

Philippians 1:3-8

Family Ties

Gilbert Johnston who lived from 1821-1908. Gilbert was born in 1821 in Eskdalemuir, Scotland to Thomas and Margaret Johnston. At age 18 he and his father moved to America and settled in eastern Iowa. He married Catherine Rice. Gilbert died in 1908 and is buried in a small cemetery in Rochester, Iowa. Why am I telling you about Gilbert Johnston? He doesn't mean anything to you, but he does to me. Gilbert Johnston was my great grandfather. A few years ago I was able to visit Scotland. I found Curie Shiel, the home where Gilbert lived, the church they probably attended and the ruins of Lockwood Castle, the castle of the Johnston clan.

Family is important to me. And I am quite sure it is important to you too. When we went to South Dakota to teach for a year in 2005 we were reminded of the importance of family. We were now not only further away from our biological families, but in leaving our church in Wisconsin we felt like we were also being ripped away from our spiritual family. Sometimes when a church has problems that spiritual family is torn apart too. And that really hurts. Many of you understand this. Believers can act terribly to each other. But Jesus said that the relationships among believers should be different from relationships among the people of this world. **John 13:34**. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ we are born again as children of God. We become spiritual brothers and sisters. Our spiritual family is important. Thus, there are attitudes, words, and actions toward each other which are appropriate and there are attitudes, words, and actions which are not appropriate.

As Paul began his letter to the Philippians, he began by expressing his feelings about them. It is these attitudes which we want to explore this morning.

Lee, is this really important? Isn't understanding correct theology, apologetics, and biblical interpretation more important? Correct doctrine, apologetics and sound biblical interpretation are important, but so are our attitudes and relationships. I suggest to you that there is a direct relationship between our attitudes toward each other and our spiritual condition. **1 John 2:9-11, 3:10, 14, 4:7, 20-21, 1 Cor 3:1-3**

Our attitudes about each other are the outflow of our faith and a thermometer of our spiritual condition. What we feel about each other, what we say to and about each other and how we act toward each other depend on two things:

- 1) A clear understanding of the Gospel and our relationship to each other in Christ. When you put your trust in Jesus you not only become a child of God, you enter a spiritual family, the Body of Christ, his church.
- 2) A spiritual maturity which affects the way we think, speak, and feel.

Paul is here modeling for us a way of thinking that is appropriate and Christ-like. There are three aspects of this model that are clearly seen in Paul and badly needed today.

1. Joy-filled Thankfulness. V. 3-5

Paul begins by expressing his thankfulness to God for the Philippian believers. (It is best to see v.4 as a parenthetical aside which anticipates two of the important sub-themes of this letter, prayer and joy) Read v. 3 and 5 together. Note the number of times Paul uses the word "all" in these opening

verses. He was including everybody—rich and poor, smart and not so smart, young and old, new believers and mature ones, ones easy to get along with and those who were hard to get along with.

The key concept to understand here is what Paul meant by their “partnership in the gospel”. The Greek word translated partnership (koinonia) has the idea of participation or sharing in something. Paul may be referring to:

- 1) their being fellow sharers in the benefits of the Gospel by accepting the Gospel. They share salvation together.
- 2) or their participation with him in the furtherance of the Gospel through their prayers (1:19), their gifts to him (Phil 4:15-16) and by their own evangelizing efforts in Philippi (1:27. 2:15-16).

There is a bond, a closeness, between people who have a commitment to the same truth and who are united around the same purpose.

When others join with us in the faith it is a reason for joy and thanksgiving. Aren't you thankful and happy when you see others loving and serving Jesus? When people accept the Gospel, it gives us joy and makes us thankful. On the other hand, one of the biggest dangers we face is becoming focused on ourselves and our own personal problems and desires, rather than on our common purpose of partnering together in the Gospel. Our lives are enriched when our hearts are filled with joy and thankfulness for each other.

I'm sure each of us could share stories of those who have brought us joy and a reason for gratitude by partnering with us in the Gospel. Think for a moment of someone who has been a source of joy and encouragement to you as a Christian.

Now, take a look around you. These people sitting around you this morning, your spiritual brothers and sisters, should inspire joy and thankfulness in your heart.

A second attitude Paul displays is

II. Confidence. V.6

There is a place for us to have some confidence in each other (2 Cor. 7:4, Philemon 21, Heb. 6:9), but that is not the focus of Verse 6. Who is the focus of Paul's confidence? The Lord.

The key question to answer about this verse is, “What ‘good work’ does Paul have in mind?”

- 1) Some suggest that it is the financial contribution that the Philippians had just sent to Paul. I don't find that suggestion very probable.
- 2) Others say that we should translate: “a good work within you, in your hearts.” The work of salvation. That certainly is part of what Paul is saying. If God began a good work in Philippi, he began it in the hearts of individuals. He will complete what he started in you and me.
- 3) A better way to translate it is: “a good work among you, in your midst.” The good work God had begun was their acceptance of the Gospel, the establishment of a church in Philippi. The saving activity of God was and is at work bringing people to faith and engaging them in this partnership to take the Gospel to others. Paul's confidence is that God is going to keep on doing this saving work until Jesus Christ comes back again.

We can have confidence that God is going to keep on doing his saving work in our community and preserving that saving work in our lives until Christ returns. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overpower it”. Do we have this kind of confidence? It is easy for a church

in a smaller community to feel insignificant. Think about this. You can have a spiritual impact on a greater percentage of the people in the Plainview area than a mega-church has in a big city. Let's not go negative. God is still at work!

A third attitude of importance is.

3. Affection. V.7-8

Verses 7 & 8 reflect a third attitude. When Paul says, "It is right for me to feel 'This way'", he means the attitudes of joy, thankfulness and confidence) By saying, "I have you in my heart" Paul means that he has love and concern for them.

There is a tie between Paul and the Philippians, and that tie is the mutually experienced, mutually shared grace of God. Since retiring, Carol and I have ministered in various churches and worshiped in various churches and we have discovered that wherever we go there is an instant connection, the bond we have in Jesus Christ. Have you felt that bond?

In Jesus we are partners in experiencing God's grace in saving us and keeping us until the day of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus we are partners in proclaiming God's grace. Paul knows that spiritually and emotionally they are with him whether he is in prison or out in the world boldly defending and proclaiming the Gospel.

Sharing together in God's grace does something to us. It creates affection in us for each other. Strong desires to be with each other, deep concern for each other. Do you find this in your heart? If we don't feel affection in our heart for other believers, we have either been deeply hurt by what people in a church did to us in the past or there is something seriously wrong with our spiritual life. Of course that affection we feel for each other should extend to others outside the church.

Conclusion

Here are three important attitudes, which should control our thinking about each other in Christ.

Joy-filled thankfulness, confidence in God's continuing work in us, through us and around us, and genuine affection for each other that is heard in what we say to each other, what we say about each other, and how we treat each other.

It seems to me that if we truly understand the nature of what God is doing, who we are by his grace, and the partnership we have together in the Gospel, we will have these attitudes toward each other.

In closing I want to say something about a word Paul used two times in these verses. It is the word "Gospel". What is this Gospel? The word means "good news." What good news was Paul talking about? We don't have to guess because he defines the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. The Gospel is the good news that Jesus died for sins and rose again to offer the gift of eternal life to those who will acknowledge their need and trust him as Savior. If you have not put your trust in Jesus, I urge you to do that today.