

Outward Joy, Unshakable Security

Philippians 1:3–11

[3] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, [5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. [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. [7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. [8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. [9] And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Point 1 — The Virtue of Joy Rooted in Otherness

[3] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy . . . [7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. [8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

- Paul writes from a Roman prison, yet he opens not with his hardship but with thanksgiving — constant and genuine (vv. 3–4). Imprisoned, impoverished Paul is joyful.
- Beneath the thanksgiving lies love — and love, at its heart, is valuing a person, not mainly the romantic love our culture assumes. To love God (Matt. 22:37–40) is to value Him for who He is; to love your neighbor is to value him as worthy of your time and sacrifice.
 - *Matthew 22:37–40 — [37] And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

- So Paul values these people: he holds them in his heart (v. 7) and yearns for them “with the affection of Christ Jesus” — the KJV renders it more literally, “*the bowels of Christ Jesus*” — seeing them in the love Christ has for them (v. 8).
- Christian joy is other-focused: you cannot be thankful to a thing, only to Someone. It is rooted in otherness — as God Himself, three persons, has been other-focused for all eternity, wholly apart from His creation.
- A beautiful picture: Jesus' High Priestly Prayer (John 17) — the love and glory shared between Father and Son before the world existed, and His prayer that His people would share that same love.
 - John 17:5 — [5] *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*
 - John 17:24–26 — [24] *Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. [25] O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. [26] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.*
 - Augustine, On the Trinity, Book VIII (trans. Edmund Hill; New City Press):
Love means loving and something loved, with love. There you are with three: the lover, what is being loved, and love. And what is love but a kind of life coupling, or trying to couple together, two things — namely, lover and what is being loved?

Augustine's point: love is never solitary — wherever there is love, there are three: a lover, a beloved, and the love that binds them, one reality in three. In that trace he glimpses the triune God — the Father who loves, the Son who is loved, and the Spirit who is their love.

Point 2 — The Virtue of Partnering (and Suffering) Together for the Gospel

[5] because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. [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. [7] It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

- Their partnership (Gk. *koinōnia*, deep close fellowship) has run from the first day — from Lydia and the founding of the church at Philippi (Acts 16) — until now (v. 5).
- They are partakers with Paul in his imprisonment — a Roman prison did not feed or clothe a prisoner; that came only from those outside — and in the gospel's defense and confirmation, their own lives and witness bearing it out (v. 7).
- The evidence is vast: they partnered in prayer (1:19), in concern for Paul (4:10), in giving and receiving — “except you only” (4:14–16) — and in sending Epaphroditus, who risked his life (2:25–30).
- *Philippians 1:19 — [19] for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance,*
- *Philippians 4:10 — [10] I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity.*
- *Philippians 4:14–16 — [14] Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. [15] And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. [16] Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again.*
- *Philippians 2:25–30 — [25] I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, [26] for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. [27] Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. [28] I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. [29] So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, [30] for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

- Beyond Philippians, the churches of Macedonia (Philippi among them) were leaders in giving — for the relief of the poor saints, the collection for Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26; see also 2 Cor. 9; 2 Cor. 11:9). They gave not out of plenty but out of their impoverishment.
 - *2 Corinthians 8:1–5 — [1] We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. [3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord, [4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.*
 - *2 Corinthians 9:2 — [2] for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the people of Macedonia, saying that Achaia has been ready since last year. And your zeal has stirred up most of them.*
 - *2 Corinthians 11:9 — [9] And when I was with you and was in need, I did not burden anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied my need. So I refrained and will refrain from burdening you in any way.*
 - *Romans 15:25–27 — [25] At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. [26] For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. [27] For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.*
- So we seek to emulate this virtue — to give sacrificially and to go, taking the gospel out and seeing it defended and confirmed by love shown in service; and to pray together fixing our eyes on the kingdom.
- As we pray, give, go, serve, and partner together, we grow in loving one another and loving Christ.

Point 3 — The Virtue of Persistent Prayer for Spiritual Good

[3] I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, [4] always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ... [9] And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

- The heartbeat of the passage: persistent prayer (the repeated all / always / every of vv. 3–4), and in vv. 9–11 the very essence of what he prays.
- He prays not merely that things would go well for them, but that God would do them spiritual good — that their love (their valuing of God and of one another) would keep growing, and grow “with knowledge and all discernment,” that is, rightly: seeing and valuing Him rightly, and valuing one another the way God values a person.
- Where it heads (v. 10): “approve what is excellent... pure and blameless for the day of Christ.” When love abounds in a community, it becomes “characterized by pure desire to serve each other rather than envying or hurting each other” (Hansen) — spending ourselves to build the other up, not to raise our own worth. Only God can bring it about.
- The end (v. 11): “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ” — a harvest at the day of Christ, all “to the glory and praise of God.”
- The virtue: persistent prayer for spiritual good — for what is good, sound, and right.

Point 4 — The God Who Finishes What He Started

[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.

- Points 1–3 are beautiful — and can feel discouraging: “I’m so far from this; my church is so far from this.” How do we ever get there?
- v. 6 is the meat of the sandwich — the fuel: “*he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.*” How is it done, and how is Paul so sure? The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints — God Himself carries His people through and completes the work He began.
- Our church’s Statement of Faith confesses this doctrine in its own article — Article XI, “Of the Perseverance of Saints”:
We believe that only those who endure to the end are truly believers (1); that their persevering commitment to Christ is the primary mark which distinguishes them from those who insincerely claim Christ (2); that a special Providence watches over their welfare (3); and that they are kept forever by the power of God through faith unto salvation (4).
 (1) John 8:31; 1 John 2:27–28; 3:9; 5:18.
 (2) 1 John 2:19; John 13:18; Matt. 13:20–21; John 6:66–69; Job 17:9.
 (3) Rom. 8:28; Matt. 6:30–33; Jer. 32:40; Psa. 121:3; 91:11–12.
 (4) John 10:27–29; Rom. 8:38–39; Phil. 1:6; 2:12–13; Jude 24–25; Heb. 1:14; 2 Kings 6:16; Heb. 13:5; 1 John 4:4.
- The Philippian church itself began when God opened Lydia’s heart — the God who began the church in Philippi is the God who will keep it:
 - *Acts 16:14 — [14] One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.*
- Paul prays with eyes open, not naive idealism — with full confidence that Jesus Christ will finish what He has started.
 - Picture 1 — dropping your child off: you walk away at peace not because you trust the child to do everything right, but because you know the one they are with will take good care of them.
 - Picture 2 — the coach who could know the future: “I can’t tell you the wins, the losses, or the injuries — but I know we will win the championship. Go out and perform; it is going to happen.” Good coaches try to say this, but can only secure so much. The perseverance of the saints is the immutable, omniscient God promising our eternal rest.
- This is why we can have confidence in what God is doing in our midst — we know the One we are with; He is our caretaker, and He will finish what He has begun.