

READING Philippians 1:1-8

SERMON:

Together in the Gospel (Philippians 1: 1-8)

Today we begin our look at the letter that Paul sent to the church of God at Philippi. This letter that talks about partnership, about going onwards together in Christ.

There are many different types of partners. There are marriage partners. There are business partners where two or more people get together in the common aim to make a particular business work and produce goods or provide a service so they can make money and live. There are partners who are put together for a project, there are friends who might call themselves partners, more likely if they are American. People are said to be partners in crime. You can have a sleeping partner in a business or a boxer has a sparing partner.

When I looked it up on a reference disc I have it had 420 entries for the word partner. I'm not going into them all, but it reminded me that:

- o You get partners in card games like Bridge
- o Countries have trading partners
- o Runners in a three-legged race need a partner - unless you happen to be Jake the Peg with his extra leg!
- o Tag wrestling is a form of wrestling involving two teams of two wrestlers, only one of whom is in the ring at one time and may ask his partner to replace him by touching his hand

And then there the more specialist meaning of the word in

- o **Symbiosis** - Any close relationship between two organisms of different species, and one where both partners benefit from the association. A well-known example is the pollination relationship between insects and flowers, where the insects feed on nectar and carry pollen from one flower to another. This is sometimes known as mutualism.
Symbiosis in a broader sense includes commensalism, parasitism, and inquilinism (one animal being in the home of another and sharing its food) – I thought that referred to the boyfriends of our daughters.

Then we moved on to some others which I had never thought of

- o **Sir Roger de Coverley** - an English country-dance in which dancing partners face one another in two rows
- o **Paul Jones** - a dance during which the couples change partners

And finally one that I saw and it appealed to me because of my Physics background

- o **Supersymmetry** - In physics, a theory that relates the two classes of elementary particle, the fermions and the bosons. According to supersymmetry, each fermion particle has a boson partner particle, and vice versa. It has not been possible to marry up all the known fermions with the known bosons, and so the theory postulates the existence of other, as yet undiscovered fermions, such as the photinos (partners of the photons), gluinos (partners of the gluons), and gravitinos (partners of the gravitons). Using these ideas, it has become possible to develop a theory of gravity – called supergravity – that extends Einstein's work and considers the gravitational, nuclear, and electromagnetic forces to be manifestations of an underlying superforce. Supersymmetry has been incorporated into the superstring theory, and appears to be a crucial ingredient in the 'theory of everything' sought by scientists

But less of a good thing. But this morning we are all partners, we are moving onwards together. You could look at the person sitting next to you and say, 'Howdy Partner'. And that is for both sides. So this morning we are all partners together, we all go onwards together.

After Paul has begun his letter in the usual way, by saying who it is from,

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, (Philippians 1:1 NIV)

I don't know why we end with the name of the sender, because all that means is that we have to look at the end of the letter to see who sent it. Then Paul tells us to whom he is writing

To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: (Philippians 1:1 NIV)

That is all of us. If you know Jesus and follow him, then you are a saint, you are a holy one, which is what saint means. He then mentions the government of the church, the *episkopoiv* and the *diakonoiv*. The *episkopois* and the *diaconois*, or the overseers (or bishops) and the deacons, or another way of thinking about it, is as bishops and servants. Paul describes himself and Timothy as slaves as *douloi*, *douloi*.

- The word for bishop or overseer comes from the one who watches diligently and so is not one who lords it over others.
- Then you have the servants, deacons and
- The slaves, Paul and Timothy.

But we are all together, we are saints and some have the office of overseer, deacon.... or slave of Christ Jesus, but we are all in partnership together, we all move onwards together.

So what keeps us in partnership? So what keeps us moving onwards together? In verse 5 Paul says

because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,
(Philippians 1:5 NIV)

Our partnership is in the gospel but there is a further fundamental partnership that underwrites all this and we find it in verses 1, 2, 6 and in verse 8. In those verses we have the phrase **in Christ Jesus** or **Jesus Christ**. In the whole of the book the phrase occurs in some 19 verses and it occurs 7 times in chapter 1 and 5 times in these first eight verses.

Possession – Firstly we have the Christ Jesus of possession. Verse 1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: (Philippians 1:1 NIV)

Paul and Timothy were of Christ Jesus and the saints in Philippi were in Christ Jesus. This is possession. You are no longer your own, but Christ's. Latter on in chapter 1, verse 21 Paul says

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21 NIV)

And again in his letter to the church of God in Galatia, Paul writes

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20 NIV)

Paul had come to that point when he realised that his life, his whole being was not his own to do with what he wanted, but was given over to God and what God wanted. I wonder where you are in this? Christ died for me on the cross. He gave himself as a ransom for me, the idea of being bought with a price, but do we then want our lives back?

When we grow up we spend most of our years trying to break away from parents. As a teenager, the test of a fashion garment was to ask your parents if they liked what you had bought and if they said, 'Yes', the garment went straight back to the shop, no messing. As a young person you take on values that are often an antithesis to one's parents, because what do they know about life, especially life today!

But when you come to Christ, you are asking Jesus to take over one's life totally, to have possession of it. This means doing nothing without asking him if that is alright. This means that if he calls you to be a missionary in wherever, that you go.

To be **in Christ Jesus** is also a spatial thing. We are to be right there with him, he is to be the centre of our lives. Where are you with God, with Jesus? Do you feel close to him or far away? Are you in Christ, is he the centre of your being? And this does not necessarily mean feeling the gooey feelings. It means doing God's will and we find that in his Word, the Bible.

So we are the possession of Jesus Christ, but do we live like that? And as his possession we are all in the same boat, we are all together in that, so no-one lord's it over another. We may have different roles, different functions, but we are all saints in partnership, all saints moving onwards together.

Gifts – but in Christ we also are the recipients of great and wonderful gifts. Verse 2

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Philippians 1:2 NIV)

Grace and peace come from the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We have so much grace. It is grace that means our sins are forgiven and that we can come to him with clean hands and a pure heart, not because of anything we do or have done but because of the death of Jesus on the cross.

But it is this very grace that gets Paul into trouble in his letter to the Romans. In chapter 5 he ends the chapter by talking about the problem God had with sin and how to deal with it. The law made things worse, but God's grace sorted it all out. And then he says

...where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 5:20-21 NIV)

So then the lawyers get on the case and the thought goes through the mind, 'Well if grace increases as I sin more, then if I sin more and more, then the grace of God will be lavished on me. So Chapter 6 begins

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?

(Romans 6:1-3 NIV)

It does not really work that way he says, but it does, but we should not think in that way because we are **in Christ Jesus**. But we do have the gift of grace from God, the gift that removes our sins from us, the gift that means that I sin now, today, which knowing me I probably will, then God is ready to forgive me when I come to him in repentance and sorrow.

So as partners in Christ, moving onwards together in the Gospel, grace should typify our dealings with one another. I have heard of Christians going to the same church, living quite close to each other who never speak to one another – one party upset the other party but neither party can really remember what over – where is the grace in that relationship? What has happened to the witness that they give out to the world, for people will notice because things will slip out in conversation and people outside of God's kingdom do see and know a lot more than we think.

Grace should be the benchmark of our relationships one with another. When we mess up, we should do all we can to bring grace into the situation, to want to heal the relationship. What did God do when the human race was at odds with him? Did he wash his hands of the whole affair and say, 'I'll wait for them to come to me, why should I do anything when I provided everything and they have just turned their backs on me?' No he didn't, Jesus came into the world – God's grace - and died for each of us. He came to us, he did all he could for us to heal the breach in the relationship – should we not do any less with others? Should we not do all we can to heal cracks, by comparison in relationship we have at times?

And then we will gain the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is that inner peace that comes from knowing him. Church should be a place of peace, not a place of conflict. This is not to say that challenge is not there and living the Christian life is not risky, but the risks are taken knowing that there is security. One of the great things about a church is where you see people participating and the whole congregation is behind them, wanting them to succeed, willing them on, making it an experience, even through the nerves, of security.

But we need to move on.

Hope – In Christ Jesus is the goal of our hope. This is as Paul says in verse 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*. (Philippians 1:6 NIV)

Until the day of Christ Jesus. The day when he will return to claim for his own, his people. Are you looking forward to that day, or do you live for today, rather than realise that the goal of our hope is the second coming of Christ when he will come in glory and splendour? Our eyes should always be fixed on the horizon and working towards that day when we can no longer bring anyone into the kingdom of God, as an individual or as a church working together in the gospel of Christ.

We are a people of hope and not a people of despair – do others see this as they look in on us? Do we live as a people of expectation or a people who are afraid of the future as others so often are? We know that Jesus is coming again for us, his people.

Affection – and finally we move onwards together in Christ Jesus in affection. Verse 8.

God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 1:8 NIV)

Paul knew the heart of God and the love for others came from God.

The world talks about having the love of a good man or a good woman, but the love of God through his people is far better. Paul was able to love them with the affection of Christ Jesus, the love which took Jesus to the cross, to die in agony. And this love was not lessened by distance, by absence.

Paul and the people of God of Philippi were still moving onwards together, still partners, even though Paul was in prison in Rome. Today we move onwards together with Christians all over this city via the London Baptist Association, all over this nation, via the Baptist Union of Great Britain as we contribute financially to what is known as Home Mission. This is a fund which goes to churches who cannot quite afford a minister, in the form of a grant. Home Mission pays for the Regional Ministers we have who give pastoral aid to churches and ministers, who give leads in mission and training. Home Mission helps to fund other ministries such as chaplaincies.

But then we are also move onwards together with Christians all over the world as we give financial support to BMS World Mission. This is to fund work overseas to take the gospel out to people outside of this country.

We move onwards together in the gospel and we show our affection for other partners by hopefully praying for them and also with our money in giving. Do you pray for others in the fellowship? Are you a member of the Prayer Partnership? This is where you get to pray for and possible with someone for a month, praying for them every day for that month after asking them for some prayer points. If not and you want to know more, then see Brian or Ruth Waterfield. May it be that we can also say like Paul

I thank my God every time I remember you. 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. (Philippians 1:3-6 NIV)

Am I indeed in Jesus Christ? Is He to me indeed Possessor, Lord, giver of grace and peace? Is my life so lived and my work so done in contact with Him that through Him, and not merely through myself, where is “my fruit found”? Is His Promised Day the goal and longing of my heart, as I submit myself to Him that He may perfect His work in me by the way, and watch over myself that I may meet Him single-hearted and ‘without offence’ at the end? Is He the pervading and supreme Interest of my life? Is He the inward Power which colours my thoughts and gives direction and quality to my affections?

Only one person can answer that.