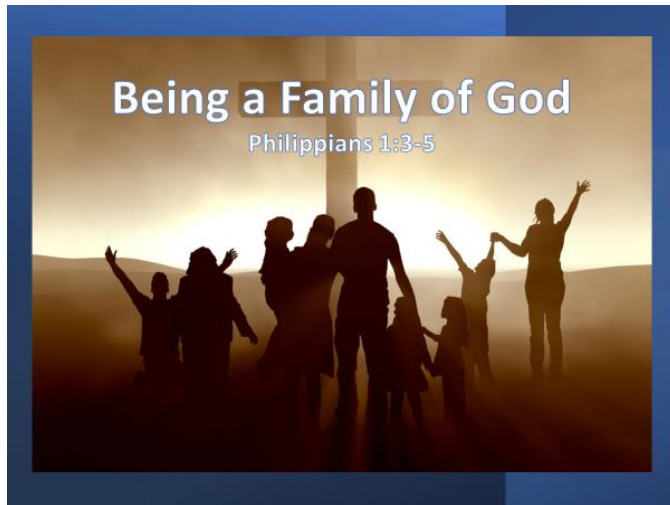


Being a Family of God

Philippians 1:3-5

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

While most people remember where they were when they got news of the twin towers falling, they are also unlikely to forget where they were when they first heard of the Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, China! Who could ever forget the social distancing rules, masks, constant



washing of hands and numerous business closures? But what I found the most difficult to endure during this pandemic was the many months that I was not allowed to congregate with fellow believers! While the churches have greatly enhanced their online presence through a much-needed upgrade in web services, fellowship did not seem the same without face-to-face contact, sharing of life triumphs and tribulations, and singing those God-honoring songs in unison with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ who were just a few feet away! And despite still having to wear a mask and social

distance, I cannot help but thank God for the absolute honor and privilege it is to meet on a regular basis! With such great blessings heaped upon us I cannot help but think of our responsibility to make every effort to be the kind of church that Christ would look upon and say, “good and faithful servants!” In the following sermon I am going to examine Apostle Paul’s thanksgiving prayer to the church of Philippi and suggest the foundation of a great church honors Christ through thanksgiving, mutual love, joy, unity of purpose, and steadfast devotion to carry on a good work until He returns!

Church Fellowship

What Apostle Paul was most thankful for was the fellowship he had with the church of Philippi in the Lord, Jesus Christ.¹ We tend to use the term “fellowship” quite loosely to mean a gathering of fellow believers with the common goal of sharing a few laughs,² fostering feelings of happiness,³ having a few theological debates while participating in social activities and

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 30.

² Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 17.

³ Roger Ellsworth, *Opening up Philippians*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2004), 16–17.

occasionally leaning on one another for friendship and support.⁴ While all of these make a really good “social club” such an atmosphere, even if loving, does not constitute what Paul means by “church fellowship.” Paul did not thank God that the people of Philippi just met regularly



together but that they “were united, not on a social level, but by their commitment to the truths of the Gospel message.”⁵ To keep from being lukewarm,⁶ true fellowship must rely on Christ⁷ to maintain the bonds of peace and enable each member to use their gifts to build one another up in the faith to collectively accomplish His will. Paul thanked God because the church of Philippi’s “right hand of fellowship”⁸ was given in love, not only for all members in the form of friendship and sharing of resources, but in labour

which was seen as a privilege,⁹ a “credit to divine grace!”¹⁰ Would you not want to join a fellowship where differences are celebrated, unity protected, and service seen as pure joy because it is done not to gain notoriety or power but to please our Lord? While a brief sermon cannot do justice on laying every brick of what makes a church holy and pleasing in the Lord’s sight, the goal of this sermon is to review Paul’s prayer for the church of Philippi and suggest just five key attributes of what makes a church great.

Offering Thanksgiving

One of the key foundational bricks of a church that is pleasing in God’s sight is thankfulness. The first thing Paul says in the opening of his prayer for the church of Philippi is,

⁴ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expositional Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 31.

⁶ C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 388.

⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 395–396.

⁸ C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 389.

⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 389.

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 390.

“I thank my God.” This phrase was not a stereotyped formula or “Christianese” term for Paul¹¹ but here and elsewhere in his writings (4:19; Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philemon 4)¹² denoted unspeakable joy that he had found from a deep, profoundly personal relationship with



the Lord!¹³ The only way for the church to become holy is if its members stop blaming their distance from God and lukewarmness on the collective whole and take responsibility for their spiritual wellbeing by asking God to search, reveal sin and through confession refine their hearts so that they draw nearer to Him! As one learns to love God more, one in turn can love others more and successfully build up the body of Christ! After Paul thanks God for his growing, personal relationship with the Lord he gave thanks not just for the friendship he had

with the church but more importantly the “evidence of spiritual blessings,”¹⁴ in the form of mutual love, the presence of the Holy Spirit,¹⁵ and their partnership in sharing the Gospel message. Since no one is good (Romans 3:10-18)¹⁶ and the heart truly evil (Jeremiah 17:9), we need to be like Paul and never stop offering intercessory prayers that God will enable the entire body of Christ to take every thought, word, and deed captive (2 Corinthians 10:5) and enable His own to do good deeds and build each other up in the faith! A praying church, who is deeply in love with God and one another, is one that stands firm on the Rock of their salvation as a holy and pleasing fragrance unto their Redeemer!

Inclusion and Love

Another key foundational brick of a church that is pleasing in God’s sight is inclusion! “Because we share a participation in the Holy Spirit, Paul admonishes the Philippians to strive to

¹¹ Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 105.

¹² Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 57–58.

¹³ I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, [A Handbook on Paul’s Letter to the Philippians](#), UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 9–10.

¹⁴ James Montgomery Boice, [Philippians: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 30.

¹⁵ James Montgomery Boice, [Philippians: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 30.

¹⁶ James Montgomery Boice, [Philippians: An Expository Commentary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 30.

be of one love of one accord, and of one mind.”¹⁷ While not all men and women are at the same spiritual level or have complementary personalities, for Paul intercessory prayer “transcends the barriers that divide the church,”¹⁸ for at the foot of the cross all have ample opportunity to confess and develop a deep, personal relationship with their Lord. While there are Christians we



would rather “sit in heaven throughout all eternity than sit ten minutes with them on a sofa here below,”¹⁹ the bonds of peace and love can only be maintained when we as Christ’s ambassadors imitate His wide, unconditional love for those created in the image of God (1 John 4:20-21). Instead of oscillating between praise and criticism,²⁰ should not God’s own praise and ask Him to “work in the members of our church no matter how fallen or needy”²¹ they might be? If we want to be part of a church that is all inclusive then we simply must stop fueling the

fires of quarrels and fighting through our callous, judgmental gossip and criticism (Proverbs 26:20) by asking God to extend His grace to those who undoubtedly wrestle with the planks in our very own eyes (Matthew 7:3-5)! Our constant prayers of exhortations and praise for sharing a common purpose to glorify our Creator,²² is not only essential to keep the bonds of peace but also is to be seen as an honor for in doing so one “participates in Christ’s mission and care for the church and the world!”²³ So, if one wants to go beyond criticizing one’s church for a lack of inclusiveness and one wants to go beyond just dreaming of finding a church that celebrates diversity in unity, then learn to do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit but rather in

¹⁷ James Montgomery Boice, [*Philippians: An Expository Commentary*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 32.

¹⁸ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 46.

¹⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 387.

²⁰ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 46.

²¹ G. Walter Hansen, [*The Letter to the Philippians*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 46.

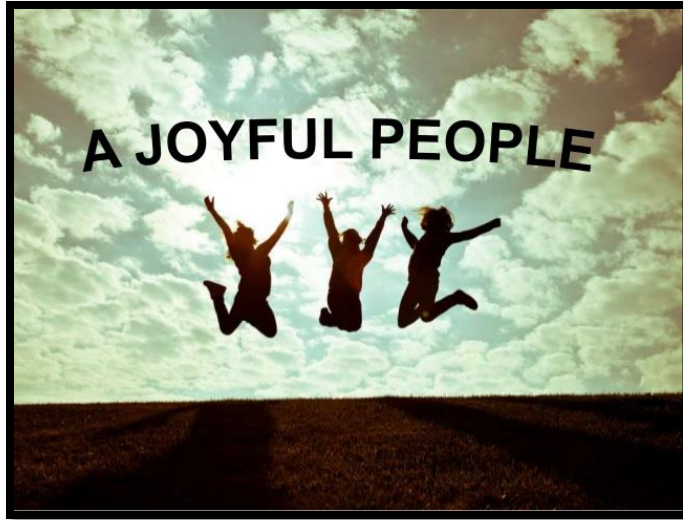
²² C. H. Spurgeon, [*“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”*](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 387.

²³ Markus Bockmuehl, [*The Epistle to the Philippians*](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 58.

humility and love consider the interests of others first in your prayers and in your hearts (Philippians 2:3-4)!

An Attitude of Joy

The third foundational brick of a church that is pleasing in God's sight is having a continuous attitude of joy in the Lord. "All along, as he remembered their prayers, their courage, their faith, their labour, their unity, their constancy, their zeal, their thoughtfulness, and their



liberality, Paul felt unmingled gratitude to the Author of all these excellent things."²⁴ Joy as the fruit and evidence of the Holy Spirit's presence in one's life is found all throughout Paul's letter to the church of Philippi (1:18, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 28, 29; 3:1; 4:1, 4, 10).²⁵ Biblical joy for Paul was not dependent on moods or emotions, wellbeing or outward circumstances,²⁶ but was found in orienting one's life to constantly and reverently obeying God's commands²⁷ (Romans 14:17; Psalms 1:2)²⁸ and in having confidence that the "Lord of life will turn affliction

into deliverance!"²⁹ Finding "its object outside itself,"³⁰ unspeakable joy can and ought to be maintained by God's own whom have received every spiritual blessing in the Lord and have assurance of their final destiny. To be the church that truly honors God let us remember and give thanks for one another³¹ and be filled with joy that we have a family that we can love and

²⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "[The Pastor's Joy and Confidence](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 386.

²⁵ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 58–59.

²⁶ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 59.

²⁷ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 59.

²⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 59.

²⁹ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 59.

³⁰ Markus Bockmuehl, [The Epistle to the Philippians](#), Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 59–60.

³¹ G. Walter Hansen, [The Letter to the Philippians](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 47.

build up in the faith for this is the key to not only pleasing God but maintaining the bonds of peace! We just went through months of not being able to meet so surely now that God has reopened the doors of the church, we can celebrate His goodness and mercy to bring us back into fellowship with one another!

Partnership of Purpose

The third foundational brick of a church that is pleasing in God's sight is for each member to accept their partnership role in the Gospel message. The "sign of our professed love for the Gospel is a measure of the sacrifice we are prepared to make to aid in its progress."³² Paul



thanked God from the very first day, some ten years earlier,³³ that while they suffered greatly for their Lord the Philippians never stopped "defending the faith bravely, spreading it zealously, and conforming their lives" to its precepts.³⁴ Their "*koinōnia*" or partnership did not fade over time into a sea of lukewarmness nor did they see their church as merely a social club of friendship or a place to clamor for personal power ... no they saw themselves as partakers of divine grace,³⁵ ambassadors of Christ, and living sacrifices called to proclaim,

defend and confirm³⁶ the Gospel message! As each day passed the desire to tell the whole world about the "resurrection of the dead, an opening of blind eyes and a turning of darkness to light"³⁷ through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ grew within their hearts. Likewise, we desperately need the members of our churches today to see their partnership in the Gospel both lived and proclaimed not as an earthly endeavor that only the most intelligent or

³² Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 66.

³³ Homer A. Kent Jr., "[Philippians](#)," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 105.

³⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, "[The Pastor's Joy and Confidence](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 390.

³⁵ J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 42–43.

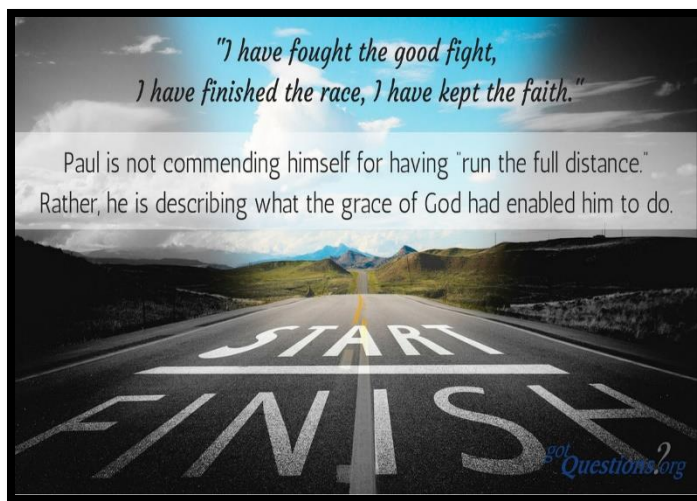
³⁶ Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 61.

³⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, "[The Pastor's Joy and Confidence](#)," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 390.

charismatic can do, but a Spirit driven³⁸ work that every member can participate in through faith in and the grace of our Lord, Savior and King! Like the Philipians let us through off the shackles of complacency and lukewarmness and with all our hearts, minds and souls let us build one another up in the faith and spread, live, and financially support the proclamation of the Gospel message both within and outside the walls of the church Christ has assigned to us!

Steadfastness and End Goal in Mind

The final brick that every church must have is perseverance in the faith until the day the Lord returns! Paul told the church of Philippi if they “held fast the word of life” in the “crooked and wicked generation” they would “shine like stars in the world (2:15-16)!”³⁹ I know many of



you have been running the race for an exceedingly long time and with the limited functionality of your bodies might have grown indifferent,⁴⁰ antagonistic, or insecure in your service for the Lord. So that you might not “die while you are yet alive”⁴¹ never forget the good work that Christ began in you on the day you were born again has no age limit!⁴² Our eternal, immutable God will provide you with the grace you need to serve Him, for what grace has begun⁴³ not even the principalities and dark forces of this fallen world can ever even slightly

diminish. Never stop praying for and encouraging one another for a “living argument”⁴⁴ is a living sacrifice that depends not on works but on our Lord’s grace to do miracles in His name! I also know that many of you serve only occasionally or not at all! Remember who you are – a redeemed, masterpiece of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)– and humbly and yet firmly stand on

³⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1997), 60.

³⁹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 84.

⁴⁰ C. H. Spurgeon, “[The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 389.

⁴¹ C. H. Spurgeon, “[The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 389.

⁴² C. H. Spurgeon, “[The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 389.

⁴³ C. H. Spurgeon, “[The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 395.

⁴⁴ C. H. Spurgeon, “[The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence](#),” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 392.

the Rock of your salvation (Psalms 62:2) and shout, boldly and with an unquenchable desire, “here I am Lord use me!” No matter how faint or feeble your current journey, repent and by the grace and strength of He who can do more than you can ever ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20) obediently run in His kingdom not by your might but by the grace of He who bought you at a price (1 Corinthians 6:20)! And when the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised imperishable and incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:42-44),⁴⁵ you will be rest assured because you have fought the good fight and through the grace of God followed His will in your life that you will spend and eternity with the truth concerning your life you have lived here on earth ringing in your ears, “good and faithful servant.”

⁴⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, [“The Pastor’s Joy and Confidence,”](#) in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 36 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1890), 391.