

They seem to be going out of fashion don't they? Good now you are listening and thinking what is he talking about – what is going out of fashion?

I am thinking about letters and specifically thank you letters. Now so much communication is done electronically that sending a thank you letter seems to have gone by the board. However, I do hope that those of you who are Mum's have at least received a card today expressing thanks for all you have done for your child.

I'm sure we all enjoy getting such letters. At home I have a file of letters of appreciation – a thin file agreed - but when I'm having a bad day I have been able to look through and gain encouragement from them.

This letter to the Philippians is a thank you letter. It was probably triggered by this church sending a gift to Paul as we see in Phil 4:14-16, "Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need." Clearly they had sent some practical gift, probably money to Paul who at that point was in prison in Rome, and he responded with this letter of thanks for them and for what he describes in v5 as their 'partnership in the gospel'

If we look at v3-6 we see Paul express his thanks.

Every time he remembered them he was moved to thank God. I wonder if we have people in our lives who whenever they come to mind we thank God for them, parents, siblings, teachers, friends, mentors. As Paul recalled his time in Philippi on his second missionary journey his heart was warmed he remember Lydia, the jailor, the slave girl and countless others there who had come to faith in Jesus Christ. He thanked God them v5, because they had partnered with him in the gospel. But also because v6 he had confidence that God would continue the work of growing their faith and using them in service right up until the end.

In vs7 he gives the reason why they had this place in his heart and how v8 he longs for them. If we read v7 in the ESV it says, "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 defence and confirmation of the gospel." He gave thanks because of their sharing with him in his imprisonment, through their gifts but also in the defence of the gospel.

Then with his thanks to God for them he also commends them to God in prayer, v9-11. He prays that their love would grow, presumably for God, and through that for others. He prays for their growing

in knowledge of God and his will so that they will know what is best and be kept free from sin and fruitful for God until the day that Jesus returns.

There we are that's the passage but before you put your iphones and notepads away I want to explore with us the heart of what it was that cause the apostle to have such a warmth towards this church and for him to give such grateful thanks to God for them. I do this because we like are a church like them and if Paul were to think of us and write to us it would be great if he could write some of the same things and supremely that we are 'partners in the gospel'.

So let's understand what Paul was saying of and to them so that we can learn from it.

1. They were partners

We are very familiar with partners such as Morecambe and Wise, Torvill and Dean, Cameron and Clegg.

We see that such partnerships exist for purpose, there is a benefit from the partnership and a strength through the partnership.

So Torvill and Dean came together to win a gold medal - there was a purpose. You could say the same of Cameron and Clegg.

Morecambe and Wise might not have been heard of as comedians had they not come together. Together they were better than they were apart.

Cameron and Clegg through their coalition, whatever we think of it politically, have been able to govern the country, which they would not have been able to do separately – there is strength in partnership.

When Paul wrote to these Christians in Philippi and referred to them as his partners we can see some of the same threads.

They had gained much from Paul in terms of their gospel partnership not least through him they had come to faith and been set on the path of sharing the gospel. Together they shared the same goal.

In a couple of weeks time we will be working in partnership with Nick Tucker and the team from Oak Hill and I can assure you from meeting with the team again a week ago that we share a common goal to see people here in Chineham discover more about Jesus Christ.

But now Paul was in prison and they were doing the work in Philippi which Paul could no longer do. They were better together than apart. Again with our partnership with the Oak Hill team we can achieve more together.

Paul was grateful for their support as we have already seen and they presumably were grateful for Paul's initiatives in moving forward with the gospel which they were happy to buy into. They gained strength in the gospel mission from each other. Again that is part of the reason of the team from

Oak Hill coming along to be with us that together we may strengthen each other as we work together and as we gain from their gifts and they learn from working alongside us.

Paul recognised his partnership in the gospel with the Christians in Philippi and as we serve Jesus here in Chineham we are a partnership together and we extend that partnership as we draw in the friends from Oak Hill.

Together we share a common goal, we are better than apart and we gain strength to share the gospel. They were partners

2. they were gospel partners

If partnerships were for a purpose, the purpose of the partnership Paul described with these Christians in Philippi was for the gospel and the partnership we share as a church here at Christ Church, and will draw the team from Oak Hill into, is for the purpose of the gospel. But what exactly does that mean and how might it affect what we do?

As far as we can see what had happened in Philippi was that Paul had arrived as we read in Acts 16. On the Sabbath he had gone outside the city to find a place of prayer and there met Lydia “She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home.” (Acts 16:14-15) Others as we read were added to that group and a church began. However not long after their short stay in prison Paul and Silas left Philippi, “After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.” (Acts 16:40) While Paul did return later, the church was in a sense left to get on with it and that they did, seeing the vine planted there by the seeds of the gospel brought by Paul continue to grow and flourish. So Paul referred to them as partners with him in the work of the gospel. I think that meant at least four things.

a. acceptance – the beginning of their partnership was their own acceptance of the gospel.

I was brought up in Kettering. The first house I lived in was 9 Wood Street. Across the road from me lived a friend called Peter. As we grew up he like me went to watch Kettering Town Football club. I was introduced to them by my aunt and him by his Dad. Later we moved house and now across the road lived another friend Michael who to be honest just was not interested in Kettering Town. I know you will find that hard to believe. Two of us were followers because having been taken to see Kettering we enjoyed it.

When Paul spoke to these Christians as being partners he knew that they had been introduced to the gospel and accepted it and bought into it as it were. Paul knew v6 that God had begun a good work in them! They were partners because they accepted the gospel. It had changed their lives as indeed it has for many of us here this morning. But if you are here or if you are listening on the

download and have not accepted Jesus as your saviour and come to know the forgiveness of your sin through his death on the cross then please let me humbly encourage you to do that.

b. identify – having seen the gospel work in their lives and the lives of those around them they identified with the aims of sharing the gospel. This church was not content simply to say well Paul has come and done the business that's great, rather they rolled up their sleeves and said what Paul has helped us to discover through the gospel we want others to discover. They had bought into gospel sharing because they knew how it radically changed people's lives. Partnership meant identifying with the aims, the goals. We see that in the way they supported Paul and in the words from v7, "for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel."

We have just seen a bi-election in Eastleigh and as part of that UKIP seem to have done well. It would appear that many people there identified with the message that UKIP were presenting. They may only have shared partnership in terms of a vote but clearly they identified sufficiently to do that. They shared even if for just that moment the aims and goals of that political party.

Paul recognised that these Christians also identified with the aims of the spread of the gospel that had drawn Paul to Philippi. Friends I think this speaks to us again as we draw close to DISCOVER. In that God calls us to partnership in the spread of the gospel and that means identifying with Paul and with each other in this task. Buying into it and saying yes I do agree that we as a church should be involved in the spread of the good news of what God the Father has done for us in Jesus.

I wonder is that where you are at? Are you saying yes we should be sharing the gospel?

c. co-operate – it is when we accept what God has done for us through the gospel and identify with the overall aim of sharing that gospel with others that we actually do something and work together in the spread of the gospel. That was what these Christians had done and why Paul was thankful for them. For he knew that they had been active in sharing the gospel in Philippi. That of course is partnership. Paul had been there briefly, shared the gospel seen people come to faith and moved on. The task of continuing the growth of the church was left to those who were there but of course with Paul praying for them. That was partnership as they took responsibility for gospel growth in Philippi. We can see that if we look across to 2:16, "as you hold out the word of life".

We like many have a neighbourhood watch group in our road. Many of us have bought into the idea that we need to keep an eye out for each other. We recognise that while the police may sometimes wander up and down the road they cannot have a continual presence there and so we co-operate with them in partnership by being their eyes and ears in order to help protect the community. The other day I saw my neighbour's garage open and two young chaps went in. I was a bit concerned until I saw them first measuring and then drilling and realised they must be workmen though I

couldn't see a van. I hope I was displaying an active concern and would have acted if anything had been amiss.

The Philippians were co-operating with Paul by taking the gospel message and working with it. In 2 Tim 1:13-14 Paul encouraged Timothy with these words, "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you." They had taken what Paul had taught them and they were guarding it, not in terms of keeping it under lock and key but in terms of passing it on faithfully and truly as Paul had taught them.

Partnership involves not just accepting the gospel for ourselves and not just saying yes it is a good idea to share it but it involves doing it.

Now I am sure that in Philippi people did that in different ways and to different degrees, partnerships are not always worked out equally, ask Rodney Trotter! So what we do as partners may be different. The things we do as partners will be very varied.

We do it in prayer as we pray for the events coming up, as we pray for our contact people, the wall of boxes is not growing very fast. Have you put a name of someone you are praying for in a shoebox and added it to the wall? We do it as we pray for the team who will come and share with us.

But then we do it as we invite our contact people to the events. These events will only be worthwhile if we invite people to them who are yet to come to faith. We do it together encouraging each other as we do it.

We do it as we share something of our journey with our person of peace and as we seek to answer some of their questions.

Partnership is accepting the gospel, identifying with the aim to spread the gospel and co-operating with others in sharing that gospel.

Then finally it involves

d. support

their partnership with Paul was not just what they were doing in Philippi but through their support of him and his ministry in Rome even though he was in prison. This is another aspect of partnership supporting those who are serving the gospel in a different way and a different place. These Christians partnered with Paul 1:19 as they prayed for him and 4:16 as they supported him with gifts.

We have just had the film from Lorna Randall in Uganda. We are partners with her even if we have never been to Uganda and we pray for her and support her financially and personally through messages. The same is true of all our mission partners. The same is true for Nick Tucker and the team from Oak Hill. Partnership involves support.

Mother's day is often a reminder to families of the need to be partners in the family not letting Mum do it all. Today under the title 'sharing the load' we re being reminded that we are partners in the gospel as we accept the wonder of what God has done for us in Jesus, as we identify with the gospel goal of the church, as we co-operate and work together to share the gospel in Chineham and as we support each other in that support the team from Oak Hill who will come to partner with us and continue to support the wider mission of the church.