

Assurance in the Work of Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, this morning we continue our series in the book of Philippians. If you were with us last week, we know we just started with the introduction.

Today we're going to be moving on in chapter 1, verses 3 through 8. So if you have a Bible, you can turn there with me. It will also be on the screen behind me. As I've mentioned before, Rachel and I, over a decade ago, we lived in China.

We lived there for just over a year. We lived in a city of 7 million. Which, by Chinese standards, is just kind of an average-sized town. And we didn't live in the heart of the city. We kind of lived on the southern edge of the city.

That was known as the Economic Development Zone. And everyone who lived in that area and had called that for years really thought it was more of a joke than anything else. Because there wasn't much economic development going on there.

There was a cluster of a few universities. Around the universities were kind of some run-down, kind of slab concrete buildings that had some shops and some restaurants. Vendors would come in in the evening and set up restaurants just in the streets and carts that they had.

[1 : 04] Beyond that were just really shacks set up by people who might have worked in the field or drove a taxi. Brick structures that may have aluminum as a roof.

No running water. Electricity that was run by bare wire from place to place. And beyond that was just cornfields. But yet this was the Economic Development Zone. There was not a whole lot of trust that anything would happen in this area of town.

There was no confidence that anyone had that there was going to be infrastructure development, that new buildings were going to go up, that anything was going to happen in this area of town. And so it was actually, when Rachel and I came home, it was about five years later that we were able to go back for a visit.

And we went to this area of town and it was amazing the transformation that we saw. Because fields had been cleared and now there were high-rise apartment buildings and luxury condos. These little shacks and shops had been totally demolished. There was a huge shopping center with a mall and a theater and a Starbucks and a KFC and a Burger King and a Pizza Hut.

[2 : 09] All the crown jewels of American culture were now at their fingertips. And so it was amazing to think about what had happened in this short amount of time, where people had no assurance that anything would ever happen in this part of the town.

There was now evidence of the progress that had been made. And so that's what we're going to be looking at in this passage today. The assurance that Paul has in the work of Christ.

Even in the midst of his own imprisonment, persecution on the rise, we see disunity bubbling up within the church. He holds on to the promises of God.

He remains confident in the work of Christ. Both the beginning, the initial work, his continuing work, and completed work. And we see that through that he has great thanksgiving and great joy because he sees that evidence at the church at Philippi.

And so let's read our passage then this morning. Philippians 1, verses 3 through 8. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[3 : 20] And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 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 defense and confirmation of the gospel.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. This is the word of God. Pray with me again. Lord, we pray that you will prepare our hearts for the hearing of your word.

Lord, I ask that you fill me with your spirit, that I may communicate clearly, that the truth of your gospel may go out with power and may sink deep into our hearts.

Change us, we pray, O Lord. In Jesus' name, amen. Now, as I mentioned last week, we started just with the first two verses in Philippians, looking at Paul's introduction.

And as is common in many of his letters, after that brief introduction comes a few verses of thanksgiving and prayer for whatever church he's addressing. And so we see that that's happening here as well.

[4 : 32] And we see at first glance this deep affection that Paul has for the church at Philippi. And we see here that it's not just this affection and this joy just isn't based on what they're on doing.

I mean, it's not that he's just saying, hey guys, you are doing great, I love you, and I thank you for your work here, and just keep on keeping on. No, we see that his thanksgiving and joy is rooted far deeper.

The crux of the passage is really in verse 6. This is the basis of Paul's assurance, the basis of all that he's saying to the church at Philippi. When he says, I am sure of this.

And so this is going to be our focus today, thinking about the assurance that Paul has. We're going to start in verse 6 and spend most of our time there, but also work our way back to beginning of this passage as well.

And so three points then, as we look and focus on this theme of assurance, we're going to be thinking about the basis of assurance, the evidence of assurance, assurance, and the response to assurance.

[5 : 37] And so let's look then at the basis of Paul's assurance. Let's reread verse 6 together. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And so the first question we ask is, well, what is this good work? Paul had been talking to the church at Philippi and was commenting on their good work, right? How they were, they had defended the gospel well, how they had love for one another.

But Paul isn't talking about the work of the church there. He's not talking about his own work. We say, he says that he who began a good work in you, that he obviously is referring to God.

And as we see, this isn't just a one-time act of God in the hearts and lives of his people. It's really this ongoing work. And so we really see it occur in three phases that Paul talks about here.

We could think about it at God's work at conversion, God's continuing work, and the completion of God's work. And so I want to think about each of them individually. Paul says here, he who began a good work in you, this work at the point of conversion, if we go back to the book of Acts, this records a lot of what happened in the New Testament church, the missionary journeys that Paul and others went on.

[6 : 52] And so in Acts 16, it records Paul coming to Philippi for the first time and what happens there, the first converts that we see in this city. And so Acts 16, verse 13, it says this, and on the Sabbath day, we went outside the gate to the riverside where we supposed there was a place of prayer.

And we sat down and spoke to the woman who had come together. And one who heard us was a woman named Lydia from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods who was a worshiper of God. And the Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And so we see here this very first convert in Philippi, this woman named Lydia. But it's interesting how Luke records her conversion.

It doesn't say that Lydia chose to believe the words of Paul or to understand the gospel on her own. It says, no, the Lord opened her heart to pay attention. And so it was the work of God in Lydia's life and the lives of other believers in Philippi that brought about change, that brought about conversion in their life.

Paul explains this in many of his letters. In Ephesians chapter 2, he says that we were dead in our trespasses and in our sins, but we were made alive with Christ.

[8 : 10] It is by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works so that no one can boast. And so we see this point of conversion, the work that God does in our hearts, in the hearts of these Philippians is all about him.

If we think about, we go back to maybe middle school time or whenever you had science class and you might have learned about Newton's laws of motion, you know that his first law of motion is that an object at rest stays at rest unless acted upon by an outside force.

And so this book here, you know, Bible we said on this table, there's nothing in that Bible itself that is going to allow that Bible to move unless it's moved by an outside force. And so the same is true in our own lives.

Without Christ, we are dead. We possess no abilities to make ourselves alive. And so it's only by the power of Christ in our lives to give us eyes to see and ears to hear, give us hearts that we can receive the gospel, the grace of God.

Even Martin Luther says that faith is like an empty hand. It's only an instrument for receiving. Faith itself is passive. It is something that is given to us as well by God.

[9 : 29] And so this is something that can bring us joy when we think about God's work in our lives at the point of our conversion, if you were a believer, to recognize that it wasn't of our own doing.

Because how horribly unsure would our salvation be if it was up to us? We think of human will and tendency, how hot and cold we can be, how certain we can be, and then uncertain at times.

How our opinions can change constantly. So if our conversion, if our salvation was based on our decision ability, if it was based on our own initiative, we certainly have no assurance at all.

But this is what our assurance comes from. And this is what Paul tells us, that it was God who willed your salvation. And so this is the same thing that Jesus said to his disciples at their last supper before his crucifixion.

He said, you didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit. Charles Spurgeon famously said that, I believe the doctrine of election because I'm quite certain that if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen him.

[10 : 43] And so for the church at Philippi and for us today, our conversion is evidence of God's work in our lives. And so this is something that we can rejoice at, to see that it was Christ and Christ alone who has saved us.

Our salvation, it isn't based on our own efforts. It is God who chose you. It was Christ who atoned for your sins. It was the Holy Spirit who called you to himself.

And that's good news. But Paul here, he's not only saying that Christ, what Christ did for you, he says what Christ did in you, the work of God in you.

And so yes, Christ died on the cross for us. He secured our salvation. We are justified before the Father. But his work is in us. He gives us the desire and the ability to believe, the desire to follow after him.

And so this is where the continuing work of God comes in. Not only God's initial work, he doesn't do a work in our lives and stop. Christ continues to work in the lives of believers.

[11 : 44] Verse 6 says again, He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. So there's work in that bringing. We look forward to the point of completion where Christ will come a day, but that, Christ will come again, but that day has not yet come.

And so right now, we're in that in-between of the already and the not yet. Christ has already come. He has secured our salvation, but he promises to come again.

And so what does that mean for us as believers? It's this period of sanctification, of us seeing how Christ can continue to work in us to make us more and more like him.

We talked about this last week when Paul refers to the church as saints. He's calling them holy ones, those who are set apart. So as holy ones, we know that that is our identity in Christ.

We are holy, but we're also called to be holy, called to pursue holiness. And so as saints, we're continually undergoing this progressive transformation to become more and more like Christ.

[12 : 53] But this isn't something that we can accomplish on our own. Back when I was in university, I played on the rugby team for my school. And it was in the spring where we'd have our normal rugby schedule.

We'd travel around the southeast to the United States playing other universities. And I remember one away game that we had. We were playing a team and we're beating them pretty good. There's about 10 minutes left in the game.

And so the coach decided to put in a few of the subs who didn't get to play much. And he put in one guy in front row. He didn't have much experience, but he was excited to be in the game.

And literally within probably two minutes of him getting the game, he gets tackled. And his arm, he falls awkwardly and his arm like shatters. He's screaming out loud. We have to stop the game. He's carted off. He has to go to the hospital and have surgery in order to set the bones that have broken in several places where pins have been put in place. After that surgery, he's put in a cast that stays in that cast for several months before that comes off. [13:57] And then he has to undergo physical therapy for weeks or months so we can regain motion and movement strength in his arm. And so this image of surgery and therapy is really how we can consider the Christ's initial and ongoing work in our lives.

He has saved us. He has secured our salvation on the cross, but he continues to work in us like an ongoing therapy to strengthen us, to mold us into his likeness.

And so when we think about sanctification, it's not just about us trying our best to please God, to doing the best that we can do to be as much like Christ as we can.

No. Sanctification is about our assurance that Christ is working in us to draw us to himself. And so Paul makes this point in Galatians.

Galatians 3.3 He asks, Are you so foolish having begun by the Spirit? Are you now being perfected by the flesh? And so again, God doesn't perform some one-time act in our lives and then kind of set us off to see what we can accomplish.

[15:05] As if to say, I did my part, now you do yours. No, we don't pursue holiness because we doubt our salvation or because we think we have to supplement it in any way. And so when we think about salvation, or when we think of assurance, this was really an issue if we go back to the times of the Reformation.

This idea of assurance was a particular point of conflict between the Reformers and the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church thought that assurance of salvation was really a horrible thing because they thought it hindered the Christian life.

Because if you had assurance of your salvation, then you had no motivation to follow Christ and no motivation to pursue holiness. But we see the Reformers, they summed up their answer and their concerns of the Catholic Church.

If we look at the Heidelberg Catechism back from 1619, in the very first question, we get a wonderful response to this idea of assurance. This is the question and answer.

It says, what is our only hope, excuse me, what is the only comfort in life and in death? This is the answer, that I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

[16:17] And it ends by saying this, because I belong to Him, Christ, by His Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for Him.

And so our pursuit of holiness is not motivated by a fear of what might happen if we fail. It's not motivated by the thought that we have to prove ourselves to God.

Our sanctification, our pursuit of holiness is based on our solid assurance of what Christ has done for us. Assurance of our eternal life, but not only that, it says here, we have assurance that Christ will make us wholeheartedly willing and ready to follow Him.

And so this is exactly what Paul says later in the book of Philippians in chapter 2 that we'll look at in a few weeks' time where he says, to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

So it is God working in us that gives us the desire to follow after Him. One of the commentators that I read about this verse noting the continuing nature of this bringing us to completion, he says it's like God is continuing to put His finishing touches on His work in your life.

[17:40] And so do we sense that? Do we get a comfort from knowing that God's fingerprints are all over our lives? Especially when we're reminded of just how weak and sinful we are.

How often we fail in our Christian lives. How unsteady our will is. How prone we are to wander. To know that Christ remains faithful. It is Christ's faithfulness that is the essence of our security.

And so just as we can be assured of Christ's work in our lives at the point of conversion, we can also be assured that Christ does not leave us. He continues to work in us and through us as we live for Him.

And so then that brings us to this third part of the work of Christ, the completion of Christ's work.

Again, verse 6, I am sure of this that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Christ. Several years ago for my brother's birthday, I decided I was going to make him a gift. And so I had this really old, thick law book that I decided I was going to get a little bottle of whiskey and I was going to cut out the shape of the bottle into the pages and place the bottle in the book so it would close up and you'd have just a little surprise in that book.

[18:57] I thought it was a clever idea. I thought it may take an hour to cut out these pages or so. And as I began to do it, I just realized how tedious and how difficult this was and it was taking me forever to do to the point that I never finished it.

I put it away in the closet because it was taking too much time and it wasn't until that we were packing our things to move here to Scotland that I realized, oh, it's still sitting there. I need to do something with it. I either need to finish it or I need to throw it out.

How often does that happen to us when we think about things in our lives? Things or projects that we start that we never finish. Books that we begin to read that we lose interest in.

We change our minds. We get busy with other things. But when we think about the work of the Lord, that's not how God operates. God's plans never change.

His mission is never thwarted. His love never fails. And so when we begin, when He begins a work in our life, we can be fully confident that He will bring it to completion.

[19:55] When we begin this journey, we recognize with full confidence that God will bring us to our destination. And so there was, it's not that there wasn't reason for doubt.

This is why Paul is assuring the church, why he's talking about his own assurance, because there was struggle within the church. There was disunity. There was fear of what might happen because Paul is now in prison.

What is going to happen to the leader of the New Testament church? We may face doubts in our own lives too. Uncertainty about what's going on around us.

Uncertainty even within the body of Christ. When we think about the past, we may be discouraged. We may be confused by the present or scared by the future. So Paul is reminding us that the past, the present, the future, all of it is held in God's hands.

God will fulfill His promises when? At the day of Jesus Christ. And so if we look back through the Old Testament, there's many references from many of the prophets about the day of the Lord.

[21:01] The day of the Lord. It comes with this imagery of judgment and destruction for the nations. But it also talks about salvation and vindication for God's people.

We read that from our verses in Malachi earlier, talking about the day of the Lord. And so this is the future glory that Paul talks about as well, especially in the book of Romans, in Romans 8, when he says that all creation will be set free from the bondage of sin, when we will receive adoption as sons, when our bodies will be redeemed and Christ will be glorified.

This is the ultimate goal. This is what all creation is longing for, where all the promises of God will be fulfilled, where Christ will have His final success. And so this gives Paul great assurance.

This can give us great assurance as well as we seek to follow after Christ. And so this is the basis of our assurance. Let's think then also of the evidence of His assurance.

Going back to verse 3, Paul says this, I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

[22:21] And so thinking again back in my time in China, there was no evidence that I had that the local government was going to do anything to change the economic development zone. If I had known that, I wouldn't have been made fun of it.

The people there wouldn't have kind of joked at the name of their little part of town. If I had seen construction on the roads being done, if I saw this infrastructure being laid, if I saw buildings being erected, I think, well, I guess they're starting to do something.

I guess there truly is a work being done here. And so here in this passage, Paul's assurance of the work of Christ is evidenced in the church.

The work of the church, the love of the church, the defense of the gospel that the church is involved in. That's observable facts to Paul of his assurance of the gospel.

And so in verse 5 where it says this word partnership, fellowship, the same word in Greek is used in other places for the word fellowship. And so fellowship and partnership is something that's essential within the church.

[23 : 29] Here, we know that this involved financial partnership. Paul talks about later in chapter 4 about when he left Macedonia, it was the church at Philippi was the only church that provided him support.

And he says how well they did that, that they provided him full payment, that he was well supplied for the work of the Lord. But this partnership really runs deeper than just giving money.

We see that partnership of the gospel and really involves this full involvement, this full support of the people of God. And so Paul says this in verse 7, he says, you are partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

So again, this word partakers, it comes from the same Greek root that's used for fellowship or partnership. So Paul is talking to the church and he's saying, you are my fellow partners, you are my fellow fellowshippers in the gospel.

And so we see this is continuous in nature. It says, from the first day until now. So there really wasn't an easing in period for the church at Philippi, it was really this drastic and sudden transformation when Christ began a good work, that work was evident from the very beginning.

[24 : 48] They were fully involved and fully committed to see the growth of the church in Philippi and beyond. And so what does this look like for us today? What evidence do we see of Christ working in our lives individually and in the lives of this church?

Do we see one another encouraging each other, exhorting each other? Do we come together for the teaching and preaching of God's word? Are we excited to serve one another and even to suffer for the gospel?

To give our time and our resources for the spread of the gospel? Because it's interesting to note here that Paul, what he doesn't say, Paul doesn't say to the church at Philippi, I thank the Lord that you show up on Sunday morning.

I thank the Lord that you come together once a week. No, he says, I thank the Lord for your partnership in the gospel that is ongoing and continuous in nature.

So what does that look for us on a practical level when we think about the evidence of Christ's assurance in our lives? How do we love one another well? How do we serve one another well?

[25 : 54] Not only within this church, but within our community. Is it writing an encouraging note to somebody? Is it meeting someone for coffee who's discouraged? Is it inviting a neighbor into your home?

Being involved in the ministry of the church? Seeking to serve internationals and refugees and those who have come to our city with no family and no help of their own? I mean, the list can really go on and on.

It's something that we need to consider together. And not that we do it because we think we need to earn God's favor. But we serve as evidence of his continuing work in our lives.

So the question we ask is, well, how is the world going to see evidence of God's work if we aren't acting and appearing any difference than society around us? See, we really need to live lives of self-sacrifice that we may have a shared vision for the spread of the gospel.

And so that's the evidence that Paul sees. What is the response then to this assurance? Again, verse 3. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always and in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy.

[27 : 14] And so Paul, when he's thinking about the church in Philippi, his initial reflex isn't pride. He's not saying, ha, I was there at the beginning. I was there at the first converse. I helped set up that church. No, he sees the work of God in that church and he responds with thankfulness and he responds with joy.

And the thankfulness isn't to the church. It's not directed to the church saying, man, you guys are doing awesome. Keep it up. It's a thankfulness that's directed up to God. And so even though Paul's assurance, he has full assurance in God, that doesn't mean he just sits idly by.

We see that this thankfulness is grounded in prayer. This is the action that Paul takes. Even though he's separated from them, even though he's in prison, he is still acting on their behalf. through prayer. And so we don't want to think that having assurance in God's work in our lives means that we can kind of lead inactive lives or gives us a pass on being involved in the life of the church.

Paul here, he's putting his feelings into action through prayer. He sees God at work and he prays that God will continue to be at work. In good times and in bad, Paul recognizes the effectiveness of his prayers.

prayers. And so his confidence in God's sovereignty, it doesn't keep him from praying, but it allows him and encourages him to pray all the more, trusting that God will accomplish his work.

[28 : 43] And so we see more about this prayer. It's holistic in nature. Always in every prayer of mine for you all, there's regularity in this prayer.

There's consistency in this prayer. He prays not only for his friends or for the leaders, he's praying for the entire church and he does so with joy. Does the evidence of Christ's work in your life and the lives of others bring you great delight?

How often do we pray with joy, with great conviction that Christ will continue to work in our lives and in others? And so that can be an example to us of how we commit ourselves to pray.

When we think about this Renew the Clue campaign, we talk about giving money and we talk about getting involved, but if we do those things alone without being grounded in prayer, it's all for naught. Christ's blessing, Christ is the giver of all blessing and we need to recognize that coming to him in prayer.

And so we see this thankfulness that's directed up, but there's also another emotion that's directed outward, this deep affection for the church. In verse 8, for God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

[30 : 00] Paul loves the church. Paul has experienced the love of the church. He longs to be with them. He longs for fellowship with them that only can come when grounded in Christ.

And so again, is this something that we possess as a church, a deep love and affection for one another that we long to spend time together, not only in fellowship, but in service and in worship and the teaching of God's word.

Not just that we may have casual relationship with one another, but that we have a true heart for community, for supporting and serving and praying and giving to one another. God's work.

And so, this should be the natural outpouring of our assurance of God's work. And so, that's my encouragement today then, that we may recognize and have full assurance in God's work in your life.

God's work at the point of your salvation, God's work in sanctifying you and God's work in fulfilling his promises to you. And maybe you don't have that assurance.

[31 : 06] Maybe you've never experienced the work of Christ in your life. Recognize that this gift is offered to you by grace through faith. It is Christ alone who saves.

It is Christ alone who continues to do work in your life and in mine until he brings his good work to completion. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for the work of Christ and we recognize that it's not of ourselves that we are saved or that we are made holy or that our lives are brought to completion.

It is only by the work of Christ. And so, may that be encouraging to us today. May we desire to see the evidence of Christ's work in our lives individually and as a church.

May we be a place that is recognized as different from the world around us. May we be marked by your love and your grace. May we desire to extend that to one another.

[32 : 16] And Lord, for those who may not know you, who have never experienced a work, your work in their lives, we pray, Lord, that you will move, that you will soften their heart, that you will draw them to yourself through your spirit.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now stand with me for our last hymn, He will hold me fast. Please stand.