

THE PASTOR'S JOY AND CONFIDENCE NO. 2154

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 13, 1890,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of my grace.”
Philippians 1:3-7.*

THE Epistle to the Philippians is the epistle of joy. Bengel sums it up in two Latin words, which, being interpreted, signify, “I rejoice, rejoice you.” Here we come to that sweet fruit of the Spirit which we call “Joy.”

The statement Paul makes about the Philippian church shows to what a high estate a church can come. Beloved, we of the Tabernacle never wish to be like the church in Galatia which was bewitched by false teachers who led away the people from the vital doctrine of justification by faith. Paul had to be very sharp with them and to lay down the grand fundamentals of free grace so as to bring them back to the one sure rock on which they ought to have built. Into that condition, by the grace of God, we have never fallen. At the same time I am afraid we have never reached as far as the Philippians went and this morning it is my intense desire that while I show you what they attained, every member of this church may resolve, in the Holy Spirit, that he will labor to bring us to that happy condition. May God the Holy Spirit fire us with a devout ambition not to be a whit behind the best of the apostolic churches! The possibilities of a great church like this are immeasurable. We may not sit down and *dream* of what we can do. We must feel our heart pulsing with a strong desire that whatever God can do with us and by us may be carried out to the fullest. If in anything there has been a falling short, may each member be determined that the responsibility shall not lie at his door!

I invite you to think, first, that the apostle speaks of the church of Philippi as of *a people whom he always remembered with joy*. Secondly, as of *a people whom he regarded with confidence*, for he says of them, “Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” And thirdly, we perceive that he viewed them as *a people concerning whom he gave all the glory to God alone*. This fact is very conspicuous throughout the whole passage.

I. First, in the church at Philippi we see A PEOPLE WHOM THE APOSTLE REMEMBERED WITH JOY.

This is seen in his declaration that *all his memory of them was happy*—“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” A better rendering is, “I thank my God upon all my remembrance of you.” Taking the long run of his acquaintance with them—remembering them from the time when he preached by the riverside and Lydia was converted—even until the moment of his writing to them as a prisoner in Rome—he knew nothing of them but that which gave him joy. He thought how they had, of their own free, will ministered again and again to his necessities when no other church was mindful of him. He says, “Now you Philippians know, also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but you only.” Their grateful benevolence caused him to thank God. He had no dash of bitter in the cup of his happy memory of them. As long as he remembered their prayers, their courage, their faith, their labor, their unity, their constancy, their zeal, their thoughtfulness and their liberality, he felt unmingled gratitude to the Author of all these excellent things. I trust there are many ministers who, with perhaps some slight reserve, can say of their people, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” If any man can say this, I claim to be that man! All have not been faithful to God in the long years of my ministry, but, taking you as a

whole, you have been true to the core. This was a great wonder at Philippi, for wanderings from sound doctrine, or noticeable departures from the way of rectitude, or acts of unkindness to their spiritual leader would have destroyed this happy memory of Paul. A consistent life may be marred in any one Christian—and when there are many united in fellowship—what a risk there is to the whole church from the power for mischief which lies in any one person! One cantankerous, over-bearing, changeable mind, or one hypocritical professor may blot the record of a church of God. Truly, “one sinner destroys much good.” It had not been so at Philippi.

Again, *all the apostle's remembrance of them was tender*. I am sure it was so because he does not say, “I thank God,” but, “I thank *my* God upon every remembrance of you.” When his faith was lively and his joy in God was overflowing—when in his closest approaches to the throne, in his most hallowed familiarities with his great Lord, he could say—“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” There existed between Paul and the Philippians a loving tenderness. They had been most kind to him personally and most hearty in their cooperation with him in his labor of love so that when he was thanking his own God for His choicest mercies, his mind brought before him these dear people. Brethren, in the relation of pastor and people I notice in many places an absence of anything like tender affection. And when that is gone the very joy of the gospel is gone from the preacher and, to a very large extent, from the people. They invite him to take office. They pay him a wage more or less scanty and then they send him about his business because they are tired of him. Can they expect a blessing upon such a hireling ministry from which every element of holy relationship is absent? But in the case in which the pastor is the spiritual father of his church and a true shepherd of souls, how different is the relationship! When they were sad, he has cheered them. When they were in difficulties, he has guided them. When their hands hung down, he has strengthened them. And because of all this, there exists a near fellowship and a tender love, as of children to a father, or of brother to brother—so that he rejoices in them and they rejoice in him. May it be so among us forevermore! If it is not so among *us*, where is it so?

Again, *all Paul's memory of Philippi excited gratitude in his mind*. He could not have said of the *Galatians*, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Oh, no! He said, “O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?” There were persons of whom he said, “I thank God that I baptized none of you.” He was pleased that believers should be baptized, but he was glad that he had not baptized certain persons who would have made capital out of it and boasted that they were baptized by the hands of Paul! All good people are not equally good. There are some in the world whom we hope to meet in heaven with whom fellowship is difficult. If they were on the other side of the Atlantic we might love them better than when we see much of them. I know several Christian people with whom I would sooner sit in heaven throughout all eternity than sit ten minutes with them on a sofa here below—distance—in their case, might add enchantment to the view. It was not so with the Philippians—Paul thought of them with devout gratitude to his God that there were such people and that he had come into personal contact with them. He knew the ins and outs of them and yet he could thank his God whenever he thought of them. Dear friends, may it be so with us, that men of God may thank God for the existence and the work of this church!

It is well with a man when he so rejoices in the excellence of others that he thanks God about it and prays about it. It is well with men when there is a something in their lives for which holy men can devoutly thank God. I have seen a good deal of testimony-giving and of public laudation of prominent men—but the happiest condition of things would have arrived if in our heart of hearts we delighted in the holiness of other Christian men and made a point of praising God on that account. To see another to be more gracious than oneself and then to praise God for it—is this common? We pray for those that err—do we praise those who stand firm? It is a beautiful spirit to cultivate. May the Holy Spirit increase it in us all!

Again, *all his prayers for them were joyful*. He says, “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy.” For some we have had to pray with tears and sighs and for others with trembling. But the Lord so heard Paul in the past with regard to these Philippians that every time he began to pray he felt liberty in prayer—a joy in bearing their names before the Lord—and a sweet assurance that he was not praying in vain. His was not the cry of anguish but the request of delight!

When we pray for those who are our joy and for that which will be *their* joy, we may well mingle joy with earnestness. For these beloved ones Paul approached the mercy seat with boldness and confidence—he felt sure of being heard on their account. In very truth, I can say the same of you all in this place. Never can I pray with greater peace of soul than when I plead for you. I believe, on the other hand, thousands of godly people find a joy in making request for me. So I am constantly told and I have no doubt upon the matter.

Now, why was all this joy in the apostle's mind with regard to the saints in Philippi? This is the point I desire to press upon you. Paul rejoiced because *all along they had been in hearty fellowship with him in the best things*. Observe—"For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now." There are churches wherein the minister is nominally the leading officer, but he cannot lead for the church does not follow. See that young officer, sword in hand, leap the rampart. He looks back, but alas, his troop is yards behind him! He cries, "Come on! Come on!" But there is no answer. He might as well call to stones. This is poor work. But see another—wherever he advances his soldiers are at his side—they are as eager as he is, the victory is as much for them as for him and they feel it is so. Well may there be an outcry against "the one-man ministry" when the one man is not backed up by all who are in church fellowship! But, brothers and sisters, it need not be so—indeed, it is not so among us! True and hearty have been the efforts of many in this church. Paul seemed to stand alone when he was with the Galatians, but the Philippians were at his side and all around him, bearing him on from victory to victory by their unanimous fellowship. For this he thanks God and well he might!

They were in fellowship with him concerning his one sole object—"For your fellowship in the gospel." If you look at the Revised Version it is, "for your fellowship in furtherance of the gospel." The apostle longed to spread the gospel! And so did they. He was earnest to carry it to the regions beyond—so were they. If he preached, they would be there to encourage him. If he held special meetings, they were ready to help. If money was required, every man was ready according to his means, without pressing. Each one felt as earnest about the work as did his minister. They were enthusiastic for the furtherance of the gospel—they were heartily with him where he most valued their sympathy.

This fellowship began early; "from the first day" of their conversion. I think we can predict what converts will be from what they are at first. Some begin warmly and gradually cool down—and we seldom know them to develop much heat or zeal if they begin in lukewarmness. When we join a church, it is well that from the first day we enquire of the Lord, "What would You have me do?" The kind of recruits which we desire in Christ's army are those who are in fellowship with us for the furtherance of the gospel from the very first! I like to see the convert at the prayer meeting, the cottage meeting, the Bible-class, or the Ragged-school, or the Sunday school, or the Tract Society doing what he can to help others! He that begins early begins hopefully. Concerning some older Christians, we could not speak of their fellowship in the gospel from the first day, for they were slow in coming forward—but I hope they will do all the more *now* to make up for it. I have heard of an advertisement of a burial club which began thus, "Seeing that many persons find it extremely difficult to bury themselves." That is not my experience, for I would have to say, "Seeing that many church members find it exceedingly *easy* to bury themselves"—we receive them into our number with pleasure but we hear no more of them. We have the distinguished privilege of enrolling their names in our book and that is all. We give them our right hand of fellowship, but they do not give us their right hand of labor. Where are they? Where? Echo answers, *Where?* The Philippians had fellowship in furthering the gospel from the first day!

Then mark that they were men of good wind, who could keep up the running. They were as patient and persevering as they were zealous at the first. "From the first day until now." *Until now*. Some run well for a time but that time is short. Oh, for the men who will live as long as they live and not die while they are alive! How many who should have been our helpers are lost to us! They have grown indifferent or they have become advanced in years and fancy that they can now do nothing because they cannot do all they once did. We can always do something for Jesus if we are willing! As we are not too old to receive grace, let us not think ourselves too old to use it—for it is given to be used. The aged are capable of the noblest work which can be performed. Encouragement of the sad and feeble almost necessitates an experience which only age can bring. There is as truly a service in the church for the most venerable

as for the most active. Let no man cut himself off from the privilege of serving the Lord Jesus “from the first day until now.”

And what they did appears to have been so general as to be practically unanimous. He speaks of them all as in full fellowship with him in his lifework. When shall we get churches alive all through? When false doctrine taints a church it usually sours the whole of it, for “a little leaven leavens the whole lump.” But if they are good churches, I am sorry to say the perfume of consecration does not sweeten every part. In most churches there are a few who, to a large extent, do everything and give everything—then another portion assist occasionally—so far as they are urged on by the consecrated ones. And after these you find a large number who are practically the baggage of the church—the lumber which has to be carried by the efficient members. Alas, that we have so many in ambulances when every hand is needed in the fight! A church is in a poor condition when it is largely so—but it is in fine health when all are hearty in the service of the Lord, as at Philippi.

It was practical fellowship. Some of them preached, all of them prayed. Some of them contributed money and all gave love. Nobody shirked his work—which was not looked upon as a labor—but as a privilege. You will not wonder that Paul rejoiced, for it gives joy to every earnest man to see others earnest! The great cause is as much yours as it is mine. A church which feels that holy service is not for a few, but for all the members, is a credit to divine grace. It is a lovely piece of divine mosaic work in which jewels of costly price are set about with solid gold and the whole exhibits a design of matchless beauty. Fellowship with the Holy Spirit and fellowship with great saints is a rare jewel—may we each one possess it!

I will not stay longer on this point, for I shall have to return to it when considering our next head.

II. Paul saw in the Philippians A PEOPLE WHOM HE REGARDED WITH THE UTMOST CONFIDENCE—“Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” What was Paul’s confidence, then?

His confidence was *that the work in their hearts was a divine work*. The Lord Himself had begun a good work in them! This is a vital matter. Everything turns upon the question, “Is this conversion a divine work or not?” The man is altered for the better. The woman is certainly improved. A work has been done—but is it God’s work? Or is it the work of the flesh? Ah, dear friends, a moral change may sometimes look so much like a *spiritual* change that onlookers cannot detect the difference! The child of nature, finely dressed, is not the living child of divine grace—and how are we to tell the one from the other? “By their fruits you shall know them.” The apostle had found the Philippians true in their partnership in the Lord’s work. They suffered for their Lord patiently. They defended the faith bravely. They spread it zealously and their lives confirmed it! And so Paul said to himself, “This is the finger of God! The Lord Himself has begun this work.” How happy we are when we can have this confidence of every member of the church—that from the beginning of their religion God has been at work in their hearts! I pray you, do not be satisfied, any of you, with the most promising religiousness if it is not God’s work! If you have undergone a change, take care that it is such a change as only the Creator could have worked in you—a resurrection from the dead, an opening of blind eyes, a turning from darkness to light! If you have not undergone a renewal which betokens heavenly handiwork, be uneasy. Be restless until God Himself, who made you, makes you new in Christ Jesus! My heart silently entreats the Lord to begin this good work in you at once—and may there be signs following which shall give us the joy of knowing that, indeed, and of a truth, the Lord has done it!

Paul could see, in the next place, that *it was a growing work*, for the Lord was still performing it. The work of God is always a *growing* work. If things do not grow they lack one of the chief marks of life. You put into the ground something which looks like a living plant and after it has been there six months you find it just the same, without a single bud or shoot. What do you say of it? Why, you conclude that it is an artificial production devoid of life. If we do not grow better, surely it is because we have no goodness worked in us! If we do not grow in divine grace it must be because we have no divine grace! Paul saw God carrying on the work in the heart of the Philippians so that they went from strength to strength and about this he was confident.

He was also confident *that God would perfect it*. He says, “He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Shall we be absolutely perfect until then? I think not. Perfection in a modified sense is possible

through divine grace—but not absolute perfection. Old Master Trapp very well says a Christian may be perfect, but not *perfectly* perfect. Perfection in the Scriptural use of it is not at all what those make of it who boast of perfection in the flesh! A child is perfect when it is newly born—there is every toe on the tiny foot and its eyes, ears, nose and other organs are all there—but if you tell me that a child is a perfect man, I smile at you. So the Christian may be perfect as to all his parts, “perfect and entire, lacking nothing,” and yet he may not be perfect as to development by a very long way. One says, “We shall be perfect at death, shall we not?” It is not so written here, but, “He will perform it *until the day of Jesus Christ.*” We may be perfect in death, doubtless, as to the *moral* and *spiritual* nature—but a man has a *body* as well as a soul—and it needs both parts to make the *perfect* man. While the worms are devouring the body the man is not yet perfect. He will be perfect as to his whole manhood when the Lord shall come and the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible! Paul delights to make the Christian leap over that little rivulet called death and swallow up the thought of dissolution in the far grander fact of the coming of the Lord! The Second Advent ought to be much more on our minds than the hour of our death! The Lord will perform the work which He has begun until He perfects it in the day when the Lord Jesus Christ shall receive His church unto Himself. Then shall be the general judgment and oh, what a blessing to be found perfect in *that* day of decision! He shall separate the righteous from the wicked as the shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. When that great day is ended, then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun! Our Lord Jesus will be covered with the infinite splendor of God in that day and then shall we be like He—His glory will be reflected upon all believers. You have no idea of what a perfect man will be like. “You see not that body that shall be.” God will give us such a body as it pleases Him and to each one a body of his own. If you had never seen wheat growing, you would never imagine that the shriveled grain of corn would produce the blade, the ear and the full corn in the ear. Take an example still more striking—many very tiny seeds produce flowers which excel in beauty of form and color—could you have ever guessed that the insignificant seeds could have come to this? Even so, the body is sown in weakness but it is raised in power! It is sown in corruption but it is raised in incorruption! The star of today will be the sun of tomorrow. All glory lies in the bud of our struggling humanity when once divine grace has quickened it. O brothers and sisters, He that has begun a good work in us will not only give us perseverance until death, but what is even more, He will give us perfection in the day of Christ! It is altogether a more comprehensive thought than the great truth of God of Final perseverance—it includes that blessed truth of God within its sweep, but it also secures eternal glory both to soul and body!

Was Paul justified in being so confident, not only that these people were converted, but that they would be eternally saved? Leave out of the question his writing as an inspired man—how did he gain his confidence? *His confidence partly arose out of his love*—“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart.” His love to them was not the mere glow of nature, but the flame of divine grace! He saw so much of Christ in them that he could not help admiring and loving them. And he felt sure that they were of the sort that never draw back unto perdition, but believe to the salvation of their souls. He perceived that the grace which was in him was in them, also—and therefore, as he hoped to be kept to the end—he felt that they would, also, be so kept. As he felt sure that the work of grace in them was of God, and of God alone, so he was confident that they would never fail. A good foundation is a grand security that the house will be substantial. Those we love in the Lord, because of what the Lord has done for them, we feel sure about as to their future.

Furthermore, *their long-continued character confirmed the apostle in his confidence*, for he adds, “Inasmuch as both in my bonds and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of my grace.” When he was bound they were not ashamed of his chains. When he was in prison the jailer washed his stripes and refreshed him at his table and this proved an omen of loving liberality throughout life. When Paul was taken away to Rome, the Philippians took care that he should not be left penniless—they sent out of their poverty to his assistance. He felt confidence in a people who could do this. Shame turns many of the weaker sort aside, but the faithful despise it. Those who love holiness when others despise and ridicule it are the people to stand fast.

Besides, they were partners with Paul in the defense of the gospel. If any Galatian teachers came their way, they gave them the cold shoulder for they would not give up the grand old gospel to please

the wise men of the period. In this way, my brothers and sisters, have you also stood by your own minister in those protests against error which have cost him so dear. Your faithfulness gives me great confidence concerning you. The people who can bear the attacks made upon you and the baits held out to you can be relied upon under God. You are not ashamed of my bonds, for you are heartily with me in the defense of the gospel in this day of falsehood.

They were also with the apostle as to the confirmation of the gospel. Their lives proved the truth of the Word of grace. When Paul was preaching, if he wanted to show that the gospel is the power of God, he pointed to what had been accomplished in Philippi—and none could deny the argument. A living argument is invincible. Reasoning is very well, but *fact* is overwhelming. Oh, that every Christian would so live as to prove the power of the gospel!

He adds another reason why he was so sure of them, namely, that *they were partakers of his grace*. The same grace which had saved him saved them. They ascribed their salvation to sovereign grace even as he did. The life in them as babes in grace was the same life which dwelt in him as a father in Israel. Their gospel and his gospel were identical—and their spirit and his spirit were cast in the same mold. His grace was such that he could not be seduced into hoping for salvation by works and nor could they. He believed in divine sovereignty, in electing love, in effectual atonement—and so did they. They were with him in all things—not in a forced union, but in hearty love to the same truths of God. Besides, he loved the souls of men and was always laboring to lead men to Jesus and they did the same. He delighted best to preach where Christ had never been made known and not to build upon another man's foundation. And in this they supported him. They were with him in every loving endeavor to spread the gospel. Now, it is a grand thing when a minister has great confidence in his people based upon the fact that he sees the grace of God in them bringing forth fruit unto the glory of God. Foolish fondness is to be avoided, but a confidence which is justified by evidence is a great solace to the heart.

What strength holy living in his people gives to the preacher of the Word of God! A man comes before you and says, "There is, somewhere about here, an invisible lake containing the purest, coolest and most refreshing water that you ever drank. You never saw water so pure and delicious." We ask the gentleman to let us see this lake. No, he cannot show the lake, but he will allow us to examine the streams which flow out of it. That is a fair test and we agree to abide by it. Here is one of the outflows. We fill a glass from it and hold it up to the light. Why, here are little whales and elephants swimming in it and no end of tiny sea monsters disporting themselves—that lake is hardly the place to drink from unless one would have meat as well as drink at every draught! Our informant assures us that there must be a mistake somewhere. So we hope. This stream has evidently gone wrong—he will take us to another outflow. Again we dip our cup, and lo, it is filled with water of a strange color as if the filth of some great city had run into it. We loathe to drink. Again we are told that there is some failure here, also, and we are begged to try again. After three or four such experiments, we feel quite unable to believe in this crystal lake. Such streams as these have not come out of an expanse of purity—we will keep to our old-fashioned waterworks till we have more reliable information. See the parallel? If Paul had begun praising the gospel and the people had said, "Show it to us by its effects," he might have said, "Let us pay a visit to Lydia, the seller of purple." They go to her store and look at her wares. Somehow her purple does not seem to be dyed after the ancient Tyrian fashion. The color is not true or fast. If she tries to pass off a base imitation as the original article we reckon the woman an old cheat and by no means a good evidence of the power of the gospel! If she uses a trademark which does not belong to her, we conclude that her religion is worthless! Let us call upon the jailer, who is another instance of the work of grace in Philippi. When we come to the jail the porter tells us that the jailer is beating the prisoners! And on enquiry we find that the prison is a little hell and those in it are wretched in the extreme under his tyrannical hand. "He is worse," says the porter, "since Paul came here. He talks a great deal about religion, but we do not see much of it unless it lies in being harsh, suspicious, cruel and selfish." If these things happened, Paul would feel sorry that he brought us to Philippi, and he would be unable to preach the Word with boldness. I will not make any application, dear friends—you can do that for yourselves.

III. My third point is this, that although Paul speaks concerning the excellence of the Philippians, he views them as A PEOPLE FOR WHOM HE GAVE ALL GLORY TO THE GRACE OF GOD. He did not praise them, but the Lord who had saved them.

Observe how he began, "I thank my God." *In what was done he sees reason for gratitude to God.* Brothers and sisters, if we win a single soul, let us humbly thank God for it. If, after years of labor, any one of you should bring but two or three children to Jesus, you will have reason to thank God for all eternity! A friend said to me on Wednesday, when the sun was shining, "We ought to be grateful for this fine weather." I replied, "I go farther than that—I *am* grateful for it." We should not only acknowledge what we *ought* to do, but we should do it. If God gives you any success in His service, do not say, "I ought to be thankful," but *be thankful* from the bottom of your heart up to the brim of it. I remember a brother who used to pray, "The Lord has done great things for us, whereof *we desire to be glad.*" The Bible does not say so—the Bible says, "Whereof *we are glad.*" Another cries, "The love of Christ ought to constrain us." The Bible does not talk in that fashion. It says, "The love of Christ constrains us." What we ought to do we should do. A Christian's life should be the Decalogue written large and somewhat more.

But Paul also, after he had thanked God, *kept on praying for what was still needed.* "Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request." See, dear brethren—at Philippi he has not only begun with God, but he goes on with God. He has much more to do but he does not attempt to do it without his Lord. Oh, that all workers were of this mind! We deal with God too little. A person exclaimed, "Let us get up a revival." The revivals which men can get up had better be left alone—we need to get revivals *down*. If we get a revival up it must come from beneath—but if we get a revival down, it comes from above. Lord, revive us! We pray for it and when it comes we will praise You for it. Brothers and sisters, we must mix up our constant service with more prayer and praise if we desire it to be largely effectual. If the work is worth anything, it is God's work in us and by us—He begins it, carries it on and completes it! What, then, can we do, if we do not draw near to Him? Our labor must have a constantly distinct reference to God. Sunday school teachers, your work requires you to begin with God—do not dare to go to the class even once without fervent prayer in the Spirit. When you have given the lesson, go straightway and ask God's blessing on it. Do not omit this even once! Paul's way is to thank God and to pray to God—and it must be yours if you would have Paul's joy.

As to *his confidence about the future of his converts, it was all in God.* It was not confidence in them apart from the work of God in them. He says God began it and God will carry it on. He does not depend on the strength of their principles, or the force of their resolutions, nor the excellence of their habits—he relies upon God, who will perform what He has begun. Did not Paul begin it? No, no! For if he had begun it he would have to carry it on and that could not be. Did not they begin it themselves? Certainly not! Does the sinner take the first step? How can he? He is dead in sin! If he does take the first step apart from the Spirit of God, he can take all the rest without God. It is with the sinner as with the Romish Saint Denis. You have heard the old fable that when he had his head cut off he picked it up and walked a thousand miles with it in his hand! A scoffer said that the thousand miles' walk was not at all remarkable—it was only the first step that had any difficulty in it. Just so, when a soul goes to heaven, if it takes the first step in its own strength, it can walk all the way—and then it will have all the glory. Brothers and sisters, we may truly sing—

***"No sinner can be
Beforehand with Thee."***

God commences the good work, however faint and feeble the beginning may appear. The tiny brook at the riverhead of repentance is of God as much as the broad river of heavenly character. This is a solemn truth of God. How deeply it should humble us! We cannot even begin—we cannot dig the foundation—how can we bring forth the top stone? All is of grace from first to last. While the apostle is so practical, as I have shown him to be, yet see how sound in doctrine he is! He never quits the grand doctrine of free, sovereign, effectual grace—"He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Beloved friends, I close when I say *the apostle derives his confidence from a great principle.* The great principle is that what God begins He will perfect. For if He did not do so, where was the wisdom of beginning? It is a word of derision when those who pass by a half-finished building say, "This man began to build and was not able to finish." We never praise a man for wisdom who makes an attempt which he does not carry through. Could angels rejoice in a work which God began and then left to fall

through? It might also suggest a lack of power. If a man is wise in his beginnings, he may break down because, through unforeseen difficulty, he has not sufficient means to complete his design. You often see the carcass of a house and it is never a happy sight—it suggests lack of means. But can there be any lack of power with *God*? Nothing is impossible with Him. But there might also be lack of perseverance. Some men are always great at beginnings but they have no stay in them—they change their minds. Does the eternal God suffer change? Is it not said that He is “without variableness or shadow of turning”? Granted an immutable God we may be sure that divine grace will complete what divine grace begins. Nor can God forsake the work of His own hands from lack of long-suffering. A man might begin to bless another and that other might be so ungrateful that the benefactor grows impatient and gives up on him. Will God fail in divine grace? Assuredly not. “His mercy endures forever.”

The top and bottom of it is that our confidence in one another must only be confidence in *God*—and our confidence for ourselves must rest in God or it will be sheer delusion.

But, beloved, albeit that where God has begun a good work He will carry it on, this does not put prayer aside, for Paul prays for these very people. Neither does this lessen the necessity of a holy life, for Paul is only confident about saints who were hearty “in the defense and confirmation of the gospel” and partakers of divine grace. He felt confident of the ultimate perfection of those only who had a divine work within them and proved it by their fellowship in the furtherance of the gospel. How can we profess that grace is in our hearts by divine implanting if we live in secret sin? How can we hope to persevere if we have not begun? If we do not join in the prayers and efforts of the church of God, how can we hope to partake in the reward at the coming of the Lord? The question as to whether God has begun saving work in us must be answered by our faith and our life—and if it is satisfactorily proved that He has begun it, we can depend upon Him to finish it! If, on the contrary, we have reason to fear that He has not begun it at all, we should not deceive ourselves, but take up our true position. We may still cry to Him as sinners and look to Jesus as the Author of faith. This will be wise and this will be successful, for Jesus says He will cast out none that come to Him. “This man receives sinners.” I hope every unconverted person here this morning who sees that salvation is God's work, will say to himself, “I will even look out of myself to Him who is able to begin the work in me. If He begins, carries on and completes salvation, then my lack of strength need not make me despair, for He is able, though I am not. He will work all my works in me and I shall praise His name.”

Oh, that the Spirit of God would lead my hearers to think of these things! Come and trust in Jesus Christ, the only Savior, and the good work will then have begun in you—a work which neither the world, the flesh, or the devil can destroy! And then in the Day of Judgment you shall stand perfect in Christ Jesus before the truth of God.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Philippians 1.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—427, 742, 739.

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