

# Gospel Partnership

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[ 0 : 00 ] Friends, before we dive into our passage this morning, I want to start with two questions to try and take us to the heart of what Philippians is all about. So I don't just want to introduce this passage this morning, but for a moment I want us to think about the whole letter as we embark on this series, Paul's aim in writing to the Philippians, and of course even more importantly God's aim in writing this letter down for all of us in these last days.

So one way or another I take it that we're going to be answering these two questions over the next sort of 10 weeks or so as we work our way through the whole letter.

And they're pretty simple questions, I hope you'll remember them. Number one, who are we? And number two, what do we own? Alright, who are we and what do we own?

I think that's what Philippians is about. Now in our passage this morning, to be honest, the who are we question is sort of in the background. But I'm still going to explain it so that we see how these two subjects are kind of inextricably linked throughout the letter.

The first question then is about identity, right? Who are we? And in particular in this letter, Paul wants us to form our identity around one word or one idea, the idea of citizenship.

[ 1 : 18 ] You see in ancient Philippi, citizenship was very important. The Philippians were very proud of being Roman citizens. Even though if you know where Philippi is or was, it's in northern Greece.

Now I don't want to get sort of bogged down in the history of that for the moment. But just sort of vaguely to fill in the outline for you. During the Roman Civil War that followed Julius Caesar's assassination in 44 BC, the final definitive battle of that conflict happened only a few kilometers outside of Philippi.

So after that battle, Caesar Augustus, who was on the winning team, settled veteran Roman soldiers in Philippi. And he gave Philippi a kind of special status as a Roman colony.

Philippian soil was considered to be Italian soil. Okay, so all of that is to say that the Philippians were very proud of being Roman citizens. And in fact, were particularly fanatical about their Roman citizenship.

As only those sort of migrant enclaves, I guess, on foreign soil might be or away from their homeland. If I can use a modern day analogy, I think it's sort of like, imagine if Brisbane was not considered part of Australia, but we were an American city.

[ 2 : 37 ] You know, here on the Australian continent. Can you sort of imagine that? Imagine if we had a border around us, American soldiers lined the perimeter, American flags were on every lawn.

Right? Imagine if, you know, if you were born in Brisbane, you were born in American soil, like a sort of embassy. We all had American passports. We all sang Star Spangled Banner.

We celebrated Independence Day. Right? That's sort of what Philippi was like. So, of course, the Philippians were fanatical about their Roman status.

Perhaps even more fanatical than your average Roman, right? Because they were an outpost inside foreign territory. They needed to keep fighting for their peculiar and distinctive customs and identity rather than just be swallowed up by Greek culture around them, which is, of course, second best.

And so, Paul is essentially going to argue in this letter that the Philippian Christians now need to adopt a new identity. They need to see themselves first and foremost as citizens of heaven rather than as citizens of Rome.

[ 3 : 46 ] This comes out, perhaps most clearly, in chapter 3, verse 20. If you just want to flick over to chapter 3, verse 20, where Paul says, But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he's not saying that they can't take pride in their Roman citizenship at all anymore. Right? We'll come back to that, perhaps, over the next few weeks as we explore this theme. But what he wants to be clear about is that their citizenship of heaven needs to take precedence over their citizenship of any earthly institution or government or nation.

So, the key verses in the whole letter are at the end of chapter 1, verses 27 to 30. These would be great verses to memorize, actually, over the next few weeks. They sort of sum up the whole book so well.

The only slight problem with that, though, unfortunately, is that the ESV slightly misses the mark on the translation of verse 27. And I'm afraid this week I'm going to have to mention a few translation niggles that I have, which is slightly frustrating.

But literally in verse 27, Paul says something like, Only let your citizenly conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ.

[ 5 : 05 ] If you've got an ESV in front of you, you might have a footnote mentioning that that is kind of more literally what the Greek says, citizenly conduct. And, of course, citizenship is the key theme of the letter, so it's a bit of a shame that it's sort of dropped out there.

But the question is, what does it mean to behave as a citizen? What does it mean to behave worthy of the gospel of Christ? What is appropriate citizenly conduct? All right. And that brings us to our second question, what do we own?

Now, I think this is where the notion of citizenship perhaps lets us down a little bit, because it's sort of become weaker and weaker in our country, probably, especially compared to the way the Romans thought about citizenship.

You see, in ancient Rome, citizenship was about ownership, joint ownership. Citizenship is about sharing certain things in common with your fellow citizens, and therefore being committed together to a common project to promote and protect your society together.

Now, the key word for the idea of ownership throughout the book of Philippians is the word *koinonia*. Right? This is just one of those Greek words that's worth knowing, even if you don't know any other Greek.

[ 6 : 20 ] *Koinonia*. This is the key word about sharing things in common and being committed together to a common project or a common cause. It comes up four times in the book in different forms, which might not sound like very much, but it comes up in every single chapter, and it's sort of the thread that holds the whole thing together.

It also comes up a couple of additional times with a prefix attached, which kind of makes it even more strong. But we'll come back to that. So sometimes it's translated partnership or fellowship, sometimes sharing.

All of those are kind of okay, so long as we understand, I think, the strength of the word. This is about owning something together with other people. So fellowship, for instance, we often sort of just mean hanging out and chatting, don't we?

Like, after church, stick around. We'll have a lunch together because we're going to have fellowship together. And that's important, and actually the word fellowship can mean that.

But that's not the kind of fellowship Paul is talking about here. This is more like the fellowship of the ring. You know what I mean? It's like this noble partnership together where we're committed to a common cause.

[ 7 : 35 ] And Paul wants to talk to us to encourage us to be kind of courageous guardians of the things that we hold in common. Courageous guardians of the things that we hold in common.

And just by the way, that is what is meant by the fellowship of independent evangelical churches. If you're new to our church, we belong to the fellowship of independent evangelical churches. It's not just that we're sort of a group that lump together for convenience or we have lots of picnics together or something like that.

It's about the fact that we're on the same venture together. Or likewise, the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students, you know, as a shout out to our friends. Or even this is what the S is meant to stand for in CMS.

And the church missionary, not the church missionary staff, but the church missionary society. The point is that we're all owners of it together. So in particular, think about some of these elements that bound the citizens of Rome together.

That bound the Roman society together. You've got the Roman emperor. Of course, you've got the city of Rome herself. And then you've got her territories and the spread of Roman ideas and

customs.

[ 8 : 47 ] Honor, peace, bathhouses, aqueducts, military prowess. The *cursus honorum*, which is the order of officers throughout society.

And the *mos maiorum*, which was the customs handed down from ancient, you know, from time in memoriam. These things are all owned by the Roman citizens.

And they are to be celebrated and promoted and gloried in and defended. But again, what Paul is doing in this letter is he's using this idea of citizenship and citizenly ownership to try and help his readers see how together they actually belong to a new society.

Whose primary allegiance is to Christ, not to emperor. To Christ and his gospel and his new city and his ventures and endeavors, his glory.

Christ is the supreme ruler to be adored and obeyed and imitated. Not the Roman emperor. Christ is to be gloried in. And everything about his kingdom is to be celebrated and promoted.

[ 9 : 50 ] And his gospel is to be promoted and defended. And Paul will use that language. The spread of the gospel is the chief contribution of Christian people to the world. And again, imagine the Romans are kind of spreading their ideas and Roman culture as a kind of light to the barbarian hordes around them in the darkness.

Just as the Americans might sing of being the home of the brave and the land of the free. And they're spreading democracy around the world. But Paul wants Christians to see that spreading the gospel of Jesus and celebrating all of his ways of peace and love and truth.

This is the greatest service that we can do for humanity. Forget bathhouses. Let's plant churches. And of course we don't spread the gospel by force like the Romans did at the edge of a sword. And there are various contrasts that Paul will draw attention to. But the key thing to understand is that he's developing this parallel. That just as the Philippians had been card carrying devotees of Rome and proud of their Roman citizenship.

So now they must transfer their primary allegiance to Christ and devote their whole lives to him and to his cause. They must cherish his name, his gospel, his kingdom. These are the most important things that they own.

[ 11 : 10 ] Is that clear? So enough of an introduction. But I think that's an introduction for the whole letter. Who are we? We're citizens of heaven. What do we own? Well, as it turns out, all sorts of things as citizens of heaven.

We own the gospel, the spirit, the mind of Christ. All of these things we'll come to as we go through the letter. Let's dive into this first chapter then. First, the greeting in verses 1 and 2. Notice in verse 1 that it's not just Paul writing.

It's Paul and Timothy. Which is sort of a detail that we might normally skip over. But actually when you think about this letter, it's quite important. Because Paul and Timothy are gospel partners, aren't they?

They're co-workers. They're writing this letter together. And this is going to be Paul's entire point throughout the letter. That he's not a lone ranger. But he's a member of a team. Citizenship is about co-ownership.

And what better way to demonstrate that from the very beginning than through co-authorship. Paul and Timothy describe themselves as slaves or bond servants. Again, unfortunately, servants is rather too weak a translation.

[ 12 : 12 ] Because Paul and Timothy, of course, are not merely Christ's employees or volunteers. No, they belong to Christ. They're owned by him. As we do. And not just from time to time, but permanently.

So our service to him is not optional. It's obligatory. It's a matter of duty. And additionally, think about this. In a letter all about citizenship. And the status that comes along with that.

Paul and Timothy want the Philippians to know from the very beginning that they would rather be identified as slaves of Christ than as citizens of Rome. In other words, from the get-go, Paul and Timothy are confronting and subverting the Roman values so deeply prized in Philippi.

Now, who are Paul and Timothy writing to in Philippi? Paul says, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons.

In other words, to the saints. That is this word that identifies believers as a distinct community. A holy, separated out from the rest of the world. We no longer belong to this world because Christ has chosen us out of the world.

[ 13 : 23 ] The point is, again, that from the very beginning of the letter, Paul and Timothy want to remind the Philippians that there's something more important than belonging to Rome, and that is belonging to God. And then this is the only letter where Paul targets the overseers and deacons in his introduction.

See, the church leaders. And I take it that's because he wants to honor, in particular, those men who are working hard to serve the team. He's trying to build up a picture of the fellowship, of the partnership of the team.

So he wants to highlight the team leaders in his introduction. Overseers would be the older men, especially responsible for leading the church, teaching the word of God, and so on.

The godly patriarchs of the community. Deacons, the word diakonos is the Greek word. So really, deacons is just a transliteration, not a translation, sort of just a made-up English word that sounds the same, which doesn't actually help us very much on understanding what it means.

But probably something like servants or assistants or even helpers would be suitable here. And I think whatever church backgrounds we've come from, we've got to be a bit careful about reading in our theories about deacons or whatever into this text.

[ 14 : 36 ] The word just means servants or assistants or helpers. The point being that these men were appointed to assist the overseers and serve and help the church in various ways, from time to time, whatever may have been needed.

Later, in his usual way, sorry, lastly, in his usual way, Paul greets the Philippians, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. This phrase unites Jews and Gentiles.

Grace is sort of a Christianized, Gentile greeting, and peace is a classic Jewish greeting. And of course, it sums up the blessings of the gospel.

Here is what will define the new multi-ethnic but monocultural community of God's people. It's as if these are the words that are on Zion's emblem.

You know what I mean? Instead of SPQR and an eagle, or instead of Advance Australia and a kangaroo and an emu, the Christian community has grace and peace as our motto, and perhaps a lion and a lamb, I'm not sure.

[ 15 : 42 ] But you see, governing everything that we are and everything we do, underpinning our society, holding us up, and holding us together is God's love for us that we don't deserve, grace, and the peace with God that Jesus won for us at the cross.

So, grace and peace to all the saints who belong to the new Jerusalem. And that's the greeting.

And as is Paul's usual custom, having greeted his readers, he almost always begins his letters with a paragraph or two about thanksgiving and prayer.

But perhaps more than any other letter in the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Philippians just bubbles over with joy and thankfulness all the way through. In the second half of the letter, he's going to command us to rejoice and be thankful in any and every circumstance.

But in the first half of the letter, he's providing a model for us himself as he tells us about his own thankfulness and joy. So, look at verses 3 and 4. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy.

You see how many times he repeats the word all or every or always? Every time he thinks of them, he thanks God for them. And he's just so overflowing with gratitude for them.

[ 17 : 02 ] And he thanks God for every one of them. Not just the overseers and assistants, but everyone in the church, all of them. And in verse 5, it's because they're all partners, you see.

Verse 5, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Now that's our word koinonia right there. Right? Partnership. Joint ownership. Paul's thankfulness and joy in this letter all stems from the fact that the Philippians have all been his faithful partners from the very beginning.

From the first day until now, he says. And actually, we can read about Paul's first day in Philippi in the book of Acts. So if you just, in your Bibles, flip over to chapter 16, Acts chapter 16, we'll read about the first day in Philippi.

This is when Paul, Timothy, and Silas, and maybe some others, Luke was there, arrived in Philippi and shared the gospel with a bunch of women at a prayer meeting. So let me pick it up in verse 11 just to refresh our memories about what happened that first day.

So setting sail from Troas, we made a direct voyage to Samothrace and the following day to Neapolis and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman

colony.

[18:27] Very important. We remained in this city some days. And on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to the riverside where we supposed there was a place of prayer. And we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together.

One who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. I think that's one of my favorite verses in the Bible. Isn't it just wonderful to see God's kindness and his power to open Lydia's heart? But the important thing for now is to keep reading because look at what happens next.

And after she was baptized and her household as well, she urged us saying, if you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.

And she prevailed upon us. Now friends, that is partnership. You see, it's koinonia. As soon as Lydia believed the gospel, she joined the gospel cause.

[19:34] And that's what we mean by gospel partnership. A gospel partner is not just someone who believes the gospel or says they believe the gospel. It's someone who believes the gospel in such a way that they own the gospel cause.

They start making radical choices to help advance the gospel and support gospel ministry. Now, of course, the first step in being a gospel partner is believing the gospel.

You've got to believe that Jesus is Lord to join his team. But it doesn't sort of end with private belief in your heart or your own personal salvation.

No, true belief in the gospel will always turn us into gospel partners, partners in the gospel cause, in the mission of the gospel. And see, as soon as Lydia believed the gospel, immediately she insisted on providing lodgings for Paul and his team of evangelists.

From the first day, you see, she became a gospel partner. She wanted to be a faithful supporter.

So, let's go back to Philippians.

[20:40] And now we're down in verse 6. Paul's just talked about the past, first day, and the present. So, the first day he met the Philippians and how their partnership has continued faithfully for many years.

He's writing to them now probably about 10 years after the first day from a prison cell in Rome. We'll see more of that next week. That's not absolutely certain, but I think it's the most likely setting.

So, he's talked about the past, the present. Now, in verse 6, you see he wants to shift to talk about the future. He says, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

In other words, just as it was the Lord that opened Lydia's heart at the very beginning so that she believed the message of grace and peace in Jesus, so also Paul is confident that the Lord will finish his good work in Lydia's heart.

He will bring it to completion, to perfection, as he would in all the believers at Philippi. See, Paul is completely and utterly convinced of this, that God will finish his good work in the believers, that ultimately it doesn't depend on them.

[21:54] Thank goodness. I mean, Paul will urge them later on in the letter to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. So it's not a cause for complacency, but it is a great cause for comfort, to know that God is a faithful God who finishes what he starts.

He's not like that, you know that funny proverb, the sluggard who buries his hand in the dish but won't bring it back to his mouth, just cannot even be bothered to finish what he starts.

No, God is not like that. God is going to follow through with the Philippians. God doesn't grant people new birth only to abandon them later on. This, of course, is what it means for our lives to be dominated by grace and peace.

Grace, God's undeserved favor that he's going to carry us from first to last. Our salvation is entirely in his hands, not on our shoulders. And thank God because his hands are powerful and safe.

He will keep us to the end. No one can snatch us out of his hand. Now, in verse 7, Paul seems to realize that some people might react with skepticism to such bold claims.

[23:07] So he explains himself and his confidence. He justifies his optimism. It is right for me to feel this way about you all because I hold you in my heart for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Now, let's just slow down and unpack this verse a little bit carefully. The word feel there in verse 7, again, I think is a bit misleading. Of course, Paul is filled with emotions throughout this passage and that's all good.

But here, he's actually talking about something that he thinks, something he's persuaded of. The problem with our feelings, of course, is that they're so topsy-turvy, aren't they?

We need to actually make sure that we build our feelings on solid thoughts rather than just letting our feelings wreak havoc with our thoughts. And Paul's confidence here is based on good, hard, solid thinking.

So that's where he starts. Again, he talks about holding the Philippians in his heart. But remember, in the Bible, the heart is not primarily about emotions. Actually, the heart is the place where you do your thinking.

[ 24 : 23 ] The bowels are where you feel your emotions. And we'll come back to that in a second. But here, Paul has some very definite thoughts about the Philippians. Certain things that he knows about them that gives him confidence for the future.

And you see, what he knows is that they're all partakers with him of grace, both in his imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. Now, this is where we get sort of another reference to that koinonia word, except that this time it's a little bit special because Paul adds a little prefix to it.

So it's sort of even more emphatic. It's like our English word co. So that here, he talks about them being co-partners or co-joint owners, which seems superfluous, doesn't it?

I mean, what exactly is the difference between a joint owner and a co-joint owner? But I think the emphasis is probably on the equality of the partnership, that they are equal partners.

And of course, that's the thing about grace, isn't it? Grace is very equalizing. It's not about merit. It's not about achievement. It's not about first in, best dressed and scoring different marks on a bell curve or something like that.

[ 25 : 35 ] Grace is very unifying. Paul is saying that we're all united because we're all co-joint owners of God's grace together. Grace, you see, is not anyone's private property.

No, it belongs to all of us as a society. It's like a national park that we all get to stroll through and swim in. And you see, Paul is confident that they are all co-joint owners with him of grace because he has seen God's grace at work in their lives in two ways specifically.

Firstly, first, in their support for him in his imprisonment and secondly, in their imitation of him in taking up the gospel mantle and continuing to fight for the cause in his absence.

I just think about how tempting it might have been for them to distance themselves from Paul while he was in prison. I mean, hardly a great honor for these proud Roman citizens to be associated with the crazy old fanatic, Paul, locked up in a Roman prison.

But even while he's been in prison, they haven't been ashamed of him, they haven't distanced themselves from him. That's why he's so thankful for them and he's convinced that they are genuinely born-again gospel partners and grace co-joint partners with him.

[ 26 : 56 ] And secondly, they've continued the fight, right? They've been doing exactly what co-owners would do. They've been continuing the fight for the cause, defending and confirming the gospel. They haven't scurried into hiding or been frittering away their time with sort of trivialities.

No, they've remained committed and on about the gospel. All right, then as we move into verses 8 to 11, Paul begins to tell the Philippians about his passionate prayers for them.

Listen to what he says in verse 8. For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. I said we'd get to the bowels here.

So here we are. Literally, he yearns for them with the bowels of Christ Jesus. And it's as if he has Christ Jesus' organs, his bowels.

Because the bowels are where you feel moved, don't you? You feel sick to your stomach or you feel butterflies or you feel giddy. I mean, I won't tell you too many of the details, but Catherine and the younger kids aren't here this morning because anyway, it doesn't matter.

[ 28 : 03 ] Now, Paul has his solid thoughts about the Philippians, but also here he has these gooey feelings for them, profound feelings. He loves the Philippians. He longs for them because he has the love of Christ kind of controlling him.

It's like it's flowing through him. To return to the citizenship image, see in the Roman Empire, the values and virtues come from the top.

Honor, status, rewards, rewards, glory, are all bestowed on those who live up to the emperor's ideals. Things like dignity, courage, piety.

The emperor is the paragon of Roman virtue and citizens are expected to see the world the way the emperor sees the world, to share his world view. Caesar Augustus, for instance, was very good at creating a kind of symbolic universe to communicate himself and his world view to his empire.

Well, likewise, a big part of this letter is going to be about sharing the mind of Christ, thinking like Christ and even feeling the way Christ does. If you pay attention, you'll notice words to do with cognition, thinking, what you're doing with your mind coming up all over the place in this letter.

[ 29 : 21 ] I think more frequently than in any other of Paul's letters. And of course, the main thing about Christ that makes him so startlingly different from all other rulers is that all of his thinking and feeling is saturated by love.

He loves us so much. He loves his people so much that he laid down his life for us. He treasures us. We are precious to him.

Christ has this deep affection for his people. He delights in you. And that's why in Christ's kingdom, love is what cascades down through all of our relationships.

Christian love is about sharing in Christ's love for each other. Feeling the same way about each other that Christ feels towards each of us.

and so Paul says, and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

[ 30 : 40 ] So Paul loves the Philippians with the bowels of Christ and Paul's prayer is that the Philippians would abound in love more and more. Love for God, love for one another, love for the lost.

Actually, all the loves probably that Roy was talking about this morning. Now, Paul knows that the Philippians are going well. He's not being critical of them but he still prays that their love might increase and so no doubt that's something we could pray for each other too.

And secondly, though, notice that it's love guided and directed by knowledge and all discernment. It's not just goopy but Paul goes back to thinking. Even though love is not less than feelings, it is more than feelings.

Remember Paul's famous poem in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way.

It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. And that last line is probably particularly important in this context, isn't it? That in order to love someone you need to know the truth.

[ 31 : 49 ] You can't properly love someone without the truth because you need to know what's good for people in order to love them. That's why knowledge and discernment is actually really important for love.

It's also, if you're not a Christian here and this might seem confusing, but it's also why Christians can't just affirm people in their wrongdoing if we love them.

When we know that gambling is destructive or that drunkenness poisons our bodies and our relationships or that sexual immorality damages those who engage in it, because we know the truth from God's word, we know that it's not loving to affirm people in their wickedness.

It's cruel and cowardly. It's because God is not a killjoy that he wants us to repent and steer clear of sin because actually it's sin that steals our joy.

So growing in love is also about growing in knowledge and all discernment so that, you see verse 10, then we can approve what is excellent. Now this word about approving what is excellent is about things that matter, approving things that are important.

[ 33 : 05 ] Paul wants us to be able to recognize the superior things from the inferior, the best, even from the good, and then of course to be able to live accordingly.

And again, Paul is not criticizing the Philippians here. He's thankful to God for them, for their partnership, and he's praying for them. They'll continue to have their kind of priorities right. That they've always valued their partnership with him in the gospel.

They've always valued their citizenship in heaven and all the things that they own as citizens of heaven. And what he's praying for them is that they'll continue to have their priorities right.

They'll grow in their convictions of the value of the gospel, that they'll learn to discern more and more the better things, the higher priorities. That they'll treasure their citizenship in heaven above their citizenship on earth without rubbishing their earthly citizenship.

And then you see, if they are able to approve what is excellent, then they'll be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God.

[ 34 : 15 ] I think of the bride in the book of Revelation who's clothed in this glorious white dress, the righteous deeds of the saints.

That is what Paul is talking about here. He has the final day of judgment in mind. He wants to see the Philippians standing there pure and blameless and filled with the fruit of righteousness, just absolutely drenched and covered in righteous deeds that are glowing as it were.

And that'll only come about if in God's grace he empowers them to abound in love, to grow in knowledge and all discernment, to approve what is excellent, etc. And then, so notice once again, it all comes back to God, to the glory and praise of God.

Paul is not ultimately relying on the Philippians to purify themselves and make it to the last day. No, otherwise their righteousness would be to their own glory and praise, to their own credit.

No, otherwise, but Paul is praying to God that he would be at work in them and that through Christ Jesus they would be filled with the fruit of righteousness so that in the end it would all be to God's glory.

[ 35 : 28 ] Alrighty then, it's about time we've finished. Remember our two questions from the beginning. Who are we and what do we own? The book of Philippians is all about these two questions and by the end of our series my prayer is that as a church we will fall in love if you like with these two marvellous answers that Paul gives to these two important questions.

Again, maybe you could pray that over the next couple of months that we would be captivated by God's vision of our identity and of what belongs to us that he lays out in this book. We are citizens of heaven citizens of no obscure city and we ought to be proud of our city and how noble how privileged to belong to such majestic society and such a wonderful king.

And in this opening passage Paul wants us to know in particular about two things that we own as citizens. Two things that of course go together the gospel and God's grace.

The question is are we like the Philippians doing everything we can to advance the gospel and to celebrate God's grace? Do we understand just how precious the gospel is and how boldly we should glory in it, boast about it, spread it far and wide to roll back the darkness around us?

The Philippians suffered for the gospel, they gave money, they gave their time, their energy to publicize across the world the gospel of God's grace. And of course not as a matter of laboring under the burden of rules and regulations and rosters, the three dreaded ours, but as a result of grasping God's grace, of being gripped by the gospel, which begs the question for us is that what we're doing?

[ 37 : 20 ] And perhaps first of all for some of us here this morning the answer really is no. And this should be a cause for soul-searching. Have we really understood the gospel of God's grace?

My friends, there's always more room for gospel partners. If in your heart of hearts you know that you're really more of a passenger than a partner, and let me encourage you this morning to start coming to church, not just to be served, but to serve.

start to look for opportunities to love those around you, to share the gospel as our Lord Jesus Christ has loved us. My encouragement to you is that wonderfully, if you do that, what you'll find is that there's nothing quite like the joy of standing shoulder to shoulder with people and working hard.

The camaraderie, the love between co-workers, co-joint owners in the gospel. When you come to church not just looking for others to serve you or to kind of make the day work, but when you come to church conscious that you're one of the co-owners of everything that's happening here, so you want to make it work, you want to make it a good day, you want to encourage people, then you find that you are encouraged.

You're going to help welcome people even if you're not rostered on officially. You're going to sing loudly and maybe even in tune if you can, but don't worry too much about that. You're going to try and have edifying, gospel truth saturated conversations after church because there are people here who need to be encouraged, who are feeling miserable and lonely this week, normally me, come up to me and encourage me.

[ 39 : 01 ] Gospel partnership is not about some sort of badge or official position, certainly not just for overseers or deacons or apostles. It's about every one of us, each one of us, playing our part on the team because we belong to this society.

We are seeking to love and serve one another and we are finding our joy in service. Okay, so it might be a challenge to some who are here but secondly, of course, there are lots of people here this morning who are gospel partners together and I think probably the big takeaway from this passage for us, brothers and sisters, is that we can be thankful and we ought to be thankful. Look at how Paul is overflowing with thankfulness in this passage and there is so much to give thanks for here at SLBC. I mean, there are many churches out there more interested in rituals than in the gospel, more interested in powerful emotional experiences than in the gospel, more interested in Christian morality or politics or social action than in the gospel and I think one of the things we mustn't take for granted here, one of the great joys of belonging to SLBC, is that everywhere you look, left and right, there are like-minded gospel partners to share life with. If you're feeling alone or discouraged at the moment, for all our flaws and warts, whatever they may be, and our inefficiencies and inadequacies and the frustrations of church life and there are some, I know that, because from time to time we all grow tired and weary and we sin and we hurt one another.

I'm not trying to sweep those things under the rug. But even in those moments, let us not forget the great blessings we have, the great society we belong to.

[ 40 : 55 ] The gospel is the most precious thing we have and we all co-own it together. Every week as I walk in the church, I love seeing the people praying beforehand for us. That's gospel partnership.

If you get here early enough, they hide out the back there and pray for us. I'm never the first person here. There's always the set-up team, the welcomers, the musos, working away.

That's gospel partnership. People who read the Bible for us this morning, prayed for us this morning, that was wonderful to pray together, wasn't it? And such a helpful Bible reading of 2 Samuel.

And of course, there are all the unseen things people are doing to invite their neighbors along to church, evangelizing colleagues, handing out Bibles and tracts, leading growth groups, praying for our partners like CMS and AFES, giving financially, making coffee, the holiday kids club, which I needed every single morning.

Time would fail me to tell of it all. And I think the takeaway from Philippians 1 is that we ought to celebrate and give thanks.

[ 42 : 02 ] And there isn't enough time in the day to give thanks for everyone and all the things that they are doing as partners in the gospel, while at the same time praying that we might abound more and more in love and knowledge and all the sermon.

Not just sitting on our laurels, but growing and encouraging each other to press on. So let's pray now. Loving Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for inviting us into your family, into your society, making us citizens of heaven by your grace.

We do pray, Father, that you would grow us more and more in love for one another and for the gospel. We pray that you give us knowledge and all discernment so that we may be able to approve what is excellent and so that throughout our lives we might continue to glorify you and serve you with many, many, many loving, good deeds.

And we pray, Father, that we might be found on that final day filled with the fruit of righteousness, standing before our Lord Jesus Christ to your glory and your praise. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.