

Series: The Fellowship of the Gospel	Reference: <i>Philippians 1:</i>	Title: Eat!	Date: 09.20.2020
Website Writeup: What's the one simple & great thing we can practice for spiritual growth & unity? Read on to find out.			

Today's our second sermon in Philippians. A very personal letter referred to as *The Epistle of Joy* & appropriately subtitled, *The Fellowship of the Gospel*. Paul's thankfulness for the Philippians drips from every word, loving them with great affection.

We'll be addressing vv3-11 today. Read along with me starting with vv3-6...*3I 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.*

We've been separated over 5 months, on hold with little interaction. Some of us have begun to gather in person, and in Community Groups. Some remain virtual. We long for everyone to be in the room together. The highlight of my past week was worshipping with you once again. Paul's on lockdown himself, still separated from these folks, and you can taste his longing to be with them once again.

Hebrews 10:25 urges, *...let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love & good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.* There's something powerful & uplifting about physical interaction & corporate worship. We miss seeing a face, body language, the warmth of a touch, a voice matched with the kind glint in an eye, the nod of a head, or a hearty handshake or hug. There's so much more to communication than we get in an email, text, a post, or phone call.

Dick Best recently moved to Portland. Weekly he calls. He misses being with us. One couple have kept a connection with this church over the years they've lived down south. They recently put their house on the market & are moving here, the first thing they did was to text me the good news. They long to be a physical part of the day-to-day life of this church again. Over the years others have moved away from this church & still contact me saying they haven't found fellowship like this - all that affects a persons walk in the Lord. Someone said to me this week that in the beginning of the lockdown as an introvert, they loved it. But as time went on they grew depressive realizing they need their church.

We'd like to say we're fully self-feeders in the spiritual life & we do have that personal responsibility to engage our own spiritual formation. But, the Trinity itself reflects the fact that we need community. You're not meant to be out of fellowship, or with limited fellowship. God's grace may go with those who're forced into solitude, but when the opportunity arises to reconnect, we should embrace it with passion - it's good for our

souls. We spur one another on best when we're together. Because together there's greater chance for deeper communication, for reading a face & the intonation of the voice & body language. In meeting together we hear another's interactions with the Word, what God's doing in their life & it speaks to our own spiritual journey.

Some will avoid this, when habits have been formed after not meeting for a time. Avoidance due to indifference, or insecurity, but that's only reacting to the lies of the Evil One. We're meant to be together, spurring one another along in faith. Someone told me last week after the service how they had a difficult 3 hour conversation with a family member about life & gospel. They needed to hear from a brother in Christ, they'd done a good job. On our own, with no encouragement, it depletes us.

My son, Aidan was recently walking home in Philly with his wife at midnight when they stumbled across a guy sitting on his front stoop. Aidan was prompted by the Holy Spirit to approach him. He was unresponsive so they knocked on the door. The young man's uncle answered, and they found that the young man had passed away due to a heroin overdose. Aidan turned his attention to the uncle who had just had another nephew die a month before from the same. Aidan asked if he could pray over him, and proceeded to tactfully share the gospel with the man. They've since met & talked more.

Aidan grew up in this church. He has a wife, a lot of good Christian friends & a strong church in Philly who encourage him in his faith. What he did was not just of himself, it has roots in years of discipleship & faith building in the body of Christ. Donna & Dave Christie & Bill Massey have been delivering meals for Easter Outreach or Manna in the city. They've taken opportunity to pray over people as they do, their faith growing bolder which is a direct influence of our church. That's the work of partnership in the Gospel! These are the stories we remember of our own people, which encourage & embolden us to be more active in Kingdom work.

Todd Hall took the time to pray over the sister of a man who'd taken his own life this past week. I've seen Rachel pray over people & counsel them. Lindley, Mike, Rob, Chris, Chelsea, Donna, Dave, Vinny, Mary, Jack, Gregg, Albert, Kathleen, Chuck, Christy, Jordan, I could list every person in our church, telling story after story of very practical care & ministry towards others.

Paul has memory & prayer. That's it. He remembers the stories, the faces & names. He remembers the work of Philippian believers on behalf of the Gospel. It's not just that they supported him financially, he's encouraged by their willingness to share Christ in a difficult place, and to endure suffering for the sake of Jesus' name. In effort of being a good brother in Christ, he prays for these people. All of them, not just leadership, but the whole church. Every single one valuable to its work. I hope we're praying for each other with such gratitude for a healthy church.

Paul knows there's more...Christ is completing His work in these people. Greater things were to come for them & us through our ministry as well. You may be numb in your

spiritual walk, but persevere, since the Spirit of God will take you down new roads as you're faithful to remain true to the call of Christ in kingdom work.

Paul continues in v7 saying...⁷It 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 & 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.

Some of us when we discuss faith cringe at emotive words like 'feel' or phrases like 'in my heart', or 'I long for all of you with affection'. We're afraid that an overly emotive approach to faith will result in the erosion of Truth. That everything will devolve into popular phrases like 'Love Wins' disregarding the deeper aspects of Scripture concerning our call to holiness & purity in keeping with the high moral standards reflecting God in life. Well...you're right...but...you're also wrong.

Others in this room love this emotive language. We want our faith to be of flowers, sunsets & cinnamon scented candles. You also are right...and also wrong. Paul's emotion here is a deep connection to people who've been willing to fight the good fight. They've not cut corners in faith & stayed true to the whole gospel. Their gospel hasn't been light, or mere pursuit of good feelings.

Emotion & affinity should play a part in faith & relationships. We should allow ourselves to feel close & weather the storms which affection brings. But we should also be willing to climb the cliffs of faith, to navigate the great rapids of life in the boat of scriptural integrity together, bleeding for the Gospel, laying aside personal desire for the sake of Jesus in others, standing strong under persecution with joy. And that's done together... American individuality where we see it as just Jesus & me isn't sufficient. Each of us should be personally pursuing Jesus, but equally aware that Christ works through others - when we connect affectionately in the unity of Christ with others, there's a deep & powerful encouraging fellowship which occurs & feeds our soul. Paul's affinity grows out of their solidity in the faith.

This relationship nourishes his soul, which isn't weakness, and no less spiritual than our personal connection to the Holy Spirit in life. It's a holistic ministry to the soul of each other when we can share hardships & joys at the same time. I think this may be one of the greatest faults of the Western Church, not to appreciate the power of fellowship & how spiritually nurturing it is.

So, there are typically two sides, the cerebral logic oriented folk & the emotive experience oriented folk. And the Gospel calls us to think..to root ourselves in Truth binding ourselves to the call & commands of Scripture. To allow them to govern life, to bring emotion under the authority & guidance of God's Word, enabling us to weather all situations. In being rooted in God's Word, we are freed & emotion takes its proper place. Unified in God's word, we're unleashed to feel what we *should* feel & feelings don't become misleading or destructive. Rather, they serve Christ as meant to. And it's there

that logic's reigned in & not cold or unfeeling, but it too can take on a passion fueled by the Gospel in unity with others.

So, if you're more emotive & experiential in nature, allow your more cerebral brothers & sisters to influence you. If you're more cerebral, allow your more emotive brothers & sisters in Christ to loosen you up. We need balance, standing firm in Truth, but passionate about it as well. If you're filled with anxiety, get around those who you see having a strong bold faith, and allow them to rub off on you. Emulate & copy their strong faith until it becomes your own. This is when 'fake it until you make it' works.

Like Paul, grow appreciative of church. Give up the popular propensity to criticize. Begin to appreciate all that church life brings us & how it blesses so richly...And realize that next Paul reveals exactly what he prays for them...⁹*And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more & more in knowledge & depth of insight,* ¹⁰*so that you may be able to discern what is best & may be pure & blameless for the day of Christ,* ¹¹*filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory & praise of God. (Php 1:3-11)*

This last grouping is probably the richest of our text today. Remember, the Philippian church started with a few Greek women worshiping what they did not know beside a river, but open to hearing Truth. Paul walks up & preaches Christ to them from the Hebrew Scriptures as he always had. Preaching the Gospel from the Old Testament, since the New Testament was still being written, culminating in the story of Christ's death & resurrection for them.

What happened to them, happened to us, they fell in love with Jesus. Their faith beginning, and Paul's already said that *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion*. From beginning to end, God's at work in us & Paul's confident of this. So, he plays off that initial love in order that it'll grow & flower. But in what? An ethereal blind faith without roots? A feel-good notion of a God of love? NO! In the knowledge & depth of insight of a long sometimes difficult history, but wonderful story & the character of God in the Scriptures. And, the secret is, that in knowing God more fully, we know ourselves more fully.

We don't just come to Jesus & that's it. Ours is not a shallow, uninformed, uneducated faith. We don't gather to chase good feelings. Individually & corporately we delve deeply into the Scriptures in order to gain a more vibrant full grasp of what God's doing in the world & how we can engage with it. The Scriptures bring depth & insight to life.

I watched a sermon by Voddie Baucham recently where he was addressing racial reconciliation. He voiced concern that Christians are being more influenced by outside literature & ideas, rather than the Scriptures. It's not that we should not read other things which may bring something to us, "But," he asked, "do we view the Scriptures as sufficient for all matters of faith & practice?" Can a person read the Scriptures & come away with the idea that racism, or any other sinful attitude, are wrong & that we can be changed & made better by Scriptures influence? The answer's yes! It's sufficient. There's

no way if you were on a desert island, with the only book to read being the Bible & come away as a racist - it's not there. The Great Commission itself speaks against it. The travels & heart of Paul to bring the Gospel to those different than himself speak against it. But you'll say, "But Jason, people justified slavery with the Scriptures." Show me their argument! Because you can't find one which works! Can you justify it from the Scriptures? No, you can't & they didn't. They tried, but they didn't really care about Jesus, other people, or the Bible. They had not really read His Word with open heart, and were only proof texting for their own agenda.

We allow ourselves to be changed all the time by the words of others. Ideas. Philosophies. Ideologies. Voices. Often it ends in devastation & destruction. The current violence & unbelievable demands we're seeing in this country & the capitulation to them is due greatly to a single theory. The simple, very biblically errant & wrong Critical Race Theory. And when you immerse yourself in the Scriptures, and the beauty of it, lining that theory up alongside it, you find it's literally a comparison of dark & light. And this theory which is driving all of what we see today, and taught so often in schools, is nothing but deception promising light, freedom & positive change - but like the Father of Lies, it's a lie which can't deliver, and ultimately damages & further divides. (*Listen to the 3rd sermon in the All Peoples series to understand Critical [Race] Theory*)

So, the question is, when do we give God's Word the chance to change us? When do we dress ourselves in the armor of God to be able to see the enemy coming from afar through insidious ideologies? Because right now he's whispering in our ears & we're listening. No need to meet us on the battlefield, we invite him into the comfort of home.

Voddie stated, the Scriptures are sufficient for all of life. The very words of life, the words of God recorded for guidance. We've been given the Holy Spirit as a guide to unfold the wisdom within them. *Jesus said in John 14:26, But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things & will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

Most people aren't significantly changed by the Bible for a few reasons. Firstly, they really don't have a habit of exploring them. They simply don't take time daily to delve into the Word, with open heart, allowing it to nourish their soul & serve as a bulwark against lies. They don't sit prayerfully looking at a passage with a few basic questions like, what does this passage teach me about God. What does this passage teach me about me? What does this passage teach me about how I respond to God?

Secondly, if they do, they fail to regard them as God-breathed, and therefore, believe they can take it or leave it, or pick & choose what they'd like to assimilate instead of the whole of it. If you're in this category, you're in danger. Your pride before the Lord's evident thinking you're above the counsel of God, you have little hope & your only recourse is to repent & believe.

Or thirdly, people may believe Scripture's God breathed, but they self-condemn & lack the faith to say, "God can & is willing to change ME by this." When you read in

Philippians 4:6, *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer & petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God,”* do you believe the practice of prayer, petition & thanks, approaching God with your requests will make a difference? That’s the definition of faith - choosing to believe, even if your unruly heart doesn’t want to - the obedience of faith. Inevitably someone will say, “Well, I’ve tried it, it didn’t work.” But remember, we live lives of instant gratification & soul-work takes time. Sometimes change is swift, but most often it’s a protracted over long periods which is solid change. Remember, you’ve taken years to develop, it’ll not often be reversed quickly. Partner with the Lord & others to grow in your faith by believing God.

The Scriptures are revealed to us & Jesus is revealed in them. They don’t originate from within, they’re given. You & I don’t have all we need within us to thrive & walk in righteousness in this world. God’s Word’s to be tasted, masticated & ingested. Listen to what God says in Ezekiel’s call to be a prophet to Israel...*Do not be afraid of what they say or be terrified by them, though they are a rebellious people. 7 You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. 8 But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth & eat what I give you.” 9 Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, 10 which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament & mourning & woe. And he said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go & speak to the people of Israel.” 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 3 Then he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you & fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. 4 He then said to me: “Son of man, go now to the people of Israel & speak my words to them. (Eze 2:6–3:4)*

This is the image I’d leave you with today. One of daily sitting down at a meal of God’s Word. Filling your belly, being nourished by His healthy food, to the end of which Paul states...*so that you may be able to discern what is best & may be pure & blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory & praise of God.* So that you’re not confused & Christ begins to consistently emanate from every pore of your being becoming a blessing to others!

As Paul said to the Ephesians...*14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back & forth by the waves, and blown here & there by every wind of teaching & by the cunning & craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined & held together by every supporting ligament, grows & builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4:14–16)*

This is what the Philippian church did, and to which we also are called. There was a lot which could’ve tossed them back & forth, as there is for us & our kids right now. As a matter of fact, moms & dads, you are the greatest influence on your children. Teach them well, get into the parenting Community Group & learn in order to teach them well. Let’s do this well for the sake of Christ’s name & for the salvation of others! Get into the Word, use the FREE *RightNow Media* account we’ve set up for you to study, it’s a great

tool. Eat, eat, eat! Be fed, gain discernment & wisdom so that you can fight off the lies being thrown at you & become useful tools in the hands of Jesus for the furtherance of the Gospel. AMEN!