

## *Participants in the Gospel (1)*

### **Introduction (Text: Philippians 1:1-8)**

- A. **Every time Paul thinks of his friends in Philippi, he is filled with joy.** The entire letter throbs with personal integrity. Most of Paul's letters include in the greeting a prayer of thanksgiving, but none of these prayers compares in depth of feeling with this one.
- B. **Affection, gratitude, confidence, and joy fill the mind of Paul, even though he is in prison, as he thinks of the one church which never caused him trouble or anxiety.**
- C. **While a number of themes are woven into the first chapter, they may all fall under the theme *partnership in the gospel*.**
- D. Paul begins his epistle with a customary greeting, which includes a prayer. **This greeting, with characteristic intensity, reveals the commanding passion of Paul's life—his devotion to Christ.**
- E. This has added meaning because of the relationship of Paul to the Christians at Philippi. **They are his friends, so the tone of the letter is set in the fact that this is a letter from a friend to his friends.**
- F. **Three times in the first two verses he speaks the name of his Lord. These references to Christ are the cord binding Paul, and Timothy, Epaphroditus and other companions in the Roman prison with the band of faithful and joyful Christians at Philippi.** They are all *participants in the gospel*. Though we may never grasp the full meaning of this, **three words begin to plumb the depths of what it means to be participants in the gospel.**

### **#1: *Privilege***

- A. **The privilege that is ours is spelled out in the first two verses and the three pivotal references to Christ.** We are *in Christ*; this is the state of our being: **“holy people in Christ Jesus.”** We are in a relationship to Christ. That relationship is one of servants: **“servants of Jesus Christ.”** Blessings from Christ and God our Father are ours to receive: **“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”**
- B. **The New English Bible expands a phrase in verse 1 to give even greater meaning to the thrilling designation of who we are: “to all those of God's people, incorporate in Christ Jesus.”** Isn't that exciting? **We have not simply taken n a new religion with a new belief system, we have a new status in relation to God, have been given a new life, and are now a part of a new community.**
- C. **Get that firmly in mind and rejoice in the sublime privilege that is ours: a new status in relation to God—forgiven and accepted, a new life, and a**

**new community.** The gospel is universal, the gift of God of Himself in Jesus Christ is offered to all. Yet, the privilege is an *exclusive one*, belonging to those who by faith belong to Jesus Christ.

- D. In a similar greeting to the **Ephesians (1:3-6)**, Paul spells out completely. It is absolutely breathtaking. **God chose us in Christ to be holy, adopted us as sons and daughters through Christ, freely bestowed His grace upon us in the Beloved, and in Him has given us redemption and the forgiveness of our sins.**

## #2: *Promise*

- A. **We may have passed too quickly over three aspects of the privilege that is ours as participants in the gospel: (1) a new status in relation to God, (2) a new life, and (3) a new community.** The promise that Paul sounds in **verse 6** stops us and calls us to look again, especially at the second aspect: a new life in Christ Jesus—**“being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion (v. 6).**
- B. **The new status that is ours is that of being justified or accepted by God. Do not miss this: it is in Christ that we are justified (Galatians 2:17), and in Christ that we are new people, living a new life. We are always in need of keeping together the new status and the new life God gives us.**
1. **This illustration is a simple one, but it will make the point.** A down-and-outer—some would call him a bum—comes to you in dire need. His dirty ragged dress is only the outer sign of his destitution and need.
  2. He is hungry and sick. You give him a bath and a change of clothing, but that is not enough. He is undernourished and sick, needing food and a doctor. Perhaps more, he needs love and friendship, healing of hurts, restoration of dignity, new purpose and meaning.
  3. **So we come to Jesus, not in dirty rags but clothed in the garments of sin, spiritually starving and sick unto death. We are welcomed by Christ, accepted—bathed in His love and forgiveness. We are clothed in His grace, received as children—as though we were sinless. God sees us as righteous in Christ: this is our new status.**
- C. **But that isn’t enough, nor is it all. Christ, the Physician, knows we are sick, so He gives us His Spirit to reside within us, to heal and strengthen, to provide direction and give new life.**
1. There are two snares into which we often fall as Christians. **One is the snare of thinking that receiving a new status before God, being justified, is everything needful.**
  2. **The second snare is despondency into which we sink when the tide of our Christian experience ebbs low.** We become life-less. No fruit of the

Spirit seems to be growing in us. We are battered by one failure after another and feel forsaken by God.

3. Temptation is especially appealing and we feel the joy of our salvation will never return. **Remember: God did not start His work within us to abandon it. He does not do things half-measure. We have the promise: He will complete what He started.** Let us claim that promise and yield to Him as we did before in baptism.

D. There is something else to be said here. **The Christian life is not an achiever's game. The Christian has no right to expect to fare any better in his own self-efforts than the non-Christian. What the Christian can count on is a God who keeps faith. We can face the coming judgment without fear for our relationship with God has been made right through Christ; we can elect that Christian mission to be vindicated and finally accomplished.**

### **#3: Partnership (vs. 7)**

- A. **"All of you share in God's grace with me."** Paul says in **verse 7**. He celebrated his fellowship with the Philippians **"from the first day until now"** (verse 5).
- B. The **"first day,"** not to be confined to 24 hours, was packed with tender memories as Paul remembered going to Philippi the first time. **Finding no synagogue to which he could go on the Sabbath and speak with the Jews, he went down to the river where a group of women were said to meet on the Sabbath.**
- C. **After he hold them the story of Jesus, one of the women Lydia, opened her heart to the Lord.** On **"the first day"** he cast an evil spirit out of a slave girl, and her owners were incensed to the point of having Paul flogged and imprisoned.
- D. But on **"the first day"** **God worked miraculously again and the jailer was converted, then his family and the Christian community grew in Philippi.**
- E. This was a big idea for Paul because it was a big experience. One of his most graphic ways of saying it was, **"For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive"** (1 Corinthians 15:22). **Two communities are designated: the fallen community which with Adam we all have shared, the redeemed community which in Christ we share by new birth and choice.**

### **Conclusion**

- A. **Once united to Christ by faith we are members of a new community which God is creating.** In this new community **"there is neither Jew nor Greek,... neither slave nor free,...neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus"** (Galatians 3:28).

***B. In this new community we are all servants of Jesus Christ and we share a common life in Christ.***