

“The Epistle of Joy (Part 2—Philippians 1:1-11)”

Philippians 1:1-11: “Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷ just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸ For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. ⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” (NKJV)

The truths in this text invite us to **RESPOND TO THE GOSPEL MESSAGE**. People become true, born-again Christians when the Lord opens their heart to respond to the Christian Gospel and the Father Himself draws such a one to Jesus. When you *respond to the Gospel message you become a bondservant of Jesus Christ* (1:1). This literally means that you are Christ’s slave, His absolute possession. This means that you belong to Him alone, and He owns you. When you *respond to the Gospel message you also become a saint* (1:1). The basic idea is that you are now different and set apart from those in darkness because you live in Jesus Christ and He lives in you. When you *respond to the Gospel message you receive grace and peace* (1:2). Grace is what is given to God’s people – peace is what results from such a gift. When you *respond to the Gospel message God begins a good work in you that He will carry on to completion until Jesus comes again* (1:6). When a person is saved the Lord forgives all their sins and makes them a new creature in Christ! Then, the Lord immediately begins the life-long work of making us more and more like Jesus and less and less like the sinful flesh. Don’t ever stop His work in your life or push Him away. Live by this motto: PBPWMGINFWMY (please be patient with me God is not finished with me yet). When you *respond to the Gospel message you become a defender and confirmer of the Gospel* (1:7). We are to *defend* the Gospel from the attacks which come from outside (Christianity is a very defensible faith). What a joy it is to *confirm* the faith and devotion present in fellow believers! We *defend* and *confirm* the Gospel by displaying its transforming power in our lives and by living what we preach. When you *respond to the Gospel message you might become a servant-leader in the church* (1:1). A *bishop* is an overseer who visits, looks after and cares for someone. A *deacon* is one who serves others in lowly service. There’s no hierarchy among saints, bishops and deacons – we’re all different parts of the same body. Grow spiritually to the point where you don’t just look out for your own journey with Jesus, but you also seek to inspire and help others along their way.

The truths in this text also invite us to **PARTNER WITH OTHERS IN THE GOSPEL**. This *partnership* or *fellowship* means to participate in something with others. Paul teaches in this passage that *there is no greater joy for brothers and sisters in Christ than to participate together in the spread of the Gospel*. The Gospel was the outstanding passion of Paul’s life. For Paul,

Christ and Gospel mean the same thing. When you ***participate in Gospel work with others*** you develop a special feeling in your heart for them (1:7-8). This leads you to ***thank God every time you remember them*** (1:3). Some of the Philippians were causing problems that Paul needed to address. But like Paul, we too should learn to *thank God* even for people who are causing us distress. We also learn this from Paul's example here: *don't pray for someone until you have first thanked God for them*. This then leads you to ***pray a lot for others*** (1:4, 9-11). Here's another good lesson: *pray FOR others before you talk TO them about a problem that needs to be addressed*. Bathe situations in prayer before taking any human action to solve the matter. Establish some kind of practice, or system, or discipline that will help you pray for others with joy. One of the greatest prayers we can pray for anyone is that *their love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight* (1:9). When you pray a lot for others ***you should envision what answered prayer will look like*** (1:10-11). A prayer for abounding love in others is answered by them being able to set aside less important matters and focus on what really counts. This prayer is also answered when they become sincere and don't cause others to stumble. Answered prayer for abounding love in a person's life will also enable them to stand the test of examination and be proven genuine and authentic. ALL of this is to the glory and praise of God alone! (1:11)

Discussion Guide/Action Steps

1. Is the Master's will your will?
2. Why don't you consider adding the title "Saint" as a prefix before a brother or sister's name?
3. Are you cooperating with God's ongoing work of sanctification in your life?
4. Are you a walking billboard advertising the transformative power of the Gospel?
5. Are you helping others in their Christian journey as you plod along yourself?
6. Have you answered God's call on your life to a particular area of Christian service?
7. Are you participating together with others in spreading the Gospel?
8. Find something in every fellow-believer for which you can give thanks to God.
9. Are you praying for others?
10. Are you living your life to the glory and praise of God?