you these questions, I am also asking them of myself. Because I have to admit that my love for you all and the church can be fickle.

Some days I feel that yearning and deep affection that Paul is talking about and other days I don't care if I see a single human soul.

But for all of us, despite how we may feel at times, we need to see the faith family, our church, as our deepest community and family. The place where we share a common life together and the place where the full and rich life in Christ is lived and experienced.

But as much as I have spent time talking about how “koinonia” points to our deep community and family connection in Christ. **It also points to the idea that we are “partners” in the gospel.**

We see this idea of partners or partnership in Luke 5:9-10 when Luke writes:

*[9] For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, [10] and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were **partners** (koinonia) with Simon...*

Now, in this context, Luke is referring to the partnership that James, John, and Peter had in the activity and business of catching fish. However, it still helps us to better understand what Paul meant when he talks about the Philippians and their “partnership in the gospel.”

On the one hand, their partnership and fellowship is about a relationship with each other as a deep community and family of faith. But on the other hand, it's also about being a deep community in action.

2. Our deep partnership in Christ should be active (V. 5, 7)

Philippians 1:5, 7

*[5] ...because of your **partnership in the gospel** from the first day until now.*

*[7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are **all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.***

If you were here last week, you may remember that one of the reasons Paul wrote this letter was to thank the Philippians for the monetary support that they sent to him through a man named Epaphroditus. As it says in Philippians 4:18:

[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.

But if we go back a few verses we begin to understand that the support that the Philippians sent wasn't just a one-time deal. Rather, the Philippian church, on several occasions, had given Paul money which is one of the reasons why Paul calls them partners in the gospel.

As he writes in Philippians 4:14-16:

*[14] Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. [15] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into **partnership** with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.*

This church was laboring with Paul in the work of the ministry by continually supporting him so that his ministry could flourish, and the gospel could be preached even from prison. **That is why he calls them “partakers or co-participants with him of grace, in his imprisonment” in verse 7.**

But Paul wasn't the only one who was a recipient of their partnership and generosity. The Philippians were also a part of giving to the Jerusalem church during an intense time of persecution and poverty, even when they themselves were dealing with poverty. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5:

[1] We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia (including Philippi), [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, [4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

The point here is that the Philippian church so badly wanted to support and partner in the work of the gospel, that they were giving out of their poverty both to Paul's ministry and to help sustain the persecuted church in Jerusalem.

As members of the deep community and family of Christ, they were being active partners and participants in the work of the gospel.

Application:

Here at LEFC, this desire to be active partners in the flourishing of the gospel is the reason we give 17% of our budget to fund global missions.

It is the reason we support Prince Paul, the folks in Cat Lake, Children's Vision, Yohan in India, and the Hershey's who are going to North Africa.

But here is something that I am wrestling with. Are we really passionate about the work of the gospel across the globe? Are we really excited and zealous about funding the work of the gospel to unreached people groups?

Sure we give 17%, which is great. But for us, as a church, we can do it without it really costing us much. In fact, we can give that money, and at the same time watch our savings continue to grow and grow.

So my question for us to pray through as a church is, what does it look like for us to be zealous about the global cause of the gospel, and how might God be calling us to be even greater partners and co-participants in that cause?

Yet, financial partnership isn't the only kind that Paul has in mind in the book of Philippians. When we go back to Philippians 1:7 we see that he calls the Philippians:

partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Now, Paul could be talking about their partnership in his ministry of defending and confirming the gospel through their support. And I believe that is partly what Paul has in view here.

However, as Gordon Fee points out, in light of what Paul says in the rest of this letter, we should also apply these words to their ministry in Philippi as well.

Meaning, that part of what Paul is getting at here is that they are partners with him as they defend and proclaim the gospel in their own city and region.

This is supported by what Paul says to them in Philippians 1:27:

[27] Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

Paul is encouraging them, whether he is present or absent, to continue striving with one another for the faith and spread of the gospel. And in so doing, they are continuing and participating in the work of the gospel that Paul started in Philippi.

So they are Paul's partners in ministry as they continually give money to support him and they are partners with Paul in proclaiming the good news of the gospel right where God has put them.

Application:

Now, I think we all understand that the church is supposed to be about the work of sharing, defending, and proclaiming Christ. I don't think that anybody in this room would disagree with that statement.

However, do you fully believe that as a member of the family of God here at LEFC, you are called to be an active worker in proclaiming that good news?

That you are meant to an active partner in this family by giving of your time, talents, and physical resources so that the church would be built up.

And that you are sent out into the world, to a home, a family, a neighborhood, a community, or a vocation to live out and proclaim the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

Because each one of us, if we are believers in Christ, are meant to be active partners in the gospel. Partners who give freely to the work of the gospel and partners who live and proclaim the gospel right where God has put us.

So a couple of good questions for us to ask ourselves are this: How is God calling me to build up the body of Christ at LEFC? Secondly, how is he calling me to live out the gospel outside of these walls?

So now we have a more robust picture of the deep and active community that Paul had in mind when Paul talks about their partnership in the gospel.

And if you're feeling like this deep and active partnership feels weighty, I want you to know that you're right. It is weighty. In fact, it is so weighty that it is beyond our ability to live out on our own.

But instead of getting scared and shrinking back at the reality and implications of our deep partnership in Christ, it should cause us to have a rock-solid confidence in God, and his work in our lives.

3. Our deep partnership in Christ should give us a rock-solid confidence in God (V. 6)

Philippians 1:6

[6] 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.

So now we've reached the high point of what Paul is trying to say in this opening section. The place that helps us to understand why he talks about their partnership in verse 5 and then reiterates and expands on it in verse 7.

He is sharing all of this because he wants to encourage and give them the confidence that he sees God at work in their lives and in their church.

This is why he says "I am sure..." or more precisely "I am convinced... that Jesus who began a good work in you will complete it."

Paul has seen and felt the blessings of their deep family partnership with him in the gospel. A family partnership that started when they first believed.

And because he has seen and experienced it, he wants to give them the assurance that despite their struggles, persecutions, false teachers, and the infighting that is going on, he is rock-solidly confident that God has not only started a good work in their lives but that he will also complete it.

They aren't left by themselves as they seek to live out the gospel in Philippi and they're not alone in their struggles.

Instead, they serve a God who is going to be with them, for them, and will complete his plans for them when he returns.

And just to be sure that they understand this point he says later in Philippians 2:13:

[13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Application:

Now, there is definitely personal application for us in this verse. That when we are going through the trials of life or are struggling, we can take confidence in the fact that if God has brought us to faith, then he is going to hold on to us, and will complete our faith when he returns.

This echoes the words of Jesus in John 10:28 when he says:

[28] I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

This is good news that we all need to hear and believe. Amen.

But Paul, in verse 6, isn't talking to individual believers, instead he is talking to a church. And the reason he could confidently say that God had started a good work and that would complete it, is because he knew these believers deeply and intimately and had seen, with his own eyes, the fruit of their faith overflow into good gospel works.

So as much as I want us to be confident that God is going to finish his work in our individual lives, the greater question is: **Do we believe that God is going to complete his work in this church?**

And I want you to know this morning, as someone who has labored side by side with many of you for the past ten years. As someone who has witnessed your faith through many trials and struggles. Who has seen the heart for prayer that God has cultivated in this place and has many times seen a church in action through service to one another.

I am confident that the God who started a good work, through Christ, in our midst here at LEFC, over 20 years ago, is going to finish it.

And even though this past year was really hard. Division came, infighting happened, relationships were strained, and people left. I see before me a people who are ready to press on and press into our deep partnership in the gospel so that we would grow deeply in our faith and the good news would spread widely outside of these walls.

However, if you haven't been here very long, or for some reason, you've been here but haven't committed yourself to this community. I want to encourage and challenge you to become so deeply invested in this family of faith, partnering in the work of the gospel, that you too will have the confidence that God's good work and plan will be accomplished in your life, the lives of his people, and across the globe.

And if we all commit ourselves to this deep partnership in the gospel. Meaning, we build deep and lasting relationships in the body. We actively work side-by-side to live and proclaim the gospel. And we live with the confidence that God is going to accomplish his good purposes in our church.

The overflow of that will be a life of joy-filled gratitude and prayer.

4. Our deep partnership in Christ should produce joy-filled thanksgiving and prayer (V. 3-4)

Philippians 1:3–4

[3] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,

As I said at the beginning, when I normally preach a passage, I like to start at the beginning. However, the advantage of doing it this way is that when we read verses 3-4, we already have a really good understanding of why Paul is thanking God and praying for the Philippians with joy.

It's because of their deep partnership with him in Christ.

A partnership that overflowed in their love and concern for Paul, their monetary support of Paul, and their partnering with him in the spreading of the gospel, both in Rome, where he is in prison, and in their own city of Philippi.

Because for Paul, there is nothing more exciting, joy-filled, or gratitude-inducing than seeing God's people doing the work of the ministry. This is one of the reasons why Paul starts many of his church letters with thanksgiving. Look with me at the following verses:

Colossians 1:3-4

[3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, [4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

1 Thessalonians 1:2–3

[2] We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, [3] remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

When Paul sees churches loving one another, staying strong in their faith, and sharing Christ, his natural response is thanksgiving and praise.

But I do think it is significant that Philippians is the only letter that contains the phrase, **“making my prayer with joy.”**

And the reason that this is important is because it highlights how intimately involved Paul was with the Philippians. As a reminder, they are a church that he **“holds in his heart”** in verse 7 and **“yearns for with the affection of Christ Jesus”** in verse 8.

Paul loves this church so much and is so deeply connected to them in the work of the gospel that he is filled with joy and thanksgiving when he remembers them and prays for them.

Application:

Church, one of the reasons that I am so excited about this book is because I believe that it calls us to joy and to rejoice in the Lord almost more than any other book in the Bible.

But we need to see how intimately connected our joy is with our deep partnership in the gospel. Yes, we do experience joy, gratitude, and happiness in our individual relationship with Christ, but Christianity, more than anything, else is meant to be deeply communal.

Meaning, that our experience of a full and rich joy and gratitude in Christ is connected to how deeply rooted we are within the body of Christ.

Closing:

So my prayer for each of us, including myself, is that we will all become more deeply connected as a family here at LEFC, and that our family connection will overflow into being an active community of faith.

A community where we love, serve, give, and build one another up in Christ. And a community where we pray for, work for, and yearn for the spread of the good news of Christ in our communities and in the world.

And if we do this, I believe that we will not only have a rock-solid confidence in God and his good plans for this church. But I believe we will experience new levels of joy and gratitude as we see God maturing us in our faith and drawing lost souls to Himself.

So my final question for us this morning is this: **Do we actually want to be apart of this deep partnership, family, and community in Christ, and are we willing to pursue it?**

Let's pray.