

***PARTNERS IN THE GOSPEL***  
**PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11**

**Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone! If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God for us today.

In light of the anniversary of our/**this** church today, we're taking a break from our other sermon series and looking at a passage from the book of Philippians.

Today's sermon is titled: "Partners in the Gospel."

So let's get right into it.

**Sermon Introduction**

Today is the 10-year anniversary of our church.

**[TGR only: Today is the 16-year anniversary of this church.]**

**I was a member here for five years from year 2 to year 7, and I was sent out from this church with some of the members to start HMCC of Jakarta in the city. So I have a deep love for this church and I'm thankful to be able to preach here as we celebrate 16 years of God's faithfulness.]**

In marriage, there are traditional gifts that are given for each anniversary year, symbolizing a new layer of commitment and growth.

- In year 1, you give paper, as a blank canvas represents the beginnings of a new life together.
- In year 2, you give cotton, as each fiber represents two people that have become interwoven with one another.
- In year 5, you give wood, which represents strength and rootedness.

So what do you give in year 10?

You give tin or aluminum. Just as tin or aluminum doesn't rust easily, it symbolizes a relationship that can withstand the test of time.

**[TGR only: So what do you give in year 16?**

**You give wax. Just as wax holds its shape and can be molded into something beautiful, it symbolizes a relationship that has adapted and endured over time.]<sup>1</sup>**

Now, when we think about our/**this church's** anniversary, the *bride* is the church, and the *groom* is God.

So in a *primary* sense, we are giving thanks and rejoicing in our *God* who has been so faithful to us as his *church*—his *bride*—and how our relationship with *him* has matured and strengthened and adapted and become more beautiful over time.

But in a *secondary* sense, we are also giving thanks and rejoicing in our God for the *relationships* he has formed and strengthened *among us* with one another over time.

So as we celebrate the last 10/**16** years today, we may not be giving each other tin or aluminum [**wax**], but we are giving thanks to God and rejoicing in the special kind of relationship that God has forged among us—the *partnership* we have in the gospel.

And that's what we'll look at more in today's passage.

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<sup>1</sup> Ellie Nan Storck and Sarah Schreiber, "Anniversary Gifts by Year: Our Traditional and Modern Guide," December 11, 2024, <https://www.brides.com/gallery/wedding-anniversary-gifts-by-year-for-him-her-and-them>.

**The One Thing**

Let's give thanks to God and rejoice in our partnership in the gospel.

**Scripture Introduction**

Turn your Bibles to Philippians 1:3-11.

I'd encourage you to keep your Bibles open to this passage and look down at verses that are referred to throughout the sermon.

If you need access to a Bible, you can download the ESV Bible app, or just ask someone next to you, and I'm sure they'd be happy to share with you.

<pause>

Just a bit of context before we jump into today's passage.

The apostle Paul is writing to the church in the city of Philippi as he is in prison in Rome.

In Acts 16, we see how Paul first preached the gospel and planted the church there. He was later imprisoned and then kicked out of the city, but he didn't lose contact with the church there.

In fact, the Philippian church continued to financially support Paul in his other missionary endeavors. So in a sense, this letter can be understood as Paul's missionary newsletter updating his supporting church.

And we'll see that the way Paul and the Philippian church relate with one another is not only meant to be between a missionary and a supporting church, but it is to be typical of the way *all* Christians in a local church are to relate with one another as fellow partners in the gospel.

So that's where we are as we begin today's passage.

**Scripture Reading**

Let's read Philippians 1:3-11, starting from verse 1 for a bit more context.

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> 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.

This is God's Word.

**Overview**

Five ways we are partners in the gospel:

- I. Partners in mission (vv. 3-5)
- II. Partners in salvation (v. 6)
- III. Partners in suffering (v. 7)
- IV. Partners in affection (v. 8)

## V. Partners in prayer (vv. 9-11)

**I. Partners in mission (vv. 3-5)**

Verses 3-5 say this:

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

In verses 3-4, Paul exudes joy as he remembers and prays for the Philippian church, and then he tells us *why* in verse 5: “because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”<sup>2</sup>

The word for “partnership” in verse 5 can also be translated as fellowship, communion, or *sharing*. So when you hear “partnership,” don’t think in terms of a *business* partner but think more in terms of a *marriage* partner, where you *share* everything together.

Even though the word “partnership” is only used *once* here in this passage, the *concept* of sharing everything together is all over this passage. As believers in Jesus Christ, God has made us *partners*—or *sharers*—in the gospel and all that entails.

<pause>

Now, remember the context: this was Paul’s missionary newsletter to his supporting church in Philippi (Phil. 4:15-16).

They may have been in two different places, but they were all committed to the Great Commission—or the *mission*—that Christ gave to *all* his churches (Matt. 28:19-20): to make Christ known and to make disciples of all nations.

In fact, this letter is meant to *encourage* the Philippian church because even though Paul is in prison, the *gospel* is still advancing.

If you look down at verses 12-14, Paul says that his imprisonment was actually a *good* thing for the sake of the gospel because he had the opportunity to make Christ known to the whole imperial guard and because his example has emboldened more brothers to speak about the gospel.

And they aren’t begrudgingly living out this mission together, but this letter resounds with *joy* throughout. Paul mentions “joy” or “rejoice” 16 times in just four chapters.

If Paul didn’t tell us, we probably wouldn’t have guessed that he was in prison.

He rejoices that Christ is proclaimed (1:18). He rejoices in the Lord (3:1). And he invites the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord always with him (4:4).

Paul’s joy and the Philippians joy was inseparably linked to Christ and his gospel being proclaimed among the nations.

They were partners in *mission*—and they rejoiced in participating in that mission together to proclaim the gospel and make disciples wherever they were.

<pause>

Brothers and sisters, though we are living in different places and times than Paul and the Philippian church, we are still partners in the *same* mission as Paul and the Philippian church and every other local church.

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<sup>2</sup> That partnership in the gospel began “from the first day”—from the first day they became Christians and became a church in Philippi.

Ten/**Sixteen** years ago, this church was started by brothers and sisters who were willing to rearrange their lives and move to a new place to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

If you ask any of us who were there at the beginning, none of us thought we were doing anything super profound, but *our* lives were forever transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it just made sense that we would rearrange our lives for the sake of making Christ known and making more disciples of Christ.

We were filled with joy to be able to do that. We rejoiced at opportunities to proclaim Christ and make disciples here.

Church, let's never lose that. Let's not allow that to be a distant memory of the past.

The day we forget our mission to make disciples of all nations is the day we become like the rest of the world. No other institution in the world has been given that mission by King Jesus himself.

He gave it for our joy, and he gave it for us to live out *together* as partners in mission.

What other earthly joys can compare?

When we have the privilege of helping others find joy in Christ, we enter the joy of our master.

We rejoice in more people coming to know Christ and their lives being forever transformed by the gospel.

Think back on the many baptisms we have witnessed over the years. Think back on your *own* baptism. What greater joy is there than to know Christ and to help others to know him?

<pause>

And remember, this is not just the mission given to *our* church, but it is the mission Christ has given to *every* local church.

And so, we regularly pray for other churches. We give towards and pray for other good gospel work being done. As pastors, we meet with other pastors in our city and overseas to be mutually encouraged and to help one another in whatever ways we can.

It's not about the glory of HMCC but it's about the glory of Christ. We're not a brand. What's most important about our church is what we share in common with every other true church for the last two millennia, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so, if God brings gospel revival in our city or overseas through *another* church, we rejoice in that because Christ is being proclaimed and people are becoming his disciples.

Brothers and sisters, yes, we are celebrating the 10/**16** year anniversary of our/**this** church today, but let's never become a church that's all about ourselves.

But let's do everything we can, even rearranging our lives, to make the gospel of Jesus Christ known near and far—as *near* as the very people in your family and work, and as *far* as other unreached places in Indonesia and around the world that have great gospel need.

And let's do everything we can to help and rejoice in *other* churches who are partnering in that *same* mission alongside us.

So first, partners in mission; and second...

## II. Partners in salvation (v. 6)

Verse 6 says this:

<sup>6</sup> 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.

As Paul was filled with joy regarding their partnership in *mission*, he can't help but to go back to their partnership in *salvation*.

They only share the same *mission* because they share the same *salvation*; and they only share in the same *salvation* because they share in the same *Savior*.

We know this is referring to *salvation* because it is not good work begun *among* them or *by* them but *in* them.

If we go back to Acts 16, when Paul is preaching the gospel in Philippi for the first time, it says this in...

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.

Even though Paul was preaching the gospel, the *Lord* opened her heart to understand and believe. The Lord was the one who *began* the good work of salvation in her—and not just her, but in every believer in the Philippian church, every believer in this church, and in every believer there has or ever will be.

[<sup>6</sup> 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.]

And if it is the Lord who *began* the work of salvation, it is the Lord who will bring to *completion* the work of salvation in every believer at the day of Jesus Christ—when Christ returns.

This is the wonderful news of the gospel!

We don't save ourselves, but God saves us from start to finish by his grace alone.

God created every one of us and we are all ultimately accountable to him, but we've all sinned against him and rightfully deserve his judgment for our sins. Yet in love, God came as the person of Jesus Christ to live the perfect life for us, to die to take the punishment of our sins for us, and to resurrect three days later to confirm who he is, what he's done, and all that he's promised. So whoever repents of their sin and believes in Jesus Christ alone as their Lord and Savior is saved from their sin and given everlasting life with him.

*That's* the gospel that Paul preached and that Lydia believed, and that all true Christians have believed.

And that salvation comes as a *package*.

- God opens our hearts to understand and believe (that's regeneration);
- we repent and believe in the gospel (that's conversion);
- God declares us righteous in Christ by virtue of our faith in him (that's justification);
- God makes us more and more like Christ throughout our lives (that's sanctification);
- and God will one day make us completely holy without sin with a new glorified body in the new heavens and new earth when Christ returns (that's glorification).

And here, Paul is saying that, if God is the one who regenerated us, then he will carry us all the way through conversion to justification to sanctification to glorification. He will not fail.

In our lives, we have many things left unfinished on our to-do list. Not so with God. Everything that God begins, he will finish.

This is an immense personal comfort and assurance for all of us who believe in Christ.

You may struggle with persistent sins that won't seem to die no matter what you do to kill them. Your faith may be weak and small. But take comfort in knowing that your salvation from start to finish is not obtained by anything in and of yourself but completely accomplished by Christ.

It's been said, "I hang by a thread, but it is of Christ's spinning" (Samuel Rutherford).

You may feel like you're hanging by a thread, but no matter how thin that thread looks, it will not break because it has been spun by Christ. Listen to what Jesus says in...

**John 6:39 (NIV):** And this is the will of him who sent me, that **I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.**

If your faith is truly in Christ, you will not be lost, but God will bring you to completion at the last day. Brothers and sisters, rejoice often in that gospel assurance!

<pause>

This is also a great encouragement for our church, as we get to see God bringing people to completion over the years. None of us are there yet, but we see evidences of God's sanctifying work in one another.

I've had the privilege to do pre-marital counseling for many couples in our church. And I recall one particular session (which I received permission to share), where the woman spoke so highly of the man she was about to marry. She was almost glowing as she commended how well he's been leading spiritually in their relationship and how mature he's shown himself to be.

And I think I even said out loud, "Really??"

You see, I knew the man since he was a college student. He was baptized in HMCC of Tangerang **[this church]**, and as a young believer back then, he was *not yet* like the man she was describing.

But I've seen the Lord sanctify him now for over a decade. In a sense, he's the same guy I knew when he was college (his personality and mannerisms are the same), but in a more profound sense, he's a different guy than I knew when he was in college (he's a faithful husband who leads and loves his wife as Christ does the church).

And I've had the joy of seeing that. And I could go on to name many others in our church where I have similar stories to tell. Think of God's sanctifying work in one another often—and rejoice in it! He's not done yet, but he will bring us to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And I long for the day when we will see each other *completed* in Christ without sin or blemish in the new heavens and new earth.

Let's catch a glimpse of it even now and encourage each other with how we see God doing that work in each of us.

We are partners in salvation now and forever.

<pause>

So first, partners in mission; second, partners in salvation; and third...

### III. Partners in suffering (v. 7)

Verse 7 says this:

<sup>7</sup> 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.

Here, Paul moves on to say that part of the reason he feels this way about the Philippian church and holds them in his heart is because they are “all partakers with [him] of *grace*.”

But notice, it's not just the grace of *salvation* that he mentioned earlier, but they are partakers with him in the grace of his *imprisonment* and the defense and confirmation of the *gospel*.

In other words, they are partners in *suffering* for the advance of gospel. Paul later writes in...

Philippians 1:29-30: For it has been **granted** to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also **suffer for his sake**, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

Paul and the Philippian church not only share in the grace of *salvation* but also in the grace of *suffering* for Christ's sake.

For Paul, he was in prison, but not all the members of the Philippian church were in prison, yet they are engaging “in the same conflict” as Paul. Look at verse 28, and it's clear that the Philippian church has “opponents.”

Their suffering for Christ's sake may have looked different, but they all suffered for the same reason—because they were trying to advance the gospel.

<pause>

John Bunyan was a 17<sup>th</sup> century preacher and writer, best known for his book *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He was imprisoned for 12 years in England, but he was offered freedom on multiple occasions if he would only promise to stop preaching. And this was his response:

I cannot do what you ask of me... my calling to preach the Gospel is from God, and He alone can make me discontinue what He has appointed me to do... I must repeat that it is God who constrains me to preach, and no man or company of men may grant or deny me leave [or permission] to preach.<sup>3</sup>

Bunyan was only saying what the early disciples had said when they were told to stop preaching by the religious leaders of their day: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

And though they were beaten by the religious leaders for speaking about Jesus, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for Christ's name, and they did not stop teaching and preaching about Jesus (Acts 5:41-42).

<pause>

We can sometimes hear about the suffering of the early disciples, past missionaries, or even current Christians around the world for the sake of the gospel—and then just dismiss it as only for “super-spiritual” Christians, as opposed to us “ordinary” Christians.

But Scripture makes no such division of Christians. There are *believers* and there are *unbelievers*—that's it.

And for all true believers, we cannot help but to speak about the One whom we love and who has saved us from our sins—and just like our Savior, we *will* suffer in doing so.

[<sup>7</sup> 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.]

Yet, that is a *grace* that all true believers share in—that we are *partners* in.

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<sup>3</sup> “The State of Freedom of Religion in the UK,” March 5, 2018, <https://www.affinity.org.uk/news/426-the-state-of-freedom-of-religion-in-the-uk>.

The only way that we'll recognize sharing in *Christ's* suffering as a "grace" (or gift) is if we long to resemble Christ (cf. Rom. 8:17-18; Phil. 3:10-11).

If we wrongly think of the Christian life as just a ticket to heaven, then sharing in Christ's suffering would be the last thing we'd want to participate in. After all, what appealed to us from the beginning was simply avoiding hell, so we'll just continue with that mentality to avoid any pain in this life as well.

But if we rightly understand the Christian life as Christ being everything to us, then the entirety of our lives is about becoming more like Christ and living to bring glory to Christ. And so, if sharing in his suffering makes us more like Christ and helps people better understand Christ through our lives, then we can rejoice in it.

<pause>

Brothers and sisters, do we see suffering for Christ's sake as a "grace" (or gift) from God that we can rejoice in? Or do we see suffering for Christ's sake as something to avoid?

Of course, we do not go looking for suffering, but we must understand that this church and every local church is built on our faith in a *suffering* Savior, and members of his church resemble him by their willingness to suffer for his sake.

Part of being a Christian is sharing the gospel with others, so we ought to ask ourselves, "Who can I share the gospel with?"

All the suffering that Paul is referring to revolves around that one question.

If we don't share the gospel, we won't suffer for the gospel. Perhaps we already recognize that, and so we don't share the gospel because we don't want to suffer for it.

But if we don't share the gospel, we miss out on this "grace" (or gift) of God. Perhaps we don't know this suffering as a grace simply because we don't know what it's like to suffer for the gospel.

And this "grace" of suffering for the gospel is meant to be shared *together* as a church. We partner in suffering for the gospel when there's a culture of *evangelism*, where it's *normal* to share the gospel with others.

Think about how *encouraging* it would be for you to hear *other* members share about how they're *trying* to share the gospel with their family and friends and how the church is *rallying* around them in support.

You'd feel more comfortable to ask for prayer, and you'd know that others can *empathize* with your fears of how your loved ones might respond if you shared the gospel with them.

If you want to hear more about this, we preached a whole sermon on this called "Our Partners" as part of our "Bringing Good News" sermon series a few years ago. I'd encourage you to go listen to it to see how God gives us the local church as partners to bring the good news of Jesus to others.

<pause>

Later today over dinner **[lunch]**, this would be a good discussion to have with one another. Who are people you've shared the gospel with before? Share more about your experience with each other. Ask each other about people in your lives whom you're trying to have more spiritual conversations with—and encourage and pray for one another.

Kids, are there friends that you have that you can share the gospel with? This would be a great question to think about and talk about with your parents as well.

<pause>



If you're not a believer and you have questions about Jesus, we would love to talk more with you. Please don't hesitate to ask me or others around you. There's nobody we'd rather talk to you about than Jesus, so we welcome your questions.

<pause>

So first, partners in mission; second, partners in salvation; third, partners in suffering; and fourth...

#### IV. Partners in affection (v. 8)

Verse 8 says this:

<sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

After bringing up how they are partners in *suffering* for the gospel, Paul cannot help but to express his *affection* for the members of the Philippian church.

*Suffering* together breeds *affection* for one another.

Here, Paul calls God to be his witness—he's swearing an oath—to attest to how much he yearns for them, or how deep his affection is for them.

But this is not the first time that we've seen Paul's affection; he's been overflowing with affection for the Philippian church all throughout this passage.

In verse 7, Paul says "I hold you in my heart."

In verses 3-4, Paul uses the language of "all" and "every" when he describes how he *remembers* and *prays* for them.

You get the sense that Paul's heart overflows with affection for them, so he remembers and prays for them *all* the time.

And it's not just *one-way* affection, but Paul and the Philippian church share this *mutual* affection for one another—they're *partners* in affection. And it wasn't just in how they *felt* towards one another, but their affection showed itself through *action*.

Later in this letter, we find out that the Philippian church sent one of their members, Epaphroditus, to care for Paul in prison—and Epaphroditus nearly died getting to him (2:25-30; 4:10-20).

Paul then sends Epaphroditus back to them, and he sends Timothy as well (2:20). And after Paul hopefully gets out of prison, he plans to come also (2:24).

<pause>

Going back to verse 8, Paul acknowledges that this affection that he has for the Philippian church is *not* his own natural affection for them, but it is "the affection of Christ Jesus."

The word used for "affection" refers to the same kind of deep compassion that Jesus showed others in the Gospel accounts (e.g., Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32).

It's *not* "affection" as the world understands.

The affection of Christ Jesus is not based on our deserving of it, but in spite of our undeserving of it.

The affection of Jesus is not just mere sentimentalism, nor is it threatened by our circumstances or feelings, but Christ's affection drove him to go to the cross to lay down his life for sinners.

And for Paul, this was *personal*. He met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and even though Paul was *persecuting* Christians, Jesus *still* had compassion on him—he still poured out his affection for him—and saved him from all his sins (Acts 9:1-19; cf. 1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 1:15).

Paul first *received* the affection of Christ Jesus and then he was able to *give* the affection of Christ Jesus.

Nobody *naturally* loves the way that Christ loves. In our sinful flesh, we love those who love us back, we love those based on our circumstances and feelings, we love those who don't require much sacrifice on our part.

But what's astonishing about the affection of Christ shown here is that it is towards the *whole* Philippian church. Paul says, "I yearn for you *all* with the affection of Christ Jesus."

And it's *not* because the church was flawless. In chapter 4, we find out that they had two prominent women, Euodia and Syntyche, who had some sort of disagreement or *conflict* that everyone in the church knew about. And it was affecting the church to the point where Paul felt the need to call them out *publicly* to address it (4:2-3)

Still, Paul does not allow his affection for the Philippian church become clouded by these kinds of problems (though he knows they are there), but he keeps in mind that *God* is the one who will bring to completion the good work he began not just in *individuals* but in his *church*—and so he loves the *whole* church as God loves them.

<pause>

I'm encouraged by the ways that our/**this** church is seeking to love another "with the affection of Christ Jesus."

When members lose loved ones, I see our/**this** church rallying around them, praying with them, providing meals, collecting funds to support them, and just being present with them.

When members are in financial need, others have sat with them to discuss their financial situation and helped them get out of debt, find a job, and provide for themselves and their families.

When members hurt one another, they're willing to have the hard conversations necessary to better understand each other, apologize, and take steps towards reconciliation.

Of course, we don't do this perfectly, but I see evidences of God's grace in our church.

And as long as God calls us to be a church together, I pray that our affection for one another wouldn't be clouded by problems, but we would instead see evidences of God's grace in each other and we would grow in loving one another the way God loves us.

<pause>

One very practical way to grow in our affection for one another is to maximize our gathering together every Sunday as the Lord's Day.

God prescribes the Lord's Day as being uniquely set apart for gathering as a church for rest and public worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; Rev. 1:10). Of all days, *this* is the day we should maximize our gathering together and invest in one another.

Paul "yearns" to meet with the Philippian church, but he is hindered from doing so because he's in prison. But we have the freedom and the privilege to gather regularly with one another. Let's make the most of it, knowing that Christ has made us such partners in affection.

<pause>

So first, partners in mission; second, partners in salvation; third, partners in suffering; fourth, partners in affection; and fifth...

## V. Partners in prayer (vv. 9-11)

Verses 9-11 say this:

<sup>9</sup> 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.

Here, Paul moves from partnership in *affection* to partnership in *prayer*, which makes sense because praying for one another is one of the primary ways that we breed affection for one another.

It wasn't just *Paul* praying for the Philippian church, but *they* were also praying for him. Paul later says in the letter, "I know that *through your prayers* and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance" (1:19).

They were partners in *prayer*.

This entire passage that we've been looking at has been *sandwiched* in prayer. Paul began by telling the Philippian church that he *thanks* God for them in prayer, and here, he tells them *what* he prays for them.

Pay careful attention to *exactly* what Paul prays for them—and may these kinds of prayer inform what we pray for one another.

Just as *Paul's* heart has been overflowing with the affection of Christ Jesus for them, he prays for them that *their* "love may abound more and more."

But Paul has a specific *kind* of love in mind, so he adds "with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent."

You cannot properly *love* whom you do not rightly *know*.

If I told you that I love my wife so much and I cry every time I talk about her, and I can't stop singing songs to her—and then I told you that she's a Vietnamese woman raised in Australia, and her favorite flowers are roses... then that would not honor her at all.

Because if you know my wife, she's a Korean woman raised in America, and her favorite flowers are hydrangeas.

It doesn't matter how intense my *feelings* are if they're not based on true *knowledge*.

And when I have *knowledge* of my wife, then I can *discern* how to love her best—I can *approve* (or evaluate) what is excellent (or best) in how I love her.

For example, since her favorite flowers are hydrangeas, those are the flowers I typically get her because I know she will enjoy them best.

<pause>

The word "love" here has no explicit *object* of love, but in all the other places the word "knowledge" appears in Paul's letters, he means it as the knowledge of *God*.<sup>4</sup>

So Paul primarily has love for *God* in mind.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, PTW (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> But the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love people, so for the Christian, love is always directed vertically towards God and then horizontally towards one another. The Ten Commandments have the same structure for love as well.

And to discern how to best love *God*, we must know him rightly through his *word*.

Christianity is not about checking your head at the door and just chasing after feelings of love.

No, God's word is opened and understood, and *then* our hearts burn (Luke 24:32).

God's word is preached and pressed in, and *then* we are cut to the heart (Acts 2:37).

Doctrine (or right knowledge of God) is meant to *fuel* our love for God.

Should you love God *less* if you know him *more*? No, the more we know God through his word, the more reasons we have to love him and the better we can love him.

Those who love *God* best are those who love his *word* most.

<pause>

Paul goes on to say, "and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ."

So this knowledgeable, discerning love for God that Paul prays for is not just meant to *inform* but it's meant to *transform* the Philippian church. They are to become more and more holy both internally ("pure") and externally ("blameless"), so that "at the day of Christ" (when he returns), they will be *completely* holy.

But this is *not* their own doing. Just as Paul said his confidence was that *God* would bring to completion his work of salvation in the Philippian believers, here, he says that this "fruit of righteousness" will come through Jesus Christ. *He's* the one producing this fruit of a transformed life in them that all will be able to recognize.

Both *doctrine* and *life* are important.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones, the well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century pastor, described his ministry like this: "I spend half my time telling Christians to study doctrine and the other half telling them that doctrine is not enough."

Paul gave the same counsel to Timothy: "Keep a close watch on *yourself* and on the *teaching*. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Life and doctrine. Doctrine and life. These two are inseparable, and that's the content of what Paul prays for the Philippian church—that their love for God would be informed by right *doctrine* (or true knowledge of God) and that such knowledgeable, discerning love for God would transform their *lives* to be more righteous or holy.

And Paul ends his prayer with his final purpose clause: "to the glory and praise of God."

The more we know God, love God, and are transformed by God, the more we will see that all glory and praise truly belong to him alone—and the more we'll desire to live our lives to reflect and celebrate the character and purposes of God.

<pause>

Brothers and sisters, we are partners in *prayer*.

Prayer weaves through all the ways we're partners in the gospel.

- We pray for God to accomplish his mission through us.
- We pray for God to bring to completion our salvation.
- We pray for God to sustain and encourage us as we suffer for the gospel.
- We pray for God to cultivate the affection of Christ for one another.

- And here, we pray for God to inform our love of him through his word and to transform our lives through our love for him.

<pause>

If you don't already, I'd encourage you to pray systematically for fellow members in the church through the members directory.

Perhaps you can pray through a page of the members directory a day.

Even if you don't know exactly what's going on in their lives, pray for them what Paul prayed for the Philippian church—that their love for God would be informed by God's word and that their lives would be more conformed to Christ, so that *he* would receive all the glory.

Or whatever else you happen to read that day in God's word, pray *that* for your fellow brothers and sisters. Make it a habit to turn whatever you read in God's word into what you pray for yourself and for others.

<pause>

We pray because we are convinced that apart from God, we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Any good that has happened in our/**this** church over the last 10/**16** years, I am quite sure was, in part, the result of God answering the prayers of his people.

Brothers and sisters, let's not lose that dependence on the Lord.

Let's not think for a moment that the good in our church has been a result of certain leaders or certain members or certain programs.

Let's not think for a moment that the good in our church has been a result of our own wisdom or our own efforts, for "[u]nless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain" (Ps. 127:1 NIV).

Let's continue to *depend* on the Lord together as partners in *prayer*, trusting what he himself said, "*I* will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

## Conclusion

As we close, notice that Paul began and ended this passage by explicitly crediting *God* for everything; in verse 3, "I thank my God," and in verse 11, "to the glory and praise of God."

From start to finish, we recognize that *God* has made us partners in the gospel, and *he* has made us to share in the same mission, salvation, suffering, affection, and prayers.

And *any* partnership in the gospel that we have enjoyed together over the years has been a result of *God* working and building and sustaining us—and he's not finished with us yet.

So as we celebrate the 10/**16** year anniversary of our/**this** church today, let's give thanks to God and rejoice in our partnership in the gospel—and let's commit to such partnership in the years to come "to the glory and praise of God."

Let's pray.