

Philippians 1:9-11

October 8, 2006

This is now our fifth (5th) lesson in this series, *Lord Teach Us to Pray*

In the Model Prayer and the prayer from 1 Thessalonians 3, how have you applied what we have studied?

- Merely hearing the Word without applying can create self-deception, hypocrisy, and pride
- *So how has your prayer life changed as a result of our study thus far?*

Last week during our study of 1 Thessalonians 3, we saw that the apostle Paul framed his prayer around three Biblical truths

- Faith
- Love
- Hope

He used these as an impetus for passionate prayer

- He asked the Lord to cause these believers “**to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you**” (3:12)

We discussed how we should be displaying this agape love

- Selfless, sacrificial giving
- Compassion without expecting something in return

This week, I want us to consider another passage on love from Philippians 1

- But before we turn there, we need to turn back to the book of Acts
- Please turn to Acts 16

We see that Paul now has a disciple named Timothy who accompanies him on his journey

- Beginning in 16:6, we read, “**And they passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; ⁷ and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them**” (16:6-7)

It is clear that the apostle Paul was trying to blaze a trail for the Gospel

- He had passionately opposed Christianity before his conversion
- Now he is passionately supporting its cause after his conversion

But for some reason, God prevented Paul from going where he wanted

- It was clear that God had other plans for him

God then gives Paul a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, “**Come over to Macedonia and help us**” (16:9)

- This has oftentimes been called the Macedonian vision
- This was Paul’s cue that God had “**called us to preach the Gospel to them**” (16:10)

So they left the area of Troas and traveled a fair distance by water (Aegean Sea) to Samothrace

- This was probably the first island that you see on your map after Paul left Troas

From here they traveled over to Neapolis

- Then the next day over to Philippi, “**which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia**” (16:12)

It was here that Lydia was converted

- She is the first convert to Christianity in Europe
- So this was pretty significant

Lydia urged Paul and his team to stay at her house (16:15)

- So they did

Some time later, Paul and his team were going toward the place of prayer, and a slave-girl who had a demonic spirit began following them

- She was repeating, “**These men are bond-servants of the Most High God, who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation**” (16:17)
- She did this for many days (16:18)
- Paul became “**greatly annoyed**” and cast the demon out of her

The problem is solved, right?

- Wrong!

Acts 16:16 told us that this girl “**was bringing her masters much profit by fortunetelling**”

- So when Paul cast this demon out, her masters were not very happy
- They had just lost their source of income!

These masters dragged Paul and Silas out into the marketplace and accused them of proclaiming “**customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe, being Romans**” (16:21)

- The leaders ordered Paul and Silas to be beaten with rods (16:22)
- Then they threw them into prison (16:23)

But around midnight, Paul and Silas “**were praying and singing hymns of praise to God**” (16:25)

- God sent an earthquake that shook the foundations of the prison
- This earthquake opened the doors and unfastened their chains

The guard was ready to kill himself since he thought the prisoners had escaped (if a guard allowed a prisoner to escape, he would be executed)

- But Paul and Silas stop him
- The jailer asked them, “**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**” (16:30)

After being officially released from prison (funny, huh?), Paul and his team encouraged the believers and departed (16:35-40)

Fastforward the tape about 12 years

- The apostle Paul is now sitting in a Roman prison
- He is not sure whether he will be released or not

It is in this Roman cell that he writes four letters that are commonly referred to as “the prison epistles”

- Colossians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Philemon

This church at Philippi had sent Epaphroditus to see how Paul was doing

- While attending to Paul, Epaphroditus comes close to death
- So Paul sends him back to Philippi

But Paul sends a letter back with Epaphroditus

- That letter is the book of Philippians

This was the first church in Europe

- Lydia, the jailor, and his family were the beginning of that church plant
- There doesn't seem to be a Jewish synagogue; otherwise, Paul would have gone there first (as was his custom)

We will be looking only at the first few verses of this epistle

Let's read Philippians 1:1-11

Can you hear Paul's love for these believers?

- He is separated from them but still feels a close kinship and fellowship with them

Hear the heart of Paul in these verses

- Thankfulness (1:3)
- Prayerfulness (1:4)
- Joy (1:4)
- Gratitude for their "partnership" (1:5, 7)
- Confidence in God's work (1:6)
- Affection (1:8)

This isn't Paul being sentimental

- This is Paul being sincere
- He is laying his heart open for these believers to see

Remember, it has probably been about 10-12 years since he was at Philippi

- And it brings him joy that God's work was continuing on (1:6)

He even gives the content of his prayer for this church

- This is what I want us to consider this morning

Philippians 1:9-11 contains four descriptions of love that will help us to pray more effectively for those we love

- They all revolve around love
 - o An overflowing love
 - o A discerning love
 - o A purifying love
 - o A honoring love

This is a very short prayer – just three verses

- But it is a precious reminder of the love that Paul has toward this church

I. An overflowing love (1:9)

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more

We know that love is a fruit of the Spirit

- “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22-23)

Love – agape love – is not something we can somehow muster up on our own initiative and effort

- Love is a Divine gift that must be borne out by the Holy Spirit

When Paul prays, he doesn’t merely ask for the recipients to work harder or to exert more effort

- Paul prays for God to accomplish certain tasks and to impart certain virtues that are **impossible** from a human standpoint

Paul prays very simply, “that your love may abound still more and more”

- We encountered this word “abound” last week in the prayer of 1 Thessalonians 3:12, “and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also *do* for you”

The word “**abound**” implies an unrestricted love

- A love that knows its proper boundaries and limitations

The element of abounding “**more and more**” implies a steady increase of love

- A continual demonstration of love that grows outside of one’s comfort zone
- Others should see a steady progress in love in our lives¹

Suffice it to say that our love should never reach a plateau

- We are never to become stagnant as it pertains to love

Our love is initiated by God Himself

- Our love should be a reflection of how He loves us

Examine your heart this morning

- Does your love reach out to those who are unlovely in your eyes?
- Do you put restrictions on your love?
- Is your love abounding more and more?

II. A discerning love (1:9b-10a)

in real knowledge and all discernment.

Sometimes it helps to understand a Biblical passage by contrasting terms

- Paul does not pray, “that your love may abound still more and more in ignorance and insensitivity”
- He doesn’t pray for them to grow “in sentimentality and foolishness”

What Paul prays for is a deep, mature understanding of how a Christian should live

- In a word, he prays for them to be discerning

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Philippians*, 44.

What happens when love is not discerning?

- Love becomes mere emotionalism
- Love can be misdirected
- Love can be misunderstood

We have to avoid two extremes here

- Knowledge without love isn't good, either
 - o "Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies" (1 Cor 8:1)
 - *There is a great danger is mere accumulation of knowledge*
- But love without knowledge isn't good, either
 - o "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor 13:1-3)

Paul is asking these believers to grant them a love that is discerning

- A love that is controlled, directed, and regulated by the Word of God

We need to have real knowledge before we can expect to be discerning

- Think of "real knowledge" being the toolbox full of tools
- But "discernment" is the ability to know which tool is best for the job

As we think of our lives, there are countless decisions where we have to make a decision

- Oftentimes, that decision isn't between something right and wrong
- It is between two things that are very good options

But discernment makes us ask, "What is best?"²

- It takes discernment to know the difference so that you can make a good decision
- A decision that honors God and His Word

As Christians, we must seek to honor God with our decisions

- How to spend time
- How to spend finances
- How to raise our children
- The decisions are limitless

Sometimes the decision is rather simple

- But many times the choice is rather complicated because of the various issues at hand

What we need is greater discernment, especially in the area of love

¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent.

We notice that the love that Paul prays for is not an end in itself

- These believers can't be smug about achieving some superficial standard of love³

² D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 130.

³ Carson, 124.

On the contrary, this love has a purpose

- This type of love should change the way that we live and pray

The word here for “**approve**” was used in relation to metals during Paul’s day

- This term was used of examining metals to see how pure they were of dross and other impurities

Can you get the picture?

- The process of loving is not complete when we are in the act
- God wants us continually to examine whether our love is pursuing those things “**that are excellent**”

In no way should Paul’s prayer be taken to mean that sanctification is all God’s responsibility

- Notice that Paul prays that their love would abound more and more “**so that you may approve the things that are excellent**” (italics mine)

In chapter two of Philippians, Paul states, “**So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.**” (2:12-13)

- We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling
- All the while, God is giving us the desire and ability to do that!

III. A purifying love (1:10b)

in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

It is amazing to study Paul’s prayers and see how many references there are to the Lord’s return

- For the apostle Paul, the hope of the Lord’s return was a great motivation and incentive toward righteous living

Knowing that the Lord will return and require an accounting of our lives should change our mindset of how we live

- It should cause us to make sure that our lives are in accordance with God’s Word

“**For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad**” (2 Cor 5:10)

- *If this isn’t motivating, then you need to check your motivator!*

Two virtues are given here by Paul to be considered in light of the Lord’s return

- “**sincere**” and “**blameless**”

“**sincere**”

- In ancient Rome fine pottery was very fragile and thin
- Oftentimes cracks would develop during the firing process
- To cover up these cracks, some shops would fill in the cracks with wax
- But when a hot liquid was put into these pieces of pottery, the wax would melt

Buyers became aware of this and began holding the pottery up to the sunlight

- The brightness of the sun would shine on the pottery and expose the imperfections of the pottery

“blameless”

- This is a related term that implies not falling into sinful conduct and not causing others to fall into sin⁴

God knows our hearts

- He knows that we have imperfections and blemishes

He doesn't want us covering them up and making excuses – like those who put wax over the cracks in the pottery

- Instead, we pray and ask God to give us grace and strength to see those areas of imperfection become less and less noticeable

IV. A honoring love (1:11)

¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ.

In no way is Paul insinuating that efforts at being sincere, blameless, loving, and discerning somehow earn righteousness

In chapter three of Philippians, the apostle Paul goes to great lengths to counter this argument

- “More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹ and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the Law*, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith” (3:8-9)

If Paul – with his religious pedigree and resume – couldn't earn righteousness on his own, neither can we!

The apostle is simply affirming that because we are believers and followers of Christ, we should be demonstrating the fruit of a redeemed lifestyle

- Not perfection
- But progression toward greater obedience

John 15 is a great chapter for you to meditate on as it pertains to the idea of fruit

- Christ expects His followers to bear fruit
- *Not to produce fruit*

God will produce the fruit when we are faithful and obedient to Him!

to the glory and praise of God.

The result of God answering this kind of prayer is simple

- God will be glorified!

The overarching goal and motivation of our lives should be for the Lord to be honored⁵

- For Him to receive the credit for anything good in our lives
- For Him to receive the applause for His work in our lives

⁴ MacArthur, 51.

⁵ Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol. 11*, 108.

It is beneficial to consider whether this closing element is a part of our regular prayer life

- Are you praying with the goal that God would be glorified?
- Are you ready to accept the fact that asking for God to be glorified might require you to change the way that you pray?

Believe me, it is easy to mouth those words, “Be glorified”

- But for Paul, he meant it
- Whatever it took for the Lord to be honored, that is what he wanted

As you think of the body of believers here at CBC, what spiritual qualities come to mind?

- What spiritual fruit can you see in the lives of others?

As you pray for other believers here, what requests dominate your prayer sheet?

- Do you pray more for physical needs than spiritual needs?
- How much do you pray regarding the specifics of loving one another?

In examining our prayer lives, I trust that we will see areas where we need to change

- Passion – praying with more fervency
- Consistency – praying with greater faithfulness and regularity
- Precision – praying for specific, spiritual issues