

# Partners in Advancing the Gospel

*Philippians*

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**Bible Text:** Philippians 1:1-18  
**Preached on:** Sunday, April 28, 2019

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Let's take our Bibles and let's turn quickly over to the book of Philippians. The New Testament book of Philippians and if you're using one of the Bibles at the bottom of the chair in front of you, you can turn to page 980. We're turning to the very first chapter of Philippians. We're going to take just a few minutes this morning and we're going to be in this book of the Bible for a few weeks and so we just want to look at a few important things this morning before we launch into our week. I'm going to read beginning in chapter 1, the very first verse, I'm going to read through the end of verse 18. So glad that you've joined us today and certainly welcome all of those who are watching by live stream and just grateful for you today. I thank God for you.

Paul's letter, Philippians 1.

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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. 12 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. 14 And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. 15 Some indeed preach Christ from envy and

rivalry, but others from good will. 16 The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,

This is God's word.

Let me pray.

*Father, thank you for this letter. Thank you for this letter to a church in the first century. They needed to hear these words, words of encouragement, words of challenge, words of hope. We need to hear them today in 2019 right here in Mount Washington, we need to hear these words. Holy Spirit, help us to hear them exceptionally today, powerfully today, that it'll work change in us. For the glory of Christ and his name we pray. Amen.*

Over the next few weeks, we're going to explore and enjoy this letter to the Philippians and so I want to start out with this way, I want to start out for the sake of my young friends, alright? For the sake of my young friends, this is history, this is real, okay? You're going to see a map, okay, ancient map. Let's start with that, alright? Here's an ancient map. Here's Philippi, okay? In the area of the world, this is an ancient map known as Macedonia, then today it's known as Greece, alright? Now here's a current map. You'll see a current map, a little more modern. Here's Greece, okay? And so it's in this area right in here because the ancient city of Philippi is only in ruins, okay? In fact, the next picture you'll see is one of the tourist attractions in Philippi. And so for my young friends, it's just important to remember this is real history. I mean, these are real historical places, real people.

It was a letter written by the Apostle Paul from prison. He's in prison and I thought, you know, maybe a good way to start would be to ask each one of you: how many of you have been in jail or prison? Ha, I'm just kidding, alright? I know that would be embarrassing so I'm not going to do that but I will say just for the record, I have been in jail and let me explain, I mean it was just a short time, only 6 or 7 hours or so. You see, I got a speeding ticket when I was a teenager and I wanted to fight the ticket because I thought the officer's stupid, he doesn't know what he's doing, I wasn't really speeding, and so anyway I wanted to fight the ticket so I had a court date. Well, it just so happened on that night of the court date, I had a date with who would be my future wife, and so I went on a date with her, skipped out on the court appearance and, of course, when you do that, you get a warrant against you, you know? And so about a year and a half later, I was driving along minding my own business, pulled over again, you know, they say I was speeding but whatever, you know? Anyway, I pulled over and they checked it out and I had a warrant for my arrest. They took me to jail, 6 or 7 hours there, I got out on bail. So, yes, I'm an ex-con. I'm an ex-con. Look, just for the record, Paul was in prison for a different reason. He was in prison for the sake of the Gospel. He had been preaching the

Gospel. His life changed completely when he met Christ on the road to Damascus and it was never ever the same again.

Now it would be helpful for us, I think, to know how Paul got acquainted with the Philippians and you can read the story in Acts 16. Paul with Timothy, Silas and probably Luke went to the city of Philippi and a big pivotal event took place in God's plan of salvation, and if you'd walked by that day, you would have never recognized it. It wasn't like, "Look there! You know, God's doing some big thing!" You wouldn't have noticed it that way because here's what it looked like. Paul, Silas, Timothy, they left the city of Philippi, they walked outside the gates of the city, it was a gated city, they walked outside and they went down by a river. Down by that river was a group of ladies who had gathered together and the Holy Spirit wants us to see one particular lady because it's mentioned a lady named Lydia. Now there was no church service going on. I think this is amazing. There's no church service, no altar call being given, just a group of ladies down by the riverside and Paul and his team come down and they begin to converse together with them and Lydia, who is a very wealthy woman, she owns her own business, she got up that morning and when she got up that morning she was dead in her sins and trespasses and later that night when she went to bed, she was spiritually alive, she had been born again. What happened? What happened? Well, the Bible tells us the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.

Every time I read that verse, it encourages me because what it tells me is this: we don't know exactly what Paul said but we have a good idea, don't we, because he was on a missionary journey. To be on a missionary journey means you are going, you are on a mission to make the Gospel known to people, you're on a mission to spread the Gospel. There's no doubt in my mind that what Paul was saying to Lydia and this group of women was proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus, how he died for sinners, how he'd been raised on the third day, and how he's alive forevermore and coming back for his church.

That message was like a key in Paul's hand that turned and opened the heart of Lydia. The Lord opened her heart but he used a man, a woman, he used the Gospel of Jesus Christ and on that particular episode, things began to change because in that city there would be a woman who was filled with demon-possession, and then there would be a Philippian jailer, both of these, all of these would come to faith in Jesus Christ and they would become the firstfruits of the church at Philippi. That was 10 years before this letter. Now 10 years later, Paul is writing them a letter from prison and we'll see that this church began by the power of God through the Gospel of Jesus Christ and this church continues to co-labor with God to further the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Quickly this morning we'll look at three quick things. Paul says three things about the Gospel in chapter 1, okay? Just in these first 18 verses, we're going to see in verse 5, partnership in the Gospel; verse 7, the defense and confirmation of the Gospel; and verse 12, the advance of the Gospel. And by the way, the Gospel's a big deal to Paul, he mentions it nine times in this letter. But first before we do that, before we look at these three statements, did you notice here Paul does not define the Gospel? He does not pause and go, "Now I mention the Gospel but let me give you a definition of it." He doesn't do

that. He assumes, he assumes that his readers are going to understand but what he does in this letter, he does give the heart of the Gospel and you'll see this on the overhead. In Philippians 2 Paul said this speaking of Christ, "obedient to the point of death even death on a cross." And then later in the letter in Philippians 3:9 he says this, "and be found in him," which is Christ, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ." Now what does that tell us? Just in those two sentences we learn this: Christ died for sinners and those sinners can possess Christ's righteousness before God through faith in him. Now that, that's the heart of the Gospel. Christ died for sinners and us sinners can have the righteousness of God applied to us through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the good news we proclaim, saints, right? I mean, this is great news. Christ died for sinners and his righteousness can be applied to us through faith in him. This is great news.

Now again Paul doesn't give a definition but he does give the heart of the Gospel. Let me give you a definition that I think is helpful. You'll see it. The Gospel is not first and foremost a mode of behavior but a message to be believed. The Gospel is an announcement of what God has done for us in Christ. You see, look, when you think about sharing the Gospel with your friends and family members, co-workers, the Gospel is first and foremost not about behavior. In other words, I don't think it's a good idea that we start with, you know, "Hey, do you smoke? Hey, are you doin' any weed?" I don't think it's a good idea to start probing into their behavior, alright? I mean, the Spirit of God will deal with those kind of things, believe me, I know, okay? But if we start with it being a behavior thing, you know, that's just not at all what the Gospel is. The Gospel is good news. It's a pronouncement of what God has done for us in Christ and so think about it that way. Don't think of tinkering into somebody's life and say, "You don't need to be doing that anymore. You don't need to go to these places anymore." We don't need to start with that, start with the Gospel being an announcement, a proclamation. This is good news.

Now that we have a better idea of the definition, Paul says, "I'm thankful for your partnership in the Gospel." Look at verse 5. He begins by verse 3 by saying, "I thank my God." He remembers him, he thanks God for them. Why? Verse 5, "because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now." What does that mean, first day until now? From the very first day of their conversion. Paul looks at them this way, he looks at them like, "Look, from the very first day, you believed the Gospel until now. You entered into a partnership in the Gospel with me."

Now what does that mean? Well, the word "partnership" there is the same word we hear oftentimes in the church as "fellowship." You know, "Come on out and we'll have fellowship." Eh, sometimes yeah, sometimes no, because sometimes all we think fellowship is is sharing good times together. "Let's get together and have a meal and we'll share some good times together." And you know, that, look, that's not all, that's not all fellowship is. In fact, Paul is speaking here of sharing in something. When he says, "I'm thankful for your partnership in the gospel," you see, he's speaking about something greater than the people involved and more lasting than the activity of any given moment.

So there are a lot of things that, you know, we get together for and have a big time for, but that's not what Paul's talking about. He's talking about a consistency, an ongoing partnership in the Gospel, specifically, let's just nail it down specifically here, Paul was referring to the Philippians' practical support of his efforts to proclaim the Gospel and meet the needs of others. In other words, as Paul travels, he's being assisted by people like the Philippians. In fact, later in this letter we're going to read that they sent him an offering because he is sharing the Gospel with others, he's meeting the needs of others as he travels.

And just pause for a moment, I want you to just think, just think for a moment about this congregation and our partnership in the Gospel. This month, Seed Company, we've been focusing on they're one of our missionaries. We've been partnering with Seed Company over a dozen years now and as Josh did so well to explain to us, just break it down to understand there's a lot of people that do not have the Bible in their language but this church, this church is helping change that. Over a half a million in Southeast Asia now have the Bible in their language because of your faithful giving and prayers and now we're working with another group in the Philippines so to get the Bible in their language. What are we doing? We're partnering in the Gospel, right? What are we doing when we're working with Mount Washington Community Ministries? People right here in our location, people who are helping families who have run into difficult times through often no fault of their own. We are giving financially. We are bringing groceries and in the bulletin next week you're going to see some specific needs they have. What have we been doing for 25 years with Community Ministries? We've been partnering the Gospel. What have we been doing with Home of Joy Orphanage and Orphan Voice and all the other missionaries that we've been partnering with? What are we doing? We're partnering in the Gospel. May God help us to continue. Don't waver for a moment but we'll continue to expand partnering in the Gospel. Why? Because Paul said you've been doing it from the first day until now. Consistency. They've stayed with it through the good times and through the bad times.

Now look at verse 6. I want you to see something. We love this verse, don't we? "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." Now we love that verse, I love that verse. It's so wonderful but, look, partnership in the Gospel was not the good work that Paul is referring to here but it was clear evidence of God's good work in their lives. In other words, the very fact that they were partnering in the Gospel, had been doing it from day one and they were still going at it, was because God really did a great work in their lives.

So let me ask you something: does partnership in the Gospel, does it give clear evidence of a good work in your life? Just ask yourself that today. In other words, from the time I've been converted, is there a consistency, is there a consistency of partnering in the Gospel? Whether it be helping others. Whether it be sharing in ourselves. Whether it be giving. Is there consistency in that? Because if there is, Paul is saying that's evidence of the good saving work of God in a man or a woman.

So first, there's partnership in the Gospel. Paul said, "I'm so thankful. I'm so thankful." Then secondly in verse 7, "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart," listen to that affectionate language, "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." Now as we mentioned, the Philippians are offering practical help to Paul but now he speaks in terms of them helping him in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel. So what does that mean? Defense of the Gospel, the word "defense" is the Greek word "apologia" which we get the word "apologetics" which means "to give an answer." To give an answer. Here's what Peter said about this word, "Always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you." That word "defense," there it is, "apologia, to give an answer."

What does that look like? Someone at work, maybe you have gone through a significant foundational loss in your life and your co-workers know it, or maybe you've suffered in some kind of way because of your allegiance to Christ, or maybe it's because of your consistency, maybe you are just steady in your walk with Christ and they see that steady faithfulness and they begin to ask, "Hey, what exactly is it that makes you tick? I've noticed you, I've been working with you for eight years. I've been working with you for five years. You know, what is it? What is it?" And then you are able to give an answer for the hope that you have. That's the defense of the Gospel. That's exactly what Paul is thanking these people for. "You have partnered with me in the Gospel, that I," he's saying, "I can have a defense, I can give a defense, I can give an answer as I travel various places, I can give an answer for the hope that we have in Christ." But notice when Peter says it, it's directed to believers in general. In other words, all of us, all of us are called to be able to give an answer for the hope that we have.

Let me ask you: do you have living hope? Do you know Jesus in a saving way? If you do, you have hope and you and I must be ready to give an answer, which would mean that we should live in such a way that provokes such questions. Living in such a way, handling our money in such a way. Living in our community in such a way that people will ask that of us. We will be so uniquely different. As Paul will say later in the book of Philippians, you'll be lights, you'll be lights in the community. You're being so distinctive that they will say, "I need an answer. I need an answer."

But then there's the confirmation of the Gospel and what does that mean? Well, I want you to pay careful attention because this really got my attention this week. The word "confirmation" means "to verify something," it means "to authenticate something in order to remove doubt." I have a book on my shelf entitled "The Age of Disenchantment." It's by David Hempton, and it's a book about people who were either raised in church, who either were in the faith, the Christian faith, or they had looked into the Christian faith and they left, and the primary reason was hypocrisy among believers. I want you to see a statement that he makes in this book. "It is no accident that in the treatment of Evangelicals in the history of English fiction and dramas, one of the most repeated tropes is the idea that Evangelicals are hypocrites, people's who pious claims are not matched by the quality of their lives. In that gap between proclamation and performance lies the space of the germination of seeds of disenchantment." Understand what

"disenchantment" means. It means you had expectations like Christianity said this, these people said this, they said this but it didn't come to pass, it didn't work for me. They're disenchanted.

What caused those seeds of disenchantment? That gap between proclamation. "Yes, I'm a Christian. I'm a Christian." Bring your Bible to work, you know, "I'm a Christian." You're really out there, out front, but your performance doesn't match up to the proclamation. It leads to hypocrisy, you see, and in that gap, in that gap there's a lack of confirmation, there's a lack of verifying, there's a lack of walking worthy of the one who's called us, you see. And so Paul is saying, "I'm grateful for your partnership in the Gospel and how we partnered together in the defense and the confirmation of the Gospel."

Then one final thing in verse 12 he speaks of the advance of the Gospel. I got this feeling that Paul is really excited about the Gospel. In verse 12 he says, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." Now if you didn't already know, you'd go, "What happened to you? What happened to you? What was it?" Well, in the very next verse he said, "my imprisonment." My imprisonment.

Now this must have sounded strange to the Philippians because you read this and you don't get this sense of panic in Paul's life, like, "You know, oh, good grief, what am I going to do? How am I going to get out of here?" You know? And it must have been heart-breaking for the Philippians to think, "Oh no, Paul was like our father in the faith. He came here 10 years ago and look now he's in prison." I mean, surely Paul's circumstances will choke out all Gospel progress, right? I mean, surely the whole program will go down now because Paul's in jail. Or surely Paul is despondent and can care less about the Gospel advance. I mean, we ought to, why isn't Paul saying, "Hey, Philippians, get me outta here!" Why isn't he saying that? Why isn't he saying, "Hey, send me a cake with a file in it! Get me outta here!" No, he says, "I want you to know, brothers, what has happened to me is really really served to advance the Gospel." Wow, Paul.

During the week God is kind to me, I'll read something and it'll just be like at the right time and it'll just drop down out of heaven. I read this this week, I want you to see it. This fits real well here. "We set ourselves at a serious disadvantage when we attempt to secure our flourishing through the state of our circumstances rather than the state of our soul." You understand what that means, right? It sounds like this, "If my circumstances were better, I'd do this. Nothing would stop me if my circumstances were better. I'd serve Jesus. I'd love his people. I'd do this. I'd go here. I'd do this if my circumstances were better." And this writer is saying, you know, we think, we think that we can have a flourishing life if we can just get our circumstances in a favorable place when actually it's the state of our soul that needs to be right.

You see, Paul is in chains but the Gospel is not. Paul's in chains but the Gospel is exploding, it's progressing. Paul is limited but the Gospel is not and in his circumstances he is able to say in verse 18, did you see it? "And in that I rejoice." What? He's in jail. I

mean, he's in prison. He's chained to a Roman guard. He's limited in what he can do. He doesn't have the freedom that he used to have but he said, "The Gospel is off the charts because I'm in chains." How can Paul say that? Listen, Paul's flourishing does not depend upon his circumstances but rather the state of his soul.

Now let me bring this to a close but if you haven't listened yet, please listen now, okay, because I want to ask you why this matters. Why does this matter? Why does partnership in the Gospel matter? Why does defense and confirmation of the Gospel matter? Why does advancing the Gospel matter? Why is this really all that's on Paul's mind? Do you see that? He is absolutely a man possessed with the Gospel. Why does this matter so much and why should it matter so much to you and to me?

How many of you, well, probably not. Some of you have listened to Ted Talks on NPR. I know, I didn't think so. You'd have to be crazy to listen to them. I listen to them, some of them, some of them. It's 18 minute talks from all the professions of brilliant people in the world, all the smart people in the world telling us little people, "You know, if you'll just do this." One of them I listened to was about the world needing a reboot. In other words, they were saying to the audience, "Our world needs a restart. We need to start over." And I thought, "Boy, I can see that. This world's a mess." Don't you ever wish, you know, that the world had a cord on it like a computer and you just plug it out, pull it out, let it, you know, wait for about a minute and reboot it and start it over again. Have you ever felt that way? Surely you have. You've been to a graveside before, wish all the sorrow and the mourning and the pain would stop.

We're not the only people that ever wished this, by the way. The Greeks. The Greek Empire, they believed that history went in a cycle rather than linear. We, you know, as Christians we believe in a linear history, but the Greeks believed in a cyclical history, and so they believed that history every so often, the world every so often rebooted, it restarted. And they had a word for this, it was called palingenesia. It was a time when everything would start all over. We'd get a brand new start. Did you know that Jesus used that word in the book of Matthew. I want us to look at it. "Truly I say to you in the new world." Do you see that italics, in the new world. That is the Greek word "palingenesia." It's the reboot, the startover, or what the translators have called "the new world." "When the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel and everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for my name's sake will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life." Notice here Jesus takes this popular word of his day, the concept that was out there of a restart, of a brand new do-over, and he says, "Yeah, there's going to be one." I mean, there's going to be only one. It's not going to be a repeat. It's not going to be two or three. He says, "the, in the new world," in the palingenesia. What will that look like? No more death. No more evil. No more pain. No more sorrow. All things will be made new. Praise God, we need a restart, right? And Jesus said there will be one in the new world.

Okay, great, what does that have to do with partnering with the Gospel, defending the Gospel, confirming the Gospel and advancing the Gospel? What does that have to do



with it? It has to do with these words that Paul said to Titus in Titus 3. Look at this, "But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared." Now what is he talking about? He's beginning to talk about salvation, how this great salvation came about. Then he goes on to say, "he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration." Do you see that? That is the word "palingenesia" again. "By the washing and regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit."

Now what has Paul just said here that is like dynamite, it's like spiritual dynamite? Jesus said, "There's going to be a palingenesia. When that happens, when that happens, when I'm sitting on my glorious throne, when that happens," then Paul uses the same word later to describe God's work of salvation in a man or woman's life. Here's the way it goes. When you and I share the Gospel, when we partner with others, the Gospel, when we defend the Gospel, confirm the Gospel, we advance the Gospel. When we do that, remember Paul with Lydia, it was like a key? When we do that and when the Gospel is believed, God's power that he will use in the future to regenerate the world is brought into their present. That's what Paul's saying here in Titus. He is saying that same power that God is going to use to bring about a new world, that same ingredient of power we are getting a taste of when we believe the Gospel. That's why it says we are new creations. It's nothing less than the power of God at work.

You see, no, it's not complete. That's not what Paul's talking about, but it's a taste. In other words, let us never underestimate the power of the Gospel to change people. Church, let's never get to a place where we underestimate, to where we're not consistent in partnering, the partnership of the Gospel that goes on and on and on. And let us never underestimate the Gospel that we'll not defend it and confirm it in the way we live, and advance it in the workplace and in our community because it's the same power that God will use to bring about a new world that is already at work in you. Isn't that amazing? I mean, that's what sets this apart from joining some kooky club out there, some kooky organization out there. That's what makes the difference. This is not some kooky club. This is the power of God unto salvation. Later Paul will say, "You're citizens of heaven." Everything's changed because of the Gospel.

So here we go. I plead with you today, let us, let us as a church recommit ourselves to partnership in the Gospel, defense of the Gospel, confirmation of the Gospel, and advance of the Gospel because this Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Go, go spread it this week.