

**Paul's Prayer for Abounding Love
Philippians 1:9-11
Part 2**

We are looking at **Phil. 1:9-11**, “**And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, (10) so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the Day of Christ; (11) having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**” In this prayer for the Philippians, Paul prays for one thing. He prays that their love would abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment. He is not speaking of the love of man generated by their own efforts, but rather he is speaking of the love of God which had been bestowed upon them in Christ.

This is a very appropriate prayer request. Just as God's love has abounded toward us in Christ Jesus, God wants His love which we possess to abound more and more through us to others. Love is at the very core of our faith and will be manifested if that faith is being worked out in our everyday lives. What I have just shared with you concerning love will make no sense at all to the people of the world.

Dr. Barnhouse tells of encountering a young Japanese girl working at the reception desk in a Tokyo hotel. Somehow in the conversation he felt led to ask her if she was a Christian. She responded by saying that she was a Buddhist. She told him that she had heard of Jesus but that she did not know anything about Him. After responding to his initial question, he asked a second question. “Do you love Buddha?” She responded, “I never thought about love in connection with religion.” His response to her was to expound on the subject of love and the Christian faith. And of course the story that he told her was completely foreign to anything that she had ever heard before.

People in the world, such as this young Japanese girl, even religious people who are involved in faiths such as Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam, do not see themselves as having been personally loved by their various deities. And because of this they will not find themselves having deep feelings of affection for their deities. They view their deities as someone who needs to be served. They view their deities as someone who needs to be honored. But they would not naturally feel affection for them.

But we in fact do feel this affection because we know that God loves us. **1 John 4:19** tells us, “**We love Him because he first loved us.**” And this love with which He loved us is in us through the person of Christ. So not only am I the object of God's love; I have become the vessel through which His love should flow. So understanding this, let us pray for ourselves and others, that His love would abound more and more. We are tremendously blessed and hopefully others will be blessed through us. Thank you Jesus.

But how should this love abound more and more? Paul goes on to say, “**In real knowledge and all discernment.**” It is not enough for us to simply possess the love of God or that His love would be abounding more and more in and through us. There is still the matter of this love being

expressed rightly. Paul here prays for the Philippians, that their love would abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

He wants their love to flow out of a deep relationship with God. This is what Paul means when he says, “in real knowledge.” He wants their love to flow out of the clear understanding of God’s moral principles. This is why he says, “in all discernment.” Hopefully, in our attempts to unconditionally serve others, we would not simply think that we can jump up on our horse and gallop off madly in all directions. Hopefully, in our attempts to unconditionally serve others, we will understand and appreciate that it must flow out of a deepening relationship with our Lord and a growing understanding of His Word.

When this is in place, wonderful things are produced, glorious things are produced. Things that far exceed the mundane issues involving the cares of this world. Hopefully as we understand not only the prayer that Paul prayed but why he prayed it, it will dramatically impact not only the way we pray but the whole of our entire lives.

WHY DID PAUL PRAY WHAT HE PRAYED?

There are two reasons specifically stated in these verses. First of all, he prayed what he prayed in order that they might “approve the things that are excellent.” Let us look at **VV. 9-10, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.”** But why? **(10) “So that you may approve the things that are excellent.”**

What does Paul mean by the word “approve?” The word “approve” (DOKIMAZO) means to “put to the test, examine.” We see this word in **1 Cor. 11:28** which says, **“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”** We see the word again being used in 2 Cor. 13:5, **“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you - unless indeed you fail the test?”** We see it again in **Gal. 6:4, “But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have reason for boasting in regard to himself alone, and not in regard to another.”**

In the Septuagint, the verb was regularly used of the proving of a person’s heart by God. Just as God would seek to prove or test a person’s heart in the Old Testament, we are to prove or test all the various things that make up our lives. We are to examine the way we spend our time. We are to examine the way we spend our energy. We are to examine the way we use our resources. We are to put to the test, to examine, everything that makes up our lives and consumes our precious resources.

What are we attempting to discover? We are attempting to discover the things that are excellent. **VV. 9-10, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve the things that are excellent.”** We are seeking to discover the things that are “excellent.” What does this mean? The word “excellent” (DIAPHERO) comes from a Greek word which means “to differ.” In this context, it would mean that we are to discover those things which differ by surpassing

others. This is why we have the translation “excellent” in the NAS and the KJV; and the translation “best” in the NIV translation.

You might think that going around approving, examining, testing various parts of our lives would be very tedious, and perhaps even burdensome. But this activity is rather common. Those who see money as surpassing all other things are continuously examining their lives in light of that value. Those who see pleasure as surpassing all other things are continuously examining their lives in light of that value.

If we in fact are in possession of the love of God and we have a growing and deepening relationship with Him and His Word we will conclude that experiencing and expressing God’s love is of the highest value. We will therefore want to examine and test the various options available to us in our lives in order to discern the most loving thing to do.

Certainly this is Paul’s conviction. Therefore Paul is praying that their love would abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that as they approve or test all their options, they would be able to identify the option that would surpass all other options in value. Hopefully we are working this out in our lives. Hopefully you are working this out this morning.

You have chosen to be here this morning. Why? You could have gone to the beach. That is an option. You could have gone to the mountains. That is an option. You could have chosen to work in your yard. That is an option. You could have gone to visit your family. That is an option. You could have chosen to watch a sporting event on television. That is an option. You could have just chosen to sit in front of a fan and read a good book, perhaps even read the Bible. That is an option. There are a lot of options. So let me ask you again. Why are you here?

Hopefully it was the result of what we have been talking about. Hopefully you are here this weekend because you could not think of a better way for the love of God to be expressed at this moment in time than to be sitting here with your brothers and sisters in Christ, praising God and seeking to learn and apply His word. I would like to think this is why you are here this weekend.

Unfortunately, some people choose to stay home or to leave town and it has nothing to do with love, the love of God. It has nothing to do with their deepening relationship with God or their knowledge of His word. They are simply doing what they want. There are people who I am reasonably assured woke up this morning and said, “I’m tired! I don’t feel like going to church today.” And they chose not to go. And they did this without giving any consideration to the Lord and His Word. They never did seek to approve the excellent thing. All that they could see was how a relaxed, uncomplicated morning would serve their flesh.

Does this mean that everyone who is not here this weekend would be guilty of not striving to approve the things that are excellent? And the answer would be, of course not.

1) Let us consider: A person with the flu. Could his staying home be an excellent thing? Could staying home be the best expression of the love of God? Yes, of course. And we do not even have to explain it. It is obvious.

2) Let us consider: A person whose boss expected them to go out of town on a business trip this weekend. Could this person going on a business trip be an excellent thing? Could leaving on a business trip be the best expression of the love of God? Yes, of course. If the options were, be willing to leave town or lose your job. It certainly could be. Not only for his family in terms of providing but also for us in terms of our care.

3) Let us consider: A family who has planned their yearly vacation and will be gone not only two but perhaps three weekends. Could this family going on a yearly vacation be an excellent thing? Yes, of course. Even Jesus told his disciples “Let us come aside and rest awhile.” When a family has faithfully been attending this fellowship week by week, giving not only their time but their energy and their resources, it certainly can be an excellent thing for them to get away. It certainly can be the best expression of the love of God.

This morning we are seeking to answer the question, “Why did Paul pray what he prayed?” Paul gives us two reasons. First of all, Paul wanted the Philippians' love to abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment in order to be able to approve, test, and examine the things that are excellent.

Secondly, Paul wanted the Philippians not only to approve the things that were excellent but to consistently choose the things that were excellent and this consistent choosing would lead them to be sincere and blameless until the Day of Christ. Let us read **Phil. 1:9-11**, “**And this I pray, that your love abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve the things that are excellent in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ Jesus.**”

If the love of God is in fact in us and abounding in real knowledge and all discernment, it will lead us to strive to approve the things that are excellent. And the striving to approve the things that are excellent, the things that are most consistent with the love of God, will cause us to lead a life that is sincere and blameless until the Day of Christ Jesus. I believe the reference to the “Day of Christ Jesus” is significant. This is the second time it has been mentioned in this chapter.

Many so called Christians are very short sighted. What is God’s goal in respect to salvation? God’s goal is that one day we will stand holy and blameless before Christ. Remember **Eph. 1:4**, “**just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him, in love.**” This is the goal. Later in this epistle Paul will communicate this goal very clearly. Listen to what he says in **Phil. 3:7-14**, “**But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ, (9) and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, (10) that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; (11) in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (12) Not that I have already**

obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do; forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, (14) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Paul certainly did not take his eventual standing before the Lord holy and blameless for granted even though he was an apostle of Christ (Phil 3:7-14).

It is true that Paul has already communicated to the Philippians that he was confident that the work that the Lord had begun in them would be completed on the Day of Christ Jesus. What did Phil. 1:6 say, **“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”** He then goes on to explain his assurance in VV. 7-8, **“For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. (8) For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”** But he is not satisfied. Out of this overflowing love for the Philippians, he takes nothing for granted. And he prays that their love would continue to abound and flow from their deepening relationship with God and His Word, producing excellent choices and good fruit until the day of Christ. I believe that the primary reason Paul prayed what he prayed was because he did not take the Philippians good standing before the Lord for granted.

Just as Paul did not cut himself any slack as we see in Phil. 3:7-14, Paul did not cut any slack to the Philippians. Though he was confident they both would be together on the day of Christ Jesus for many good reasons that he stated in VV. 7-8, he does not take the future for granted and goes on to pray for them in VV. 9-11.

CONCLUSION

Are you taking your salvation for granted? Are you taking the salvation of others for granted? Biblically we can never take our salvation for granted. Salvation is truly a gift from God and the gift that we have received from God will bear fruit. There is no more distinct fruit of our genuine living, saving faith than love. Love is at the very core of our faith. There is no better thing that we can pray for in respect to ourselves or our brothers and sisters in Christ than God’s divine love would abound more and more in us and through us in real knowledge and all discernment.