

The Christian's Contentment

Paul's Prayer to God

Philippians 1:9-11

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Paul's Prayer to God

Scripture

We are in a series of sermons on Paul's letter to the Philippians that I am calling, "The Christian's Contentment."

After the opening greeting of his letter to the Philippian Christians, Paul gave thanks to God for them, which we examined last time. Today, I would like to examine Paul's prayer to God for the Philippians. Much of the material for this message comes from D. A. Carson's fine exposition of Philippians.¹

So, let's read Paul's prayer to God in Philippians 1:9-11:

⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11)

Introduction

In my previous sermon I said that Paul lived and served in a culture that was hostile to the gospel. There were all kinds of views regarding eternity. There was frankly massive confusion, not unlike there is in our own day. And then, on top of that, there were false teachers going around the churches teaching heresy, again not unlike there is in our own day.

Paul wrote this letter to the believers in Philippi, the church that he had planted in about 51 AD. He had visited

¹ D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 10–19.

them several times since he planted the church, and the Philippian church was probably his favorite church. Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians in about 62 AD in response to a financial gift that he had received from them. So, the Philippian Church was about 10 years old.

Paul wrote to the Philippians because he also perceived threats to their spiritual well-being. He could not visit them because he was now a prisoner in Rome. But he wanted to encourage them. So, what does a man write about when he is staring death in the face? We should pay attention to what Paul is saying because of the urgency of his writing. His burden for the Philippians—and, indeed, for all Christians in all ages—is that they put the gospel first in their lives.

In his exposition of Paul's letter to the Philippians, James Montgomery Boice put it this way:

One of the reasons why God has saved us is that we might be fruitful Christians. He has not saved us merely that we might be free from judgment and go to heaven when we die, but that the character of Jesus Christ might be reproduced in us while here on earth. We are to live in the flesh but not of the flesh. We are to do good works that Christ might be glorified and that many might be brought to faith in him.

This is stated in a wonderful way in Ephesians 2:10. Most Christians know the two verses that immediately precede verse ten: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." But I wonder how many know the verse that follows: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." These verses say three things. They say that God has saved us by grace. They say he has a plan for our lives. They say there are good works in that plan.

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God is somewhat like a father who is raising a large family. He is pleased to have the family, and he is delighted you are a member of it. But he is not satisfied only with that. He also wants you to grow up to be a good citizen, spiritually speaking. He wants productive children. He wants your life to be fruitful with good works.²

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul told them (in verse 4) that whenever he prayed for them, he did so with thanksgiving and joy. Now, when he got to verses 9-11, Paul's petitions reflect the priorities of the gospel.

Lesson

Philippians 1:9-11 teaches us to put the priorities of the gospel at the center of our prayer lives.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Paul's Prayer to God Is for the Philippians' Love to Abound More and More (1:9a)
2. Paul's Prayer to God Is for the Philippians' Love to Be More Knowledgeable (1:9b)
3. Paul's Prayer to God Is for the Philippians' to Be Pure and Blameless for the Day of Christ (1:10-11)

I. Paul's Prayer to God Is for the Philippians' Love to Abound More and More (1:9a)

First, Paul's prayer to God is for the Philippians' love to abound more and more.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers in verse 9a, **“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and**

² James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 45–46.

more.” What is interesting is that Paul does not provide an object for **love**. Does Paul mean to say, **“And it is my prayer that your love for God may abound more and more”**? Or, does Paul mean to say, **“And it is my prayer that your love for one another may abound more and more”**? It is entirely likely that Paul left the object for **love** unstated because he wanted **love** for both God *and* one another to **abound more and more**. Kent Hughes writes that the old Latin commentator Bengel said, “The fire in the apostle never says, ‘It is enough.’”³ To which Hughes adds, “Paul is passionate here—*more love, more love!*”⁴

Surely, at the heart of our response to the gospel is love for God. The Apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:19, “We love because he first loved us.” Before we became Christians we had no love for God at all. We did not care for God or the things of God. But, then, one day we became conscious of God’s love for us, and we were converted. Now, we respond to the love of God for us by our own love for God. Moreover, we learn that the great and first commandment given by Jesus himself is, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). And so, as Christians, our first priority is that our **love for God may abound more and more**.

Is your love for God abounding more and more? You say, “How will I know if my love for God is abounding more and more?” Love for God will undoubtedly include spending time with God in prayer. It will include reading the Bible. But, love for God will be seen chiefly in obeying his commandments.

³ *Bengel’s New Testament Commentary, Vol. 2: Romans—Revelation*, trans. Charlton T. Lewis and Marvin R. Vincent (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1981), 426.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 40.

The Apostle John wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments” (1 John 5:3a). You will discover that your love for God will abound more and more as you delight in conforming your life to his commandments.

But, following immediately on the heels of our love for God is our love for one another. In fact, Jesus went on to say that the second great commandment is like the first, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39). The Apostle John applies Jesus’ teaching as follows in 1 John 3:16–18, “By this we know love, that he [that is, Jesus] laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

Is your love for one another abounding more and more? Love for one another is more than words or talk. It includes action. Let us love one another by serving one other and helping one another. Our love abounds for one another when we are demonstrating it in practice.

II. Paul’s Prayer to God Is for the Philippians’ Love to Be More Knowledgeable (1:9b)

Second, Paul’s prayer to God is for the Philippians’ love to be more knowledgeable.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers in verse 9b, “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, **with knowledge and all discernment.**” Our culture is very confused about love. From the Beatles’ slogan of “all you need is love” to the modern idiom of “love is blind,” the idea seems to be that love is merely an emotion. Frank Sheed has written:

A virtuous man may be ignorant, but ignorance is not a virtue. It would be a strange God Who could be loved better by being known less. Love of God is not the same thing as knowledge of God; love of God is immeasurably more important than knowledge of God; but if a man loves God knowing a little about Him, he should love God more from knowing more about Him: for every new thing known about God is a new reason for loving Him.⁵

Paul understood that love is not primarily a feeling or an emotion. True, biblical love has content. It is grounded in **knowledge and all discernment**. Carson adds, “Of course, Paul is not thinking of just any kind of knowledge. He is not hoping they will learn more and more about nuclear physics or sea turtles. He has in mind the knowledge of *God*; he wants them to enjoy insight into God’s words and ways, and thus to know how to live in light of them.”⁶

We cannot grow in **knowledge and all discernment** if we are not dealing with sin in our lives. If we are bitter, resentful, lustful, covetous, proud, angry, and so on, and do not repent of those sins on a regular basis, we will not become more knowledgeable. We may read Scripture, we may memorize God’s word, we may teach the Bible in Sunday school or Bible study, or we may even have a theological or Bible degree from a college or seminary, but that is not necessarily the same thing as growing in the knowledge of God and gaining insight into the mind of God. As Carson says, “Such growth requires repentance; it demands a lessening of our characteristic self-focus. To put it positively, it demands an increase in our love,

⁵ F. J. Sheed, *Theology and Sanity* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1946), 9-10.

⁶ D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 20.

our love for God and our love for others.”⁷

Carson goes on to say, “Christians cannot say, ‘I will improve my prayer life but not my morality,’ ‘I will increase in my knowledge of God but not in my obedience,’ or ‘I will grow in love for others but not in purity or in my knowledge of God.’ They cannot do it. The Christian life embraces every facet of our existence. All of our living and doing and thinking and speaking is to be discharged in joyful submission to God and to his Son, our Savior.”⁸

Paul’s prayer for Christians’ love to abound more and more **with knowledge and all discernment** means that it produces a practical insight for daily living. Maturing Christians are those who handle the turbulent rapids of daily living with growing ease. They apply with increasing accuracy the word of God to every situation they encounter. You know Christians like that, don’t you? They are the ones you want to talk to when you discover a problem in your life. You want to get their input and advice about how to handle a difficulty that you have encountered. Kent Hughes writes that several years ago Dr. Kyung Chik Han, pastor of the Young Nak Presbyterian Church in Seoul, Korea, was honored at a fifty-year class reunion at Princeton Theological Seminary. He answered several questions at that banquet. Dr. Earl Palmer was there and remembers:

At one point he explained the theological examination process for elders in the Young Nak Church, which with a membership of 50,000 communicants is the largest Presbyterian church in the world. He said that each prospective elder

⁷ D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, 21.

⁸ D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, 21.

was examined in “Bible, Theology, Church History and Common Sense.” Yes, of course, I thought to myself when I heard his remarks—common sense should be added to Theology, Church History and Bible!⁹

Isn't that interesting? But, it seems wise to me.

How, then, is your love may abounding more and more with knowledge and all discernment? Do you deal with your sin on a daily basis? Are you repenting of sin continually? Are you reading God's word regularly so that you may know him and his ways better and better?

III. Paul's Prayer to God Is for the Philippians' to Be Pure and Blameless on the Day of Christ (1:10-11)

And third, Paul's prayer to God is for the Philippians' to be pure and blameless on the day of Christ.

Paul wrote to the Philippian believers in verses 10-11, **“...so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”** Paul wanted the Christian believers in Philippi to grow daily in spiritual maturity. Of course, they would never achieve perfection in this life. But that is the goal. That must be their aim: **to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ**, that is, the day when they see Christ. And all of this is **to the glory and praise of God**.

This is summarized as being **filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ**. Boice says, “The fruit of righteousness is the fruit that righteousness produces. This is to be seen in the innumerable acts of kindness

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel*, 42.

and service to which every believer in Jesus Christ is called.”¹⁰

Unbelievers are unable to be filled with **the fruit of righteousness**. This is a mistake that many non-Christians make. They think that they can earn or merit God's favor by doing good works. Boice is helpful here. He writes:

The unsaved person practicing good works is like a child just after he has fallen into a mud puddle. Worried that his mother may be upset, he comes in the front door and tracks through the living room to the piano and practices a bit. Then he goes into the bedroom and picks up his toys. After that he goes to the bathroom, and then he shows up in the kitchen. Everywhere he has been there is mud.

What does his mother do? Instead of praising him for his good deeds, she takes him to the bathtub and washes him. Then he is sent again to play the piano and to put away his toys. In the same way, the unsaved person must be washed of sin in Christ's blood before he can even begin to produce the good works that God the Father has ordained for every Christian.

When Lawrence of Arabia was in Paris after World War I with some of his Arab friends, he took some time to show them the sights of the city: the Louvre, the Arch of Triumph, Napoleon's tomb, the Champs Elysees. They found little interest in these things. The thing that really interested them was the faucet in the bathtub of their hotel room. They spent much time there turning it on and off; they thought it was wonderful. All they had to do was turn the handle, and they could get all the water they wanted.

Sometime later, when they were ready to leave Paris and return to the East, Lawrence found them in the bathroom trying to detach the faucet. “You see,” they said, “it is very dry in Arabia. What we need are faucets. If we have them, we will

¹⁰ James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary*, 47.

have all the water we want.” Lawrence had to explain that the effectiveness of the faucets did not lie in themselves but in the immense system of water works to which they were attached. He had to point out that behind this lay the rain and snowfall on the Alps.

Many people are living lives that are as dry as the deserts of Arabia. They have the faucets, but there is no connection to the pipeline. They must come to God through Christ. Other people are also parched, but they are parched for another reason. There are impurities that choke the lines. You are a Christian, but your life is unhappy and you need God's cleansing. You must come to Christ for cleansing. You must seek his way and he will make you fruitful.¹¹

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Philippians 1:9-11, let us put the priorities of the gospel at the center of our prayer lives.

Paul's prayer for the Philippians is gospel-centered. His petitions designed to advance the gospel in the lives of the Philippian Christians.

What do we pray for? We often pray for health, for personal safety, for employment, and so on. Now, it is not wrong to pray about these things. But, dear friends, let us also pray for our love to abound more and more, for our love to be more knowledgeable, and for us to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Let us put the priorities of the gospel at the center of our prayer lives for ourselves, and also for others. Amen.

¹¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians: An Expository Commentary*, 48.

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is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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