

**Phil 1: 9-11**<sup>9</sup> **And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,**<sup>10</sup> **that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,**<sup>11</sup> **being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**<sup>1</sup>

Look around you this morning.

How many times have you prayed for all the people in this building. Some of them you know better than others. Sometimes you may **intimately know** of their struggles and needs. Sometimes you are only **vaguely** aware of them.

Well think about Paul. Here he is praying for a bunch of people, most of whom he is not **intimately** acquainted with. He does know they have some **spats** among them. He also knows they are developing attitudes that are making them less effective at **ministry** and probably at **fellowship**.

So. How does Paul pray? What does he pray for? What does he focus on? What does he hope **gets accomplished**.

\*\*\*This passage is immediately applicable for us. It immediately applies to us. Do you sometimes not know what to pray for your brothers and sisters? I challenge you this week to **paraphrase this prayer** and **pray it** for your brothers and sisters here and elsewhere.

So this passage is helpful as a pattern to pray by.

But what else can we learn?

Well, we can rest assured that if Paul is going to pray, he is going to pray for the things that are **needed** for **the growth** of these people. He is going to pray for them to become **the people in Christ** that they should be. Since that is true, we need to pay careful attention to **what** Paul prays for. We can assume that he is praying both for what **we need as a Christian** and **how it is** that we need it.

In these three verses Paul lays out what is necessary for spiritual growth. The assumption is that, as these people **receive** that which Paul is praying for, they will become **more and more ready** to stand before Christ one day.

So this passage is also helpful to give us things to strive for.

That is a whole lot of purpose for three short verses.

**<sup>9</sup> And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,**<sup>10</sup> **that you may approve the things that are excellent, that**

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<sup>1</sup> [The New King James Version](#) (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), Php 1:9–11.

**you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

Paul has already begun to describe how **he prays** in verse three. He starts with **thanks** and talks about the **rich relationship** he has **with** them and the **confidence** he has **in** them. He appreciates their comradery in the gospel.

This morning he moves into the content of what he asks God for. Paul knows that God responds to prayer. He knows these people need God's work on their behalf. And he knows what things he should pray for that will most help them.

So he begins with this

**that your love may abound still more and more**

What is the most important command? Love God with all your heart soul mind and strength. What is the second. Love your neighbor as yourself.

So that is where Paul starts. No one is sure if Paul's concern is mostly love for God or love for each other, but most of the commentators think that, based on the context the emphasis is love for each other that originates with love for God.

What does love do? Love reaches out to meet the need without concern for the cost that springs from trust and obedience to God.

Now look closely at what Paul **says**. He does not say I pray that you **begin** to love. No. Love is part and parcel of these people's lives. We could look at lots and lots of verses that make it clear that **Christians love**. A person cannot be a Christian without loving God and people.

**1 John 4:7,8 7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

1 John 4:20–21 (NKJV)

**20 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.**

John 13:35 (NKJV)

**35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."**

It isn't like there is any kind of option to be a believer without being a lover of God and people.

But what do we know from our **own experience** about **loving God** and **loving people**? Are you ever content that you do it **well enough**? That you do **it often enough**? That you do it **enthusiastically enough**? I am guessing we would all say, no. Never good enough. So what do we need?

We need our love to **abound still more and more**

If today Christ were to come to you and ask you what you would like **more of** every day of your life, love would be an **excellent answer** and maybe the **very best** of all answers.

We need to love more and more and more each day.

It needs to grow in how we **relate to God**. It needs to grow in how we **respond to each other**. The only thing it does not need to grow in is how much we **love ourselves**. It is assumed in scripture that we all have more of that than we will ever need.

Now what does that love need to **grow in** to be useful? What does the desire to **do what pleases God** and to **do what best meets needs** in other believers, what does that intention need to **grow in**?

God knows that we can have the sincerest of intentions, but without direction they will fall flat.

I remember when I was first married how I would try to please Carla. And at first I was just as likely to irritate her as to please her. But as I gained knowledge of Carla, my ability to please her grew.

Well that is how it is with us and God as well.

Our love needs to grow **IN** something. There has to be a substance that **shapes** and **directs** that love. It can't just grow. It must have a greater and greater capacity to **be directed**.

In this case Paul prays that love abounds more and more in **knowledge and all discernment**.

The word for knowledge is epignosis. This word and gnosis are very similar. In fact, I have read that they are often used interchangeably except when both of them are used together. When used together, epignosis is used to emphasize the experiential nature of the knowledge. It is knowledge you know deeply by experience. It would be like Brad would coach baseball. He is sharing knowledge that he knows, not just from a text book, but by playing baseball so much.

The knowledge that our love is to **increase in** is primarily the knowledge of **what God says**. We cannot separate what God **says** and what God **wants**. One reveals the other. So how can you reach out to meet a need when and where and how God wants it met? By finding out **what God** wants in **His word**.

I have noticed a trend among young people I have contact with. That does not prove anything, but I suspect it is truly a growing trend. Young people, for the most part, do not read much. And they rarely read anything that is lengthy or makes them work. As such, that really hurts their ability to have **their love grow in knowledge**. The knowledge we need is not going to **fall** on us. It isn't going to be **zapped** on us. It will only grow as we **read and study** and **listen** to those who **read and study**.

I have a concern that the next generation church is going to struggle because there will be a shortage of those whose love has **grown in knowledge**.

I urge you to train your kids to **read** and challenge them to **read and read** to them. If you do, they will be more able to provide a very needed service to the next generation. Knowledge.

And while this knowledge of what God wants is important, Paul mentions another part of this that is also necessary.

Knowledge and discernment.

The word for **discernment** means a deep and well trained degree of **spiritual perception** that has been trained by using God's word. It is the ability to understand and apply the word of God in making moral distinctions. And it carries all that out with the goal of **holy living**.

I am often impressed when I fellowship with the local pastors. While they are all good at preaching sermons, they show their real skills when they talk about applying their knowledge in day to day situations. They can look at a situation in the church and they can discern **the problem** and **the solution**. They can spiritually discern right and wrong, better and best. They counsel in relationships and discern where the **real issues lay** and what scripture **applies to them**. They are like Elijah's servant who suddenly could see all the angels in the same situation where he saw none previously.

Discernment looks at life from a spiritual perspective instead of an earthly perspective. It looks a person who is young and healthy and headed for hell as a person who is in a horrible state. It looks at an old and sickly faithful Christian and sees them in a wonderful state. It first must have the knowledge of God's word. But it does more than that. It **interprets life** through God's word. It sees trials as **needed opportunities**. It sees life situations as being **God's assignments**.

So our love for others needs to keep growing in having **first hand experiential knowledge** about God's word because we are **living it out**, and the ability to see and discern life from an eternal perspective that is **created and shaped** by God's word.

What for? What is the goal of this knowledge and discernment?

**that you may approve the things that are excellent**

Approve is a word in Greek that means “allow, examine, prove,” and even “discern.” It was used of examining metals to determine purity and of testing coins to see if they were pure and genuine.

Basically this approving is essentially pouring your **full effort** into determining if something **is** what it **says**. It isn't until we find out what we are approving that we get the full picture.

All of this work of approving is done to **identify what is excellent**.

This has a lot of implications.

I have bought a lot of cars in my long life. I think it is safe to say that none of them were excellent. Can I get an amen?

Anyway, I have read consumer reports on cars. I have seen their employees do an **excellent job** of approving **excellent cars**. They test them. They evaluate them. They tell you what is perfect and what is slightly less than perfect. Those are not so much the things that concern me. But the process they go through is to **approve that which is excellent**.

Well one car might get me where I want to go just as well as another superior car. In the same way you and I can make a lot of life choices that fit within the parameters of **the biblical law**. We can choose actions that are not, in and of themselves an objective sin. No one can come to us and tell us we are sinning by doing that thing. They cannot say we must stop.

But at the same time, it may still not be **the excellent choice**. It may not be the **best** choice. It may not be the **better of two options**. It may not be the thing chosen because we know it **most pleases** our Savior.

And I think Paul is going to lead us to example of this very thing later in the letter. He is going to talk about the two women who could not get along. My guess is if you went to **either woman** they would say they were **within their rights** to have the attitude they had. They may not have been gossiping about each other. They may not have even said bad things about each other. But they had their reasons that they were not going to work out their differences. And both would say that they were making **perfect sense**. And according to Paul, neither one of them was approving that which was excellent.

Approving that which is excellent requires a very demanding skill. We must allow the Word of God to call the shots about human behavior.

We have to allow it to overpower all of our “yes buts.”

**Yes**, I would approach that person **but** it is that person who offended me. They should come to me.

**Yes**, I know the relationship is not what it once was, **but** I did not move so I should not have to initiate contact.

**Yes**, I know I have done wrong things, **but** that person has done me greater harm that inspired my wrong actions.

Approving that which is excellent is not asking, what am **I allowed** to do. It is not asking what **can I get away with** from scripture.

Approving that which is excellent is asking what is the **one thing** in this circumstance which would **best represent** King Jesus's interests? And doing that will often cost us more than we desire to pay.

Do you see why this is Paul's prayer? Do you see why it would be such a **spiritual thing** to move into **this way** of thinking and deciding and processing? First we apply ourselves to **knowing God's will**. Then we exercise ourselves in seeing the world through the **perspective** of God's will. Then we apply ourselves to looking at situations and saying what is the thing that I am most sure would **best attend to Christ's interests**? Those things that Christ loves most.

And then choosing only to do that because Christ is worthy.

A person has to die first. A person has to pick up that cross and bear it first. They must say none of my **selfish or prideful reasons** for not doing this thing are good enough. I want to **do that thing which is best to do**. I don't want second best for Jesus. I don't want to do some kind of **bare minimum** for Jesus. I want to go all out. I want to make Him happy with what I decide. I want to **most glorify** Him.

That is essentially what Paul is praying for these people for. He wants them performing for Christ with excellence. He wants them doing the best.

This isn't the first time Paul said such a thing. In First Corinthians Paul talks about things he is free to do but still will not do.

**1 Corinthians 10:23–24 (NKJV)**

**23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.**

When John Wesley went away to Oxford, his godly mother, Susanna, wisely wrote in one of her many letters to him: **"Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the delight for spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin**

She had a grasp on the fact that just going by the **technicality** of what we **are** and **are not** allowed to do is not enough. Our standard must be higher than that, like Paul's was.

Now this kind of living leads to something else.

**, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,**

The word for sincere is really interesting. Literally it means **lacking wax**. When potters made pots back then sometimes the kilning process would cause cracks in the pottery. Potters would sometimes fill the cracks with a dark wax. Then they would paint over it and no one could tell. The only way to tell was to hold the pottery up to direct sunlight. Then it was very obvious where the crack was because it was a different color in the light.

So a person is sincere if **he is** what he **appears to be** and he is not intentionally taking measures to hide what is not true about him. The opposite of sincerity is hypocrisy. A sincere person appears on the outside what they are on the inside. A hypocrite makes specific efforts to appear on the outside **different** than one is on the inside.

That seems so simple. But it is terribly difficult. We have all encountered people who truly are what they seem to be. You might notice that you relax in their presence. You do not feel you need to impress them because they are doing nothing to impress you. They are simply real.

And we have met people who are just trying to hard to create some kind of an image. Have you ever noticed you find yourself on guard around that person. There is something off. They cannot relax. They are spending effort in appearing a certain way. One is sincere. One is without wax. The other is something else. Well Paul is praying that the Philippian believers will **deeply know the word**, that they will be able **to apply it properly** and **see life as it is**, that they may **work to know** that which is **most pleasing to Christ** so they can **do it**. So that they can be the kind of believer who you know is on the inside just like they present themselves.

But there is one more thing.

**and without offense till the day of Christ**

Paul prays that this sincere person, due to the process of doing the highest thing, the best thing, will be without offense. Other translations say blameless. But the word basically means **not falling into a sin** or **doing things that would cause others to fall into a sin**. Again, this does not mean morally perfect. Sincere believers sincerely sin and sincerely confess their sin. But this state that Paul describes is someone who lives in such a way and makes decisions in such a way

that he first, does not continually live in the state of sin. And secondly, he gives up freedoms if needed, he does the **highest thing** to please Christ, so that he does nothing that would cause a believer to do things that would go against his conscience.

And Paul is praying all this so that those he prays for will show up at judgment day in this state. He wants and prays for all those he loves to be **prepared for seeing Christ**. He never loses that perspective. There may be others out there preaching in a way that appeals to followers **to capitalize on their happiness in this world** with the world's stuff. But not Paul. He is always preparing people to meet Christ.

And what is the ultimate end goal? For Paul it is always the same although he may focus on different aspects.

**<sup>11</sup> being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**

The fruits of righteousness are probably best understood as living in a godly fashion so that what one **does is righteous**. What one **does** is the right thing to do. The fruits are all those things that are composed of converts, creeds and conduct. They are the results of living our lives. We saw a boatload of content about this in First John so there is no surprise here.

Now notice it says **“which are by Jesus Christ”**.

What do you do with the things that you are proud you accomplished?

Don't we often boast of those things?

Don't we sometimes boast about the bad things that we would **never have done** because we were simply **too moral** to do such a thing? We look at things our willpower and commitment and our high moral standards kept us from doing? Things our moral compass would simply not have allowed?

None of that is what Paul is talking about because all of that stuff is the delusional fiction we tell ourselves. Those works of fiction are **imagined virtues** that our **pride** takes credit for. But they are not real. We just display in that pride that we really do not know ourselves. The fruits that are by Jon Zeigler are not worth keeping.

What Paul wants are fruits which are **by Jesus Christ**. Those are the things we look at in our lives and we say, **“That is way different than I used to be.”** “God must have done that because it is way too good for something that would have **come out of me.**” That looks way different than the things that came from me. Those are the things we look at and think, “wow, God really came through for me



here.” “He really did make the changes I prayed for.” “He really answered my prayer and kept me from those evil things.”

Sincerity when informed **knows better** than to boast. And all it really **could** boast about is fleshly. Sincerity would **not take credit** for things that **Christ did** in our lives. When we hold ourselves up to the light, we would see quickly that our lives would **not have produced the qualities** that Christ produced in us.

And Christ really has no interest in the qualities we have **produced by flesh**. They have zero value spiritually. They are not fruits of righteousness. They are the things that Paul left in the dust of his past.

Now what is this all for? Is it for us to proclaim how wonderful we have become? Not likely.

**to the glory and praise of God.**

We say this often, but our flesh must continually be countered. The whole Christian project is about glory and praise to God. Our salvation is **by Him** and **from Him** and **to Him** and **about Him** and **through Him** and **for Him**, and has his remarkable fingerprints all over it.

We did not **author** it. We did not **perfect** it. We did not **think** of it. We would not have **decided for it** had He not intervened.

It is a miracle that any of us are here. But, here we are, none the less.

**to the glory and praise of God.**

While everything we studied was a prayer of Paul, it gives us plenty of information for what we should be directing our lives to. While we should **pray** this same thing for ourselves and for each other, we should also be doing everything in our power to **facilitate** these same traits.

And Paul has given us an awesome model to copy when praying for each other.

And he has given us an excellent guide to let us know how we can, more and more, conform to that which will most **grow us up spiritually**.