

# Philippians 1.3-8 Sermon / COB / 07.31.16

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## Introduction

- † **[1: title]** Every once in a while, LeeAnn's supervisor will send her a \$25 gift card. With it, she will include a note that might say something like, "LeeAnn, thank you for working late to fix those problems, even though they were not on your project. You always are a team player." Or "LeeAnn, thanks for covering the customer care line, I appreciate your willingness to do whatever we need."
- These notes are affirming: they boost your morale, they make you feel appreciated, they boost your confidence, they help you believe you are an important part of the team. They also use positive reinforcement to encourage attitudes and behaviors the supervisor likes and wants to see more from LeeAnn.
  - When Paul told the Ephesians they should speak only words that build people up, he wasn't just saying they should avoid unwholesome speech, he was saying they should actively use their words to build each other up. LeeAnn has been fortunate to have a supervisor who does.
- † Last week, we saw how Paul and Timothy used their opening greeting to reinforce the gospel of Christ and good theology in the minds of the Philippians, and thereby reassure and encourage them.
- Today we will read Paul's expression of thankfulness, something that would affirm them, reinforce right thinking, and encourage certain behaviors. What we will see today is an extreme example of the notes LeeAnn receives with the gift cards, and in Paul's version, there is a lot of good theology as well. We also will see that Paul even keeps himself focused on right thinking, which helps him deal with adversity. Let's pray and then we will get started.

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## Exposition

- † **[2: 1.3-8]** We will be reading Philippians 1.3-8 today, if you want to open your Bible. I will have the verses on the screen, using the New English Translation, which is what you find in our pew Bibles.

**Philippians 1.3-8 NET: I thank my God every time I remember you. I always pray with joy in my every prayer for all of you because of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am sure of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. For it is right for me to think this about all of you, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel all of you became partners in God's grace together with me. For God is my witness that I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.**

- † **[3: legal language]** Paul might have used legal terms, like "defense" and "confirmation," because [as he literally said] he was "in chains," imprisoned, preparing his legal defense in the Roman court.
- He was in prison because of his public defense and confirmation of the gospel. While in prison, he continued to defend and confirm the gospel. He eventually would go to Roman court, and there he would defend and confirm the gospel one more time, whatever else might transpire.
  - Paul was a stubborn animal! I had a cat like that while in college. One day, he got into the trash, right in front of me. I gave him a tap on the nose. He went right back into the trash. I gave him

a hard smack on the hiney. He went right back into the trash. We repeated this a few times. My hand was starting to hurt. Didn't matter, he went right back into the trash. I finally picked him up, put him in the sink, and gave him a shower, which seemed to cool his jets for a while. That was Paul: he was determined to pursue his goal, the gospel mission, whatever it cost him.

- † Paul's multi-year imprisonment confused people back in Philippi: they had seen Paul delivered out of jail in their own town when he was founding their church, and they had heard of his deliverance at other times, so why not now? Was this a sign Paul was no longer in God's favor? Plus they now were suffering some persecution, making them wonder whether God was angry at them.
  - Into this situation, came some Jews who today would be in a cult. They believed Jesus was the Messiah, so they called themselves Christians, but they had a different gospel. We call them these people the "antagonists," because Paul argues against their teaching in this letter; they are the bad guys in our narrative.
  - These antagonists argued God was not pleased with Paul and his gospel, and that was why Paul languished in jail; and the Philippians were suffering because they had aligned themselves with Paul and lived by his gospel. The antagonists offered a different gospel, a different path to righteousness and God's favor, encouraging the Philippians to align with them to please God.
  - Do you remember from last week what was different about their gospel? **[4: gospels]** The antagonists said you earned righteousness in God's sight by obeying the Mosaic Law of the Old Testament; in other words, you earned your salvation by becoming a good enough person. They believed Jesus was the long-promised Messiah, but apparently they thought he only pointed the way toward perfect obedience.
  - The gospel Paul received from Jesus himself was very different. The truth is you cannot earn righteousness or salvation, because you will never be good enough for God's standard. But through Christ, God has mitigated that problem. When you put your faith in Christ on the cross taking your punishment for your sin, God the Father accounts to you the righteousness of Christ. This is a gift of grace, unearned, unmerited. God declares you to be righteous in his sight, as righteous as Christ. One gospel is about works or merit; the other is about grace.
  - When I was a teaching assistant at Georgetown, I worked for a professor who told me that he always put one trick question on his tests, so that nobody got a 100. In human obedience class, can you get 100? We cannot get 100; no matter how hard we try, no matter how good our attitude. Hopefully, our sin will be accidental, not willful, but it's still sin. And even if you could be perfect from this moment on – hey, if you were to drop dead ten seconds from now, maybe you could! – even in that situation, you could not make up for past sin, for the corruption you've had since conception, for the guilt accounted to you as part of our wayward species. You need to receive righteousness and salvation as gifts of grace from God; you cannot merit them.
- † **[5: relational]** That's the theological issue here. Relationally, even knowing that some of the Philippians were starting to doubt him and his message, Paul still loved them. He was thankful for them, he prayed for them, he was writing to encourage them, he loved them, had them in his heart, longed to be with them.
  - And notice he says he loves them *all*, he prays for *all* of them. Some of them might have doubted him and turned against him, but his response was to desire to be with them, in part to help them see the truth and be spiritually healthy. He would overlook any personal feelings of

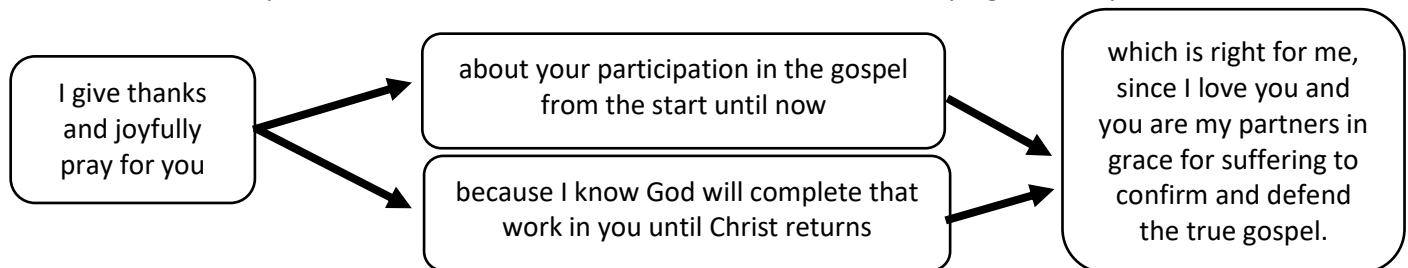
hurt, because all he wanted was to help them. Is that easy to do? Not for me! This a good lesson for those of us who aspire to be spiritual leaders for Jesus.

- Paul said he longed to be with them “with the affection of Christ Jesus”: I think that is a statement of his love’s magnitude, depth, and inclusiveness. I think it also reflects his love’s purposefulness: he wanted to be with them to love on them, such that they would be spiritually safe and grow strong in faith. Again, this is a good lesson for us, a way to check our own hearts.

† **[6: prayer]** Paul was addressing a theological problem with a resulting relational tension. I reckon it was good that he seems to have prayed a lot and he prayed often for the Philippians. We should learn from this: we too should be in prayer constantly; and we should pray for those we love.

- As he prays, Paul prays for their needs: a word for word translation would be, “... always – in every prayer of mine in behalf of all of you – with joy making *entreaty*...” The Greek word δέησις is an urgent prayer request to meet a need. This is what we call “intercessory” prayer.
- Think about how you feel and how you pray when someone you love is hurting or in danger. When loved ones are dying or very sick or very hurt or living in dangerous situations or making bad choices or not yet believers, it is hard for me to think about it, because it hurts so much; and yet I cannot help but think about it, because it hurts so much. Stylistically, our prayers in such moments range from ongoing, incoherent, tearful chant of “O God, O God, please, please help!” to the stoic barest request like, “Lord, please help,” and then forcing the brain to think about something else. Inside, we feel anxious, stressed, frightened.
- **[7: joyful prayer]** Now look at how Paul prays: he is thankful for them, and he is joyful as he prays for them. He has thankfulness and joy in his heart, not anxiety.
- Bible scholar G. Walter Hansen said as Paul prayed, God so filled his consciousness, that Paul could not help but continue to believe in God’s faithfulness and in God’s people, forgiving any past slights. As we pray, as we pray more frequently, more fervently, more in knowledge of what scripture reveals, we too can be filled by the Holy Spirit in those moments, with more faith, more peace, more joy and thankfulness, to mitigate our anxiety and stress and fear.

† **[8: logic]** So we are having a good discussion here, I think; but we have not yet really talked about what Paul is saying. In the Greek text, vv.3-7 are one long sentence. To understand the points Paul is making here, we need to understand the logic of this complex sentence, which ironically can be obscured by our translations which use several shorter sentences hoping for clarity.



- This chart looks better all horizontal on my page than it does slanting downward to fit on the slide, but hopefully you can follow the logic.
- Why does Paul rejoice and give thanks? His first thought is that he rejoices and gives thanks for their participation in the gospel since the first day when they became believers. Let me explain this and then we will come back to our chart.

- † **[9: participation]** “Participation” in v.5 translates the Greek word κοινωνία, which usually means “fellowship.” One way they had fellowship in the gospel was by believing it with Paul. In fact, the gospel created a new fellowship [a new κοινωνία] in Philippi, called the church, with relationships so deep that Paul often referred to fellow believers as “brothers and sisters.” Later in the letter, Paul refers to this as “spiritual fellowship” or “fellowship in the Spirit” [2.1].
- But we can discern there is more to this point, because Paul used this term κοινωνία in other letters to mean active participation in something, not just fellowship as we think of the word.
  - Also, the way Paul wrote this sentence in Greek could be translated as “participation [or fellowship] *for* the gospel” [εἰς = *for* per Fee]; in other words, Paul saw their fellowship served some purpose to further the gospel mission, not just providing them with companionship or association with each other as a benefit.
  - Think about our church. It is nice that we sometimes hang out together and go out for fun together. But there is more to our fellowship than that, there is purpose to it, right? We worship together, we serve each other, we shine God’s light out into the pagan world. As a church we have a mission, we have ministries that support that mission, and even our fellowship efforts are focused on helping each other become healthy and growing spiritually.
  - But the clearest argument about the nature of their participation comes from the context here, especially what Paul says in 1.7.
- † **[10: partner]** In 1.7, Paul says, it is right for him to be thankful and to joyfully pray for them, because he loves them and because both in his imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel all of them became *partners* in God’s grace together with him.
- Each was a συγκαινωνός, a *partner* with Paul in his ministry. They were partners with him to defend and confirm the gospel, such that they supported him sacrificially even while he was in prison. This sheds light on the meaning of 1.5: Paul was thankful for their fellowship or participation in the gospel, in that they had been his partners in that gospel mission.
  - **[11: missions]** The Philippians had partnered with Paul in the gospel, not just by believing and then sitting mute; no! they had truly partnered in the ministry, in the mission. They had partnered with Paul on his missionary journeys, through ongoing prayer support [1.19], financial support when they could get it to him [4.10-18], and sending one of their own spiritual leaders, Epaphroditus, to help Paul in Rome [2.25-30].
  - **[12: + evangelism]** They also partnered by sharing the gospel locally themselves, suffering for their faith in the face of opposition [1.27-30] and continuing to live as God’s lights [his witnesses] in their perverse society [2.15-16], as they defended and confirmed the true gospel of Christ [1.7]. They did the work of the gospel mission and they supported Paul’s efforts to do that work as a missionary and church planter.
  - Look . . . The inference the Philippians should have drawn – the main point Paul wants to reinforce here – is that it was good that they always sacrificed for the gospel which Paul preaches. It was good, not bad as the antagonists are saying.
- † Participation in the gospel for their own salvation and spiritual growth led them to participation in the gospel mission for the salvation and spiritual growth of others. Their faithfulness in the defense and confirmation of the gospel was evidence of their faith in the gospel.

- This is just as true for us: our salvation and sanctification should lead us to share the gospel truth with others, this should be a natural, integrated, part of our lives. And our dedication to the gospel mission in our daily lives is great evidence of our own faith and salvation. Does playing Pokémon provide evidence of salvation? No. Better evidence would be to intentionally invest that time in your relationships with unchurched neighbors and coworkers.
  - Can I tell you something about the new Pokémon game? The game uses our church parking lot, isn't that a hoot? I was joking with Andrew that this went against our bylaws, so I was going to sue Nintendo and the other investors to get at a few of those millions. Andrew found out that you can request removal of your property from the game. But I think it is good for the game to bring people all the way to our parking lot, maybe some will come back! Here's the way you should play Pokémon: try to bring more people to the church than the game does this month!
- † **[13: attention]** So Paul was thankful and joyful about the Philippians, because they had been active partners in the gospel mission since they first believed. But there is more! In v.6, we have two language features that signal to us that something important is coming.
- First, Paul says "I am sure of this very thing..." Using such elaborate, unnecessary phrasing like "this very thing" signals that something important is coming; he is getting the reader's attention.
  - Then instead of simply referring to "God," Paul describes God as "the one who began a good work in you"; this focuses the reader's mind on the one aspect of God Paul wants to emphasize.
- † **[14: perfect]** With that set up, what is the important thought? Paul says he is thankful and joyful because he is sure "that the one who began a good work in you will perfect it [or complete it] until the day of Christ Jesus." The day of Christ Jesus refers to when Christ returns, the end of time. In other words, Paul is sure that God did begin a good work in them and that God will perfect or complete it all the way until the end.
- **[15: perfect]** What is that good work? Is God promising to protect their salvation? Is God promising he will continue transforming [or sanctifying] the Philippian believers to be like Christ? Is it their unity as a church fellowship?
- † The context – the passage we are discussing today – suggests Paul is talking about their participation in the gospel mission, their defense and spread of the gospel.
- **[16: good work]** The theme of this whole section is Paul's thankfulness for their past partnership in the gospel mission and confidence in their future partnership in the gospel mission. This is supported by the theme of the whole letter to align with the true gospel and those who live it out, resisting the influence of the antagonists with their false gospel.
  - Here Paul provides positive reinforcement about their participation in the gospel mission, and he could pray for them with joy because he trusted God would empower them to overcome deception and persecution [and probably the same types of distractions we face today] to continue partnering with him for the true gospel.
- † **[17: implications]** Still, this does have implications about their salvation, sanctification, and unity.
- Paul is expressing confidence that they are truly saved by the gospel of Christ [a work God began], and thus they will continue to grow spiritually [a work God began], and so they will persevere in this fellowship/partnership of the true church [another work God began], to pursue the mission of spreading the gospel of Christ [another work God began], because through all this

God will preserve and grow their faith, which will keep them aligned with Paul, and keep them eager to share the transformative gospel with others.

- † Let's talk about us. If we have fellowship in the gospel, if we have truly believed the gospel of Christ and thereby received the gift of salvation, scripture says that salvation is guaranteed. The seal or mark of that guaranty is the Holy Spirit indwelling us: he is a sign and guarantor of the assurance of our salvation right through our resurrection at the end. Our salvation is based on the righteousness of Christ, not our own behavior or merit, so we cannot lose it, and it cannot be taken away.
  - If we have this salvation, then our spiritual growth [or "progressive sanctification"] also is assured. The Holy Spirit will continue to mature us, to perfect us, to make us more like Christ, God's image bearers, right through to the end. How smoothly that process goes often is up to you, because you can resist submitting to Christ or yielding to the Holy Spirit, you can choose to dwell in the murkiness of sin and ignorance instead of knowing and following Christ, but God is not going to let go of you, it's just that the Holy Spirit will set aside other growth issues to get you past the obstacles you have created.
  - If we have salvation through the gospel of Christ and are growing spiritually by the Holy Spirit, then of course we will remain in the orthodox church, aligned with Paul and the other apostles, who gave us this gospel and the correct doctrine that is derived from it. We will remain in unity with the apostles and with each other in this church.
  - If we have salvation, are experiencing progressive sanctification to become more like Christ, and remain in the teachings and church of the apostles, then of course we will continue to pursue the gospel mission. In fact, as we grow to be like Christ, to become his devoted slaves, we will pursue his gospel mission more and more, being distracted by the cares and pleasures of the world less and less, because Christ's heart for multiplication of God's image will grow in us.
- † **[18: perspective]** That's a lot of serious thought! Here is another: we said earlier that Paul prayed a lot and that God so filled his consciousness, that Paul could not help but trust in God's faithfulness and his love for God's people; now note that Paul's joy comes from his perspective on God. He is joyful because he is confident in God's faithfulness.
  - Paul knows that whatever is happening now that might seem bad or frightening – and after all, he is in prison and the Philippians are suffering persecution and deception – despite all that, he knows God began this work of partnership / participation / fellowship in the past – God began it! it is a work of God! – and he trusts God will complete it in the future.
  - That confidence in God empowered Paul to have joy and peace, he wanted it to empower the Philippians to the same joy and peace, and it should empower us to that joy and peace as well. Despite the dire circumstances they and Paul might face, God is at work and in control. They should accept this truth, which would mitigate their anxieties and stresses.
- † The devotions this week talk more about how Paul could experience joy, peace, and thankfulness despite wallowing in prison, not able to help his loved ones who were suffering, knowing some of them were even turning against him.
  - He stayed focused on his confidence in Christ and God the Father, trusting in their provision and peace and grace; he stayed prayerful, allowing his knowledge of God and Christ to fill his mind, pushing out worry and anxiety; he reminded himself of all that God had done and could do, of how much God had blessed them all for which he could be thankful; he trusted that God had a

plan and would carry it out, that God would fulfill his promises, so he trusted that God would complete the work he had begun with the Philippians.

- And relationally he focused on how much he loved the Philippians, allowing that love and his confidence in God's work to push out any hurtful emotions he might have felt.
- † What Paul expressed here should mitigate the two issues we identified. He made a correction to the way they were thinking, to their theology, so they could have joy and thankfulness about their lives and their relationships with God, instead of the anxiety they had been feeling. And with that theological understanding, they could see it was good to continue aligning themselves with Paul in both the gospel life and the gospel mission, thereby fixing the relational problem that had arisen.

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## Conclusion

- † **[19: title]** Paul wants his readers to believe in the true gospel of Christ. He knows that is a transformative experience: it brings about a spiritual rebirth and starts the growth process.
  - In this letter, he will argue that really understanding the gospel will lead us to understand and accept suffering for the gospel. As Christ's slaves, we can shine God's light brightest when we resolutely continue to walk in faith and obedience despite all the hardships in our lives. It might sound harsh or sad, but God is more interested in you serving him this way than he is in making you comfortable. If you accept that, you can experience joy, peace, contentment, and thankfulness even while hurting.
  - Paul also will argue that really understanding the gospel will lead us as Christ's slaves to willingly sacrifice for the gospel. We will sacrifice to obey even though we might not want to. We will sacrifice to put each other first and find unity in this community.
  - And we will sacrifice to become evangelistic and missions-minded. We too will partner with Paul to confirm and defend the gospel of Christ. This week, reflect on how many scripture passages over the past three years have led us to this same message: as image bearers, as the church, as Christ's slaves, we are to pursue multiplying God's image by living out the gospel mission, leading others to faith in Christ, and then teaching them to follow Christ. Let's pray . . .