

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

Title: Praying for the Church, Part 2

Truth: We ought to pray for one another like this.

Date/Location: Sunday November 28, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

⁹ And this I pray, **that** your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ [so] **that** you may approve the things that are excellent, **that** you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In English, this passage seems to give three specific requests, each delineated by the word *that*. But in the original text, there are really two interconnected requests. The middle “that” is different and it is the result of the first request, thus I translated as “[so] that.”

I. Discerning Love that Knows What is Best

A. True godly love is at the heart of the Christian faith. The apostle is not praying for an increase in “self-love” or love of the world. He is praying for an all-around godly kind of love.

What God has designed us to do is to love Him with all our hearts (Matt. 22:37), and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:39). He has made us to love Christ and show it by keeping His commands (John 14:15, 23-24). He has designed wives to love their husbands and children (Titus 2:4) and husbands to love their wives in the same way Christ loved the church (Eph. 5:25, Col. 3:19). He calls for church members to love one another with a pure and fervent love (John 13:34, 15:12, 17; Romans 13:8; 1 Thess. 3:12, 4:9; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 3:11, 23, 4:7, 4:11-12; 2 John 5). He calls us to serve others sacrificially with compassion and concern.

This is how you should pray for your fellow Christians. Because you know that you tend to love yourself and your love for God and

others is often interrupted, you should pray for others that they will not “leave their first love” (Revelation 2:4), that they will not “love this world” (2 Tim. 4:10).

B. Christian love must not only abound, but it must abound in *knowledge* and *discernment*. It is an informed love—based on God's Word—and it is a discerning/discriminating love. It is bounded by truth and holiness, just like God's love. This discernment is moral perception and understanding. The true love for which the apostle prays cannot be a misdirected feeling that puts love ahead of all Bible or all brains, but rather loves within the boundaries of the knowledge of the truth and holiness. “Love must be intelligent and morally discerning, however, if it would be truly agapēē.”¹

“Love is love” is a popular sentiment today, but it is, first, meaningless because it is a tautology, and second, it is patently false. It is trying to say that all loves are equal and valid. But some “loves” are criminal and land the lover in jail. Some loves are harmful to person loved, or to the person doing the loving. The Bible declares some “loves” to be illicit—which brings hatred upon Christians from those who want unfettered freedom to act on any kind of perversion their minds conceive.

C. You cannot love well if you do not know the Word of God well. You cannot love well if your spiritual senses are not exercised to be able to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:14). If you try, you will misapply love—if not often, then certainly from time to time, and in embarrassing and sinful ways. You might even think a feeling is love when it is not. You must have the Spirit-guided perception of things to get this right. And *that* is found in the Bible.

D. Since God designed humans and gave us the gift of love, He knows where love is properly directed, and that is *never* with an affinity toward things or situations that are unholy. Biblical love does not unqualifiedly accept all behavior regardless of whether it is sin. It draws near to holiness and departs from iniquity. In other words, godly love approves things that are superior, that are best.

¹ Homer Kent Jr., *Philippians* in Expositor's Bible Commentary, p 108.

E. This love evaluates, like in Luke 14:19 where there is a man going to **test** his new team of oxen. 1 Tim 3:10 speaks of the **examination** of deacons before they can serve. 1 Peter 1:7 speaks of the **proof** of our faith. It examines things to see if they are worth more or are superior to other things. For instance, Matthew 6:26 speaks about people being worth more than the birds of the air. As used as in Phil. 1:10, it refers to *the things that really matter* or things that are truly important. Compared to other things, these things are worth more.

The fact is that we spend a lot of love on things that are worthless, useless, and foolish. This instruction is about way more than just doing things that are not explicitly sinful. It is about loving things that we discern to be the *best* things, excellent things, worthwhile activities. For example, productivity is a valuable trait. But true *Christian* productivity spends itself on the things that are *best*.

F. This is a never-ending quest. Paul prays that the Christian's love may grow and become ever more knowledgeable and discerning. It never arrives at a point of completion. It is an ongoing project.

In other words, this is no criticism of the Philippian Christians. They had already demonstrated their love for God and for Paul in their generous support of gospel work. Paul recognizes that without diligence—you can forget for a time and your love can grow cold.

II. Sincere, Blameless, and Righteous Conduct to Honor God

A. *Sincere* means pure and without hidden motivations, pretense, or hypocrisy.

B. *Blameless* means without fault due to an offense of some sort toward others. It involves our conscious participation like Paul, who made a big effort to be without offense toward God and men (Acts 24:16). This includes our best efforts to avoid offense toward all people (1 Cor. 10:32).

C. The endpoint of our sincere and blameless conduct is “the day of Christ” (Phil. 2:16, 2 Thess. 2:2). It is the day on which each of us will give account of himself to God. That future day must purify our lives today. See Romans 14:12. In that passage, the emphasis is on the fact that each of us gives our own account, so that we are not

concerned about the accounting someone *else* will give. That is between them and God. Instead, we are to focus on not causing our brother any obstacle on his way to God’s judgment. And that, undoubtedly, because we love our brother!

See also 2 Corinthians 5:10—all Christians have a subpoena to appear before the judgment seat of Christ and to there give account for what we have done—whether good or bad. Might I suggest this paraphrase of the point of evaluation: whether our works are loving, discerning, best, sincere and without offense, or whether some of our works are worthless, impure, and undiscerning.

- D. The way that a person can be sincere and without offense is to be “filled with the fruits of righteousness.” The verb is in the perfect tense—like “having been filled” in the New American Standard translation. As a Christian, God has already given you the resources to live a life filled with righteousness. Paul’s prayer is that your life would manifest such fruit day by day.
- E. This fruit comes from Jesus Christ by means of His gift of the Holy Spirit. See Galatians 5:22-23; Ephesians 5:9; John 15:2-8; Romans 7:4; Hebrews 12:11; James 3:18.
- F. The result of your life should be the glory and praise of God. That is why we exist: not to glorify and praise ourselves, but to honor and worship God (Psalm 115:1). His glory should be evident in our lives.

Conclusion

This prayer is a great reminder of what God wants us to be like. In fact, He has begun a good work in us to be like this, and He is bringing it to completion, in part by Paul’s prayer, in part by our exposition of that prayer, and in part by our adherence to the values expressed in the prayer. He will also complete His work in your fellow Christians as you pray for them in this way. Not only thank God for their partnership in the gospel and express your love for them in prayer but pray that their love may not grow cold; that it may abound; that it may be discerning and not sappy or foolish. Pray they will live so that God can judge them as having done well.