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Bread of Life, Plattsburgh, NY
August 30th, 2020

Philippians 1:3-8

Intro

Belonging to a church family as a member is a beautiful thing, isn't it? As members, we are all professing to be believers, and asking one another to love us, pour into our lives, and hold us accountable to walk in Christ. As members, we promise to life together, loving one another, praying for one another, living life together, bearing one another's burdens, and dwelling in loving unity. We validate one another's professions of faith as we see the fruit of the Spirit, *disciple* each other, longing not only for each one to be saved, but also to grow as healthy, mature believers, glorifying the Lord! What a wonderful, beautiful thing it is to belong to a church family; to have plainly before: *love these people, and be loved by these people, all in the love of Christ!*

But sometimes loving one another as fellow church members can be very difficult; after all, we are all broken sinners, aren't we? Sometimes we don't feel like joyfully loving each other because of sin in our own hearts; our hearts become hardened with sin, and as we harbor pride, bitterness, or jealousy, we have a hard time joyfully and affectionately loving our fellow church members, our fellow saints in Christ. This can be especially true if doing so requires admitting when we're wrong, repenting, and asking one another for forgiveness. Or at other times, we don't feel very grateful for one another because of the ugliness we see in each others' lives! I'm a sinner, and so are you. As we walk through life together, being open and vulnerable, we're going to see the *ugliness* in each others' lives. Sin will be exposed. There will be moments of weakness. We will be caught off-guard, disappointed, maybe even offended, Misunderstandings happen. Sometimes, personalities clash and we just get annoyed! For whatever reasons come up, the simple reality is, sometimes it is difficult to obey the Lord in sincerely loving one another; not only to perform acts of love, to to genuinely love each other with hearts full of affection, thanksgiving, and even joy towards each other!

So what do we do when we find it very difficult to joyfully love and give thanks for our fellow church members, maybe even certain members in particular?

We pray. We regularly pray for one another. We give thanks to the Lord for one another. We diligently pray for one another's good. Paul models this for us in our text this morning: he intertwines *thanksgiving* and *petition* as he prays for the church in Philippi. He regularly prays for them, and everytime he does, he *gives thanks to God* for them (vv. 3-8), And throughout these verses, Paul makes clear that these aren't just general, detached prayers of duty; no, these are *emotional* prayers full of love, affection, gratitude, and joy in these beloved believers! As he says in verse 8, he does this "with the affection of Christ Jesus."

So let's return to our question: "How do we genuinely, sincerely, and evenly joyfully, love our fellow church members, even when it is difficult?" Well, we could ask it a different way: "How do we love each other with the joyful love and affection of Christ? The same love that Paul reveals in this passage?" I think the answer, at least in part, is to *pray for one another like Paul does*. And not just to pray the same words, but to embody the same *heart*, the same purpose of love, behind this prayer: the heart and love of Christ.

Regularly praying for one another, especially in the ways we see here in this passage, help us to joyfully love each other, when it is difficult. *Prayer for others humbly recognizes that every good work is from God* - Therefore, the proper response is to give Him thanks and praise His glory for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. When we pray for one another, and thank God for each other, we are humbly acknowledging that these are the Lord's people, that they have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, and that every good work within them, even their faith in Christ and salvation, is the Lord's work. And this is true not only of them, but of us as well.

Prayer rightly orients our own hearts - It is very difficult to stay angry, self-righteously blind, or resentful towards someone when you are praying for them. This passage reminds us to systematically give thanks for one another, noting and giving thanks for God's grace at work in their lives. And as we do this, the proper response is joyful, affectionate love for each other and for Christ. This is what we see in Philippians 1:3-8.

I. Give Thanks for God's Work of Grace in Each Others' Lives (vv. 3-8)

Paul begins by telling the Philippian church that he regularly prays for them; and when he does, he *gives thanks to God* for them, and prays for them *with joy*. We see this in

verses 3 and 4: “***I thank my God in all my remembrance of you***” (v.3). That is to say, every time I think of you, I ‘thank God’ for you; I prayerfully give thanks to the Lord for you. He emphatically continues: “***always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy***” (v.4). In other words, Paul is saying: “I pray for *all of you* regularly; everytime I think of you, I pray. And every single time I pray for you, I do so *gratefully* and *joyfully*. I *give thanks to God for you* and I pray *for you* with a great sense of joy.” Or as he further elaborates later on, in **verse 8: “For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus”**o (v.8). Paul regularly prays this local church, both joyfully *giving thanks* for them and joyfully, even *affectionately* praying *for* them.

Why does he “always” give thanks and pray for them with joyful affection? He gives us the reason in verse 5, and then further explains the reason in verses 6-8. He prays for them this way, in v.5, “***because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.***” What does this mean? Is he simply referring to their partnership in ministry? This is definitely included, but it al *more* than just their work and partnership in ministry. After all, he says, “*from the first day until now.*” Then, in v. 6, “***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.***” How does this verse fit in? What is this “good work” begun in the believers?

To put it simply, Paul is referring to God’s saving work of grace in their lives. He is full of joy and gratitude to the Lord for these believers, and counts them dear to him in his heart (v. 7), because he constantly keeps his eyes on God’s grace on display in their lives; he recounts God’s evident grace *in the past, in the present, and in the future*. He joyfully gives thanks to God for their **1. Saving faith; 2. The evidence of their saving faith throughout their lives; 3. And their perseverance.** The grace of God is evident in their lives, so that he has “assurance” and confidence that they are truly believers - that they have experienced the salvation that comes only by grace through faith in the gospel of Christ. Therefore, he has confidence they will continue to persevere until “the day of Christ,” when they will enter into eternal life with Christ in His Kingdom. And Paul’s assurance is *grounded* in God’s work of grace in them. So let’s look at each of these three things in turn:

II. Give thanks to God for Saving Faith

First, Paul rejoices and gives thanks for their *salvation*, for the fact that they are true *believers*, i.e. Christians. He gives thanks for their “partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.” What was their partnership in the gospel on the first day? He is referring to their *conversion*. As we talked about last week, Paul and Timothy themselves, along with their team, came to Philippi preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ; they themselves shared the gospel, made disciples, and planted the church in Philippi. We mentioned how the Book of Acts actually tells this story, and records the conversion stories, the *testimonies* of at least two of these believers in Philippi. So when Paul refers to that “first day,” he’s recalling the story of how they became Christians: when they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ proclaimed they responded rightly: by *repenting and believing*; they turned away from sin, this world, and all other forms of religion, and instead turn to the Lord Jesus, trusting in Him with saving faith!

They heard *this gospel message*: that there one true God who created all; that we are all sinners, standing condemned before the Lord and deserve His eternal wrath because of our sin; that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, the God-Man, to be the Savior; that he lived a perfect life in our place, bore our sins and the wrath of God on the cross for us, died, was buried, and was raised by God, on the third day; and that our *only hope for salvation* is that we respond to this message by *repenting and believing* this gospel; by turning away from all else and embracing this truth, embracing and trusting wholly in Jesus Christ as our only Lord and Savior! And that if we do, then we have the sure confidence that his blood, that he poured out as a sacrifice in our place, will wash away *all of our sin*, so that we can be completely forgiven, declared righteous before God, and have the sure hope of eternal life in Him as God’s beloved children. This is the gospel Paul speaks of here! The same gospel he preached to the Philippians. And they responded, on that “first day,” with repentance and faith; they believed! And as time was to show, this was *true, saving, repentant faith*. How did Paul know? Because this gospel changed their lives, so that Paul can say they were “*partners in the gospel*” (v.5), fellow “*partakers of grace*” (v.7).

III. Give Thanks to God for Good Works

That is to say, their *repentance* and *saving faith* in the gospel was made evident by the fruit they bore in their lives. The first was their initial response to the gospel in conversion, to be sure. But as Jesus warns us in the parable of the sower, not all that make an initial profession of faith in Christ truly believe. But these believers continued on in their faith and grew in Christ! They proved their faith genuine through their “partnership in the gospel.” They joined in the gospel work Paul and his companions started; they joined him in the “defense” and “confirmation of the gospel,” as he says in verse 7. They shared the gospel, defended the right doctrines of the Christian faith, and confirmed it by living it out in their own lives, as a church, and by passing it on to new believers. Not only did they pursue gospel ministry in their own city, but their faith and love in Christ prompted them to partner with Paul by supporting his missions in other places; as we see in chapter 4:14-18, they had supporting Paul financially for quite some time, and had even recently sent him a gift while he sits imprisoned in Rome. Paul even boasts of their giving in other letters to other churches! That’s part of what Paul means by saying they are fellow “partakers of grace” with him in his “chains” or “imprisonment” (v.7).

To paraphrase this in a different way: our good works in our lives come only by the grace of God; they are not ultimately our works, but the “good work” of God in us. ***As the gospel takes root in our hearts, it necessarily bears fruit in our lives.*** When we truly believe in the gospel of Christ, trusting in Jesus alone as Lord and Savior, then we live transformed lives! Why? Because this is God’s good work of grace in us, from beginning to end. Our believing, our growing, our trusting, repenting, obeying, persevering... *all of it is the work of God!* These are evidences of God’s grace; these are evidences that God has begun the “good work” of salvation in their hearts. That work began when they responded to the gospel in saving faith. And this good work continues as we grow in Christ. Every part of sanctification, and good work we do, all of it is from the Lord! And all of it is a part of us ***“confirming the gospel!”*** These are evidences that we too are ***“partakers of grace,”*** for these works come only from the Spirit of God! And so we should give him the glory!

[Application]: So look into the lives of your brothers and sisters around you; look at your fellow church members. Do you see their good works? Do you see how they have been serving the Lord and ministering to others in specific ways? Have you seen them live out the gospel in their lives? Have you seen a great love for the gospel, a great love for the lost, leading them to share and defend the gospel, even when it is costly? Have you seen evidences of the Spirit of God in them? If so, rejoice! You are witnessing God's good work in them! So give thanks to the Lord for them and praise His name!

IV. Give Thanks to God for Perseverance and Assurance

And because this is *God's good work* in us, not our own, then we can have confidence that we will persevere to the end; we can have assurance of our salvation, for it is rooted in grace, in God's efforts, in what Christ has done on our behalf. And so, another evidence of grace that Paul sees and gives thanks for is *perseverance*.

Just as Paul endures suffering and hardship for the sake of the gospel, so do they. As we saw last week, the Philippians were no strangers to persecution. They had to live out their faith in Christ in the face of opposition. To deny Caesar as Lord, and to worship Jesus as the only Lord and Savior, could bring a high cost to pay in the Roman city of Philippi. Yet they endured and persevered in defending and confirming the gospel, even amidst *suffering and persecution*. They were fellow partakers of grace, even in Paul's "*imprisonment*." They joined him in carrying on the gospel ministry, both living out the gospel faith in their own lives, and being apart of sharing the gospel and making disciples of the lost, even when it came with the high price of suffering and persecution. What a mark of true saving faith! Such perseverance displays God's grace. Such perseverance shows true saving faith. And as the scriptures make clear, all who truly believing in the gospel - all true Christians - necessarily persevere to the end! We do not lose our salvation; God holds fast each one of His children and does not let us go! If you are trusting in Christ this morning, rest assured, you will persevere! How do we know this for sure? Because with Paul, we are "*sure of this, the He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion*." You and I have assurance of our salvation because our salvation, from beginning to end, is rooted not in our own works, but in the grace of God and the work of Jesus Christ! Therefore, when we believe,

when we grow and obey, and when we persevere, all of this is but further evidence of GOD's work of grace in us! And therefore, we can rest assured that He will give us the grace to continue to persevere.

Conclusion: God's Good Work of Grace

As Paul recognizes how their lives have been transformed by the gospel, and the fruit they have borne, this makes him incredibly glad! He rejoices and gives thanks to God! If we truly *yearn* to see sinners saved from sin and find salvation in Christ, then how happy and joyful should we indeed be when there is evidence that another sinner has moved from death to life! He has *great joy* in the way they have responded to the gospel and lived out their faith! **Seeing someone repent and believe should produce a heart of joyful, affectionate love towards them!** As we give thanks for the grace of God we see in each other, this makes us thankful *for that particular person!* It is right for us to find *great joy* in our brothers and sisters in Christ - in our fellow church members! It is right for us to love each other with the "affection of Christ Jesus" as we rejoice in the good fruit, the good works, of gospel faith, ministry, and perseverance we see them do!

And at the same time, just as Paul does, we should immediately recognize that this is not ultimately *their* doing, but God's: it is the "**good work**" that God "**began in [them]**" (v.6). This is nothing less than the incredible grace of God in their lives!

The work of salvation is **God's good work of grace, from beginning to end.** This is true for all of us, for every believer. From our faith and conversion on the first day, to our good works in the present, to our perseverance and completion of salvation on the last day - it is all God's work of grace! And he deserves every ounce of glory, thanks, and praise for it! Yes, we are commanded to repent, to believe, to trust, to obey, and we are responsible to do these things; and yet, we are only able to do them because we are "partakers of grace." And because our salvation is rooted not in *our* work, but in *God's* work, let us **joyfully and affectionately** praise Him and love each other more, giving thanks for God's grace even as we pray for more!

Application:

And so, when we see such evidences of God's grace, in our lives or in our fellow church members, this is a cause of great joy! Let this stir up *love and joy* in our hearts for each other, and let us *joyfully give thanks* to God!

- 1. For yourself:** First, start by thanksgiving God for the "good work" he has begun in your own heart. Do you see evidences of God's grace in your life? Has he begun this good work in you? Have you responded to the gospel by repenting and believing in Christ alone? Are you now continuing to grow in Christ, living a life changed by the gospel? Do you long to defend and confirm the gospel in all that you do? Do you long to see the gospel spread and save others? IS the Lord strengthening you to persevere in Him, even in difficult days? If so, rejoice! Give thanks to the Lord, for this is *God's work of grace* in you! And rejoice in this: because this is rooted in Him, because *God began this work*, then He *will surely bring it to completion*. Rest and rejoice in *the assurance of salvation we have in Christ!*

- 2. Regularly give thanks to God for one another.**

It is appropriate to give thanks for all fellow Christians, as God's brings them to mind. When we see God's work of grace in the lives of our friends, family, and other believers we know of, this should should make us glad! We should rejoice in such things, letting our love grow for these precious fellow believers! And we should be quick to *thank God* for them; to thank GOD with joy and affection for them.

We should *especially do this regularly for each other as fellow church members*. We should strive to make it a regular practice in our lives to joyfully and affectionately thanks for each other; for each of our fellow church members - Look around you; these are the Christians God has placed in your life in a special, unique way. Part of being a church member means we are specially covenanting together, or promising to one another, that we will participate in the Christian life, gospel ministry, and the "defense and confirmation" of the gospel together. And this isn't just on Sundays or Wednesday nights; we are called to live our lives together. Therefore, we have front-row seats to see God's grace at work in each others'

lives! It is surely appropriate, then, to regularly give joyful, affectionate thanks to God for one another in this way, isn't it?

And just as Paul uses the words "*all of you,*" over and over throughout this passage, so we should strive to systematically give thanks *for each and every fellow church member*. Yes, even when we find it difficult to do so! Even when we might struggle to be thankful for one another, we can start to prayerfully list of GOD's grace we see in them: give thanks to GOD's for that fellow church member's profession of faith and personal testimony; thank God for the way He has worked in and through them over the years. And as we start to pray, we might be surprised just how much we have to be thankful for in that person! And as we give thanks, pray that the Lord would shape our hearts to have joy, affectionate love for all the saints, even with the affection of Christ.

I have found it incredibly helpful to do this, systematically for each one of you, by praying through the *church membership directory*, praying for each individual and family, day by day. And I would encourage you all to do the same! Take the directory and just start praying for one or two families or individuals of the church each day, until you make it through the list, and then start over. And even if we don't know what to pray for, we can always pray this prayer of Paul for each other. So let us give thanks to God for His grace in each others lives, and let us continually prayer for more!

3. Pray for God's saving grace in the lives of unbelievers

Finally, pray for God's saving grace in the lives of unbelievers. The gospel leads us not just to love fellow Christians but to love everyone! And so we long to see all saved in Christ! But we know that only God can save; and He will! Let us diligently pray for God to begin this same work of salvation in the lives of every unbeliever we come across!

So if you are an unbeliever this morning, or if you are not a believer today, this is my prayer for you: that you would become aware that you, just like me, are a sinner; and we deserve the wrath of God, in Hell for eternity, for our sins. Yet God sent Jesus Christ into the world to live, die, and be raised for you and me! My prayer today is that you would turn away from your own good works, because they will never save you. Instead, turn to the good work of salvation

displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ! Trust in Him alone as Lord and Savior! And cry out to the Lord that God would begin this good work of salvation in your own heart!

Let us Pray.