

**National Ministries Conference
“For the Sake of the Name”**

III John Part II

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And grace and peace be multiplied again to each of you tonight in the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ our Lord. Would you take your copy of God's Word and be turned with me to Philippians chapter one? I want to focus your attention this evening on verses 3-8 of Philippians chapter one. Reading from the English Standard Version of the Bible. These are God's words...

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you always and every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy. Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 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. 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. For God is my witness. How I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Amen.

In his book, The Power of Loving Your Church, David Hansen tells about the ball cap crisis he calls it that erupted in his congregation when several teenagers began wearing baseball caps in worship services. Not wanting to be considered a close minded or narrow minded traditionalists. Hansen initially permitted the boys to wear the caps in the service. This made him a hero to some, particularly the boys and their families. But as you can imagine, there were others, many others who were offended and outraged. At some point, Hansen changed his mind and required the boys to remove their caps in the worship services. The families left the church. But Hansen said there was no external pressure that caused him to reconsider the matter. He changed his mind as a result of thinking about the nature, mission and function of the church in ways he says he had not done in years.

He said the decisive question that he asked himself was this do I pastor a church or just a collection of individuals? Unfortunately, there are many who view the church as just a collection of individuals. There was a time when Christians viewed themselves as pilgrims traveling together through a foreign land on their way home. Now we are more prone to view ourselves as tourists who just happen to be on the same bus with conflicting interests, priorities and agendas. And as a result, many non-Christian philosophies individualism, relativism, subjectivism, and the list goes on now dominate church life. You can see the spirit of the age in some church goers who sit in worship with an attitude that all but announces that if this congregation doesn't keep my interest, meet my needs, or suit my tastes, I'll go across town and find me another church.

And as a result of this my first philosophy, there are too many pastors and churches in our land that seem to be willing to do virtually anything and everything to draw a crowd. In leaning over to reach the world. The church has fallen in. And we're not impacting the society around us, because in too many instances, we are only offering the world what the world already offers. Just dressed up with religious terminology.

I contend tonight, saints, that we need to get back to the basics and get a biblical answer to this important question. What is the church? And I contend that the church is not. I repeat, is not a collection of individuals. It is, as Paul calls it here in Philippians chapter one, verse five, a *partnership in the gospel*.

The new and in the New American Standard Bible calls it participation in the gospel. The new King James renders it fellowship in the gospel. But in those various translations, the key term doesn't change. The gospel. All of the priorities of the church, from exalting Christ to reaching the lost, to building up the saints. What happened next? Inevitably, automatically, if the church just keeps the gospel first and allows its life to be shaped by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And Philippians chapter one, verses three through 18, we basically find Paul's thanksgiving for the church at Philippi. And in it I hope you'll get a sense of the of the warm friendship and bond that was shared between Paul and the Philippians. But I want you to note that it is more than just warm human affection. Paul and the saints here were tied together in gospel partnership.

May that be reflected in the body life of this church. A bond of partnership in the gospel. What does it mean to be partners in the gospel? Consider the answer to that under three headings. With me tonight. First, note the affirmation of gospel partnership. That's verses three through five. In verses 3 to 5, it is as if Paul kind of swings back the curtains of his private devotions and shares his heart with the Philippians to affirm the bond that they shared in Christ.

There is this affirmation with thanksgiving. Verse three says, I thank my God in all of my remembrance of you. One of the worst things you can call a person is ungrateful. And for a person who has been saved by grace through faith in Christ to be ungrateful. Here's a weird irony, a gross sin, a great contradiction. Are you grateful tonight, friend?

I assumed you would say yes to that. So let me press in a little further. For what? Are you grateful tonight? And I, I suggest to you that in your list of things for which you are grateful, if it is dominated merely with things, as your priorities are out of order. Who are the people you thank God for?

What are the gospel relationships that call forth praise from your heart and through your lips to God? Can you say of your relationship with the church what Paul says here about his relationship with the Philippians? I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. It doesn't matter where I am or what I'm doing or what's going on. Just the thought of you causes grateful praise to spring forth from my lips to Almighty God. Let me be quick to say, Paul doesn't talk this way because the church at Philippi was a perfect church. It was not. There was fear and trouble

and division in the church at Philippians 4:2-3. You remember Paul has to call out two sisters by name and ask the saints to help these sisters to work out their differences.

But if I may get ahead of myself. Paul was confident, verse six, that God was at work in the midst of the church, so he was able to look beyond unresolved problems and difficult personalities and whatever else, and see the hand of God at work among the people of God. And it caused him to give thanks. And that thanksgiving bled into intercession.

I'm at verse four where he says, always in every prayer of mine for you all I am making my prayer with joy. Here we see the open secret of what made Paul's faith so strong and his ministry so fruitful. He was a man of prayer. Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest in Rome. He did not know, as he awaited trial if he would be vindicated and released or convicted and executed. But he wants the saints to know that his imprisonment has not hinder the progress of the gospel. He says, even though I can't get to my pulpit, I can still get to my prayer closet. And there are two key words in verse four to note about Paul's prayer life.

The first key word is all.

He says in every prayer of mine for you all. That is language he is going to use repeatedly in this passage in verse seven. He says, it is right for me to feel this way about you all, for you are all partakers with me of grace. Verse eight. I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. This all inclusive language reminds us that there is no place, for we don't have time for clicks and division in the work of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In anyone who builds up in us versus them mentality is not of Christ. He says, I am praying for you all.

Here's the second key word in that verse, which is even more remarkable to me. He says it. I am making my request for you all with joy. Joy and rejoicing. Mentioned some 16 times in this letter, Philippians is called the Epistle of Joy. This verse is the first mention of joy in Philippi, and it is the joy Paul gets in interceding for the saints. In verse six, he gives the reason for his spontaneous thanksgiving and his continual intercession. He says, it is because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, this word here partnership, fellowship, participation translates the Greek word *koinonia*, the common term that we have kind of diluted. We treat fellowship as if it refers to us getting together, having a good time at the same event or activity. But Paul and the Philippians were not together. They were not having a good time. They were not sure if they would see each other again. And yet, he says, we are bound together. Even though we are separated geographically, we are bound together spiritually in partnership.

Dr. Carson envisions that term in its commercial implications of two men who start a fishing business together, and they both sacrifice to buy a boat to fulfill their common vision. He describes that as fellowship, partnership. The term here *koinonia*. It is mutual sacrifice for the fulfillment of a common vision. In a real sense. Paul bluntly says, we must remember as God's people, we're in business together. Gospel business. Our partnership is not based upon a geographic location, a physical structure, a pastoral vision, a church tradition, ministry

programs, or anything like that. He says what binds us together is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The saving message that confronts each of us with the fact that we are sinners, who will have to give an account to God for how we have lived our lives, and there is nothing we can say or do to satisfy the righteous standards of our Holy God. But Jesus, the Son of God, came to earth and lived the righteous life. We should have lived and died the death, suffering the wrath of God that we should have died by his blood and righteousness. When we turn from our sins and trust in him for salvation, we receive free forgiveness, radical transformation, and eternal hope.

Paul says, that's what makes us the people of God. Not buildings, not programs, not not worship services. The gospel. But after mentioning the affirmation of the gospel in verses 3 to 5, he says a word about the assurance of gospel partnership in verse six. And in a real sense, verse three 3 to 5 looks back in affirmation. Then verse six looks ahead in assurance. What a verse. He says, I'm sure of this. I'm convinced of this. I am persuaded. I have come to a settled conviction of thoughts, and nothing can change my mind by two assurances about the church that were rooted in God. There are obviously here in the text he says, first, God has begun a good work in you. Some commentators suggest that this is merely a reference to the love offerings they had sent to Paul in the past, and were now resumed. It may include that, but I contend that this refers to something much more than that. The word here begun or began, is used here and in Galatians chapter three, where Paul asks, are you so foolish, having begun in the spirit, will you now be perfected in the flesh? The term he is using there began, begun refers to the work of God in salvation.

In Galatians, Paul is saying that God began that work in us by the Holy Spirit, and the flesh cannot perfect what only the Holy Spirit can complete. It is in that same theological redemptive sense. I am convinced Paul speaks of it here. God shows us in eternity past. He has called us to himself in the proclamation of the gospel. And when we repent and trust in him, he begins a good work in us. What a great way to describe salvation. It's the work of God. It's a good work. And Paul says it's just the beginning. Have you thought about that? All that God has already done for us in his saving grace is just the beginning. He has begun a good work.

And here's the second assurance of verse six. Do you see it?

God finishes what he starts. But we all begin things that we don't finish. Some sometimes by negligence, irresponsibility, or sloth. Other times we just don't have the time, the resources, the scale, the effort, etc. but either way, inevitably all of us begin good things that will be marked incomplete in the final inspection. Not so with God. What God begins. God completes. What? God starts. God finishes. What God initiates. God consummate. In fact, God is so great that when he starts a thing, the consummation is embedded in the initiation he's done before he starts. We've just got to catch up with what he's doing. This is a statement about salvation but Paul is speaking here in about the Ministry of Gospel Partnership. I have to move on.

But if I can give you a page out of my own biography in 2008, I was invited to preach to fill the pulpit of a church on a holiday weekend in Jacksonville, Florida. And two months later, that church extended a call for me to be their next pastor. I was the last person to know that God was sending me to Jacksonville, and I was like bizarre old Isaiah, you know, here am I send somebody else! I did not want to go. I love my life in Los Angeles. I lived in one city. I had grown up in one church. My father served the church. I served that church. And I remember in prayer telling the Lord. Lord, I can't move now. This church needs me. In this. It's as if the Lord said, They need you. The Lord sent me to Jacksonville. My young preaching assistant who, I expected to go to Jacksonville with me. The Lord led me to commend him to the elders to be the next pastor. They prayerfully accepted that recommendation. They called the next pastor eight days after I left town, and they flew me back to Los Angeles to lead the congregational meeting to call the next pastor. A year later, the young man invited me back home to preach. And after the service, mind you, I pastored that church. My daddy pastored that church after the service. I'm in the, front of the church shaking hands, and a man walks up to me and he says. He says, little preacher, that was all right. He says, what it was. I didn't hear you. What's what's your name? I said, my name is H.B. Charles Junior. He said that was all right preaching. Where did the pastor find you from? And I wanted to tell him. Pastor didn't find me. I found Joe pastor. But it's as if the Holy Spirit tapped me on the shoulder and reminded me of my prayers. They need you,

Oh, brothers and sisters, I hope you see what I'm trying to say to you. We got here too late, and we'll leave too early to have a monopoly on God's agenda. It's a privilege to do anything in the Lord's program. He does not need us. He is the one who begins the good work. And he will complete what he started at the day of Jesus Christ. And so in verses three through five, there is the affirmation of gospel partnership. In verse six there is the assurance of gospel partnership. But in verse seven and eight would you note with me the affection of gospel partnership. Many times in Paul's letters he begins with a thanksgiving and prayer. That is what we have in this text. But there is an element that is unique to Philippians. Between the thanksgiving three through six and the prayer nine through 11. It's verse seven and eight where Paul just bears his heart and shares his affection for the church. That's marked by Christian love and Christian longing. His affection was rooted in Christian love. He says in verse seven, 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 my defense and confirmation of the gospel. But you notice that how Paul describes his ministry, he says, my entire ministry was just confirming and defending the gospel. I confirmed it for believers. I defended it against unbelievers. But it was a reminder that if you just keep the gospel first, the gospel has its own power to build up his friends and knock down its enemies. And he says, you will not be fair weather friends. I hold you in my heart because when when I was out confirming and defending the gospel, and even now in my imprisonment, the bond of gospel partnership continues. He says in verse five is actually from the first day until now, since we've known each other for these ten years. But not only is their gospel Christian love, but Christian longing. Verse eight For God is my witness, how I yearn for

you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Will you know that Paul, who is under house arrest in Rome, doesn't say merely that I'm yearning to get out of prison? God is my witness.

I yearn to be with you.

It is a reminder to us brothers and sisters, that you cannot have a high view of Christ and a low view of the church. At the same time. I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. That word affection refers to the visceral parts, the intestines. They are the King James Version. Renders it literally, even though not elegantly, says, I yearn for you with the bowels of Christ Jesus. He says, the closer my I get to Christ, the more I can feel this heart beat and his heart beats for you. And so there's no way I can be getting closer to Christ without yearning for you all. With the affection of Christ.

May I conclude with one devotional thought. That I just can't resist. In that last line, that may be a blessing or an encouragement that someone came to night and desperately needed. Do you see it in verse eight? Christ Jesus has affection for you. It may seem like no one knows. It may seem like no one understands. It may seem like no one cares. That's not so. Christ Jesus has affection for you. You can cast all your cares on him because he cares for you.

More than 100 years ago, there was an itinerant evangelist, Stillman Martin, who traveled with his wife, Sevilla. She would play, she wrote music. They wrote music together. She would sing. They they told of adopting an old couple. The Doolittle's. Mrs. Doolittle was a sickly older lady who could not get out of bed. Mr. Doolittle was the, a partial invalid who cared for the family affairs from a wheelchair. But they noted that that that old sickly couple was the most joyful people they had ever met. And on one occasion, Sevilla asked the old lady, how is it that you have so much joy with all of the suffering and the trials and the troubles that you face? The old lady told her one day I was just reading the gospel, and read the words of Jesus, that the sparrow cannot fall from the heavens without the heavenly Father knowing about it. And the old lady said, I just concluded that if his eye is on the sparrow and he's watching over me, those words stuck with Sevilla. And sometime later she wrote them out and set them to music.

Why should I feel discouraged? Why should the shadows come? Why should my heart be lonely along for heaven and home? When Jesus is my comfort, a constant friend Is he. His eye is on the sparrow and I know he watches me.

So I sing because I'm happy and I sing because I'm free. His eye is on the sparrow. And I know he watches over me.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for its truth, wisdom and authority. I pray for this local congregation and all of their ministry partners, that you would bind them together in partnership in the gospel characterized by mutual thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, spiritual confidence that you have begun a good work and you will complete it at the day of Jesus Christ. May our hearts be filled with love and longing for one another through the affection of Christ. We pray that you would receive the glory in us, through us and among us.

Amen.