

**Sonoraville Baptist Church**  
**Sunday, June 5, 2011 – 11:00 AM**  
**Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor**

**The Connection Challenge - Philippians 1:3-6**

**Introduction:** Tonight begins our Big Apple Adventure in VBS 2011. We are looking forward to a fun-filled adventure exploring the truths of God's Word in Bible Study, Crafts, Recreation, and Fellowship. Our workers are ready to work and our kids are ready and excited about learning, so I hope you'll be in prayer for us all this week.

As you can see by the posters on the wall, part of our VBS Theme is making a connection with Christ and each other with Faith, Love, Trust, Others, and Life. This morning, I want to capitalize on that theme with a message I've entitled, "The Connection Challenge."

In order for a group of people such as a church to gather and meet on a regular basis there has to be something that connects them and keeps them together. That is what I would like to examine today. What is our connection? What is it that has held and sustained this church for these past 108 years? What keeps us together now, and what is going to keep us together in the future?

We can look at the church in Phillipi to answer these questions. Paul had written to them and thanked them for helping him. They had reached out to him both spiritually and financially many times. Throughout this letter Paul eludes to what it was that helped this church to endure. So this morning, we're going to take a look at what held the Philippian church together and see how we compare. If you have your Bibles, let's read in chapter 1:3: **3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:3-6 (NIV).**

**Prayer**

First and foremost, we see that the #1 connection that holds a church together is:

**1. Salvation in Jesus Christ (5)**

In vs. 5, Paul said that he recognized that the Philippians were in fellowship and agreement with each other concerning the gospel. In other words, they shared a belief that salvation is received by believing in and trusting in the sinless life of Christ, the vicarious death of Christ, and the glorious resurrection of Christ. The question is, **how** does this connection through Jesus Christ hold us together? Well, I see three ways. First, salvation offers:

**A. Freedom from the Past.** *"Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."* **Isaiah 1:18 (NIV).**

The vivid terminology of this verse contrasts the remarkable difference Christ makes in a believer's heart and life. God is somehow able to take a life that is marred and stained by sin (scarlet and crimson sins) and transform them into purity (white snow and wool). This means that when someone turns to Christ and repents of their sins, they no longer have to worry about their past sins. It's true that they may still face consequences from them, but in God's eyes they have been washed clean. The upshot is that believers can find joy by uniting with others who have had the same experience of having their past sins forgiven. Second, salvation offers:

**B. Purpose for the Present.** Before Jesus left this earth and ascended to heaven, He gave this command to all believers: *'Go into all the world, and preach the good news to all creation.'* **Mark 16:15 (NIV).**

This is our marching orders as a church. In this command, we find our purpose in life after receiving salvation. We are to worship and glorify God by telling the world about Him. Now no one person can shoulder this responsibility. The task is too great. However, believers who are regularly gathering together in the name of Christ can achieve it, and in fact, can be held together by this purpose. Third, salvation offers:

**C. Hope for the Future.**

*"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* **Philippians 1:6 (NIV).**

This verse is a promise of completion. When a person turns to Christ in faith for salvation, God starts the process of salvation. By process, I mean that we are saved the moment we accept Christ, but we are being saved as we continue to grow and become more and more obedient in our relationship with Christ until *"the day of Christ"*

Jesus” when the Lord takes us home and our salvation will be complete. So those who have accepted Christ can look forward to spending eternity in heaven worshipping Him forever. The assurance that one day Jesus Christ will someday come again and take us home to live with Him gives us hope for the future.

The #2 connection that holds a church together is:

## 2. **Servanthood.**

*I rejoice greatly in the Lord that at last you have renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you have been concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it... Yet it was good of you to share in my troubles. **Philippians 4:10 & 14 (NIV).***

This Philippian church took care of Paul. We don't know exactly what they did to help him, but it's clear that whatever it was, it helped Paul out in a great way. They were there for Paul when he needed them. They were his servants in the gospel, and he acknowledged them for their efforts.

In the Christian walk, this spirit of servanthood and ministering to others is one of the clear identification marks of God's church, and it shows up in at least four ways. First, servanthood shows up in:

**A. Bearing Burdens.** *“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” **Galatians 6:2 (NIV).***

We are commanded to bear one another's burdens. As Christian brothers and sisters we are to be there for others when needed. And you've done this many times. By taking food or otherwise helping out when there is a sickness in the family, you are helping the hurting bear the burdens that weigh them down.

When you pray for someone whom you know is going through a difficult time, you are helping to bear their burden.

When you teach a class of children or youth, you are helping bear those parent's burden of training up their children in the ways of the Lord.

When you minister on the mission field; whether it's building a church in Tanzania, conducting a medical clinic in Mexico, or painting a fence or a wall at the Children's Home, you are bearing a burden and fulfilling the law of Christ.

Any time you put aside your own needs and help out someone else in their need, you are bearing a burden, and it is helping to connect us to Christ and it is helping to hold us together.

Second, servanthood shows up in:

**B. Praying for Each Other.** Paul says **Philippians 1:4 (NIV)**, *“In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.”*

How many of us can say that we joyfully pray one for another? Statistics reveal that the average Christian spends very little time in daily prayer if they pray at all. And the praying that is done, I would just guess that it isn't done very joyfully. Most of the time, our prayers are hurried up prayers that are done in a rather haphazard fashion, or prayers that are said more out of habit than out of a love for God.

But when it comes to a church's survival, we **must** spend time in prayer for one another. I'm not talking about just praying whenever a sickness or a problem arises. As 1 Thess. 5:17 says, we must *“Pray without ceasing.”* or *“Keep on praying.”* That means, there is never a time when we should **not** be praying! We need to pray for each other that we can be better Christians, better parents, better children, better husbands or wives, better teachers, better leaders, better workers and business men and women. We need to pray for each other that we'll grow in spiritual maturity and have a passionate desire to serve the Lord. And we need to fervently pray that we'll never allow anything to come between us and our relationship with Jesus Christ. Prayer is one of the essential bonds that holds us together. Third, servanthood shows up in:

**C. Loving One Another.** **1 John 4:7 (NIV):** *“Dear friends, let us love one another: for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.”*

**1 John 2:9 (NIV):** *“Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in darkness.”*

These two verses contrast the difference between a genuine Christian love and a fake love that is only spoken. In fact, the latter says that a person who hates others are showing that they are still in the darkness and have not experienced salvation.

We hear of some churches today that are filled with dissension among its members, and one thing that is doing is turning people off to Christianity. Certainly, if people can detect animosity among people who are

supposed to be following Christ, how can we expect them to become church members, much less followers of Christ? **We can't!** And the reason is, that churches that are constantly filled with jealousies and strife are probably filled with non-believers who are claiming to be Christians. The Bible says that if love is not present in someone's life then God is not present either.

What can we do about that? The best thing that we can do is not judge others, but examine ourselves. We have got to make sure that there is no hate in our own hearts. In doing so we need to do as **2 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV)** says, "*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith...*" We need to take a close look at our walk with God and make sure that our relationship with Him is genuine.

If we want to be a church that stays together, then it should go without saying that we must love one another. Finally, servanthood shows up in:

**D. Esteeming Others Better than Ourselves.** "*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*" **Philippians 2:3 (NIV)**

This verse wraps all that we've said together in one tidy package. If we bear one another's burdens, if we pray for each other, if we show genuine love for each other, then we can honestly and humbly say that we've not acted selfishly, but we've placed others needs above our own. That is what being a servant is all about. A servant tends to the needs of others, and cannot be just thinking selfishly about self.

The only way for our church to hold together is for every member to put aside his or her selfish desires and place others needs before their own.

**Conclusion:** Of course, the most important bond holding any church together is the salvation of its members. There has to be a common belief of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in order for any kind of peaceful relationship to exist.

But along with that salvation should be a spirit of servanthood among the people. **Ecclesiastes 4:12 (NIV)** says, "*A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*" Well, in the rope of servanthood, we have those three strands: Bearing each other's burdens, praying for each other, loving one another. And in all those acts of service, we are esteeming others as being better than ourselves. If we as God's church will do those things, we'll create a powerful connection – a permanent bond that will never be broken.

As God's Church, this is the Connection Challenge before us. In order to be in a better position to bear each other's burdens, to pray for each other, and love each other, we must be sure we're connected to Christ? Have you trusted in Christ by believing in His life, death, and resurrection for your salvation? That is where you start. Servanthood does little good if you're not serving for the right reason. If you haven't made that connection yet, during this invitation, I urge you to make it today. Let us pray