

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *Partners in the Gospel*

SERIES: *Letter from a Roman Prison*

SCRIPTURES: *Philippians 1:1-8*

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DATE: *2021 - 9 - 5*

**Credit to Bruxy Cavey; for valuable insights/illustrations related to the book of Philippians!*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church. If you have a Bible please turn to the New Testament...book of Philippians. If you need a Bible we have some available. For this series in particular it's just gonna be really helpful to have the passage in front of you, so that you can follow along as we work our way through.

We have spent significant time over the last couple of years, really honing in on passages in the Bible directly related to Jesus, his life and teachings. Many of our series have come the Gospels. We've also taken a few series delving into some OT passages. We did a series kind of giving an OT overview (**TITLE SLIDE**) We did a series on the character of God (**TITLE SLIDE**), found in "The Lord, the Lord..." We did a series on Ruth and David and Judges (**TITLE SLIDES**).

This morning, I'd like us to jump ahead in Scripture...after the Gospels. Which is the story of the early church and mostly letters that were written to the early church. Take a look at this map for a moment.

(MAP) This is **Jerusalem**, kind of the center of Jewish life. Jesus spent much time in around here.

But after Jesus death and resurrection there was much persecution for anyone still claiming to be his follower. And the persecution caused people to leave Jerusalem. And as they did, they took the message of Jesus, his life, teachings, resurrection with them.

And little communities of Jesus followers, called churches, began to spring up. And a man named **Paul**, a Jewish leader, who initially was leading much of the persecution...has a transformative experience and becomes a follower Jesus. And he becomes one of the first missionaries. And he begins planting churches all over the ancient Med world...in **Corinth**, and one in **Colossae** and one in **Ephesus** and **Rome**.

But again, this is during a time of Christian persecution. And Paul often ends up beaten, tortured, imprisoned. But it doesn't slow him down. He uses these times of imprisonment to write letters of encouragement to the churches.

And so several of the writings in the New Testament are known as the Prison Letters. And one of the letters that Paul wrote, was to the church in **Philippi**.

We know Paul was in prison when he wrote it, but we don't know exactly where...two best guesses seem to be either Rome itself or perhaps Ephesus. And he's writing to encourage the believers in Philippi. And we have a copy of the letter he wrote.

And so for the next several weeks, we want to make our way through Paul's letter to the Philippians. What does he write to those believers about what it means to follow Jesus and what does that mean for us today?

Our series is called "**Letter from a Roman Prison.**" (Series Title Slide) So, see if you can find the letter in your Bible. As you're turning there. I want to encourage you over the next several weeks, to **read it**. Or listen to it in an audio format if you prefer that.

Too often, much of the confusion people experience with the Bible is because many of us just want little sound bites. And you can find bumper sticker verses all throughout Paul's letter. But if you aren't familiar with the larger context of the verses it's very easy to mis-understand.

Have you seen some of these commercials about dropped calls or only hearing parts of the conversation. And how it leads to misunderstandings. When we just pull out a verse, we often miss the full context.

Philippians is easy to read. It's short. You could read the whole letter in 30 mins.

I. Philippians 1:1-8

This morning let's just take a look at this very first section of Paul's letter, first 8 verses and try to understand a little bit about the context of the letter. And then we'll talk about So What? Why should this matter to you, in 2021 Waynesboro, PA.

1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons^[a]:

A. Paul and Timothy...

Paul begins by stating who the letter is from, Paul and Timothy, but as you read the letter, it becomes clearer that Paul is the author (the one doing the writing). Timothy is just his partner.

It's possible that Timothy is with Paul, also in prison, but perhaps more likely Timothy is the person who is taking care of Paul in Prison.

Roman prisons were very efficient...the basic needs of prisoners were not taken care of by the authorities. Sometimes they provided water, but prisoners were not fed. When you read in Scripture about “caring for those in prison,” it literally meant, feeding them! That meant that only those with family or friends on the outside who would stop by would get fed.

Many died in prison because they did not have outside support. It seems like that’s what’s going on here with Paul and Timothy.

But more than that, notice Paul does not include **titles** when he introduces himself and Timothy. He doesn’t open with, the Apostle Paul. No language related to personal status or importance because of his position as an apostle.

And this concept continues...**“To all God’s holy people.”**

The Greek word is **agios**, often translated **saints**...your version might say “to all the saints.”

Sometimes we get stuck on hierarchy.

Like your ordinary, common, average follower of Jesus is a **Christian**. But then if you’re a little more serious, maybe you read your Bible a little more often outside of church or you pray regularly we tend to think you’re a little higher up and you might be a **disciple** and then you know if you are a really serious follower, maybe even are on staff in a church, you have a title, like Pastor and you hardly ever sin anymore, then you might actually reach **saint** status.

We create these tiers or levels of Christianity. For Paul, there are no such tiers or levels of Christians. For Paul all people, who choose to follow Jesus, are saints. All lumped together.

Men, women, Jews and Greeks, slave or free...all are one in Christ Jesus. All have the same status, value, importance in the community of faith.

And Paul takes this concept one step further.

To all God's people...together with the overseers and deacons.

Finally, he mentions some of the titles or offices within the church.

The word **overseer** is used interchangeably in Scripture with Pastor or Elder.

And then **deacon** is kind of a fun word that the early church borrowed from the surrounding culture. It is often translated as deacon or minister. The word in Greek literally means "table-waiter" and you'll get a kick out of this, it was the word used to describe ancient table-waiters who would make sure "beverages" never went empty. That's what deacons are. Anybody want to sign up to be a deacon this morning? The point, in the church setting, was to be others'-centered...looking out for the needs of the others. That's deacons.

But again here's what stands out in this opening greeting...Paul doesn't write from leader to leader. From Apostle to the Pastors and deacons. No, he simply writes...from Paul and Timothy, to the church (oh, yeah the leaders too.) In fact, the first word Paul uses to identify himself and Timothy is "servant." Literally slaves of Jesus.

We'll talk about this more in a moment, but the church community is much more one of relational influence than hierarchical or positional influence.

Ok, let's keep moving...look at verse 2.

Grace and Peace to you from God our father and Lord Jesus Christ.

B. Grace and Peace

Two words that Paul uses here as he greets the church. At first glance may not seem that significant, but again when you understand the context, it's kind of neat what Paul is doing.

Grace or favor to you...was a form of a fairly common **gentile greeting**. The Philippians, mostly Romans, would have been familiar and comfortable with that kind of greeting. But then Paul adds "**and Peace**"...

This second word, comes from the Hebrew word Shalom. And this was a common **Jewish greeting**.

Paul unites the two greetings into one. Almost like he's greeting the Jews in their language and the Romans in their language. In fact, Jesus said this inclusive characteristic would be one of the markers of his followers.

Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said (Matthew 5:47), "**if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?**"

Pagans, people out there in the world, they'll greet each other, those who look like them and speak like them. But Christians open up their arms and learn the greetings, the language, the culture of those who different. And even embrace these differences.

Christianity transcends culture and language. In Islam, for example, to be a true Muslim, you must learn to speak Arabic and read their Holy Scriptures in Arabic. But the Gospel of Jesus does not have linguistic or national borders.

Unity, oneness in the community of Jesus not based on race or language. This was one of the incredibly fascinating characteristics of the early church. Jesus the Jewish Messiah, wasn't just for Jews. He came for Jews, but also Samaritans, and Romans, Gentiles. Jesus message of hope, peace and joy and love for Americans, but also, Canadians, Mexicans, Zambians, Chinese, Afghans...

Grace and Peace, Paul writes...because he wants gentiles and Jews to feel welcome in the community of faith, worshipping together, side by side.

Let's move on to the next section...

³ I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ 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.

One of the key themes running throughout this letter and really throughout all of Scripture is the concept of the church community as

C. "Partners in the Gospel."

The Greek word, we're all gonna become Greek students as we make our way through this series...but the Greek word here is the word **koinonia**. Which may be familiar to some of you, because it's a word that if you're around churches tends to get used.

But I will say, it is often a misunderstood term in many church circles. Often when people hear or translate koinonia they use the word **fellowship** or **friendship**.

And while fellowship and friendship are important church characteristics, that's not a great understanding of this word. In the ancient world koinonia was used in a very specific context. Pop quiz this morning...in what context would you guess this word was used in the ancient world?

Political, religious, business, sports, family, entertainment

Business! Business partners...

Koinonia is strategic partnership to accomplish a purpose. Partnership for a purpose. And the early church adopted this word to describe the relationship they shared with one another...they saw themselves as partners with a purpose.

Now, how might that understanding of koinonia impact how you view your role in the church?

This implies that church is more than just fellowshiping together, and getting together to hang out with friends if it suits our schedules on Sunday morning. We aren't just getting together to drink coffee, sit in soft comfy chairs and hope the message is entertaining.

We are business partners on mission...there is a purpose we need to achieve. A task we trying to accomplish.

What is the task of the church? What are we, you and me and Five Forks accomplishing together?

If you watch commercials on television...the best businesses always have a clear and obvious vision or focus. They know what their main business is.

Viewers know. Consumers know. The employees know...what the company's purpose is. They can likely quote it. It's central. I always thought that Insurance companies were the best at this:

“Like a good neighbor...” State Farm is there.

“You're in good hands with...” Allstate

“15 minutes could...” save you 15% or more on car insurance (Geico)

What's our tagline at Five Forks? What are we mostly about? (not coffee kiosk, not our freshly baked cookies)... **“Knowing, loving and following Jesus.”**

We are in business together for this purpose. Do you think about that when you think about coming on Sunday?

Ok, last section for today. Verse 7...

D. The Guts of Jesus

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

One of the things that stands out here, is Paul's deep love and affection for the people of Philippi. The partnership is not solely one of business and getting a job done. But it is intimate, heartfelt, personal aspect to it.

Business partners don't often say, *"I have you in my heart. And I long for you with the affection of Jesus."*

Again, fascinating language that Paul chooses to you use here. Literally Paul is saying to the Philippians, **"I long for you with the bowels or the guts of Jesus."**

In the ancient world, the seat of emotions was the bowels. In our world the seat of emotions is the heart.

Put your heart into it. I love you with all my heart. In the ancient world, the would have said, *"put your bowels into it"* or *"I love you with all of my bowels."* Not quite as romantic back then!

But here's what Paul is saying, *"I'm so in tune with Jesus. That I've started to feel what Jesus feels."* *"I long for you with the affection of Jesus."* *I long for you, with the same emotions that Jesus does.*

This is just a really important concept for many of us North American Christians to grasp. We tend to talk about and emphasize belief and doctrine and truth and right thinking.

And beliefs and doctrine and right thinking are important. But too many Christians stop there.

"I believe the right thing or said the right prayer."

Paul's relationship with Jesus is much deeper than mere right thinking. Paul has started to feel like Jesus. Christianity is transformation in thinking yes, but also feeling.

This is what it means for us to become Christlike. It's having the compassion of Jesus in us...I feel how Jesus feels towards the people around me.

II. So what?

What does all of this mean for us today...

Well, first of all this week...let's all look for opportunities to...

A. Practice relational influence.

Are you familiar with the concept of positional authority vs. relational authority?

Positional authority is a form of hierarchal power that is top down.

I influence people or get them to do what I want them to do because of my position, title, rank or status.

I'm the boss, so you do what I say. As parents, sometimes we say..."Because I said so and I'm dad." This is one way to influence people. Make sure you're in a position of authority over them, then you can tell them what to do.

How often is our world motivated by positional authority and important titles, wealth, popularity?

On the other hand, Paul's approach to the church community is much more one of **relational authority**. Relational authority comes much more from a place of trust, respect and love.

You trust what I have to say because we have a relationship.

In Matthew 23 Jesus dealt with this very thing. The pharisees have set themselves apart in the synagogue with special seats, special clothes (prayer tassels), special titles (rabbi). Very similar to the affinity we have with hierarchical influence.

But not so with you...Jesus says. Not in my community. Instead, in my community...

¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Leadership is important. Structure is important. There are times that Paul will use his title as an apostle as a form of influence and authority, but it is not how he sees himself primarily...the essence of the church community is one of relational influence built on trust and mutual accountability.

Jesus is master and Lord and after that is everyone else. We are all on a level playing field before Jesus.

Expand your social interactions this week to a more diverse group.

B. Diversity in our Community

Grace and Peace...Paul wrote...the Jews had to learn to be comfortable with the Gentile greeting, even some of their customs and their food. And Gentiles had to be comfortable with the Jewish greeting. We must do the same...

I was reading an article (**PIC OF VATICAN**) about the transition of the Papacy, one pope to another, back in 1978. This ceremony takes place at the Vatican in Rome. Pope John Paul I was just being inaugurated as Pope with hope and

anticipation...sadly he died only a few months later. And John Paul II was to be assume the papal duties.

But the tragedy of his passing, caused confused, skepticism...it was a time of doubt and uncertainty and to make matters worse for John Paul II, was not Italian. He was going to become the first non-Italian pope in over 450 years.

How would he even begin to win the favor of the people? So he did something unprecedented for the papacy: He addressed the crowd directly and chose to speak the crowd's native tongue of Italian, one of twelve languages in which he had become fluent." He greeted them in their language.

He even went on to acknowledge the potential mistakes he might make with the spectators' language and invited them to correct him when he did.

"His openness, vulnerability, and humor drew laughter and applause from the crowd. By the time the extemporaneous speech drew to a close, a remarkable thing had happened: the crowd that was surprised and confused before was now wholehearted on John Paul II's side."

If the church, wants to have an effective mission to the world, to the un-churched we must learn the language.

Expand your social interactions this week to a more diverse group.

This is not about finding people who look different from you or speak differently from you or believe differently than you and trying to persuade them to be more like you. This learning appreciate someone else for the way in which they are different from you.

Greet someone at the grocery store who perhaps speaks a different language.

Eat at an ethnic restaurant and order something that is new to your taste buds in an effort to gain an appreciation for diversity.

Interact with someone on a topic, who doesn't hold the same opinion you do...and as you do, don't immediately try to figure out why you disagree...instead try to understand from their perspective why their view is important to them.

Finally, if you haven't you need to consider how you are participating in the partnership of the Gospel.

C. Participate in the partnership.

If church is intended to be more than simply fellowship. If it's true that we are in business together, then you need to be involved. If you are good inviting. Invite someone to come with you. If you are a teacher...think about how you could be involved in teaching. If you want guests to feel welcome, sign up to help be a greeter.

I have a role to play. Pastor Bill has a role to play, the staff has a role, the secretaries, the custodial staff...but not just paid staff...volunteers...you have role. Why, because we are the koinonia business partners. We have a job to do.

Let's pray!