

Back to the Basics

Paul's prayer to the God who can help for the church that he loves
Philippians 1:9-11; Coast Community Church; Mark Johnson; 8-20-2023

In the first chapter of Philippians, Paul asks the Lord to do some specific things for the church in Philippi. His prayer is simple and methodical, and it lays a foundation for the spiritual growth that he longs to see. While it's critical that our theology be expansive and robust, it's also important that we not lose sight of the basics.

Before we get into Paul's prayer specifically, let's look at the foundation he lays for us:

- 1. Who is Paul addressing in the letter? (Vs. 1)** (2 Tim 3:16, Romans 15:4)
 - Paul addresses his letter to the entire congregation, not just the elders and deacons.
 - This message is for all the followers of Christ!
 - As we approach the Word, we are all to be Bereans, eagerly searching the scriptures with the conviction that these words are for us to understand and apply!
- 2. What is the power source for his prayer? (Vs. 6)**
 - The natural condition of our hearts and minds are opposed to the things Paul is praying for (Jeremiah 17:9, Romans 12:2)
 - The Lord begins the work. The Lord continues the Work. The Lord sustains the work, and the Lord completes the work.
 - Barnes says in his commentary: "It is in God alone. It is not in man in any sense. No reliance is to be placed upon man in keeping himself. He is too weak; too changeable; too ready to be led astray; too much disposed to yield to temptation."
- 3. Why does he rejoice in the church's participation in the gospel? (Vs. 4-5)**
 - Paul rejoices because of their faithful ministry
 - Yet we see that their participation in the gospel is only from God initiating and sustaining
 - When Paul rejoices, it is a proclamation that the Lord is at work in His people!
 - In the church of God, though Paul's prayers no doubt highlighted difficulties and trials (Phil 4:2), the underlying theme in his every prayer is joy because of the mighty hand of God at work

We see that Paul's deep affection for the body of Christ in Philippi stirs him to ask the Lord to do great things for them. What specifically does he pray for?

That they would abound in love (Vs. 9)

- What kind of love is he asking for? Of the four types of love that we see in the New Testament, this one is Agape love (1 Cor 13:1-13). This kind of love does not find its motivation in what it can get out of the object of love. Instead, this kind of love lays down its life for the good of others. Clearly this is not a natural kind of love for fallen men! How do we grow to love in this way?

Through the vehicle of knowledge - firstly (Vs. 9)

- What kind of knowledge? Knowledge of your sin. Knowledge of your savior. Knowledge that transforms (Luke 7:36-47).

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- Not a formal book-knowledge either, but an experiential knowledge. The kind of knowledge a husband has for his wife after decades of listening, learning, and growing together (1 Peter 3:6-7).

Through the vehicle of discernment - secondly (Vs. 9)

- How should we understand discernment? Right judgements. An unyielding moral and ethical understanding to facilitate correctly dividing between right and wrong.

Why would knowledge and discernment be needed for true sacrificial love? True love cannot function with compromise and capitulation. A love that is equipped with knowledge and discernment is what compels believers to:

- Uncompromisingly affirming that marriage is between one man and one woman
- Standing firmly on the unpopular position that women should not be pastors
- Go to abortion clinics and plead with young mothers not to murder their children

What does Paul say should be the outflowing of this kind of transforming knowledge and love?

Loving things that are excellent (Vs. 10)

- The sense behind excellent things is things that are truly lasting. Things that matter. Things of God!
- There's an irresistible quality to the desires that the Lord begins to transform (Psalm 37:4)
- The lies of the world that lurk in the shadows are pulled into the light
- The beauty of Christ is shown to be unmistakable

Transformed lives bearing fruit to the glory of God (Vs. 10-11)

- Followers of Christ walking in obedience to the Lord look different from the world
- This draws attention to the fact that their ultimate hope is not in this world

It will be a small thing for us to give up our freedoms or endure hardships for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, because our reward is so much greater than anything this world has to offer! (1 Cor 8:13, Phil 3:7-8, Psalm 63:3). In the Lord's mercy, he has laid out for us in Philippians 1 the path for His children to be satisfied in Him. May we pursue knowledge, discernment, and love so that we would crave the things that matter, shine as lights in the world, and bring glory to our Heavenly Father through lives devoted to Him!

For personal consideration:

- Does my study of the Word emphasize growing to know God better?
- Do the excellent things of God look more attractive to me than the things of the world?
- Do our lives reflect that the kingdom of heaven is where our true hope lies?