

Sermon 4:
Joy In Praying to Christ
Philippians 1:9-11
CRCC 2/5/17

Intro

Someone once well said, “Prayer is a mighty instrument, not for getting man’s will done in heaven, but for getting God’s will done on earth.”

How do you view prayer? Do you use prayer as a means to get your will done in heaven, or to get God’s will done on earth? Do you view it as an opportunity to treat God as if He is a genie in a bottle, ready and willing to meet your every request? What is God’s will exactly?

One of the simplest verses in the Bible says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (I Thess 4:3). That statement applies to you, indeed it applies to every Christian. Sanctification is “a state of being set apart from sin to holiness”.ⁱ Wayne Grudem, in his Systematic Theology helpfully defines sanctification as: “a progressive work of God *and man* that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”ⁱⁱ Sanctification involves *your* participation in the spiritual growth of holy living. Remember the command originating from the OT, but repeated in the NT: “You shall be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:44; I Pet 1:16). Spiritual growth requires effort on your part.

You say, what? Really? I thought God was sovereign over everything. How can spiritual growth be a progressive work of God *and man*? Interestingly, the Philippians may have asked this themselves especially since Paul told them in 1:6 that since God began the work of salvation in Him they could rest assured that He would complete it. Our tendency is to say: if God does the work, then we have nothing to do with it. If God is sovereign, then why would God use us to accomplish His purposes?

Paul's thinking was the exact opposite. Because God is at work in our lives, and we know that, therefore we have a responsibility to respond to His work in us. Later in this book Paul will return to this concept in 2:12-13 where he says: "*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.*" But here in chapter 1, he introduces what he will develop throughout the letter. And he does it by telling the Philippians what his prayers for them consist of. He has already told them in vss 3-4 that every time he remembers them he prays for them with great joy. But in vss 9-11 he tells them that the content of his prayers for them revolves around their sanctification, or spiritual growth. And once again, later in 3:12-14 he will explain how he is never content with his growth in holiness, but presses on, as He says, for the prize that is unattainable in this life but one that all faithful believers will receive someday in the next life.

The prayer of Paul found here in vss 9-11 is a model of sorts. It's a prayer to Jesus that requests the Philippians grow spiritually in a life marked by love. Undoubtedly Paul prayed this for himself. And undoubtedly we should pray this both for ourselves and our fellow believers in the church. Paul says imitate me as I imitate Christ. And if you look at Paul's recorded prayers in Scripture you'll find that he never prays the physical needs of others or church growth. The most important thing to him was the spiritual lives of the saints. He will at times pray for the unsaved to be converted (Rom 10:1; 9:2-3). But most of his prayers center on the spiritual growth of his brothers and sisters. In Eph 6:18 he urges believers to pray fervently just as he himself regularly made "petition for all the saints".

There is historical precedence in the Reformed tradition for praying the Bible, which is essentially what I'm telling you you need to do. Matthew Henry is probably the most popular Bible commentator. His commentary continues to be reprinted, although Henry himself died in 1714. He was an English Puritan who initially studied to be a lawyer, but God called into the pastorate at the age of 24 (same as me). His church began in homes like our church, but eventually grew to 350 members and attendees. He spent 8 hours a day in study, sometimes rising at 4am. We know him for his commentary on the whole Bible, but few know that he also wrote a book on prayer.

He gave three instructions for prayer. Directive one was to *begin* every day with God in prayer. Directive two was to *spend* every day with God in prayer. And directive three was to *close* every day with God in prayer. The method of praying he set forth was simply praying through the Scriptures. He said, "God's Word must be the guide of your desires and the ground of your expectations in prayer." This involved praying God's Word back to God. The Puritans called this "pleading the promises". The idea is that God has made promises to His people and His people are to respond by asking the Lord to fulfill these promises through prayer.

Vss 9-11 contains God's promises for us. Central to this is a promise to sanctify us. Remember the verse I quoted to you earlier? "*For this is the will of God, your sanctification*" (1 Thess 4:3).

Philippians is all about the joy you can experience in living a Christ centered life. Chapter 1 deals with joy in the practice of Christian living. And prayer is the power behind living the Christian life. So we must do it, and do it regularly and rightly!

Proposition: And Paul’s prayer in vss 9-11 is a model that you should adopt. Your prayers to Jesus should center on growing spiritually in a life marked by love both for yourself and your brothers and sisters in the church. The prayer is divided into 6 *requests* that should mark your own prayer life.

~Read 1:9-11~

Trans: The first request Paul makes that should also mark our prayers is...

I. A Request to Love Abundantly (9a)

He says at the beginning of v9: **And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.** The greatest and most important fact about God is that “*God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). Paul’s prays here that the Philippians would love with no limit, which may seem like an odd request given how much love we saw that he had for them and them for him in vss 3-8. But love has no limits. No matter how much you love, you can still love more. We can never say, “I have loved enough.” You can say it, but don’t deceive yourself into thinking that is a Christian statement. Indeed, love is the surest mark of a truly saved person.

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).

The word **abound** (περισσεύω) has the idea of overflowing in great abundance.ⁱⁱⁱIt’s in the present tense in Greek, which means Paul expects continual advancement in love. As I Cor 13:8 says, “*Love never ends.*” Interestingly, however there is no object of love mentioned. Is Paul talking about love for God or love for one another? But to separate love for God and love for one another is limit love. Jesus said that the foundation of the whole law of God was found in love of God and love

of neighbor (Mt 22:37-40). In other words, you can't separate them or you tear God's law asunder. I John 5:1 reminds us that a growing love for God will naturally be reflected in growing love for believers.

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him" (referring to other believers).

Its natural to everyone here today, Christian or non-Christian and whether you are willing to admit it or not, that this kind of overflowing, abundant, never ending love that Holy Scripture calls us to is so demanding that we seek slick ways to limit our love without it appearing that way.

This is exactly what lurked behind the question asked to Jesus after He said that the greatest commandment was love of God and love of neighbor. The question, 'But who is my neighbor, Jesus?' was not filled with innocence, but unwillingness. That question was really seeking to know the limit of his responsibility to love. We do the same thing, "If they are my neighbor, then I will love them; if not, then I won't." Don't sit and wonder who your neighbor is. That is to limit love. Love can never say, "I have done enough, or I can choose who to love". Love is to **abound more and more.**

This is precisely why you need to pray it. You can't (indeed you won't) love this way apart from the power of God! And you need to pray it not just for yourself, but for your brothers and sisters. "God, help them to love their spouse, their kids, the church, and above all, you." The Christian life begins and ends with love. The key to spiritual growth is love: love for God and love for others. The key to joy is loving and giving yourself to God and others in service. Jesus said, "It is more

blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Giving begins with a life of love.

Trans: But is it really true that all we need is love? Some people think so, but not Paul. Paul says not only are we to love abundantly, but also we should pray that we would love wisely. This 2nd request is at the end of v9.

II. A Request to Love Wisely (9b)

You say, “I thought just loving is the key.” Well, that can’t be. People wrongly think that both faith and love are blind. But faith is only as good as the object in which it is placed. Faith in Jesus is the only valuable faith that exists. In the same vein, love is not blind. It requires a certain vision. Notice Paul says, **And it is my prayer that your love abound more and more, with knowledge and discernment.** This is not love with blinders on; this is love with crisp vision. It is a sort of love that requires **knowledge** of how to love, which can only come from knowing God and His ways. Further, its love with **discernment**. This word refers to “perception”.^{iv} The Greek word is pronounced αἴσθησις from which we get our English word a “aesthetic”, which has to do with personal tastes and preferences.

If you’ve ever been to Ashley’s office, he has a nice showroom complete with kitchen and bathroom fixtures. Couples building a home walk through the showroom literally picking the details of what they want in their home. They pick according to their personal tastes and preferences. They tailor a home they can live in that makes them happy. I doubt any of them care what others think. They don’t walk through the showroom

saying, “I wonder if so and so would like this shower faucet.” It’s irrelevant if so and so likes the shower faucet because so and so will never take a shower there. You will so it only matters what you think.

Here Paul calls for **discernment** (αἴσθησις) in our love. But he’s calling believers to put aside personal tastes and preferences. He’s saying, “Don’t love in a manner that is aesthetically pleasing for your life. Learn to love the way Scripture informs you to love.” God’s word provides knowledge and insight into the words and ways of God. Biblical love is not love as the world sees it. Love in the world is often blind. Biblical love knows best how to love others. It is wise and prudent. Biblical love is under the control and direction of the Spirit of God. As we allow God’s Word to influence our feelings of love, our love will reflect God’s type of love. As we live in His presence through being familiar with the Word, we begin to have the “mind of Christ” (I Cor 2:16) and we become more like Him.

A parent who loves with any sort of knowledge and discernment will not give in to every wish to their children and refuses to withhold punishment and discipline. God is our Father. Nobody has ever loved like Him. Indeed:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

God’s love is vast, but God loves in a manner that never violates His holiness. All believers are saved in Jesus, but all who reject Jesus are justly punished in hell for eternity. His love never conflicts with His

wisdom or ignores His own righteousness. Indeed, He is a Father who will discipline His children from time to time rather than in the name of love allow them to do whatever they wish. God's love never interferes with His truth and what's best for Him and us. God's love is filled with **knowledge and discernment** we could say.

We too must understand that love and truth are not enemies. We will see in a moment how this applied to the Philippians specifically. But allow me to apply it very directly to our own church. When Geoff and I started the church we decided that we wanted love and truth to be the dominating themes. Why is it that so many churches claim to hold steadfastly to truth, but appear to have no love? And why is it that other churches never stand for truth because they understand love to be agreeable and tolerant of every doctrine and lifestyle imaginable. We strive as the elders of this church to love with **knowledge and discernment**. That is, we try to love wisely. On the one hand, we don't want a church culture that sees love as blind, embracing all forms of inappropriate worship, lifestyles, and doctrine. On the other hand, we don't want to have a love that never meets people where they are. One of the ways that we have determined to love rightly and wisely is to allow people to be part of this church who have differing views on baptism. We, of course, reject any sort of understanding of belief that says baptism is necessary for salvation. And there are some who believe that. The Roman Catholics are one group, but there are others. However, there are Presbyterian brothers and sisters who read Scripture in such a way that they believe infant sprinkling is a legitimate form of baptism. We don't reject them because we know they don't believe sprinkling their babies makes them Christians automatically. This is just one example where we try to focus

on the gospel and love even when there might be disagreement on secondary issues. We want to set a tone for a loving atmosphere. We don't just want to love, but we want to love wisely. And that's our prayer for you as well.

Trans: But this naturally leads us to the next request Paul makes, which is...

III. A Request to Love Effectively (10a)

This is related to and spins right off the last one. Notice Paul says: **And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent.**

To love abundantly means we are not stingy in *who* or *what* circumstances we apply love. Loving wisely means we love according to Scripture, *so that we can achieve the goal of loving effectively.*

The word **approve** (δοκιμάζω) means “to test, examine, discern, distinguish”. It conveys a similar thought as that of *discernment* in v9. This word was used to test coins to see if they were made of real metal or were counterfeits. The NIV translates v10 helpfully as, “able to discern what is best”. Paul is praying for the Philippians to be able to distinguish between right and wrong and between what's good and what's best. He's praying that they would learn how to love effectively, which is closely tied to what it means to loving wisely.

Sometimes our love can have the right motivation, but the wrong implementation. For example, we say the right thing the wrong way and the result is conflict or misunderstanding. Loving effectively is the ability to choose the best way to handle problems, sin, conflict, and

relationships in general in the church. This church in Philippi (modern day Greece) was Paul's healthiest church both doctrinally and spiritually. However, division was beginning to creep in. a division he alludes to in 2:2 and then speaks to directly in 4:1. Later, he warns them about the danger of false teachers (3:2, 18-19). If the Philippians were not careful, they would make themselves easy prey for division in the church if in the name of love they never addressed the itching conflict between Euodia and Syntyche on the one hand, and never confronted the false teachers on the other hand.

It is wrong in the name of so-called love to refuse to confront bad belief or bad behavior in the church. This is not loving. True love loves effectively. It diagnoses the problem, sees the heart of the matter and addresses issues where they can be solved, not where more problems are caused or the real problem is ignored. Paul is praying that they would see their duty to love and to demonstrate that love effectively so that inter relationship issues within their church are headed off before they grow too big to handle.

Too many personalities and preferences exist within a church, even a small church plant like ours, to fail at not learning what it means to love effectively. To on the one hand, make mountains out of molehills based on personal preferences, or on the other hand to in the name of love ignore sin and wrongly held beliefs is to fail to love effectively. Love and truth are not enemies. They never have been.

No one was more loving than Paul. He loved the Philippians with the very affection of Christ (1:8), yet at the same time he did not hesitate to rebuke Peter, a fellow apostle, for compromising the truth. In fact, he confronted him publicly about this, "to his face" as he puts it (Gal 2:11-

21). But it resulted in Peter repenting. I am confident this is partly because Paul was loving wisely and effectively, don't you? He somehow convinced Peter both of his love for him, as well as the error of Peter's ways. Nathan the prophet did this successfully with David when he got David to admit his sin by telling him the parable of the little ewe lamb that was stolen. Once again, love and truth are not enemies. They never have been. Let's not be guilty of pitting them against each other.

Trans: There is also another request Paul makes on behalf on the Philippians that we should make on behalf of believers and ourselves. It's...

IV. A Request to Love Sincerely (10b)

Notice he goes on to pray for the Philippians at the end of v10 that they would **be pure and blameless for the day of Christ**. Actions are easy to detect, motivations much harder. Loving *abundantly, wisely, and effectively* have eternal consequences. We are not just dealing with the hear and now. Our spiritual growth in a life of love will be examined by God one day. Therefore, it's important our lives are lived loving God sincerely.

The word translated **pure** can be translated as "sincere", but more literally means "pure or unmixed". In ancient times shopkeepers who made fine pottery often were not careful when carving and sometimes accidentally carved too deeply resulting in a crack. Dishonest shopkeepers applied hot wax to the cracks and then covered them with paint. It would be sold as one piece, but once it was brought home and something hot was put into the vessel, the wax would melt and it would crack into several

pieces. Or, if leaving the market place, the buyer put the vessel up to the sunlight, he could detect the crack. Honest shopkeepers began stamping their products with the phrase *sine cera* translated “without wax”. This guaranteed this was a reliable and sincere piece of pottery.

It should be our all-consuming prayer that we live sincerely in light of the approaching **day of Christ** that Paul mentions. On that day the sunlight of God’s purity will prove if we lived as sincere vessels for God, for “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so 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), and where “each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work” (I Cor 3:3), and again when the Lord “will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts” (I Cor 4:5). The knowledge that one day the truth will come out ought to cause us to live and love sincerely before God and man.

It’s possible to live wrong, but be sincere. It’s also possible to live right, but be insincere. A person who is wrong, but sincere is deceived. And a person who is right but insincere is a hypocrite.^v

What if you went to take ibuprofen and grabbed from the cabinet what you thought was a bottle of ibuprofen, and swallowed two pills. They were the same size, shape, and color of ibuprofen, but were actually poison. Would your sincerity help you in such a case? Of course not. It would hurt you. Don’t hurt the degree of eternal rewards you will receive because you fail in this area of living with integrity before God. And being sincere is not enough, we must also be right. But we can be right,

and not be sincere. And that's not helpful either. God knows. And everyone will know some day whether your life is a sham.

Part of loving sincerely involves being **blameless**. This word means “without stumbling, or offense”. We are to live not only a pure life for ourselves, but also for others. We must learn to live with loving concern for our brothers and sisters’ particular weaknesses and temptations to sin. We must not put stumbling blocks before them (Rom 14:13). A sign of true spiritual growth and maturity in love is letting go of what we have a right to do simply because it’s not helpful to our fellow believers.

Trans: Paul’s 5th request is one that will be answered for every true believer.

V. A Request to Love Righteously (11a)

Paul affirms that the Philippians have **been filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ** in v11. The NASB translates it more literally as “having been filled” indicating a perfect passive participle that refers to something that happened in the past and has continuing results.

At salvation, all believers are justified. Justification signifies our lives are put right with God being declared righteous.^{vi} This **comes** because of and **through Jesus Christ**. But if our lives are right with God, then fruit will mark them. What is **the fruit of righteousness**? It’s the same thing Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. John MacArthur calls these “divinely bestowed attitudes designed to produce divinely empowered good works”.^{vii}

In order to be justified (be right with God) and sanctified (live right before God) you must be connected to Christ. Jesus Himself said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). The implication is, “But with me you can bear this fruit.” And notice the first 2 items that head the list of fruit: love and joy.

That’s what we’re talking about isn’t it as we walk through *Philippians-joy*? And vs 9-11 are about growing spiritually in a life marked by *love*. The key to having joy is living a life of love. But you must be connected to Christ. Please do not try to live a life of love apart from Christ. It can’t happen. You will deceive yourself. You must come to Him today recognizing His love for you by dying on the cross and rising again to give you eternal life before you will ever live a life of love toward God and the church!

Trans: What should fill our prayers for the church and ourselves? We’ve see: a request to love abundantly, wisely, effectively, sincerely, and righteously. Notice the 6th one at the end of v11.

VI. A Request to Love Doxologically (11b)

Paul asks Jesus that the Philippians lives of love would be to the **glory and praise of God**. The Greek word for **praise** (δόξαν) from which we get *doxology*. Each Lord’s Day when you and I sing the doxology together we are praising and worshiping God from whom all blessings flow! But our lives are to exemplify worship to Him every day of the week, not just one.

‘What is the chief end of man?’ asks the WSC. It answers: Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy Him forever.”

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But how can we enjoy God if we aren’t glorifying Him. And how can we glorify Him if we aren’t praying that our lives would do just that. Indeed, let us pray Philippians 1:9-11 for ourselves, for our church, and for God’s glory!

ⁱ MacArthur Study Bible, I Thess 4:3 notes, 1799

ⁱⁱ Grudem, 746

ⁱⁱⁱ Mac Comm, 44

^{iv} Phillips Comm, 41.

^v Ibid., 43.

^{vi} Ferguson Comm, 16.

^{vii} Mac Comm, 53.