

Paul's Prayer for Loving Discernment

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

Introduction:

1. Review: The overarching theme of the Epistle is joy (See 4:4). Joy is not something dictated by our circumstances as it is a part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and is therefore something that is supernatural.
2. The Apostle Paul is now informing the Philippians of his prayers for them. A prayer report is a common introductory feature found in many of Paul's Epistles. In our last lesson we looked at the thanksgiving part of Paul's prayer for them. He now details the specific requests he was bringing before the Lord in prayer on their behalf. This prayer flows out of Paul's deep, spiritual affection for them (Vs. 8) (notice 'and' in Vs. 9). You will pray fervently and specifically for those you love.
3. Fee: "At the beginning of his thanksgiving (Vs. 4), Paul told the Philippians that he prayed for them on a regular basis, and that he made those prayers with joy. Now, flowing directly out of his own longing for them "in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Vs. 8), he tells them what that prayer consists of."
4. In actual fact, the prayer is one unit. It is one of Paul's telescope prayers with a main request followed by several intended consequences of the request. Each phrase builds upon and flows out of the preceding phrase.
5. For our study, we will break the prayer into 3 sections.

I. THE GRACE CONNECTED TO DISCERNMENT (VS. 9)

Paul prays for:

A. A Love that is Growing (Vs. 9a)

1. 'love' = Divine love. Love for the brethren is a fruit of salvation (1 John 3:14) but it needs to grow. "The love that God is (1 John 4:16), produced in the heart of the yielded believer by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5), its chief ingredient, self-sacrifice for the benefit of the one who is loved (John 3:16), and its constituent elements analyzed for us in 1 Corinthians 13." (Wuest) The primary connotation of the word 'love' is "not 'affection' as in the preceding phrase about Christ (Vs. 8), but rather a sober kind of love – love in the sense of placing high value on a person or thing, which expresses itself in actively seeking the benefit of the one so loved." (Fee)
2. 'abound' = the word means to overflow, "to exceed a fixed number of measure, to exist in superfluity" (Wuest). The imagery is that of a river overflowing its banks during a flood (Gromacki). It is one of Paul's favorite words (26 out of 39 occurrences of the word in the N.T. are Pauline). It is a word that speaks of the abundance of the Christian life. Because God's grace abounded towards us in salvation (Rom. 5:15), we can overflow with love to others. The word is also translated 'abundance' (Lk. 12:15, 21:4), "over and above" (Jn. 6:13), 'excel' (1 Cor. 14:12), 'increase' (1 Thess. 4:10) and 'abound' multiple times. To this Paul adds the words "more and more" revealing just how much love the believer is to have in his life. This is an ongoing growth process.

Rejoice - Philippians Series

3. Illustration: An overflowing bucket under a stream.
4. 1 Thess. 4:9-10 "But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye **increase more and more**;"
5. Someone has described this Divine love as an exotic flower from heaven planted in the foreign soil of the believer's heart.
6. Challenge: What picture best represents your love for the brethren? A deep flowing river or a dry, cracked creek bed with a tiny trickle of water?

B. A Love that is Governed (Vs. 9b)

1. The kind of love Paul has in mind is not a lawless love but a love that is guided by the great principles of knowledge and judgment. This verse should end forever the notion that godly discernment is to be laid aside in favor of love. True Biblical love is entirely consistent with and connected to godly discernment. Sadly, many believers live as though a life of discernment is incompatible with a life filled with love.
2. The word 'knowledge' has the idea of a full and deep knowledge. "In secular Greek it denotes moral understanding based on experience, hence something close to 'moral insight'" (Fee). To have knowledge is to have a "thorough, mental grasp of spiritual truth." (Gromacki) In Colossians Paul prayed for the believers that they would be "filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." (Col. 1:9) Knowledge forms the basis of discernment therefore the better you know the Word of God, the better equipped you will be to make wise decisions. This is not us making our own set of criteria for judging things but rather basing our judgments on infallible guide of God's truth.
3. The word 'judgment' means perception, discernment. The word originally was used of sense perception. It refers to the ability to make proper moral decisions in the midst of a vast array of differing choices. It refers "to a sensitive moral perception and a quickness of ethical tact." (Wuest). It is a spiritual sense of smell. Notice that it is preceded by the word 'all'. God wants us to know the full scope of biblical discernment.
4. Illustration: Knowledge and judgment are like the two banks of a river that serve to direct the flow of the river. Biblical love must flow within the channel of God's truth. "Paul prays that this love may overflow more and more, but that its outflow and application might be brought within the guiding limitations of knowledge and judgment." (Wuest)
5. Heb. 5:14 "But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their **senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**"

II. THE GUIDANCE OF DISCERNMENT (VS. 10A)

A. The Testing Involved

Rejoice - Philippians Series

1. 'that' = introduces a purpose or result of the preceding action. This action is the purpose or result of discerning love. (Gromacki)
2. 'approve' = the word was used of the testing of metals so has the idea of approving after testing. "It means to discriminate, to test and set the seal of approval on the one thing rather than on the other." (King) It is in the present tense indicating that this is to be cultivated as a practice of life. The word was used of the candidates for the degree of doctor of medicine who had passed their examinations and had become certified physicians. Also translated 'discern' (Lk. 12:56), 'prove' (Lk. 14:19, Rom. 12:2, 2 Cor. 8:8, 22, 13:5; Gal. 6:4, Eph. 5:10, 1 Thess. 5:21, 1 Tim. 3:10), 'alloweth' (Rom. 14:22), 'try' (1 Cor. 3:13) and 'examine' (1 Cor. 11:28). This is the practical function of taking the 'knowledge' of God's Word and using it to make wise judgments.
3. Equipped with the truth of God's Word, we are to put things to the test. Sadly, many believers today exhibit the opposite attitude to the testing mindset described in this verse.
4. The same word is used in the following verses:
 - a. Eph. 5:10 "**Proving** what is acceptable unto the Lord."
 - b. 1 Thess. 5:21 "**Prove** all things; hold fast that which is good."

B. The Things Involved

1. "things that are excellent" = literally, "the things which differ". This exercise is more exact than simply discerning the things that are clearly spelled out as right and wrong. It involves discerning what are the things of primary vs. secondary importance. "It is between the primary and the secondary, between eternal and temporal values." (Gromacki)
2. On an advanced level, we are to learn to discern between what is good and what is best. This is what is in view in this verse. We are to learn to determine what is excellent in the Christian life.
3. Beware that in your life the good doesn't become the enemy of the best.

III. THE GOAL OF LOVING DISCERNMENT (VS. 10B-11)

The goal of the proving process is that we might be found pleasing to the Lord at His coming.

A. Found in Purity – 'sincerity'

1. The word is translated 'pure' in 2 Peter 3:1 and means unmixed, unsullied. It literally means "judged by sunlight", that is, tested as genuine. Ancient jars and vases were examined for disguised cracks by holding them up against the rays of the sun (Gromacki). In Paul's day, sculptors would use wax to hide mistakes in their craftsmanship. Holding the object up to the sun would melt the wax and reveal the true character of the workmanship.
2. Illustration: Someone came to Spurgeon and expressed an interest in writing a biography of his life. Spurgeon replied, "write it in the clouds, I have nothing to hide!"

B. Found in Blamelessness – "without offence"

Rejoice - Philippians Series

1. Means “having nothing to strike against, not causing to stumble” (Gromacki). It means “blameless in the sense of not offending or not causing someone else to stumble.” (Fee)
2. This applies:
 - a. To myself – cultivating a discerning life keeps my personal life free of offense before God.
 - b. To others – walking in godliness means my life is not a stumbling block to others.
3. “till the day of Christ” = the duration of this walk. It is for our entire lives until the coming of Christ. The phrase “day of Christ” points to the coming of Christ and the subsequent judgment seat (2. Cor. 5:10).
4. Illustration: Employees often work with an eye towards the clock. As believers, we work with an eye towards the Lord’s coming.
5. Two helpful tests for Christian discernment are:
 - a. Will it make myself or others stumble?
 - b. Will I be ashamed if Jesus Christ should return?

C. Found in Fruitfulness (Vs. 11)

1. The Plenteousness of this Fruitfulness (Vs. 11a)
 - a. ‘filled’ = this is an abundant fruitfulness. There is a theme of abundance in these verses with abounding love (Vs. 9) and abounding fruitfulness (Vs. 11).
 - b. “fruits of righteousness” = a description of our sanctification. It includes the fruit of the Spirit, the fruit of soul-winning...
2. The Person of this Fruitfulness (Vs. 11b)
 - a. These fruits are not self-produced through self-effort but by the life of Christ working in us. “He, not we, is ever the emphasis of the N.T.” Fruit is produced by life, not by law.
 - b. “Too many Christians try to “produce results” rather than allowing God to do the work through them. A fruit tree does not make a great deal of noise when it produces its crop. It merely allows the life within to work in a natural way and the fruit is the result.” (Wiersbe)
 - c. Jesus Christ is the vine; we are the branches: John 15:5 “**I am the vine, ye are the branches:** He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”
 - d. F.B. Meyer writes, “Do not concern yourself so much with the fruit end of the bough, but with the end of fibrous wood which is connected with the vine. See to it that you live always in union with Jesus Christ, for without Him, severed from Him, you can do nothing. Abide in Him and let Him abide in you. Let the one agony of your life be to keep near to Jesus. See to it that every morning in your prayer you touch Him, that you meditate on the Bible, that all day the union is kept unbroken, so that the living Christ may pour through you the sap of His own vitality, and fill you with the fruits of righteousness.”
 - e. Jesus Christ is our sanctification: 1 Cor. 1:30 “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and **sanctification**, and redemption.”

Rejoice - Philippians Series

- f. Note: We cannot afford to lose sight of the centrality of Christ in sanctification. The Holy Spirit will not own and bless the formula-oriented approach to sanctification that displaces Christ!
- 3. The Praise for this Fruitfulness (Vs. 11c)
 - a. The grand design and purpose of the prayer and the holy life it contemplates is the glory of God.
 - b. Genuine fruit glorifies Christ, not the Christian. That which is self-produced glorifies self rather than the Saviour.

Conclusion:

1. How is the quality of your prayer life? Are they focused on the eternal and spiritual or the temporal and carnal?
2. What is your mindset concerning a life of godly discernment?