



Joy in fellowship

Introduction

Philippians 1:3-11

A family went to the movies. On the way in, the young man of the family stopped at the refreshment stand to pick up some popcorn. By the time he got into the theater, the lights were already dim and he couldn't find his family. He paced up and down the aisles in near darkness, peering down each row. Finally, in desperation, he stopped and asked out loud, "Does anyone here recognize me?"

Even though it's well-lit, there may be people who come into this church and feel like that young man--lost, isolated, disconnected from everyone. Deep down, they are silently crying out, "Does anyone here recognize me?" They're longing for true Christian fellowship.

While the local church ought to be the place where you can find genuine fellowship in Christ, all too often it is lacking. On vacation a couple of years ago, our family visited a small church in Colorado. It should have been obvious to the regular attenders that we were new. And yet, even though we arrived before the service began and stood around for quite a while after it was over, no one came up to talk with us. That doesn't incline you toward going back a second time.

The local church is not supposed to be like a theater, where you file in, find a seat next to folks that you don't have any relationship with, watch the performance, and file out. Part of our problem is that we've come to think of the church as the building you go to for church services. That idea is foreign to the New Testament, which clearly presents the church as God's people, a living body knit together by their union with Christ, the head. Coupled with the church as a building fallacy is the equally unbiblical notion that the pastor and perhaps a few committed volunteers run the church. The rest of the folks just come, sit, listen, and go home.

But the Bible is clear that every member is a minister of Christ, with a vital function to fulfill. If everyone here who knows Christ as Savior viewed himself or herself as a minister, here to serve Christ by reaching out in love to others, no one could walk into our services and feel like no one recognized him.

As you read our text, it is obvious that Paul had a relationship of close fellowship with this church. It wasn't what often goes by the label "fellowship" in American Christianity, the superficial chatting about sports or the weather over coffee and donuts. Even though they were miles apart, Paul's heart was tied up with these people, and their hearts were with him. There was no natural explanation for this closeness between this Asian Jew who was now in prison in Rome and these European people who themselves were no homogeneous group. What knit them together was true Christian fellowship.

True Christian fellowship means sharing together in the things of God.¹

¹ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole "True Christian Fellowship" found @ [Lesson 4: True Christian Fellowship \(Philippians 1:3-8\)](#)

Open it

1. What is the best compliment you have ever received? Who gave it and what made it so special?

Read it

Philippians 1:3-11

Explore it

2. What does Paul tell the Philippians brought him joy in verse 5?

3. What was Paul confident of?

4. What did Paul want the Philippians to be filled with?

Apply it

Friend Like Me

Paul tells the Philippians that he has been praying for them. But he doesn't just pray, he prays with joy. And his joy comes "because of your partnership in the gospel." Paul's joy is a shared joy. This partnership is more than just spending time together . . . there is a unity, a joy, a purpose that is held in common.

Think about a great experience you've had? Perhaps it was the birth of a child. Maybe it was a great buck you got during hunting season. Maybe it was a great honor paid to you or a life-changing insight. Whatever the experience I would venture to say that it was a joy that was made complete as you shared it with others. A shared joy is a deeper joy.

One of the great things about attending a ball game is the chance you have to talk about the last play or to debate strategy with those around you. It wouldn't be near as much fun if you just listened to the game on the radio. It wouldn't be as much fun if you were standing on the sideline or sitting in the bleachers by yourself. There is something great about sharing the experience together.²

5. In what ways do all Christians have partnership with others. What types of things keep us from experiencing true "togetherness"?

Our concept of fellowship today is often watered down to mean little more than "hanging out." If you have coffee with a non-Christian, then you're just having coffee, but if you have coffee with a believer, we often call it fellowship (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27). While socializing is part of fellowship, there's much more to it. We share in the common mission of making the gospel known to the world. Through Christ, we are friends and coworkers with other believers. It's one thing to have gospel-centered friendships, but it's another to have coworkers on mission. If you get both, friendships and co-laborers, then you can enjoy what many never experience.³

6. Paul begins our text by joyfully thanking God for the church in Philippi because they are his partners in God's kingdom work. Why is being involved in a church vital for living the Christian life?

² Sermon excerpt by Bruce Goettsche "Characteristics of Christian Joy" found @ <http://www.unionchurch.com/archive/102200.html>

³ Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Philippians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 26). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

The word 'fellowship' originally had commercial overtones. If two men bought a boat and started a fishing business, they were said to be in *koinonia* –a formal business partnership. **They shared a common vision and invested together to make that vision become a reality.** True Christian fellowship means sharing the same vision of getting the gospel to the world, and then investing personally to make it happen)...when Paul thanks God for the 'fellowship' of the Philippians, he is thanking God that from the very first day of their conversion, they rolled up their sleeves and got involved in the advance of the Gospel. True fellowship means putting the Gospel first as the controlling motive of your life and then doing whatever it takes to spread the life-changing message to the ends of the earth.⁴

7. Think through the people you come into contact with on a daily basis. Which of the three individuals from What spiritual realities create a sense of partnership among Christians? What can be done to develop these types of partnerships in the church? What attitudes and practices must we exhibit in order for this to become a reality?

8. How would you describe Paul's attitude and feelings toward the people of the church of Philippi from these verses? About whom might you be able to say similar things about?

One way (not the only way) that the Philippians had fellowshiped with Paul in the gospel was by frequently sending him financial support (4:15-16). It's safe to say that if the gospel has not touched your money, it has not touched your heart, because your heart is bound up with your treasure (Matt. 6:21). So a powerful evidence of the new birth is when, quietly and without public notice (Matt. 6:1-4), out of a desire to please God, you begin giving generously to support the work of the gospel.⁵

9. What happens to Christian community when people become selfish and stingy with their stuff? How can our generosity to God and others be used to bring people closer together?

⁴ Sermon excerpt by Ray Pritchard "Joyful living in a Grumpy World" found @ <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/joyful-living-in-a-grumpy-world/>

⁵ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole "True Christian Fellowship" found @ Lesson 4: True Christian Fellowship (Philippians 1:3-8)

I'll Make A Man or (Christian) Out Of You

Paul is so sure of God's powerful hand upon his friends in Philippi that he could tell them he knew God would continue working in them until Jesus came back to get them. Of course, he didn't know when that would be, but even if they died, that would be their day of seeing Jesus face-to-face. The good work that God was doing included their salvation and their continued growth as Christians. God didn't ever plan to stop making them the quality people He wanted them to be.

Where Paul wrote "being confident," the Greek word is (pépoitha), we know from the tense that he was saying he'd already come to a proven certainty that God would work in them and that he was continuing to have that same assurance. So it was an already-established fact in his mind, and he kept on believing it. That's confidence!⁶

10. What does Paul mean when he says God will "complete the good work he began" in them?

11. How can Paul's words in verse six build Christian confidence and destroy pride at the same time? Which perspective of God's ongoing work is most needed in your own life?

Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah...Zip-A-Dee Day (My, Oh My...What A Wonderful Day!!!)

The assurance God gives us not only guarantees the outcome; it guarantees too every experience of every day, for in all things God is 'putting the finishing touches'. Good news, bad news, difficulty, blessing, unexpected happiness, unexpected trouble—it all has a purpose. Concerning all such situations faith affirms, 'Without this, I would not be ready for the day of Christ.' This is the immediate, practical and strengthening benefit of the truth of Christian assurance.⁷

12. How can having confidence in God's ability to finish what he started allow us to experience greater contentment and joy even amidst the trials and tribulations of life?

⁶ Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2754-2761). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Motyer, J. Alec. The Message of Philippians (The Bible Speaks Today Series) (pp. 44-45). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

13. What things can cause us to doubt the truths of verse 6? How can others help us when these doubts begin to manifest themselves in our lives?

He will “carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” This means that God won’t be turned aside by difficulties of any kind. He is so determined to make you like Jesus that even your own backsliding won’t ultimately hinder the accomplishment of his purpose. Someday you and I will stand before Jesus Christ as redeemed children of God—holy, blameless, and complete in every way. We’re a far sight from that today. But a better day is coming for the people of God.

What is incomplete will be made complete. What is unfinished will be finished. What is lacking will be made full. What is partial will be made whole. What is less than enough will be far more than adequate. What is broken will be fixed. What is hurt will be healed. What is weak will be made strong. What is temporary will be made permanent. God has promised to do it and he cannot lie.⁸

14. What is the “day of Christ” that is mentioned in vs. 6? (see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) What are some areas that you are looking forward to being complete and perfect on “that day”? Till then what things can you do to grow and mature in these areas?

YOU WILL BE IN MY HEART

Paul doesn’t hold anything back when he’s speaking of his affection for friends. It’s obvious that the intense affection Jesus has for these Philippian believers has been transferred into Paul’s heart, and he’s not afraid to speak of it. As though it might sound a little too passionate, Paul seems to defend his affection for them. And one of the reasons he gives for feeling that deep tenderness is because they have supported him and actually gone through difficulties with him.⁹

15. Paul and the Philippians had experienced some very difficult times together. How can the hard moments of life make friendships stronger? When have you seen this?

⁸ Sermon excerpt by Ray Pritchard “Faithful to Finish His Work in You” found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/faithful-to-finish-his-work-in-you/>

⁹ Miller, Kathy Collard. Paul and the Prison Epistles (The Smart Guide to the Bible Series) (Kindle Locations 2796-2800). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

Philippians 1:8

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

16. What are you communicating when you tell someone you “yearn” for them? What does it look like to love “with the affection of Christ Jesus”?

Paul found joy in his memories of the friends at Philippi and in his growing love for them. He also found joy in remembering them before the throne of grace in prayer. The high priest in the Old Testament wore a special garment, the ephod, over his heart. On it were twelve stones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel engraved on them, a jewel for each tribe (Ex. 28:15–29). He carried the people over his heart in love, and so did Paul. Perhaps the deepest Christian fellowship and joy we can experience in this life is at the throne of grace, praying with and for one another.¹⁰

17. How can praying for fellow believers improve our fellowship with them? What can we learn from the things Paul prayed when it came to others?

*The Philippians needed to know of Christ’s love for the church and how they were to unite together. They needed to know that they should love by putting the needs of others ahead of their own. Every church needs to know these foundational theological truths. But how can love be expressed in a way that puts the needs of others ahead of one’s own needs? There could be many ways to express this. And we need discernment to choose the best way forward. As you follow Jesus, you should be praying for discernment. Put the two together. **You need a knowledge of Christ and His Word, and you need a discerning heart and mind in life and in your relationships.** In this we see the great commandments of loving God and people. The two are tied together. Know God, know people; love God, love people.¹¹*

18. How would you describe the needed balance between love and discernment? What damage can be done to a church when one is made a priority to the exclusion of another?

¹⁰ Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Joyful (Philippians): Even When Things Go Wrong, You Can Have Joy (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 34). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

¹¹ Merida, Tony. Exalting Jesus in Philippians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 43). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups