

Philippians 1:3 I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. ⁸God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Dear Friends in Christ,

“THEY GET IT!”

Martin Luther had a way with words. One of my favorites I just heard for the first time a couple days ago: “Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave.” Never heard that one until Friday. Wow! I think that marriage advice pretty much covers everything: “Let the wife make the husband glad to come home, and let him make her sorry to see him leave.”

Luther was also wise enough to admit when other people had a wise word. Here is one he quoted: “It is a true and good saying...: To God, to parents, and to teachers we can never render sufficient gratitude and compensation.”¹ “To God, to parents, and to teachers we can never [give enough thanks]...” Why “God, parents, and teachers”? Obviously, these three are the three, more than anyone else, who make us who we are. But there is something else. These three—God, parents and teachers—are basically stuck with us. Everyone else, if they want to, can walk away, but God, parents and teachers are stuck with us. They have to be patient and put up with us. Even if we ignore them and their wisdom, they have to keep on trying to teach us block-heads. What was that favorite line of your mom? “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you...” Yep. And on that 1,001st time Mom told you, and you finally listened and did what she said, her mouth hit the floor and she dropped and busted a juice glass in disbelief (which is why she only has five and not six in that set to this day) and she said, “You get it! You got it!” All the frustration of saying the same thing a thousand times finally paid off! “To God, parents, and teachers we can never [given enough thanks].”

Paul wrote 13 Holy Spirit-led letters which are included in our Bibles. They were written to believers, mostly to groups of believers,. If you lay all thirteen letters out on the table, you find out that each one has its own personality. When he wrote to the Galatians it is one of exasperation, “You guys, I can’t believe how gullible you are! You just believe anyone who comes along and says, ‘Hey, God talked to me!’” When Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth he had to tell them, “You guys didn’t listen to a thing I said! Let’s review some basics.

¹ *Triglotta Book of Concord* – English; Luther’s Catechism, §130.

Idolatry—bad. Adultery—bad. Suing each other in court—bad. Getting drunk in church—bad. Jesus—good. Got it?” Well, they didn’t; not really. So he had to write them again, which is why we have First *and* Second Corinthians. But with this book of Philippians you can almost hear Paul breathe your mom’s sigh of relief:

“THESE GUYS GET IT! THEY GET IT!”

Philippians is Paul’s one letter that has basically no reprimand. From beginning to end, it is encouraging and full of joy.

I. Paul’s Joy because They Are Gospel Partners

“I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel.” Paul’s joy over this gathering of believers is every pastor’s joy. What joy it is to see people of their own free volition, take their Sunday morning and gather at 377 East Lincoln Trail for an hour of worship, and maybe another hour or more for choir practice and Bible study and Sunday School and catechism class, and then to even support this Gospel ministry with some of your hard-earned cash. “You guys get it!” You know that Jesus saved you. You know what he saved you from, and you know what he saved you for. And you know that this isn’t a history fact that you memorize so that you can pass the test. As if when the Day of Judgment comes, it is just THE Final Exam with one multiple choice question, and all you have to do is regurgitate the correct answer. Jesus saving you is the start of a relationship of trust and hope and joy with Christ and his people. You get it!

This is what Christians do. Paul’s joy in this Philippian congregation came from a rich history, a friendship born of adversity. When Paul first brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ to Philippi, there were a few converts, a few believers. In a matter of days or weeks in Philippi, Paul and a fellow missionary had been mobbed, then arrested, then beaten, and once the authorities realized it had all been a mistake they released them, but told them to leave the city, and they left. But the believers in Philippi did not fold. In fact, they didn’t just let badly bruised Paul go on his way, but they remembered Paul. They remembered how Paul had worked as a tent-maker among them even as he was preaching the Gospel in their midst. They wanted him to be able to dedicate himself to gospel ministry, so they did what none of his other mission congregations did, they sent money ahead to Paul at different times so that he could do less tent-making and more Gospel preaching.

These Philippians got it! When Paul wrote this letter to them, a decade had passed since his first visit to Philippi. Since then Paul had visited them only once, briefly. Yet they were still sending him monetary assistance. In fact, the occasion for writing this letter was that he was in the city of Rome under guard, under house arrest and had been for at least three years. One day a face he recognized showed up at his house and handed him a gift of money from the Philippians. That was no small thing! It wasn’t like they had electronic banking back in those days. The Philippians had to send a man on a thousand mile journey, over land and sea to get to and find Paul in Rome. Imagine sitting there, imprisoned for years, and someone from your past not only sends you a gift but actually goes not hours or days, but weeks out of his way to find you and to hand you a huge gift! I’ve visited prisoners before. I sort of know the isolation, the loneliness they feel. Five bucks from an outsider is not a small deal to them. I am certain that Paul had tears in his eyes. What partners in the Gospel they were! And so you understand why Paul gushes in verse 7, ***“I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me. God can***

testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.” “They get it!” They get Jesus!

Paul’s joy is mine.

II. Paul’s Prayer that They Continue to Get It

The Apostle Paul was the original missionary. Sure, in the two decades between our Lord Jesus and his Apostle Paul, other people carried the gospel around. Believers took the gospel from Jerusalem to nearby Joppa or Samaria. When their business relocated them, they carried the Gospel from Judea a couple hundred miles north to Damascus and then Antioch. But they weren’t missionaries. They were believers who just so happened to be going that way, and when they went they naturally took the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them. And that was a good thing. But they weren’t missionaries.

The Apostle Paul was the original missionary. He had no reason to go where he was going, except to take the Gospel to new places. He had no business taking him to those cities with the strange names like Lystra, Philippi, Thessalonica or Corinth. He wasn’t going to those places to visit relatives or friends, or in government service. He went for no purpose other than carrying the Christian faith to new places.

Paul the apostle was the first true Christian missionary, and he was the greatest. But Paul was not just a missionary.

There are people out there who go out there who have lots of excitement and love to get stuff going. God bless ’em. They do great work. Then they get bored and tell someone else, “Well, I’ve done the hard part. Why don’t you take over from here?” Nothing against initiators, but a lot of times that isn’t the hard part! The hard part isn’t putting the seed in the ground, it is weeding the garden. The hard part isn’t having a kid—not to downplay labor pains and delivery and all that—the hard part isn’t having a kid, it is raising a kid. The hard part isn’t starting the project (whose basement or cupboards isn’t full of a half-done projects), it is completing the project. Which is exactly what made Paul such a great missionary.

Not only did he start oodles of Christian congregations in cities where people had never before heard of this Jesus of Nazareth, but Paul continued to monitor and lead and care for them even in his absence. He never did the grand hand-off to luckless latecomer not quite sure of what was next, “See ya latter! She’s all yours now!” Paul continued to guide and care for those many congregations in his absence through letters.

So he says, ***“I always pray with joy... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus”*** (4,6).

Paul is confident that God keeps believers strong in the faith. But notice, it is God! Paul’s confidence is based on the fact that *God* began the work in them, and that *God* will carry it on to completion.

One of the most worrying things I hear is when I talk to faltering Christians and they say to me, “Pastor, oh, you don’t have to worry about me. I’m good. I believe.” Let’s leave my opinion out of this. What do you think Jesus’ reply would be to that person? “Jesus, don’t worry about me...” What would the one say to them who said, “Sell all you have and follow me”? What would the one say to them who said, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me”? What would Jesus who said, “Because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth”—what would he say to people who don’t really want to invest too much of their precious time and effort in their faith? What would he say?

Since the Philippians got it, since they had no such illusions that they were somehow the brave masters of their own spiritual fate, Paul joyfully continues. ***“This is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ”*** (9-10).

His prayer is that they continue to grow because faith, like everything else, if it isn't growing, it is dying. He prays that they are more and more informed by God's will. And when they are rightly informed, they will act more and more like God's people.

But how do you get informed? How do you get ***“more and more knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless”***? Do just what you are doing today. Hear God's Word. Study it. Weigh the your desires, your actions, the opinions you hear, not by social posts on the internet, not by smiley faces and thumbs up and likes, but by the word of God. Gather to hear God's Word, read it. Come to a Bible study and discuss it. Begin or end your day with a devotion based on God's word. Make it the guide of your life, your North Star. Because, as Paul twice reminds them in this reading, Jesus will come. Not as he came once in a barn, but on the clouds; not as a servant, but as a king; not to bear sin, but to judge and bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

Paul praised God because the Philippians got it. I praise God because I know that by the grace of God “You get it!” Amen.