



Paul's Perfect Pastoral Prayer for the Philippians

Series: Philippians – To Live Is Christ

Philippians 1:9-11

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This morning we are going to finish up the introductory part of Paul's letter to the Philippians and we are going to do so by considering this impeccable and powerful prayer that Paul makes for the Philippian church. You know, one of the surest evidences of real love for someone in your heart is whether or not you pray for that person. Real, earnest prayer springs forth from a heart of love for someone. And there is no doubt that Paul loved this church, is there?

This church was Paul's joy and crown. Thinking of them filled his heart with gratitude, with joy and with love. He was grateful to God for the work of grace in their lives, looking at them with grace-filled eyes, grateful for their partnership in the gospel, confident that their salvation was true and real and that God would indeed give them the grace to persevere to the end. What marks these first several verses, including the ones that we are looking at today is real love – intense, deeply felt, affection just like that which Jesus Christ has for his saints; this is what Paul felt for these brothers and sisters.

And we see that theme continued in the prayer that Paul prays for them. He wants the church to know exactly how he prays for them. Paul prays earnestly for the Philippians' spiritual growth, for their endurance, for their spiritual maturity and vitality. Paul's longing, his love-filled desire for them is to be strong in the Lord, to be mature in Christ, to be marked by the character of God, to be pleasing in the eyes of their Savior King. He wants their lives to be so filled with the fruits of righteousness so that they would be pure and blameless on the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ and so bring praise and glory to God the Father.

This is an encouraging, well-considered, and eternally significant prayer. It is the perfect pastoral prayer for the Philippians and for us. In fact, let me just say a couple of things about

this prayer that we need to see from the very outset. First, I want you to notice the focus of this prayer. The focus of his prayer is not on temporal needs, is it? It is not a prayer for ease, or for prosperity, not for a job, not about illness, not for finances, not about avoiding hardship or suffering. His prayer is focused on things of deep spiritual importance, on spiritual blessings and he sought these things as the most desirable of all. That is not to say that praying for a job or about someone's illness or those sorts of things is not important or that we should not do it. That is not what I am saying. But I do want us to see that this prayer that Paul prays is far greater in scope than how we sometimes pray, isn't it? It is focused on eternal realities, on spiritual realities, on spiritual character. He wants them to be a church that is strong in the Lord.

The second thing I want for us to see is that this prayer is in accordance with the promises and purposes of God. Let me show you what I mean. Back in verse 6, Paul expresses his confidence in the power of God's grace in the lives of the Philippians when he says, ***“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6, ESV)*** His surety and his confidence that God will accomplish His purposes in the life of this church does not lead Paul to complacency or laziness – instead it drives him to pray all the more that God would do what God promised He would do. Paul's knowledge that God had begun a good work in these Philippian Christians and that He would unquestionably finish what He had begun did not create a spirit of lethargy or sluggishness in Paul. It was the very opposite. It gave him hope and motivation to believe that his prayers were powerful, that they could accomplish much in the lives of this beloved church, because he was praying in accordance with the will and heart of God for them. This is a powerful and meaningful prayer, an intelligent prayer with a definite progression and goal in view – the glory and praise of God. So what does Paul pray for this church that he loves so much? What should we be praying for our own church, if we love her, as we should? Let's take a look. First, he prays that this church and the people in it would be characterized by

A Love that Abounds More and More (9a) Paul says, starting in verse 9, ***“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more...” (Philippians 1:9a, ESV)*** Paul's longing for this beloved church is that they would have a life that, in every respect, is molded, mastered and motivated by a growing love for God and for Christ – a love that overflows to their brothers and sisters in Christ and a love that embraces the lost.

Now listen, Paul's prayer isn't that they would start loving God. They loved God and that love had overflowed to Paul and to the Jerusalem church already – Lydia opening her home, the jailer ministering and tending to Paul's needs, the collection they took up for the Jewish Christians, the faithful support they gave to Paul in both his ministry and in his imprisonment. But there were also signs of fracturing and self-interest, anxiety and worry creeping into the church. The antidote, Paul saw, was an increase in love. **“It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more...”** Notice that the love that Paul speaks of has no object in this sentence. Is he talking about love for God, love for the brothers and sisters in Christ, or love for the lost? The answer is all of the above.

Love for God and love for others cannot be separated. Jesus summed up the law with two commandments, **“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”** (Matthew 22:37–40, ESV) The Apostle John said: **“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him... And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”** (1 John 4:16–21, ESV) This is a love that finds its source in God, right? **“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** (1 John 4:9–11, ESV) And as Paul says in Romans 5:5, **“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”** (Romans 5:5, ESV)

Paul desires that these Philippians grow and abound in love – loving God more, loving each other more, and loving the lost more and more abundantly and actively and purposefully. He desires that their love would overflow in all dimensions in a lavish, ongoing, and limitless love – a bubbling fountain of love up to God and out to others – a love that originates in God. Let me give you an illustration of what I mean. Last week, when I was working on my sermon, I was in my office writing when I heard the sound of what I thought was the washing machine filling with water. I've heard that sound before and so I just kind of ignored it. But after I wrote a couple of pages or so, and I was collecting my thoughts, I noticed that I was still hearing that sound. So I walked out of my office and into our hallway and found a lake forming, really more like a river of water. I walked into the laundry room and discovered that the source of that sound was not the washing machine but the laundry

tub. Gretch had put some baseball pants there to soak, turned on the water and forgotten all about it. Water was pouring out of the faucet, into the tub, was overflowing the tub, and pouring onto the floor, pouring through the floor and into our weight room. Water was everywhere.

That happened, by God's providence for this sermon, I am convinced. You and I, we are the laundry tub. That faucet represents the Lord and the water represents the love of which Paul is speaking. So you see it? God's love, like that water, flows down to each of us from Him and fills us up. It rises in our hearts back toward God, as we love Him because He first loved us, but it cannot be contained. As that love fills us it cannot help but overflow to those around us, filling our hearts and flowing out of our lives. That is the idea here. It just flows down, up and out like a river. That is what Paul is praying for here. In fact, Paul told Timothy that the goal of his ministry was: ***“love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”*** (1 Timothy 1:5, ESV) But the love that Paul has in mind is not just empty emotionalism or sentimentality, but

A Love that Is Intelligent and Discerning (9b) Paul says: ***“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,”*** (Philippians 1:9, ESV) Unlike the water from the laundry tub that was just flowing everywhere, the love that Paul is praying for is not a shapeless or uninformed kind of love. It has boundaries and shape to it. Think of the Mississippi River. When it stays within its banks, it is a blessed thing, right? But when it floods, not so much. Paul prays that this love would be an intelligent love, a love that is well-informed and shaped by a proper view of God, who He is, His ways, His character, what He has already done for His people and what He continues to do.

He was praying for a love that was governed by God's truth, from an intimate knowledge of God and from a right understanding of the character of God's love. This word that is translated as “knowledge” is a Greek word, “epignosis” that is used by Paul fifteen times in his letters to speak of a personal, intimate, and experiential knowledge of God the Father and of Jesus Christ. Paul is praying for a love that has shape to it, that has strength, that has power.

Lots of times when people speak of love in our cultural sense, they are talking about warm feelings, or some kind of namby-pamby, pandering, undefined, and self-gratifying emotions, but that is not what Paul has in mind here. He has in mind a love that is shaped by God's love. The way to understand the love that Paul is talking about is to study the character of God and of Jesus Christ. That kind of love is sacrificing -- **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16, ESV) It is a righteous love - **“For the Lord is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.”** (Psalm 11:7, ESV) it is steadfast and compassionate -- **“I will rejoice and be glad in your steadfast love, because you have seen my affliction; you have known the distress of my soul,”** (Psalm 31:7, ESV) It is soul nourishing and forgiving -- **“For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you.”** (Psalm 86:5, ESV) It is a love that speaks what most needs to be heard -- **“And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.””** (Mark 10:21, ESV) It is a love that goes beyond expectation -- **“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** (Romans 5:8, ESV) It is a love that gives comfort and grace and produces good in us -- **“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”** (2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, ESV) It is a love that discipline us for our good -- **“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”** (Hebrews 12:5–6, ESV) He wants them to comprehend the love of Christ and then to love as Christ loves.

I could go on and on, beloved, but the point is this: You have to know God, really know God, through His word, through walking with Him in order to love with knowledge. It is knowing God like this that will lead to greater and greater love for Him, but it will also lead to loving others better – with real substance and strength. What kind of love has shape and strength to it? The kind of love that is learned from God, that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, right? There he writes: **“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”** (1 Corinthians 13:4–7, ESV) In other words, what Paul is saying is: “I want you to love more and more. I want you to love God but I also want you to love one another well. I want you to abound in more patience, and more kindness. I want there to be less and less envying, and boasting, and pride, and rudeness, and self-seeking, and easy outbursts of anger, and less of a spirit that keeps a record of wrongs. That does not serve

love. I want you to abound in rejoicing in the truth, approving what is good and right, trusting, and hoping, and persevering.” That is what Paul is praying for. This is the kind of love that Paul desired between the Philippians and it’s a worthy goal for us, beloved.

And this love Paul is praying for is one that must be discerning – that must be well-honed, that is really considered and thought about. This kind of love Paul is praying for takes real contemplation and consideration. It means that we must think to ourselves, how can I best return love to God? How do I best express my love to God? In some ways that’s easy to figure out – you love God through heart-felt praise and worship, through obedience from the heart, through communing with Him in His word, through engaged prayer, through testifying to His goodness and love, by upholding His righteous standards and defending the truth, by orienting my life around service to His kingdom and His church. That much is obvious, but how to do that most faithfully requires that I think about my life and what I give my time, my attention, my love, my money, my passion, my energies to. It means thinking honestly about what my life says about whom I love and how to arrange my life in order to express my love for God most clearly.

But it also means that we need to think to ourselves – what is the best way that I can love this person in the situation that they are in? It means seeing people’s need clearly and then acting to meet that need. How can I best show love to them? Sometimes the best way to show love is to sacrifice your own desires for their good, spend that money, for instance, that you were going to use to buy something for yourself to alleviate someone’s needs. Sometimes it requires you saying the thing that they may not want to hear but that they need to hear. Sometimes it’s entering into their condition to give them godly comfort and advice. Sometimes it means bearing with immaturity and other times calling to repentance. Sometimes it means limiting your liberty so as to not cause another to stumble. The love of which Paul speaks is a kind of love that is governed by biblical principles and that is exercised with judgment. This kind of love is challenging but it is so amazingly rewarding and edifying and strengthening to the loved and the lover. So he is praying for a love that is fueled by knowledge and shaped by discernment.

Just one more thing. Notice what Paul is saying here. There is a fundamental connection between love for God, love for others and the knowledge of God. In other words, one of the principles that Paul is setting forth is this – true knowledge of God must lead to real love for God and for others or your knowledge of God is deficient or merely intellectual. On the

flipside, any expression of love to God or others that is not rooted in theological truth is not Christian love at all. Love and knowledge of God go together. Knowledge without love is really ignorance and lacks any power – and – love without knowledge is empty sentimentalism – it lacks real substance. So Paul has in mind a love for God and for others, a love shaped by Scripture, and

A Love that Leads to Wise Living (10a) 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...” (Philippians 1:9–10a, ESV)** Paul is praying for a growing and well-informed love for God and for others that would direct the Philippians to live wisely. Let me show you what I mean. The word that is used here for approve is a word that means to examine, to test, or to try something according to an established standard. It was a word that was used of examining metals to discern if they were true and genuine. We have all heard of iron pyrite, haven't we? What is that? It's “fool's gold.” Back during the gold rush of 1849, there are numerous stories of greenhorns who went out west, taking all of their life savings, looking to strike it rich. Most of them really know nothing of mining gold or how to test gold and so there are a bunch of stories of men who went looking for gold, who mistook iron pyrite for the real thing, purchased a claim and wasted everything they had on a worthless fake because they didn't know how to test it. They were seduced by empty promises and hopes.

Paul does not want that for the Philippians. He wants them to be wise. He wants them to be so mastered by a well-informed, well-grounded love for God that they make wise choices that leads to wise living, to what is excellent before God and one another. All of our lives are filled daily with choices, aren't they? And Paul's desire is simply this – that they would be so controlled by the love of Christ that they would make wise choices. In a very real way, and I am not denying God's sovereignty here, there is a sense in which we make our choices and our choices make us. We either choose wisely or we choose foolishly. We either make our choices with a view to honoring Christ or we make our choices with a view to honoring ourselves. We make choices with our time, how to expend our energy, what to give our attention to, what relationships to invest in, what will have priority in our lives, what will be the goal of our living. Paul's desire is that they would make choices that would honor Christ, that would feed their souls, that would bless others, that would benefit the Kingdom.

You can relate to Paul's heart here if you are a parent or grandparent, can't you? What do we desire for our children – that they would live wisely, right? Think about it. We labor to fill their minds with theological truth, to fill their minds with gospel realities and our hope is that it will blossom into real and vibrant love for God and for His Christ, into love for the brethren, into love for others, and into lives that are marked by wise and godly living. That was Paul's desire for this church – that they would approve what was excellent, what was pleasing to God, what would make for a joyful and spiritually enriching life. That's what Paul was after. And a life controlled by the love of God would lead to a life of integrity.

A Love that Yields Integrity (10b) Now look at verse 9-10 altogether: ***“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, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ...”***

(Philippians 1:9–10, ESV) Paul is praying for growing, well-informed and wisdom-generating love for God and for others that would produce a life of integrity. He longs for them to have lives that are pure and blameless before Christ. That word for pure is a powerful one. It is a word that means to be “tested by the sun.” It was a word that was used of honey that was pure and transparent, that was without wax, through which the sun could shine.

When it is applied to the Christian's character, it is a word that speaks of speaks of integrity, of a life that is minus deceit, a life that is free from selfish motives, from cunning and manipulation, a life free of double-dealing. It describes someone where “what you see is what you get.” It describes someone that is straightforward in speech and action. It's a word that describes someone who wears Christ, not as a put-on for personal gain, but in sincerity and honesty.

Paul desired that the Philippians would be so mastered by abounding love for God and for others that their living would be marked by integrity and not by hypocrisy. The word for hypocrite is a Greek word that was used to speak of an actor in Greek theatre who pretended to be someone that he was not. Unfortunately, sometimes the greatest theater in the world is the church – where people put on performances and speak in pious language, where they give off a certain appearances that they carefully cultivate – but the outside doesn't match the inside. Beloved, we have to see how that breaks down fellowship with God, fellowship with our brothers and sisters and hampers the testimony of Christ. What ends up happening in those situations is that we don't really interact with people but with characters. Paul know that and he longed that the love of God and love for God and love for

others would so abound in the hearts of the Philippians that they would be real – real in their relationships, real in their struggles, real in the embrace of grace, real in their advance in holiness – that they would be marked by reality and the real pursuit of godliness energized by love for God and for one another.

Having that kind of life – a pure and unadulterated life marked by love that produced integrity would make them blameless. The word that's used for blameless refers to causing other people to stumble –whether in their relationship to God, their relationship to other people or in their pursuit of holy and righteous living. It means that they would live in such a way never to put a stumbling block before someone else – not injuring another's walk with Christ – neither by example, or by opinions, nor conversation, nor deception, nor actions. It's pretty comprehensive.

Paul's desire of his heart is that they would be ready to see Jesus face-to-face and to be unashamed at His coming. Paul wanted to lift their eyes to the return of Christ when He returns in power and glory. No faddish or trendy Christianity for them but long term faithfulness, And they would be unashamed because this kind of love, a love that produces integrity in the lives of God's people is that kind of love that results in a spiritually bountiful life. Paul is praying for

A Love that Brings Forth Much Fruit (11a) Follow the flow with me again starting in verse 9: ***“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, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ...”*** **(Philippians 1:9–11a, ESV)** Paul longs for the Philippian brethren to be mastered by God's love in these very ways so that their lives would be laden with the fruit of righteousness. He prays that their faith in Christ, their love for Christ, would lead to a life that produced abundant fruit – faithfulness, trust, reliability, confidence, compassion, kindness, goodness. The wish of Paul is that they would show abundantly by their lives that they were truly righteous.

How would this happen? – Only through Jesus Christ. Understand what Paul is saying here. The gospel truth is that the instant we trust in Christ as Savior, God imputes His righteousness to our account, so that we have right standing with Him. But the Christian life

is a process of growing in righteous character and deeds. As the word “fruit” implies, this is a process, not something instantaneous. The word picture also implies that it is the life of Christ working in and through us that produces the fruit. Jesus explained it this way in John 15:4-5, **“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”** (John 15:4–5, ESV)

We have been placed into Christ by the Holy Spirit but we must consciously grow in that relationship by the decisions we make – the choices that we talked about – choices to pursue the knowledge of Him through His Word, to relate to him in prayer, to relate to other believers in body-life experiences -- bearing one another's burdens and confessing our faults and sharing in fellowship with one another, wherein we learn about and see Christ in one another, the choice to worship and serve and use out gifts for His glory. This is what brings forth the life that is laden with spiritual fruit. This is the fruit of a life of love abounding to God, of love abounding to others and it ultimately results in

A Love That Produces Glory and Praise to God (11b) Watch now as Paul brings His prayer to its full completion, saying: **“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, 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.”** (Philippians 1:9–11, ESV) Again, Paul has the long-haul in view here. He understood that if the Philippians were to honor God, it could not merely be with their lips – with expressions of prayer or praise minus the heart. It must be from a life fully devoted to Him. Paul knows the temptation to substitute lip-service for a life of patient and consistent piety and faithfulness, but he also know the joy and satisfaction of a life well-lived for Christ and that is what he desired for the Philippians. He longed that they would have a life that magnified God’s reputation in this world.

Beloved, this is the kind of life that we were made for – individually, yes – but especially corporately. Together, we ought to desire that this prayer would be borne out in us – that we would be a people who are people who are growing in love, people who are increasing in our knowledge of God and His character and so who love with a discerning love, people who are choosing that which is excellent, who are living in sincerity and integrity, who are manifesting fruitful lives, and who are living for the glory of God. Imagine what it would be

like is that was the sincerest pursuit of all of our hearts. Imagine if these were the sorts of things that we could rejoice in, in one another.

This was the greatest prayer that Paul could have possibly prayed for the Philippians. It is the perfect pastoral prayer that Paul prays here in this text and I want to challenge you, starting right now, to pray this very prayer for one another, every day for the next month. Will you covenant with me to do that? Every day, for the next month, I want to challenge you to pray this prayer for one another and to do it by name, as God brings people to your mind to pray for. Start this morning with the people who are seated around you in just a moment when we begin to pray. You can do it individually or you can do it in groups – whatever you want to do.

Maybe you need to begin today by repenting – repenting of love grown cold, or of not pursuing a growing knowledge of God and Christ. Maybe you need to repent of not seeking ways to express your love to your brothers and sisters in Christ, or of pretending to be something you aren't. Maybe you need to begin by repenting of foolish choices or of fruitlessness, or of not promoting this kind of love. Listen; don't be discouraged if the things for which Paul was praying for the Philippians are not overflowing in your life as they should – that's why he prays, so that they will. Instead, know that God is forgiving and He delights to forgive His children who will humble themselves and pray for His grace. So begin this morning by humbling yourself and then pray. Pray that we would be a people who are people who are growing in love, people who are increasing in our knowledge of God and His character and so who love with a discerning love, people who are choosing that which is excellent, who are living in sincerity and integrity, who are manifesting fruitful lives, and who are living for the glory of God.

Will you covenant with me to pray this prayer for one another, every day for one month and see what God will do?

And for you who have not personally experienced the love of God in Christ, who have not personally received Christ as your Lord and Savior through faith, who have not received the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and for eternal life with God – I want you to know I am praying for you today...

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