

Partners in Grace

Philippians 1:5-7 HCSB because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. (6) I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. (7) It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel.

Philippians 1:5 HCSB because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Because of your partnership. Paul was grateful, but not because they merely accepted the Gospel and became converts to the Lord Jesus. He was grateful because they went beyond mere salvation to the more mature view of mutual service and adherence to the Great Commission.

- **Matthew 28:18-20 HCSB** Then Jesus came near and said to them, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Their partnership apparently took form in financial support for his ministry (4:15).

- **Philippians 4:15 HCSB** And you, Philippians, know that in the early days of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you alone.

What's really interesting was that the Philippians supported Paul when no one else would. They were remarkably constant in their loyalty, in contrast to the Corinthian church that was known for its instability and fickleness.

The Gospel. Our principle task is the spread of *evaggelion* (pronounced yu-on-ggellion), which is the Gospel. All other tasks are subordinate to and hopefully supportive of this mission. *Evaggelion* means either "reward for good tidings", or "good or glad tidings." The good news is about Jesus and the message He brought us about the availability of God's Kingdom to all humans, regardless of their ethnic origin, or the depths of their sin.

From the first day. Paul is referring to his first visit to Philippi (Acts 16:11-40).

- **Acts 16:11-12 HCSB** Then, setting sail from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, the next day to Neapolis, (12) and from there to Philippi, a Roman colony, which is a leading city of that district of Macedonia. We stayed in that city for a number of days.

Until now. This is considered by most to be near the end (see 2:24) of Paul's first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16-31).

- **Acts 28:16 HCSB** And when we entered Rome, Paul was permitted to stay by himself with the soldier who guarded him.
- **Acts 28:30-31 HCSB** Then he stayed two whole years in his own rented house. And he welcomed all who visited him, (31) proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with full boldness and without hindrance.
- **Philippians 2:24 HCSB** And I am convinced in the Lord that I myself will also come quickly.

Philippians 1:6 HCSB I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

He. This is the Greek letter omicron with a rough breathing, pronounced something like “haugh” in a clipped fashion, which is used as a demonstrative pronoun. In a sense, it is unnecessary because Greek, like Latin, can simply use the third person singular verb, which implies a singular actor other than the speaker or the audience.

So, Paul could have simply had the verb standing alone. However, when it is seen in this way it is used to designate a person or a thing that is the only one of its kind, distinguishing it from all other persons or things. What it does not do is ascribe gender but is instead neutral (see Thayer’s article on 3588 on p.433 of Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

So, in my opinion, a better way of rendering this particular passage is “I am sure of this, that the One who started a good work in you...” that the One who works in us and will continue to work in us until the Day of Christ” or “that which has started a good work in you will carry it on”. Who is the One who continues to this very day to work in us and will continue this labor of love till the Day of Christ? None other than the gracious and phenomenally patient Holy Spirit.

- **John 14:16 HCSB** And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.
- **John 14:26 HCSB** But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit--the Father will send Him in My name--will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.
- **Acts 9:31 HCSB** So the church throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace, being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, and it increased in numbers.

Started a good work...carry...to completion. The work only begins with salvation. Salvation is not an end in and of itself.

- **Romans 8:29-30 HCSB** For those He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers. (30) And those He predestined, He also called; and those He called, He also justified; and those He justified, He also glorified.
- **Ephesians 2:8-10 HCSB** For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift-- (9) not from works, so that no one can boast. (10) For we are His creation--created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time so that we should walk in them.

This process is described as a birth (John 3:3).

- **John 3:3 HCSB** Jesus replied, "I assure you: Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

It is also described as creation groaning in empathy together with the Spirit’s labor pains.

- **Romans 8:19-22 HCSB** For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility--not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it--in the hope (21) that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God's children. (22) For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.

Creation eagerly waits in anticipation of the end of the labor pains when the children of God will be finally be revealed.

Anyway, this imagery is largely lost in Philippians 1:6 if we artificially supply the pronoun He when it is not actually present in the text.

The Day of Christ Jesus. Paul will mention this day several times throughout the book.

- **Philippians 1:10 HCSB** so that you can determine what really matters and can be pure and blameless in the day of Christ,
- **Philippians 2:16 HCSB** Hold firmly the message of life. Then I can boast in the day of Christ that I didn't run in vain or labor for nothing.
- **Philippians 3:20-21 HCSB** but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (21) He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.

So, it might be important to understand what he's referring to. Consider what Paul has to say elsewhere.

- **1 Corinthians 1:8 HCSB** He will also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- **1 Corinthians 5:5 HCSB** turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.

He told the Corinthians that this day would be the "end" and implied that it would be a day when we will be judged but found "blameless".

He implies the same thing in 1:6 and verse 10 where he says that that day will mark the "completion" of the spiritual work being done within us by the Spirit and that we will be found "pure and blameless". Apparently, this day will be when those who have held firmly to the message of life will be revealed and Paul expected to be able to see that all his work had not been in vain (2:16).

On the Day of Christ, our citizenship in heaven will be confirmed and we will be physically transformed; given a new glorious body that will be like Jesus' (3:20-21). On that day, we will finally, at long last, truly understand the big picture.

- **2 Corinthians 1:13-14 HCSB** Now we are writing you nothing other than what you can read and also understand. I hope you will understand completely-- (14) as you have partially understood us--that we are your reason for pride, as you are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

I can only assume, based on these facts, that the Day of Christ is none other than the Bimah Seat where all believers will be judged. Our salvation will not be in question since our names will be still inscribed in the Book of Life. However, the quality of our good works for our Master will be tested in a crucible and our rewards for our labors will be revealed on that day.

Philippians 1:7 HCSB It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and establishment of the gospel.

Partners in grace. This grace took form in sharing in Paul's imprisonment and sharing his mission of defending and establishing Gospel. How different is this definition and application of grace from that which Cultural Christianity gives us. They define grace as God's limitless readiness to forgive everything we do, no matter how heinous, no matter how destructive, regardless of our feeling *nach'am* (contrition) or demonstrating practical *shuv* (real change of ways). In contrast, Paul defines grace as the ability to share in imprisonment and bold testimony of the truth of the Gospel.

How did they "share" in Paul's imprisonment? They willingly identified themselves as his supporters even when it meant personal physical risk by sending Epaphroditus with financial support for Paul while he was in jail and unable to work.

- **Philippians 4:18 HCSB** But I have received everything in full, and I have an abundance. I am fully supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you provided--a fragrant offering, a welcome sacrifice, pleasing to God.
- **Philippians 2:25-27 HCSB** But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus--my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need-- (26) since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. (27) Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another.

When Epaphroditus expedited this work to the point that it made him sick and he nearly died, Paul ascribed part of the merit of that mitzvah to those who sanctified him to the task and supported him throughout.

This is very important to understand because it implies that when we support ministers of the Gospel, whether they be elders in our church, chaplains in our community's jail, short term missionaries to other parts of our country or long-term missionaries to other countries, in God's books we gain a certain merit from their work.