

Grace, Mercy, and Peace are yours from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

### [First Impressions]

First impressions are incredibly important, aren't they? While there can be a million things said over the course of a relationship, the first impression is one that sticks with you for the entire relationship. There have been people that you've met who struck you the wrong way, or people you met who you hit it off with instantly. Oftentimes, you and I like to think that we are good judges of character, or at least nobody I've met has admitted, “Actually, I'm a pretty bad judge of character”. You and I tend to trust our impressions of people as factual and determinative. Even when we're wrong.

What's your first impression of the people in Philippi?

Of course, you've never met them before. Perhaps you don't know if you could pinpoint Philippi on a map. No matter how familiar or unfamiliar you are with the people of Philippi, you've gotten at least a first impression. This first impression has come long after the original author of the letter, as well as the original recipients of the letter have been dead and buried.

So, is it a good impression, negative, awful, or so-so?

Far from it. Paul begins his letter to the people of Philippi by saying, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy,” notice how many absolutes are in that sentence. “**All** my remembrance”, “**always** in **every** prayer”, “for you **all** making my prayer with Joy”.

Paul seems to think pretty highly of these people. And if you have any sort of good impression of Paul, that means you probably ought to think pretty highly of them too.

### [Partnership]

However, Paul doesn't say that this comes from nothing. He isn't offering empty praise to the people. Paul says that he loves the people greatly and that his love stems from their *partnership* in the Gospel. Partnership. Paul, often considered one of the greatest apostles in the Bible, is calling these people partners. Not like partners at a law firm, nor is he thinking of them as business partners, but instead, Paul views the people of Philippi as co-workers. They aren't esteemed over other employees, neither are they owners of the church alongside Paul. The Philippians are working with Paul to spread the Gospel. In our Acts reading, we get a small flavor of what that looks like, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."

You see, people back then weren't used to the church. They didn't know what these people were talking about. They didn't have a good impression of what the church was all about. Which isn't too different from today.

You and I don't talk about things that make sense to the people of the world. Jesus Christ is both God and Man, He's one person in the Trinity which is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We were brought into the family by water combined with the Words of God. Together, we partake in His body and blood through bread and wine. If you want to be first, you've got to be last. Want to be great, serve others so they can be great. While some of this stuff makes sense to you and I, the rest of the world can't even know where to start. So, what are the things we can share?

## [Partakers in grace]

These days, “sharing” has a million different meanings. Is it enough to share a video? You can easily “share” news articles and YouTube videos, and during Zoom Bible studies, we “share” a screen. Is that what Paul is talking about? Well, if we look at our Acts reading again, we notice something unique. The people were sharing the word of God, yes, but they were also sharing each other. Not as in they were borrowing each other to do household duties. They were sharing *life*. They had fellowship.

Of course, this fellowship wasn't just potluck duties and candy. This fellowship was around grace. Paul says, “for you are all partakers with me of grace”. What the people shared with Paul and with one another was grace. It may not seem like such a big deal. Certainly not something you and I might write home about, but for Paul this was something he included in a letter that went out to the churches at Philippi. For him, and as it should be for you and I, partaking in grace with each other is incredibly important. Grace- getting what you don't deserve is how you and I know that God has given us so much more than we ever deserve. Grace is also how the world knows we are a people set apart.

Grace is something you and I can share at all times.

In Hospitality, there is grace.

God-given grace.

## [The Grace of God]

Of course, this doesn't come from you and me, but from God Himself. That's what makes us partakers. You and I partake in this grace when we love one another. You share this grace when you forgive those who the world says deserve your anger and wrath. Grace is shown when we take the time to sit down and explain everything in the kindest possible way. Grace is shared, when we are Hospitable as the church.

There are times when you and I don't feel like being graceful, just as there are times when you and I don't want to be Hospitable. The world encourages people to look out for themselves, Satan tells you that everyone but you is stupid and wrong, and the desire to be selfish and look only to our own needs is great.

But talk about a lousy impression.

People in this world, they're used to seeing hate and anger. You and I know that we can find judgement and wrath at every corner. You can join Facebook groups that allow you to voice your anger at people who disagree with you and there is always the beloved comments section beneath videos and posts.

Finding hate is easy. It's even harder when that hate is directed towards the Church you and I love.

Christ said, "Love those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you." Give them what they don't "deserve". Because until you and I were brought into the family of God, we were going to get what every person on the earth deserves, death, hell, and damnation.

**[Approve What Is Excellent]**

As the church, as the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, let us then approve of the things that are excellent. Let us approve of love and kindness. Let us approve of speaking well of one another, of showing kindness. Let's look to the benefits of our neighbor, not ourselves. Let love abound where hate threatens to run rampant.

This is the impression I get of the people of Philippi.

Not because they were some super-human people who decided on their own they wanted to love, but because Christ first showed them Hospitality.

Maybe you and I struggle with first impressions, or you might even feel as though you don't make any kind of impression. But as the people of God here and now in Iowa city, Our Redeemer is making an impression. In the days and months ahead, you and I will continue to make an impression. Not because you and I have a desire to show Hospitality, not because we're so great.

But because Christ is Risen.

He is Risen indeed.

Talk about an impression.

So be it.

Amen.

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As followers of Christ, "Keep loving one another earnestly  
And show hospitality to one another without grumbling." AMEN! (1Pt 4:8-9)

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