

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Eighteenth Sunday After Trinity, September 29, 2024**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 44, 238:1, 548:1-4, 363, 468.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 4:1-14, Acts 16:11-34, Matthew 4:23-25.

Sermon Text: Philippians 1:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We learn from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Philippians that he is now imprisoned in Rome. When we realize that Paul is writing these words of encouragement and hope from prison, we are all the more impressed about his love and concern for his fellow believers and especially his love for Christ.

As he begins this letter, we see

**PAUL'S THANKFULNESS AND PRAYER FOR CHRISTIANS**

1. We see thankfulness for all God has done, and
2. We see his prayer for love and growth.

Paul greets them with words you often hear at the beginning of sermons. ***“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*** In these words of benediction, in which he is saying “blessing be upon you”, he tells them ‘I want you to have and experience all the grace of God. I want you to have and experience all the peace of conscience you have because of what Jesus Christ did for you. All the Philippian Christians were, in the eyes of Paul, saints. He disregards the fact that there can also be hypocrites in the visible church. For the sake of love he speaks of them all as Christians, as saints.

He wants to see them. ***“God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”*** In this way we read that the Philippians were very dear to Paul.

Thankfulness is an important concern in this letter. To show his thankfulness for all God has done for them, he writes: ***“I thank my God every time I remember you.”***

What has God done for them? Paul writes ***“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 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.”***

God had brought them to faith in Jesus Christ. In our epistle lesson you heard that it was just through a small group of women who heard about Jesus Christ that others had come to faith. That is God's work begun in them and God has continued that work. You also heard about the miracles which brought the jailer in Philippi to faith.

We read about their partnership in the Gospel. They had obviously shared it with others in Philippi, but also had sent Epaphroditus to Paul in Rome with a monetary gift when he was in prison. They obviously hadn't just listened to the Word of God and let it go in one ear and out the other, but it had brought forth fruits of faith in their lives. The word ***“partnership”*** tells us that they were active partners in sharing the news of the Gospel. That includes the news about a life after death through faith in Jesus. Partners share. Partners do things together. He goes on: ***“It 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.”***

They are dear to him, partakers with him of God's grace, and when he uses the word grace he means God's undeserved love.

Now that he is in prison and not able to preach Jesus Christ publicly in person, Christians in Philippi are defending the Gospel. We don't know exactly how they did this, but Paul knew, because they had sent Epaphroditus to him in prison in Rome. We know that Satan and his allies are always attacking God and the Word of God. The Philippian Christians were obviously, with words and their lives, defending what they had been taught, using the weapons you heard about last week.

When he writes they were ***"confirming the gospel"*** we understand that they were teaching others and they were witnessing to the truth of what Paul had taught. They were declaring it and by their lives and concern for others were sharing the good news of eternal salvation through faith in the Savior.

He repeats how he longs to see them. ***"God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus."***

Jesus Christ created this affection. Paul also uses the word "love" five times in this short letter. As we carefully read this letter, we see that Paul loves them and wishes he could spend more time with them, and is thankful for their faith.

He is thankful that God, ***"who began a good work in [them] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus"***, until the day he comes to judge the living and the dead. Not only is Paul thankful, but he is confident that God will continue to be with them as they follow God's Words.

This ***"good work"*** is a very broad phrase to point to the faith God has created in them and the fruits of faith which the Holy Ghost leads them to do. Paul has confidence that God will complete it. And we know, because of the sinful flesh that is with us every day, that we can't do it by ourselves.

What a remarkable and positive way of speaking of them! Oh, for that kind of words and life! In this we find a positive example. Doesn't it often happen that we are tempted to "speak ill of" Christian brethren? We see the shortcomings and outright sins of others, including fellow confessors of Christ and our sinful flesh leads us to tear them down. Yes, we must admonish and rebuke sin. But when there is repentance, there should be rejoicing!

Paul expresses confidence in God that he will complete and accomplish the good works he began in them. ***"It 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."*** We see Paul's joy over them.

Just as Paul was thankful for the Philippian Christians, we, too, can be thankful. And how are we thankful? We might think first of all about all the material things God has given us. But such things only last for a time here on earth, and can easily be destroyed. Christians are especially thankful for spiritual blessings.

Believers who have been brought together in a gospel partnership joyfully give expression to their partnership. They do this in many ways. They worship, pray and study God's word together. They joyfully acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. They show to one another a special measure of helpfulness and love. They encourage one another in Christian living, and they work together to promote the cause of the gospel in the world.

In the case of the Philippians, too, this gospel partnership they shared was a special gift of God's grace to them. Through the gospel God had continued to nourish and strengthen their faith and to fill them with enthusiasm for the Savior's cause. Paul was confident that, through that same gospel, the Lord would continue this gracious work until the day of Christ's return.

Today as we worship together, we share a gospel partnership with the members of our congregations. Our worship life, our mutual support of the Lord's work, our encouragements to each other to live as Christians, are all expressions of that partnership. So is the special affection and concern we feel and show for one another.

Paul's prayer of thanksgiving moves from praise to petitions. ***"And 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, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God"***

As we defend the Gospel of Christ, the message found in the Word of God, we use the tools and weapons God has given us that we talked about last Sunday.

These include ***"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."*** They include ***"the shield of faith," "the helmet of salvation"*** and ***"the breastplate of [the] righteousness"*** of Christ. (Ephesians 6:13-17 NIV)

Near the end of this letter to the Philippians, Paul writes ***“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*** (Philippians 4:4–7, NIV)

As a result of all that God has done for them Paul writes ***“It 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.”***

Love is his overriding concern and reason for writing as he does.

And Paul writes: ***“this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.”*** He wants their love to abound, to continue to grow. He wants them to be ***“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”***

The Apostle Peter expressed the same encouragement when he wrote that Christians are to ***“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever!”*** (2 Peter 3:18, NIV84)

The goal of Paul writing this letter is eternal life not only for the Philippians but also for us. Listen to the prayer with which he closes our text: ***“And 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, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”*** (Philippians 1:9–11, NIV84)

How is it that we discern and recognize ***“what is best and may be pure and blameless”***? It is by learning the will of God through his Word. Remember the third use or purpose of the Law of God, as summarized in his commandments? It is the Law of God as a guide, as a guideline, as a straight-edge to lead us to do the will of God. The Law of God shows us how to please God.

And finally, God is the one who will carry out good works through us. It is not the believers who by their own strength and power are able to remain faithful to the end, but it is God who will perform this, since he does not work in vain.

On the last day this faith, which has been preserved by the gracious power of God, will finally provide the free gift of eternal salvation.

May God continue to work in you that fruits of faith may flow freely all your lives! Amen.