



Partnership in the Gospel

Opening Prayer

Almighty and ever-living God, You make us both to will and to do those things that are good and acceptable in Your sight. Let Your fatherly hand ever guide us and Your Holy Spirit ever be with us to direct us in the knowledge and obedience of Your Word that we may obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

How would you summarize this passage?

The Apostle Paul offers thanksgiving and prayer for the Philippians. Paul does this “with joy” because of the partnership in the Gospel that he has with the Philippians. This partnership in the Gospel allows Paul to boldly declare that God will bring to completion the good work He began in the Philippians at the day of Jesus Christ (the Last Day).

What is the context of this passage?

Paul writes this letter, while in jail, to Christians (or a congregation) with whom he had previously done mission work. The Philippians had given financial gifts to Paul on a few occasions, two of them a couple of years back (Phil. 4:16) and one more recently (Phil. 4:10). This most recent gift might have been to support Paul’s daily needs while he was in prison, as prisoners often had to provide for their food and basic needs even while they were in jail. Paul rejoices in these gifts of financial support from the Philippians but is even more thankful for their partnership in the Gospel.

Why is the work that God has already begun in us significant for our view of congregational partnerships?

Paul declares that we are reconciled to and made a new creation through our baptism into Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:16-17). Since we are made new, we no longer consider things from the perspective of the world or our old sinful nature. This is especially to be true of how we consider other Christians. We no longer consider them according to the flesh, but according to who they are in Christ Jesus, our partner in the Gospel.

How should keeping in mind the day of Jesus Christ (the Last Day) affect our efforts when it comes to congregational partnerships?

The view of the Last Day reminds us of what is truly important. It is so easy to lose sight of the Last Day as we live our lives in this world. We can easily look to our possessions or our desires as the driving force for what we do. But the promises of God are to be the driving force of our lives in this world. This is to be done not in such a way that we talk about escaping this world (John 17:15). Instead, our view of the Last Day and the promises of God becomes our focus as we seek to live according to what God, our Heavenly Father, has called us to.

How does God's Word challenge our thinking and shape our understanding of partners in the Gospel?

Ideally, we think of our missionaries, seminaries and colleges, and Synod and district as partners with whom we work in various ways (prayer, financial support, resource sharing, mutual conversation and consolation, etc.). However, this is not always the case. Often in our congregations, we think the only partners in the Gospel we have are the other members of our congregation. Sometimes we might not think of others as partners at all. However, Paul calls the Christians in Philippi partners even though they are in different locations and haven't seen each other in years. God has joined them together by grace. Paul makes the point that it is not location but the Gospel that brings them together and should encourage them to strive side-by-side for the faith of the Gospel (Phil. 1:27).

What have you learned about partnerships in the Gospel from this passage or study?

Participants should better understand how the Gospel has already made them partners, especially with other LCMS Christians. In the LCMS, we really have one big partnership, which allows us to work together in various ways, including supporting mission work. Just as the Philippians partnered with Paul, we are partners in the Gospel with other LCMS congregations and members. Instead of seeing other congregations as competition or worrying about how working with another church might cause us to compromise on things like time for worship or programs, we should really be asking how we can work together efficiently for the sake of the Gospel and considering the day of Jesus Christ.

What can you or your congregation do to work with other "members," considering this Word from God?

Answers will vary. This might range from holding some joint activities with a neighboring LCMS church to forming an official congregational partnership.

With whom can you talk about ways to promote partnerships in the Gospel?

Answers will vary. This might involve talking to other churches or leaders in the community about how a congregation can work together with others to benefit the community. It might involve conversations with leaders of area LCMS congregations about a joint activity like a youth event, a retreat for some different groups in the church, or hosting a seminar or circuit forum. Finally, conversations might be had with area pastors, elders, or council members of other area LCMS congregations about exploring a formal partnership arrangement.

Closing Prayer

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.