

## *Participants in the Gospel (2)*

### **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 new status in relation to God—forgiven and accepted, a new life, and a new community.
  2. **Promise:** 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.
  3. **Partnership (v. 7):** 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.

**Note: Now, Paul turns to his prayer for these members of this special congregation that he loves so much. His prayer for them is my prayer for each of you who are participants in the gospel (Philippians 1:9-11).**

### **#1: It is a Prayer for Love**

- A. **“That your love may abound more and more” (v. 9). It is on target that this would be Paul's great intercession for those who are participants in the**

**gospel, because love is the core word of the gospel.** In English, “love” is an appallingly overworked word, diminished in power.

- B. In the gallery of word pictures signifying love, none come close to “the width, and length, and depth, and height” of *agape* the love of Christ which passes knowledge (**Ephesians 3:16-19**).
- C. **In language we are poverty-stricken to convey the richness of the meaning of *agape*, and so pictures are necessary: a father welcoming home a wayward son, a forgiven woman pouring precious perfume on Jesus, a shepherd risking the wilds to find one lost sheep.**
- D. **Dare we hang the portrait *par excellence* in the same gallery? —the Son of God hanging on a cross, spilling every ounce of blood in love for us sinners, acting out everything He said: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).**
- E. Paul felt poverty-stricken in language, too, so he pictured *agape* in Jesus, urging us to read into the meaning of the word the mighty acts of God, culminating in God’s choosing to do in Christ something never done before and never to be done again: **to be born, to live, to teach, to suffer, to die, to rise again—all “for us men and for our salvation.” And the way that *agape* looks in our lives is etched immortally in Paul’s hymn of love (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).**

## **#2: *It is a Prayer for Light* (Philippians 1:9)**

- A. Who coined the phrase “Love is blind!” That is 180 degrees off course. In this verse we separate light from love only for the sake of clear reflection. **Paul’s prayer shows us that we can hardly pray for growing love apart from a greater light.**
- B. Both the Phillips rendering and the NEB make this sublimely clear. **“My prayer for you is that you may have still more love—a love that is full of knowledge and every wise insight” (Phillips). “And this is my prayer, that your love may grow ever richer and richer in knowledge and insight of every kind” (NEB).**
- C. **Love calls for and seeks after knowledge. It is not blind. It does not overlook faults and weaknesses in others, but sees them clearly, looking beyond them to “the heart of things” and continuing to love.** Loves does not downplay truth, or speak in circles or opaquely to avoid confrontation, but speaks the truth that change and healing may be possible.
- D. **Spiritual knowledge and discernment are gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:4-11) and are desperately needed, especially in our time of moral and spiritual confusion.**

### #3: *It is a Prayer for Life*

- A. Everything that Christ does *in us must* reflect itself *through us*. So the prayer is for life, life lived in a special way because the love of Christ is abounding within us, spiritual knowledge is increasing, and the capacity of discernment is being sharpened. How does this life express itself practically? What does it look like? (choices)
- B. **“So that you may be able to discern what is best”** (v. 10). To be able to differentiate not only between good and evil, but between good and better, between better and the best. *Best is the quality we must seek.*
- C. **What we read, the entertainment we seek, how we relate, the content of our conversation, the degree to which we discipline ourselves, how we respond to and participate in our “sensate culture”—this tells the tale of our lives, how discriminating we are.**
- D. **Our culture is so far gone down the path of sexual promiscuity, selfish indulgence, moral indifference, flabby thinking that only those who consistently choose the superlatively good can make a difference.**

### *Conclusion*

**Note:** Consider the two last phrases of Paul’s prayer and its application for our life.

- A. **“Pure and blameless for the day of Christ”** (1:10b). “Sun-judged”—to be able to stand in the clear sun of God’s judgment and the judgment of our sisters and brothers, with no need to hide, or to conceal our thoughts and our desires. **“Live like men who are at home in daylight,”** Paul urged the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:8, NEB). This is what it means to be transparent, sincere and without blame.
- B. **“Filled with the fruit of righteousness.”** This is a beautiful expression for our life as participants in the gospel: *fruitfulness*. We would expect Paul to pray in this fashion. He knew the work of the Spirit in his own life—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, which were now being tested in prison as he faced his own execution. **“Filled with”** puts us in mind of trees whose every branch produces in this early life **“the fruit”** Paul described in **Galatians 5:22-23**. **When we live this way, people will be drawn to us and we must point the way to Christ!**