

Philippians 1:3-11 – Partners in the gospel

Paul calls their relationship a “partnership in the gospel.” The Greek word translated “partnership” is *koinōnia*. It describes fellowship, sharing, participation, and common involvement. Here it refers to the Philippians’ active participation in Paul’s gospel mission.

Our relationship with one another differs from the Philippians’ relationship with an apostle. Yet their partnership provides a beautiful pattern for partnership within the local church.

What happens within a church when the gospel begins shaping our relationships with one another? We see our membership in a local church through the lens of a partnership. What we see in our text today is that gospel partnership produces gratitude for one another, confidence in God’s work, deep affection, and a desire/commitment to one another’s maturity.

1. **Gospel Partnership produces gratitude (3-5)** - Whenever Paul remembers the Philippians, he thanks God and prays with joy.
 - A. Faithful partnership produces gratitude – Their partnership continued “from the first day until now.” This was sustained faithfulness extending across more than ten years.
 - **Around AD 49–50:** Paul and His team plan the gospel and a church in Philippi. (*Acts 16:6–40*).
 - **Around AD 50:** After Paul left Philippi and continued to Thessalonica, the Philippian church sent financial support to him time and again. (*Acs 17:1–9; Phil 4:15–16*).
 - **Around AD 56–57:** Paul returned to Macedonia and visited them again during his third missionary journey. (*Acts 20:1–6*).
 - **Around AD 60–62:** Paul was imprisoned under house arrest in Rome, where he received visitors and continued preaching. (*Acts 28:16, 30–31*). During this time, the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Rome with another financial gift and instructions to care for Paul.

Paul’s gratitude for them came from this 10-year relationship. They prayed for Paul. They supported his ministry financially. They sent Epaphroditus. They stood beside him during his imprisonment.

- B. Local Church membership should produce gratitude in the life of its members for one another.
 - Meaningful membership becomes gospel partnership as we take responsibility for one another.
 - Gospel-shaped churches are strengthened by ordinary believers who remain faithful to one another through changing seasons. They serve the Lord by serving one another. They remain faithful when their work goes unnoticed. They continue loving, even difficult people, even difficult seasons. They remain committed through disappointment and change.
 - One of the greatest gifts we can give one another is our faithful presence.
 - The fellow believers God places around us are gifts of his grace and instruments of his care.
 - Gospel partnership gives us people for whom we can thank God. Spend some time this week thanking God for the people in this church he has placed around you. Let them know you are grateful for them.

2. Gospel Partnership produces confidence in God’s work. (1:6)

- A. Fruit - Paul's confidence in the Philippian church is found in the evidence of grace.
 - Their generosity, courage, endurance, and service were fruits of the grace God had begun working within them. These fruits were evidence of God's grace.
- B. God - Paul's confidence in the church is found in God who finishes what he starts.
 - The Philippians had already received saving grace, yet God was still developing their love, discernment, courage, unity, generosity, and holiness.
 - God will continue his work "until the day of Christ Jesus." The day of Christ is the day Jesus returns, raises the dead, judges the world, and completes the salvation of his people.
 - The God who began their salvation will bring them safely into the presence of Christ. Romans 8:30 – Foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified.
- C. Application – Gospel partners learn to look for and identify evidence of grace. When we see fruit (repentance, growing love, faithful service, generosity, endurance, or increasing obedience), we encourage people. We say, "I see God working in you, and I thank God for it."
 - Struggle –
 - Isolation – If we are not in the lives of other church members we don't get a front row seat to God's work.
 - Perspective - Our close relationships give us a clear view of one another's remaining sin. We often need a perspective change.
 1. Confidence in God's continuing work does not make us passive about one another's sin. Paul knew the weaknesses of this church. Paul will address the Philippians' selfishness, complaining, and conflict later in the letter.
 2. Trusting God's grace allows us to address weakness honestly while remaining hopeful about what God can produce. Even though he knew they had issues, he also saw generosity, courage, endurance, service, and affection. He recognized God's continuing work and named it with gratitude.
 - Our opportunity for confidence – Our proximity to one another allows us to see the work of God in one another's lives.
 - When you look at the members of this church, do you primarily see our remaining weaknesses, or are you learning to recognize the work God is doing in us?
 1. **Practice gratitude:** Look for evidence of grace in imperfect people.
 2. **Exercise patience:** Remember that someone's present weakness does not tell the whole story. God is at work.
 3. **Maintain hope:** Rest in the faithfulness of the God who completes salvation.

Paul's confidence in God's work in the Phil church was joined by his deep affection for them. He "held them in his heart."

3. Gospel Partnership produces deep affection for one another. (7-8)

- A. "I hold you in my heart", "I yearn for you all with affection of Christ Jesus."
 - Through years of shared ministry, generosity, suffering, and prayer, Christ had formed within Paul a deep affection for the Philippians.
 - His imprisonment became their concern. His defense of the gospel became their concern. His physical needs became their concern.

- B. What does your affection or lack of affection with members in our church reveal?
- Is your relationship with this church primarily one of attendance, or are your life, resources, service, prayers, and affections becoming intertwined with God's people for the good of one another?
 - Deep affection ordinarily grows as believers faithfully give themselves to one another over time.
 - We cannot remain at the edges of church life and expect deep relationships to appear. Affection grows as we faithfully share our lives with one another.
 - Think about our church family, whose burdens, growth, and future have become personally important to you? Find a way to demonstrate your affection this week.

4. **Gospel Partnership produces a desire/commitment for one another's maturity. (9-11)**

Because Paul trusted God to complete his work in the Philippians, and loved them deeply, he prayed for God to mature the church. How can we pray for one another's maturity?

A. **Pray for discerning love—Philippians 1:9** - "It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment"

- He prays that their love will "keep on growing."
 - Christian maturity never reaches the point where we have loved Christ or one another enough. Keep praying that we will love one another more.
- Paul is asking for love that grows "in knowledge and every kind of discernment."
 - "Knowledge" is a growing knowledge of God, his truth, and his will.
 - "Discernment" is the moral perception required to apply that knowledge wisely in particular circumstances.

B. **Why pray this way? Philippians 1:10 – 11**

- **So That** - So that you may approve the things that are excellent
 - He is praying for mature love. Love that is shaped by truth and exercised with wisdom. It knows when to encourage, when to correct, when to remain patient, when to speak, and when to remain silent. Pray for this knowledge and discernment.
- **and** - may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ."
 - Paul then directs them toward "the day of Christ": Paul wants them to live today considering the day when they will stand before Christ. The return of Christ gives urgency and direction to Christian maturity. Mature believers evaluate present decisions in light of their future appearance before Christ.
 - "Pure" and "Blameless" - describes holiness, sincerity, moral integrity, and a life capable of standing under examination.
 - If Christ returned today, which of the matters consuming your attention would still possess eternal importance? How does Jesus want us to treat one another? Live it!
- **Filled with the fruit of righteousness Philippians 1:11.** Paul does not pray for occasional fruit. He prays that their lives will be filled with it.
 - The "fruit of righteousness" is the visible result of God's transforming work. Mature Love.

- This fruit becomes visible in the ordinary relationships and responsibilities of the local church.
- C. Application - Think of one member of this church whom God has placed especially close to you. Begin praying Philippians 1:9–11 for that person by name: “Lord, cause their love to abound. Deepen their knowledge of your truth. Give them spiritual discernment. Help them recognize what matters most. Prepare them for the day of Christ. Fill their life with righteous fruit through Jesus Christ, for your glory.”
- We often notice where someone needs to grow. When another member’s immaturity frustrates us it is easy to remain focused on the remaining sin in one another’s lives. Gospel partnership carries that person before God and asks Jesus to produce maturity in them as we come alongside them in love for their maturity.
 - Parents can pray this for their children. Elders already pray this for the church regularly. D groups can pray this for their members. Pray this for the people you serve with, sit next to, etc.
 - Before you leave today, identify one church member whom God has placed in your life. If you need help remembering someone, open the Church Center directory. Begin praying Philippians 1:9–11 for that person by name.

Conclusion – This is the kind of church we want to become. We want to be a church shaped by the gospel—a church that has gratitude toward God for one another, trusts his continuing work in one another, carries deep affection for one another, and prays and works for one another’s maturity.

So ask yourself: For whom am I thanking God? Where do I see evidence of his grace? Whom am I learning to hold in my heart? Whose maturity am I carrying before God in prayer, and who am I actively partnering with for their maturity and my own?

Gospel partners change their perspectives about why a church exists and what their role is in it. God has placed us together to help one another follow Christ until the day he returns. God began the work. God continues the work. God produces the fruit. God receives the glory.

Communion (Together)- no music- 1 Cor 11:23-26

Research:

Philippians 1:3–11 is Paul’s response to a relationship that had been developing for roughly ten years. The Philippians’ “partnership in the gospel” had taken visible form through hospitality, financial generosity, personal service, suffering, and continued identification with Paul while he was imprisoned.

The reconstruction below assumes the traditional Roman setting, around AD 60–62. Ephesus and Caesarea have also been proposed, though Rome remains a strong and historically defensible conclusion. Paul’s references to the praetorian guard, Caesar’s household, and an impending legal decision fit well with the Roman imprisonment described in Acts 28.

A working chronology

Approximate time	Development
AD 49–50	Paul plants the church in Philippi through the conversions of Lydia, the jailer, and their households (Acts 16).
Shortly afterward	The Philippians send Paul financial help more than once while he ministers in Thessalonica (Phil. 4:15–16).
Following years	Paul maintains contact with the church and visits Macedonia again (Acts 20:1–6).
AD 60–62	The Philippians learn that Paul is imprisoned and renew their financial support.
During Paul’s imprisonment	They send Epaphroditus with their gift and commission him to care for Paul (Phil. 2:25; 4:18).
While with Paul	Epaphroditus becomes seriously ill and nearly dies (Phil. 2:26–30).
After his recovery	Paul sends Epaphroditus home, almost certainly carrying the letter we call Philippians.

Things worthy of Noting:

“Your partnership in the gospel” — verse 5

The Greek word is *koinōnia*. In this context it describes active participation in Paul’s gospel mission. Financial giving was one visible expression of it. Paul uses the same word family later when he says they “shared” in his trouble and entered into “partnership” with him in giving and receiving (Phil. 4:14–15).

Their partnership included:

- Sharing their resources — Philippians 4:15–18
- Sharing Paul’s affliction — Philippians 1:7; 4:14
- Sending a trusted representative — Philippians 2:25
- Risking life for the work of Christ — Philippians 2:30
- Continuing together “from the first day until now” — Philippians 1:5

“He who began a good work in you” — verse 6

Verse 6 certainly expresses confidence in God’s preserving grace. Its immediate context connects that confidence to their continuing gospel partnership.

I would express the synthesis this way:

God had begun his saving work among the Philippians, and their persevering partnership in the gospel was visible evidence of that work. The God who created this gospel-sharing church would sustain his work in and through them until Christ returned.

This keeps the personal sanctification emphasis while honoring the corporate and missional context.

“Partakers with me of grace” — verse 7

Paul is describing their participation in the grace of gospel ministry and suffering. They had willingly identified themselves with an imprisoned apostle. Their gift publicly connected them to Paul, his chains, and his gospel.

The money carried by Epaphroditus said, in effect:

“Paul, your imprisonment does not embarrass us. Your gospel is our gospel. Your work is our work. Your suffering is our suffering. We are standing with you.”

Why Paul prays for them — verses 9–11

Paul’s prayer grows directly out of this partnership. He wants their love to become increasingly discerning so that their partnership will remain faithful and fruitful until Christ returns. They had begun well, and Paul prays that they will continue growing toward the day of Christ.

When Paul looked at their gift, remembered their history, and stood beside their messenger, he saw the grace of God at work in a church. That is why he could write, ‘I thank my God every time I remember you.’

Principal academic sources

- Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Eerdmans, 1995).
- Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Baker Academic, 2005).
- G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2009).
- Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, NAC 32 (Broadman, 1991).
- David E. Garland, “Philippians 1:1–26: The Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel,” *Review & Expositor* 77 (1980): 327–336. Garland specifically connects the thanksgiving, *koinōnia*, and the Philippians’ financial partnership on pp. 328–330. [Article text](#).
- Stephen R. Llewelyn, “Sending Letters in the Ancient World: Paul and the Philippians,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46.2 (1995): 337–356.