

In Fellowship with El Salvador Philippians 1:1-11

Introduction:

The mission trip to El Salvador was nothing short of amazing.

We had a wonderful time teaching lessons, leading songs, constructing crafts, providing food bags, supplying readers, and uttering prayers.

It reminds me of Paul's single-minded focus—live for Christ and the Gospel.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul was looking beyond his circumstance as a prisoner in Rome to what it meant for Christ (mentioned eighteen times in Philippians 1) and the Gospel (mentioned six times).

“Paul's...circumstances strengthened the *fellowship of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:1–11), promoted the *furtherance of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:12–26), and guarded the *faith of the Gospel* (Phil. 1:27–30).”¹

Take a closer look at the first of these thoughts with me this evening.

Paul's circumstances strengthened the fellowship of the gospel (Philippians 1:1-11).

The word “fellowship” at its most basic level means “to have in common.”

This explanation often hinders our understanding of Christian fellowship.

“Too often what we think is “fellowship” is nothing more than acquaintanceship or friendship.”²

In Philippians 2:1, Paul writes about “the fellowship of the Spirit,” enjoyed only by those who have been born of the Spirit (Romans 8:9).

There is fellowship in the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10).

When we share what we have with others, there is also fellowship (Philippians 4:15—study the word “shared;” its root meaning is having fellowship with).

True Christian fellowship is much more than having a name on a church roll, a picture in the directory, or being present at assembly times.

It is possible to be close to people physically and miles away from them spiritually.

Christian fellowship is being spiritually close to one another because of our nearness to Christ.

Paul was in Rome, and his friends were miles away in Philippi, but their spiritual fellowship was real and satisfying.

Christian fellowship is described by Paul in three thoughts: Fellowship of the mind, fellowship of the heart, and fellowship in prayer.

I. Fellowship of the Mind (1:3-6)

As Paul awaits his trial in Rome, his mind goes back to the believers in Philippi, and every recollection he has brings him joy.

But Acts 16 tells that while Paul was in Philippi he was wrongfully arrested and beaten, placed in the stocks, and humiliated before the people.

Yet these memories brought joy to Paul because it was through his suffering that the jailer came to Christ!

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 64.

² Ibid.

Paul recalled Lydia and her household, who responded to Paul's teaching and were baptized.

He remembered the poor slave girl who had been demon-possessed and healed "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 16:18).

It was the Christians at Philippi that brought Paul joy.

Their salvation was more important to him than any mistreatment he could face, so in reflection, the thoughts that filled his mind were those of people and their trust in God's Son, along with their obedience to Christ's teachings.

If we have this single mind—to live for Christ and the Gospel, then we will realize people, not circumstances or programs, bring about Christian fellowship.

Am I the kind of Christian who brings joy to others when they think of me?

Fellowship of the mind is experienced when we focus on living for Christ and the Gospel.

II. Fellowship of the Heart (1:7-8)

It is possible to have others in our minds without having them in our hearts.

Many people today would have to confess, "I have you on my nerves."

Paul's sincere love for his friends was something that could not be disguised or hidden.

Christian love is "the tie that binds."

Love is the evidence of salvation: 1 John 3:14 proclaims "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death."

There are at least seven instances in the letter to the Philippians where Paul uses the phrase "you all."

Paul's love was for every soul; thus, he considered his difficult circumstances an opportunity for defending and confirming the Gospel before officials of Rome, knowing this would help his brethren everywhere.

Paul longed for his friends "with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8).

It was not Paul's love channeled through Christ; it was Christ's love channeled through Paul.

Romans 5:5 reveals, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

How can we tell if we are truly bound in love with other Christians?

Being bound in love with other Christians means we are concerned about them.

The believers at Philippi were concerned about Paul and sent Epaphroditus to minister to him.

Paul was also greatly concerned about his friends at Philippi, especially when Epaphroditus became ill and could not return right away (Philippians 2:25-28).

Another evidence of Christian love is a willingness to forgive one another.

1 Corinthians 13:5 states that "love...does not take into account a wrong suffered."

Christians who practice love always experience joy, because both come as a result of the presence of the same Holy Spirit.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy" (Galatians 5:22).

Fellowship of the heart is experienced through growing in love for one another.

III. Fellowship of Prayer (1:9-11)

There is joy in remembering brothers and sisters before the throne of God above.

Perhaps the deepest Christian fellowship and joy we can experience in this life is praying with and for one another.

Paul prayed for maturity in the Christians.

The maturity he sought began with abounding love and discerning love.

Love in the mind should become love in the heart and vice-a-versa.

The heart and mind work together so that growth in discernment takes place.

The maturity continued with Christian character, “sincere and blameless.”

The kind of character that can pass the test—unmixed, genuine, or unadulterated.

The character it takes to not stumble nor cause others to stumble.

The maturity included Christian service, “filled with the fruit of righteousness.”

The spiritual maturity of service requires the kind of spiritual fruit that is produced when we are in fellowship with Christ.

Being “filled with the fruit of righteousness” results in the “fruit of the Spirit” being presented (Galatians 5:22 and 23), lost souls being obtained for Christ (Romans 1:13), and sanctification/holiness shining as a benefit (Romans 6:22).

Fellowship of prayer is enjoyed when you feel the pulse of fellow workers praying for spiritual growth.

Application:

The brethren in El Salvador are excitedly thinking about next year’s mission trip; in fact, they are already planning the work to be done in 2024.

How can you think about working **with** someone, without having them in mind?

How can you plan for the future without being mindful of others?

The future needs to be talked about and plans for the future should include dreams and expectations.

The love the Salvadorean Christians have for us is very evident.

Alexander Leiva (Leeba) asked multiple times for me to be sure to thank you and tell you he loves you.

Jorge Torres Jr. and Alexander Torres checked on me several times throughout our days in El Salvador and almost every time followed up with a question about the church in Waverly or an individual member.

The more we get together the happier we’ll be; in part, because the more we are around one another the more we will love one another.

Prayers for the church and her successful growth are spoken often.

The church in El Salvador is praying for the church in Waverly—her growth, her strength, and her means to continue helping.

Our prayers for the church in El Salvador continue.

Conclusion:

To the untrained eye, “In Fellowship with El Salvador” speaks of remembering one another, being concerned for one another, and praying for one another because we go once a year to El Salvador.

True Christian fellowship takes place even if we are thousands of miles away from one another when we are in fellowship with the Savior.

El Salvador means the Savior.

Are you in fellowship with the Savior, sharing in the activities or privileges of an intimate association with Jesus?

Do you think about Him often and plan ways to learn more about Him?

Are you concerned for His life and work being accomplished through you?

Do you pray for the success of the church, especially her spiritual maturity and salvation?

God has called us “into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9).

John would write, “What we (speaking of the Apostles) have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

Then, he added in verses six and seven, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Being in fellowship with the Father and His Son means we have heard the call of God through His word, answered the call to come out of darkness to Christ by having our sins washed away in the blood of Jesus (Revelation 7:14), and now walk in the Light so His blood keeps on cleansing us from all sin.