

## THE HAPPIEST MAN IN ROME Philippians 1:3-8

Popular comedian Jim Gaffigan – known for his bacon and hot pocket jokes – has a new book called *Dad is Fat*. In it, he talks about the counter-cultural nature of having lots kids (he and his wife have five!). Gaffigan says some onlookers have asked, “Don’t you know what’s causing that?” Others see him as some sort of alien, as his family boards the subway in New York. He’s even had people liken kids to puppies, “Oh, you just had a baby? Yeah, we just got a puppy.” Though *Dad Is Fat* is not a handbook on Christian parenting (though I found it encouraging!), it did remind me of how unusual Christians are in highlighting the value and glory of children. Many today devalue children. They see them strange and distracting to their career. As a result, childbirths are dropping.

Christians not only have a counter-cultural view of children; we also have a counter-cultural view of *joy*. We aren’t against pleasure and satisfaction. We simply have a source other than sex, money, power, career advancement, and entertainment.

What do you think you need for joy? The quest for it is built into the fabric of the United States, “the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.” Yet, many could take as their anthem “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” People look everywhere, and once they find what they’re looking for, they often end up saying like Solomon, “Vanity.” Others commit suicide once they realize their functional god won’t satisfy or gets taken away – as we’ve seen in recent years with the collapse of the economy. Dissatisfaction isn’t new, though. Alexander the Great wept in his tent saying, “There are no more worlds to conquer.” A modern example was seen in the honest confession of Tom Brady, who after three NFL championships, remarked, “Is this all there is?”

Can you find joy? The answer is yes. St. Cyprian wrote to his friend Donatus in the third century:

This seems a cheerful world, Donatus, when I view it from this fair garden under the shadow of these vines. But if I climbed some great mountain and looked out over the wide lands, you know very well what I would see; thieves on the high road, pirates on the seas, in the amphitheaters men murdered to please the applauding crowds, under all roofs misery and selfishness. It really is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. Yet, in the midst of it, I have found a quiet and holy people. They have discovered a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of this sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not.... These people, Donatus, are the Christians, and I am one of them.

Are you one of them?

Consider the apostle Paul sitting in a prison. The happiest man in Rome was in jail! How could this be? Ancient Rome was a consumerist wonderland filled with games, sexual pleasures, lavish parties, theatre, and more; yet, Paul had a joy a thousand times better. He writes a prayer of thanksgiving “with joy” (4). This is the first mention of joy in Philippians, and it resounds through this section, as well as the book. Often in Paul’s opening prayers, he expresses key topics

to follow, as well as the particular *tone* of the letter. This prayer is no different. Here’s an overview of this idea of joy and the tone of the letter (ESVSB):

Reference	Paul . . .
1:4	prays with joy
1:18	rejoices that Christ is proclaimed
1:25	will remain living on earth, for the Philippians' joy in the faith
2:2	asks the Philippians to complete his joy
2:17–18	is glad and rejoices with the Philippians
2:28	sends Epaphroditus, that the Philippians might rejoice
2:29	tells the Philippians to receive Epaphroditus with joy
3:1	tells the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord
4:1	tells the Philippians they are his joy
4:4	tells the Philippians twice to rejoice in the Lord
4:10	rejoiced in the Lord at the Philippians' concern for him

That’s a lot of joy! How could the happiest man in Rome be in jail? Joy is found in Christ, not in a trouble free life, or a life filled with stuff. (I don’t make a distinction between “happiness” and “joy.” That’s a distinction that the Bible doesn’t make, cf., Deut 33:29).

I know the acronym is cheesy but it’s helpful. The secret to joy is in keeping things in this order: “**J**esus, **O**thers, **Y**ourself.” As you scan through the letter to the Philippians, you see that Paul is all about *Jesus*, and his mind is filled concern for *others* – namely, the Philippian believers. When contemplating the glory of death, he says “I will remain and continue with all of *you for your progress and joy* in the faith” (1:25, my emphasis). YOJ

While Paul doesn’t act as if he doesn’t exist, or doesn’t have real needs, the glory of Jesus and the needs of others occupies his heart and mind. He lives out his later exhortation, “consider others as more important than yourselves” (2:4b). Because this was the pattern of Paul’s life, he was truly happy, even though he’s attached to a Roman guard!

No Jesus? No joy. No relationship with other “Gospel partners?” You’ll lack joy. Always focused on self – your stuff, your problems, and your calendar? You’ll lack joy.

Even Christian servants can often misplace their cause for joy. They can turn inward too. When Jesus sent out the seventy missionaries, they came back “with joy” saying, “Lord, even the demons submit to us” (Lk 10:17). But Jesus rebuked them. He said, “Don’t rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (10:20). Don’t derive your joy from your performance, your popularity, your gifting, or your accolades – rejoice in the fact that your name is written in heaven. Focus on Jesus and others and you’ll maintain joy.

In Philippians 1:3-8, Paul displays his vibrant communion with Christ, and his personal love for the Philippian community, which results in his “alien like joy.” Though Paul doesn’t mention “joy” in each of the following verses, the tone is one of joy. The phrase in verse 4 “with joy” strikes the chord that runs through the passage. Paul is brimming with joy in thankfulness to God, and in love of the Philippians. To know the joy that Paul possessed, we need we too need to know the joy of (1) prayer, (2) partnership, (3) anticipation, and (4) affection. Let’s learn from Paul here.

## **FINDING JOY IN CHRIST AND COMMUNITY**

This thanksgiving in verses 3-8 bears some similarities to other thanksgivings in some other epistles, but there are differences. It’s important to note that Paul didn’t pray the same generic prayers for every church, nor did he pray in the same way. As you read through his epistles, you find specific thanksgivings and requests for each group of people. This prayer appropriately reflects Paul's special bond with the Philippians.

### **#1: Know the Joy of Prayer (1:3-4)**

The opening verses are remarkable, especially when you consider the context of the book:

*I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, 4 always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer, (Phil 1.3-4)*

As Paul prays for the Philippians, he is thankful; and his mind is filled with blessed memories. This leads him to joyful intercession.

In prayer, we can commune with God anywhere at anytime. We can pray for our friends and colleagues. And in prayer we gain fresh perspective and strength.

***Gratitude Despite Internal Conflict.*** He begins his prayer, “I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you” (1:3, my emphasis). Even though the church was not perfect; he was still grateful for them – *all* of them! Look at these phrases: “for all of you” (4); “you all” (7); “for you all” (8). Based on chapter 4, some individuals needed a pastoral rebuke. Yet, on a whole, Paul was grateful. The conflict did crush gratitude.

Do you give thanks to God in prayer for others? Kent Hughes says, “Paul rarely thanked God for things. Paul thanked God for people, who, despite whatever trouble they may have been to him, remained a source of joy and thanksgiving.” (*Philippians*, 24)

Paul even wrote a word of thanksgiving for the crazy Corinthians (1 Cor 1:4)! That’s impressive. That’s instructive. That’s hopeful. If you’re a super critical person, always focusing on what’s wrong, then you won’t be a grateful person. If you’re an entitled person, you won’t be a grateful person. Don’t look for perfection before you show gratitude, look for evidences of grace in people’s lives. Be quick to thank God for Christian virtues in others, and remember that sanctification is a slow process.

Do you allow conflict to crush your joy? Don’t misunderstand. Paul doesn’t overlook the conflict. He addresses it. He doesn’t say he enjoys conflict. He simply is able to rejoice in the Lord despite the conflict. This again shows us that you better have a well of joy that is much more satisfying and sustaining than a fountain filled with comfortable circumstances to stimulate joy. You must go to the Gospel for this kind of joy.

Have you expressed thanks to God lately? Or, do you think when blessings come that it’s “God’s job” – that He owes you? May God help us to see that we deserve nothing but judgment, and every good gift we have comes from Him. And may we not take people for granted either. May we be quick to give thanks for people. One sure sign that you’re growing in grace is that you’re becoming a more thankful person.

Are you an interceding individual? Notice that the context for Paul’s gratitude is in prayer for the Philippians. Many problems in the church would disappear if we genuinely prayed for one another. Let us learn to pray from Paul here – in joyful thanksgiving and faithful intercession.

***Great Memories Despite Hardship.*** Scholars point out that you could translate this opening phrase as “upon all your remembrance of me” (A.T. Robinson, *Joy in Christ*, 56, also Witherington, *Friendship and Finances in Philippians*, 38). Both are certainly true. Paul remembers them prayerfully, and the Philippians constantly cared for him practically.

In a fallen world, we will have trouble, and surely some of Paul’s memories were not good (e.g., the conduct of the magistrates and the populace toward him in Acts 16); but on a whole, Paul could be thankful. As he thought about the big picture, he gave thanks.

Don’t allow a few stumbles and struggles to rob you from an attitude of gratitude and joy. Take a view of the big picture and learn to give thanks to God. Recognize that your greatest problem has already been taken care of, through Jesus’ cross and resurrection. Realize that there’s no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

As you reflect on where God has brought you in His loving faithfulness, and how he has reached down and rescued you, does it cause you to give thanks, and does it fill your heart with joy? As you thank about people that have impacted you, and the community of

faith that surrounds you, does it cause you to give joyful thanks? That was the attitude of the greatest missionary of all time.

***Joy Despite Imprisonment.*** Remarkably, Paul is filled with joy while in prison. Do you find this challenging? I do. Do you think you need something other than Jesus to find real joy? Better behaved kids? A better job? A different address? More vacation time? In America, we often think "bigger" is the answer -- bigger house, bigger muscles, bigger church, etc. you need a bigger vision of God. None of these are ultimate sources for joy. You can have all of these but not know this joy. If you have everything but not Jesus, you will be longing for more. If you have nothing but have Jesus, you have everything you need for joy.

Look at the decadence and the excess of modern culture. None of it provides what people desire.

On the flip side, consider what Paul says in 2 Corinthians, paying attention to verses 10-11

*4 But as God's ministers, we commend ourselves in everything: by great endurance, by afflictions, by hardship, by difficulties, 5 by beatings, by imprisonments, by riots, by labors, by sleepless nights, by times of hunger, 6 by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, 7 by the message of truth, by the power of God; through weapons of righteousness on the right hand and the left, 8 through glory and dishonor, through slander and good report; as deceivers yet true; 9 as unknown yet recognized; as dying and look —we live; as being disciplined yet not killed; 10 as grieving yet always rejoicing; as poor yet enriching many; as having nothing yet possessing everything (2 Cor 6:4-10)*

You can grieve and still rejoice. And you can "have nothing but possess everything" – if you have Jesus.

In Psalms 42-43 we find the Psalmist wrestling through a period of despondency. Yet, he begins to "preach to himself," saying to his soul, "Hope in God!" He reminds himself of the goodness and grace of God to inspire hope and joy. That's what we have to do too. You need to preach this Gospel to yourself, "instead of listening to yourself" (Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, 20-21). Stop listening to what culture says you need. Dwell in God's Word daily, don't neglect meeting with the saints regularly, and sing songs of praise constantly – all of it, in a spirit of prayer. Know the joy of prayer.

## **#2: Know the Joy of Partnership (1:5)**

In verse 5, another distinctive in this thanksgiving stands out: Gospel partnership. Paul provides one of the reasons for his grateful joy saying "because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now" (5). This church had supported Paul and served as co-workers in the mission from the beginning. As a result, he was filled with joyful thanksgiving.

**Koinonia.** What does “Gospel partnership” mean? To answer this, we need to consider the word *partnership*, which is the word *koinonia*, a word that appears throughout Philippians (cf., 1:5, 7; 2:1, 3:10; 4:14, 15). We often translate it as “fellowship.” It connotes a variety of relationships “involving mutual interests and sharing” (Hanson, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 48). Hanson notes that marriage and family relationships, friendships, business partnerships, and common ownership of property were some of the examples of *koinonia* (Ibid.). D.A. Carson notes that in the first century if “Harry and John” bought a boat to start a fishing business, they entered into a “fellowship” (Carson *Basics for Believers*, 16). He adds, “The heart of true fellowship is self-sacrificing conformity to shared vision.” (Ibid)

In Philippians, the *koinonia* spoken of refers to this *Gospel-centered friendship* (look at the affection words in verses 7-8), as well as a shared mission of *Gospel proclamation* (eg., 1:7, 12). We do well to dwell on these two aspects of Gospel partnership: *friendship* and *mission*.

**Friendship.** Regarding their friendship, it was established through Christ (3:10). They were bound together by the Spirit (2:1). Even though they may be from different places (Rome, Greek, Asian), they could be “brothers and sisters” because of these spiritual realities.

Unbelievers can have friendships. These friendships are the result of God’s common grace to humanity. And you should have friendship with unbelievers, just as Jesus did. But spiritual friendships, “Gospel partnerships,” are different. C.S. Lewis said friendships are discovered when you say, “What, you too?!” They’re based on commonality. Gospel friendships are much deeper because there is a “You too?!” that’s radically greater. We share in a common Savior, are united by the same Spirit, and are headed for glory together.

Another reason why Gospel partnerships are deeper more abiding is not only do they have a deeper *commonality*, but they also have a means by which to deal with *conflict*: the Gospel. When a couple gets married, now two sinners have become one! When a bunch of sinners come together, redeemed though they are, and form a church, then there will be trouble – just look at Philippi. But from the Gospel we learn about sin, repentance, reconciliation, forgiveness, and service. We learn what is needed to maintain relationships. When Paul calls the Philippians to unite in chapter 4, he mentions Gospel concepts, “agree *in the Lord*,” “true companion,” “side by side with me *in the Gospel*,” “fellow workers,” “names *in the book of life*.” These are Gospel applications that maintain relationships.

We are made for relationships. No dying person ever says, “Hey, bring me my diploma. I’m dying. And bring me my trophies from third grade too.” Instead, they want *people* at their bedside. Paul would have wanted the Philippians at his bedside because they were more than friends; they were Gospel partners.

There are at least four obstacles that will keep you from having such enjoyable and edifying relationships as a Christian: sensationalism, mysticism, idealism, and individualism. Sensationalists don’t find Christian community scintillating enough to participate. But the

Christian life isn't about shock and awe but with lowly acts of service of love (Phil 2:3-4) – which are extraordinarily significant. Mystics make the Christian life into a series of quiet times. They desire to live a “Me and Jesus” kind of Christianity. We have created this kind of Christianity – one without church. But Christianity is “we and Jesus” not just “me and Jesus.” Idealists struggle in Christian community because they have, in the words of Bonhoeffer, a “wish dream” of what the church ought to be, and it never lives up to their expectations. Individualists fall prey to culture that only enjoys community on-line. Privatization coupled with this technological-video game culture kills people's ability to relate to others. We even have a culture of “busy loneliness” – people doing a lot of stuff, but that remain extremely lonely.

It doesn't have to be this way. Get a new vision. You need Gospel partners, those united together in Christ by the Spirit, from every tribe and tongue, who live on the Gospel. Friends that will fall, and fail, but who need the same grace and mercy of Jesus that you need. But you need more than friendships; you also need co-workers on mission with you.

**Mission.** Regarding their shared *mission* of Gospel proclamation, Paul calls the Philippians to suffer for the Gospel. (1:27-30). And he goes on to commend them for “sharing” (*koinonia*) in his troubles for the sake of the Gospel (4:14-15).

You know what Paul is talking about if this is like if you've ever worked a job with other people. If you work in a good restaurant with others, there's a bond that's created. You have a different relationship with co-workers than with customers. Paul saw the Philippians as co-workers, and that brought him great joy. Sadly, many see the church more like an audience of customers to please, rather than as a group of co-workers who spread the Gospel all week, and then gather together to encourage one another.

Our concept of “fellowship” today is often watered down to mean little more than “hanging out.” If you have coffee with a non-Christian, then you're just having coffee; but if you have coffee with a believer we often call it “fellowship” (Ibid). While socializing is a piece of fellowship, there's much more to it. We share in a common mission of making the Gospel known to the world. Through Christ, we are friends *and* co-workers with other believers.

It's one thing to have Gospel-centered friendships, but it's another to have co-workers on mission. If you get both, friendships and co-laborers, then you can enjoy what many never experience.

In his book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, J.R.R. Tolkien writes a thrilling story to illustrate this idea of Gospel partnership. The fellowship is made up of radical diversity – these little resilient, pipe-smoking hobbits from the green shire with big, hairy feet; a few warriors, a wizard, an elf with amazing archery skills, and an out-from-under-the-mountains dwarf with an axe. Together, they share a common mission of defeating the forces of darkness and saving middle earth. They were willing to die for one another and the mission.

Paul says that in the fellowship of the Gospel, we recognize our differences, but celebrate our unity in Jesus, and commit to give ourselves for the mission of making the Gospel known. If

you have partners in the Gospel, you should celebrate! If you don't, and you are a Christian, then you should cultivate these relationships.

**Cultivate Gospel Partnerships.** How might we enjoy such friendships? *You must put the Gospel first.* Notice how many times Gospel or "proclaiming Christ" appears in chapter 1. Because they loved the Gospel, they were co-laboring, loyal friends.

When you're together around the table, at a ball game, or doing a project, talk about Jesus. Talk about your time in the Word, about your prayer concerns, about who you are sharing the Gospel with, and about how you can bear one another's burdens for the sake of Gospel ministry. Center it on Jesus.

The outworking this Christ-centered unity between Paul and the Philippians worked itself out in at least three ways. First, they provided financial aid and personal care. Ben Witherington, renowned New Testament scholar has a commentary on Philippians called *Friendship and Finances in Philippians*. This was a major aspect of their partnership. Second, their partnership involved suffer alongside of one another, and encouraging one another. Third, their partnership involved praying for each other (cf., 1:19). These are good tests for whether or not you have Gospel partners – generosity, suffering with/encouraging, and praying for one another.

What gives Paul joyful thanks? People - people who are his friends and co-laborers in the mission. Christian joy comes from Christ and in community. If you don't have deep joy, then it might be because you don't know Jesus, or that you haven't cultivated such relationships nor participated in the mission, as you should.

### **#3: Know the Joy of Anticipation (1:6)**

Paul gives a further, but closely related reason for his joyful gratitude: confidence in God's nature and purposes. He writes these wonderfully comforting words about God's unstoppable work of grace in believer's lives:

*I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (1:6)*

The apostle is sure that God will continue and complete what He started in the Philippian believers. He bases this upon his knowledge of God and His saving grace, and his knowledge of the Philippians faith.

While many apply this verse to individual salvation, we should remember that Paul has been speaking of the *koinonia*, that is, the work of God go form *a people* for Himself. It seems best to apply this text to both dimensions, the personal and corporate aspects of God's saving grace. Both are gloriously true.

**Divine Grace.** We learn here that salvation from beginning is *God's work*. God sovereignly *inaugurates* this work in us, opening up our hearts like He did for Lydia (Acts 16:14). We receive this salvation by faith alone, apart from works (Phil 3:9), as illustrated by the



Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31). God sovereignly *continues* this work in us, like he was doing for the Philippians (cf., Phil 2:12-13). And God *will complete* this work in us, “until the day of Christ Jesus” (1:5b).

Believers should rejoice in the fact that God will have a people that give honor and glory to Jesus. Paul tells the Thessalonians that Christ is coming to be “glorified by His saints and to be admired by all those who have believed” (2 Thess 1:10). “That day” is coming. And “that day” should give us joy “this day.”

God begins the work, continues the work, and will complete the work. Sometimes when students fail to turn in their assignments before the term ends, they receive an “Incomplete.” Perhaps you’ve had some incompletes. If not in school, what about incomplete projects around the house? I’ve started many things that I never finished! But God never received an “incomplete.” God always finishes what He starts. The Psalmist says, “You guide me with Your counsel, and afterward You will take me up in glory” (Ps 73:24).

Is there any better news than this? God will take us to glory if we’re in Christ! It’s a sure thing. You may not be sure of a lot of things in this life, but you can be sure of this if you’re a Christian. We can be sure of it because this is God’s Word, and this is God’s work of salvation.

Not only is salvation God’s work, but Paul also refers to it as “*a good work.*” The work that God begins and completes is good, because salvation flows from the very goodness of God. When you think about your salvation, and how God has saved others that you know, you should say “This is God’s work. And this is good work.”

Kent Hughes reflects on God’s goodness in keeping us:

As I reflect on my fifty plus years in Christ it is indeed God who has kept me. It is not my grip on God that has made the difference, but his grip on me. I am not confident in my goodness. I am not confident in my character. I am not confident in my history. I am not confident in my “reverend” persona. I am not confident in my perseverance. But I am confident in God (28).

And you can be confident too. This promise is for every Christian. No wonder Paul’s heart is brimming with joy and praise!

A few years ago I (Tony) was teaching in Ukraine. Due to a volcano in Iceland, flights were grounded. This bizarre event hindered thousands of people from going to their destination. Every day I would call the airline to see if I could go home, only to be denied, leaving me with groaning stop deep for words! Finally, about a week after my original departure time, I was able to get my boarding pass. But I would face some drama before getting home. Once I arrived at the airport in Kiev, the agent told me that I wasn’t on the plane. After a period of discussion, I got on. Then in Amsterdam, I had to wait in line for three hours to get a boarding pass. People

furiously were storming off after being told that the flights were full. So when I got to the agent and he gave me my seat, needless to say, I was celebrating. I got on the plane, sat down, breathed, and worshiped.

Believers are going home one day. If you're in Christ, your destination is certain. You have something even more secure than a boarding pass to assure you, you have the promises of God, and the Spirit dwelling inside of you. The waiting may be grueling, but soon it will be over. And we will worship.

**Human Evidence.** But we must notice something else as it relates to assurance; namely the “human evidence of assurance” (Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, 45-46). Paul knew not only the nature of God who provides salvation, but he also knew that the believer's lives demonstrated that they belonged to Jesus. If you just peak into the next verse, or consider the whole letter, we see that Paul commends the Philippians for their faithfulness. Silva says, “God is the only grounds of our confidence, but the apostle claims no insight into the eternal counsel. His assurance that the Philippians will persevere to the end arises from the external, visible evidence that their lives provided” (Silva, 46).

In other words, when God works salvation into the life of a person, they bear fruit. They demonstrate a life of faithfulness. Paul could say, “It is right for me to think this way about all of you” (1:7a), for there were observable qualities to their faith. Paul speaks of their partnership in the Gospel (1:5, 7a), and of their support in the “defense and establishment of the gospel” (1:7). He then goes on to commend them for many other qualities. All of these fruits were evidences of God's amazing grace in their life. John wrote, “I have no greater joy than this: to hear that my children are walking in the truth” (3 Jn 4). Paul too shared this joy of hearing that the Philippians were living out their faith.

Further, Paul later exhorts them to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (2:12b). Assurance of salvation is not a cause for laziness. It should lead us to persevere, and as we can do so with hope because God graciously provides the desire and power for endurance.

The doctrine of assurance of salvation, then, should make us *happy* and *humble* people. We should praise God with great joy for His work of salvation in our own lives. And when we see believers giving evidence of God's grace, we should glorify God for His work in them.

We should be humbled because we've done nothing to deserve such a great salvation. God alone receives the glory. He started it, continues it, and completes it. Humility should also be expressed as we grow in the knowledge and grace of God – as we kill sin, stand in awe of God, set our minds on things above, live in biblical community, and dwell God's Word.

So what are you anticipating? Does something other than the “day of Christ Jesus” fill your heart with better, more sustaining joy? An upcoming game? An upcoming vacation? Live with the anticipation of either death, which is “gain” (Phil 1:21), or the return of Christ and the new heavens and new earth. Fill your mind with what's coming!

#### #4: Know the Joy of Affection (1:7-8)

Paul digresses for a bit, and this digression highlights a fourth distinctive in this thanksgiving: his affection. He picks up his prayer in verses 9-11. The material in verses 7-8 conveys Paul's emotion and intensity that he touched on in verse 5. He writes:

*7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

From these verses, we see that the apostle Paul was not an isolated saint, nor was he a mere intellectual giant. Paul loved people deeply. Some academics may be embarrassed by such a display of emotion, or dismiss it as mere exaggeration. But Paul says, "God is my witness" – he truly feels deep emotion and affection. We need to learn not only the theology and disciplines of the apostle, but also to accept the importance of having deep affections for God and others. Paul's faith didn't have the appearance of a stuffy classroom, or an empty ritual; there was passion.

**Heart-felt Affection (7).** Paul says that he holds the Philippians in his heart. Robinson notes that the text can be translated "because you hold me in your heart" (64). Both are surely true. A heart relationship exists between Paul and these believers. But the preferred translation is that Paul holds them in his heart. He delights in his friends at Philippi.

This affection shouldn't be taken as mere sentimentalism. Hanson points out a similar expression, where Paul tells the Corinthians "for I have already said that you are in our hearts, to live together and to die together" (2 Cor 7:3). In Philippians 2, Paul says that he has poured out his life for the Philippians (2:17). This is a model for us in what it means to have Christian friendships centered on the Gospel. It involved a willingness to sacrifice.

**Appropriate Affection (7).** Paul moves from affection to appropriateness in saying that it is "right" to feel this way. Why was it right? It was because they were "partners with [him] in grace, both in [his] imprisonment and in the defense and establishment [or confirming] of the gospel." Paul uses the same word in verse 7 that he used in verse 5, "partners." As mentioned, being a partner in grace meant more than just saving grace; Paul has in mind sharing in the struggle for making the Gospel known (cf., Phil 1:29).

The Philippians displayed their partnership in loyalty to Paul and the mission. In his "imprisonment" they had supported him in prayer and financial support. They didn't turn their back on him. They weren't ashamed of him – imprisonment would have brought great shame in this time. And they also supported him as he shared the Gospel with the captors and judges over him. As Paul shared in these contexts, through his suffering, the power of the Gospel was put on display, or confirmed. The Philippians' loyalty to him in prison made this relationship especially sweet.

***Christ's Affection (8)***. As Paul thinks on his relationship with the Philippians, he makes a remarkable statement saying that he longs for them with the "affection of Christ Jesus" (8b). He reminds them of Christ's affection for them, and how God is at work in him to love them that way.

The Greek word translated "affection" refers to the inward parts of the body; they served as referents for emotions of love and deep compassion. Paul is united to Christ, and he shares Christ's love for the church. It's a deep love that goes beyond sentiment.

Once again, we need to think about our Gospel partnership. Realize the love Christ has for you and the church, and resolve to share in this love. Express affection for Gospel partners, and receive affection from Gospel partners. Such affection leads to joy.

### **Conclusion**

Paul's thanksgiving emphasizes joy, gospel partnerships, assurance, and affection. His skin is chaffed from being chained to a Roman guard, but his heart is filled with thanksgiving because of these things. He's the happiest man in Rome, and he doesn't have a posh life. If you could bottle up Paul's joy, you could sell it to the world. Yet, it's available for free.

What will rob you of this type of joy? Not having what we've just pointed out. If you are Christ-less, you won't find joy. If you are prayer-less, and ungrateful, you won't find joy. If you don't have Gospel partnerships, you won't find joy. If you don't have assurance of salvation, you won't have joy. If you don't have affectionate relationships, you won't have joy. So, let us look to Jesus, who went to the cross for us, bearing our sin and punishment, so that we may be reconciled to God and enjoy Him forever.