

Fellowship of Joy: A Study in Philippians, 1:3-11, Preached @ Harambee Church by Pastor Michael Gunn on July 13th, 2008

Intro:

Last week we began our journey through the book of Philippians and saw Paul's and Timothy's identity is found in Christ, and their mission is God's mission ("Missio Dei"). Paul is writing to commend the Philippians for their faithfulness to the gospel, and exhort the church to remain faithful and unified for the sake of the gospel, so that they will live "*In a manner worthy of the gospel*" (**Philippians 1:27**). It's amazing how sin can derail our faith so easily! It doesn't take much, and bitterness and disharmony is a sure faith wrecker!

In our section today, Paul is letting us in on his prayer time with the Lord. As usual, Paul spends his time in praying for others, staying centered on Christ and the gospel. In our passage we see the why and what of Paul's prayer.

From the Head...

As Paul most often does, he begins his prayer in thanksgiving (see **Philippians 4:6**). Thanksgiving is the linchpin of joy and contentment. This is where it begins. When you live your life in despair and desire, you will never be either joyous or content! Paul is in prison, yet he can find joy, because of his desire to think eternally. What is it that gives Paul joy? Today we will look at the **Why** of Paul's joy, and the **What** of the content he prayed for the Philippians church, and then see how it affects us in the 21st century.

Why Is Paul Thankful? (Philippians 1:3-7)

There are basically 2 things Paul is thankful for in our text:

1. *Partnership in the Gospel* (vv. 4, 7)

The word partnership here is the Greek word "*Koinonia*" which means fellowship, participation or communion. Paul isn't thankful that they get together a lot, and host many programs for people to get to know one another. He is thankful specifically for their fellowship (Participation) "*In the Gospel*" (see **Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13** for some of the 19 usages in the NT). Most people judge churches based on how many friends they have after a few months (Statistically if visitors do not have at least 3 new friends after a few months they will look elsewhere for "Fellowship"). Many people want to come to a church, meet people and "Hang" with the pastors, without even caring about the mission of the church. The church is NOT a social hall; it is a mission post in a dying world! True **Biblical** fellowship comes from working side by side in the trenches for the sake of the gospel. This is the center of Paul's joy. He is excited and joyous because the gospel is being furthered, and his circumstances are secondary. Happiness/Contentment begins near to God and His mission, no matter where that mission may take you! Paul feels this way because he has these people "*In my heart*" (v. 7). Their desire to be part of the gospel did not end when Paul was in prison. They continued to minister to Paul, and that ministered to Paul's heart.

2. *He who began a good work in you, will bring it to completion* (v. 6)

This is an important piece to this section. Any joy, and mission cannot begin with us, but what God has done, and is doing in us. Paul is excited because he sees in the Philippian believers the reality that God is working in their midst. They were eager to do what it took to further the gospel, and they were very giving people (See **2 Corinthians 8:1-4**). Their hearts were reflective of someone transformed by the power of the gospel. Without the gospel of Jesus Christ, biblical fellowship would be impossible. We'd have a tribal religion that loves only those that are like us, and wouldn't be willing to love those that hate us.

Key Note: Both of these points are related to one another theologically in a very important way. The first point is evidence of the second point. God's work in us gives us assurance of the reality of His Spirit dwelling in us. There is a profound relationship between faith and works (See **Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:18, 22, 24; Philippians 2:12-13**). Works, according to Paul's clear theology does not save us, but it acts as an indicator that there is new life in you. Note the "Works" here are not religious works of do this and don't do that; things which we can do without God. The works in these contexts are works of the heart that demonstrate that we have been freed from our enslavement to ourselves, and that we are connected to God and His mission in the world.

What Is Paul Praying for the Philippians? (Philippians 1:8-11)

Again we see Paul's real "Affection" for these people, and his prayer is pointed. Paul is in prison praying for others, because his perspective is eternal. His prayer is that: *Their love may abound still more and more in **Real knowledge and discernment***. This is Paul's prayer! It seems that the context helps us understand that the love he is talking about is a love for one another, but that love comes from a "Real knowledge" of the TRUTH about God. We can't love unlovable people apart from the heart of Christ. Love is not sentimental! We are motivated to love by knowing Christ, and His sufferings and His love for us, so that we can turn and love others as He has loved us. This is where theology and practice meet. We

desire love, without a theology that drives it. That kind of love is a human love that we can do without knowing Christ. God calls us to a love that only can be fully seen and understood at the cross of Jesus!

Paul tells us that he prays this *“So that you may approve the things that are excellent,”* which leads us to living *“pure”* (Literally unmixed, and open) and *“Blameless”* (Without stumbling). When your love grows based on the knowledge of the love of God in your life, then you will be able to discern better to prioritize your life around what God is calling you to do.

How is this possible? We are *“Filled with the fruit of righteousness that come **through** Jesus Christ.”* Anything that we are able to do comes as “Fruit” from the righteousness that we have “Through” Jesus. Without Christ, there is no righteousness of our own. Repentance begins with repenting of our own righteousness; our own self-saving mechanisms that we trust instead of God for our salvation. Our righteousness is Christ’s righteousness (**2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 10:1-4**). Note that this fruit leads to 2 things: The **Glory** and **Praise** of God.

...to the Heart

Our prayers are often soaked with ourselves, and our own needs, but when we begin to know the love of God in our lives and we connect to His mission in this world, our prayer life will begin to change, and our joy will be made complete as we see God working in the lives of others.