

Lesson 3
Paul's Prayer of Desire for the Philippians
Philippians 1:9-11

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. A recent graduate of seminary took the pastorate of a church. In his first message, he preached on "Love for the Brethren." The leadership and congregation were delighted with the message. On his second Sunday, he preached the very same message as the week before. The elders thought this strange but said nothing, thinking he was a novice and could not get a second message prepared. The third Sunday, he preached the very same message. Now the congregation and leadership were up in arms and after the service they all pounced on him. They said, "You, young man, have preached the same message three Sundays in a row. Can you give a rational explanation of this?" "Yes," replied the young preacher, "You haven't applied the message yet. There is no use going on to the second sermon until you apply the first one!"
- B. This is how we should view Philippians 1:9-11. We should not go on until we have applied the message which is all about love for the brethren. Loving the brethren is the very apex of Christianity. The Christian who loves biblically is a mature Christian. The church which loves biblically is a mature church. Every word in these three verses is all about love – how it is done, how it is manifested, and how it is appropriated. Notice the prayer is for love and everything else is telling about this love. The whole section is one long sentence about love.
- C. What Paul is stating in these verses are his desires, longings and goals for the Philippians and these are the same goals which should be set for any group of Christians anywhere at any time. Almost every word of this prayer must be weighed if the greatness and richness of each one is to be grasped in full.
- D. Paul, in verses 3-8, began his prayer by giving thanks to God for the Philippians. Now he stops thanking God and begins to make petition for them. Paul did not say to these Philippians, "I'm praying for you," leaving doubt as to the content of his prayers. No, he told them exactly what he was praying for them. This made them conscious of these things in their lives, and they would look to see if the Apostle's prayers were being answered by observing the individual and corporate life of the Philippian Church.

II. PAUL'S DESIRES 1:9-11

- A. For Abounding Love (9a): ***And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more ...*** -- Paul is asking God that these Philippians would have abounding, overflowing love for one another. Paul does not pray that they love him, for he knew they did. He does not pray that they should love Christ, for he knew they did. What he prays is that God would give them more and more love towards one another. Strange request, for what church was more loving than the Philippians? None, yet there was a need for deeper, more sincere, more earnest love among the brethren because they were a church which still had some division, strife and fighting in their midst. While they had love, they needed more love. Love is never perfected; love is never fully mature. No Christian has ever gone far enough in love or loved too much. No one has ever arrived in the art of loving as Christ loved. There is always room for improvement in the skill of

loving another brother or sister in Christ. We see that Paul was never satisfied with anything short of perfection. He would not allow these Philippians to rest on their laurels. He would not tolerate these Philippians being satisfied with mediocrity in love. Love was to abound, overflow, super-abound. NOTE: The end of Christianity is not doctrine but love. The test of a mature Christian is not how much one knows but how much one loves. The test of a mature Church is not how much doctrine it can spit out but how much love it can manifest (*1 Cor. 13:4 – 8a [Philipps]: This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience—it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive; it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails. Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen.*). NOTE: Love is caring; love is tolerating; love is accepting a person where he is and not where we would like him to be; love looks beyond faults to what the person can be in Christ; love is bending and flexing when necessary. NOTE: without genuine love, we have nothing. Without love we are a spiritual zero. We are “spinning our wheels” as Christians if we do not love others. Love is the key to success in the local church and each Christian must take it upon himself to work at producing love by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Col. 5:22a: But the fruit of the spirit is love.....*). NOTE: The Philippian Church had quite a bit of dissension in its midst, much of which was due to personality conflicts between believers. Paul’s answer for division is more love for the brethren (*John 13:34-35: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.*). NOTE: People will be attracted to Howell Branch Fellowship when they see genuine love and concern among its members for one another. The church must be a loving-center as well as a teaching-center. What is God’s goal for our lives and for our church? That we should be manifesting a Christ-like, self-sacrificing love. NOTE: People often say, “I wish we would get off this love stuff and get to the deep things of God. Love is one of the deepest subjects of the Bible, and we can never know enough about it or do enough of it.

Most of us know a Christian or two who has a head full of knowledge and a heart empty of love. He is ready to argue theology at the drop of a hat, insisting every one dot their “I’s” and cross their “T’s” the same way. he is critical and judgmental of all who do not act and think as he does. He badgers with the truth, driving people from him because he is so ugly in his approach. This person has not understood love.

B. For Controlled Love (9b)

1. ***In knowledge*** -- Christians are to love by knowledge. Love does not occur in a vacuum. Knowledge without love leaves the Christian spiritually bankrupt, and knowledge puffs up and love builds up, yet love needs knowledge to learn how to love biblically. The love for which Paul prays is defined by the Word of God, bound by the Word of God, and conforms to the love of God revealed in the Word. It is an intelligent love. The word for “knowledge” in the Greek is epiginosko which means “full, mature knowledge” or “applied knowledge.” It is not head knowledge alone which teaches us to love; it is applied knowledge. A Christian studies the Bible and in the Bible he learns about love, but by faith he applies the Word to his experience

which brings his life into conformity to the love of God revealed in the Bible. Love is not a mushy-gushy experience or “sloppy-agape” but it is love which grows from a scriptural foundation. Love must be rooted in truth or it becomes mere religious sentimentality. NOTE: One of Paul’s hidden desires or goals for these Philippians is that they would be Bible students but more than that that they would be Bible-appliers. The ultimate goal is love guided by truth. (*1 Tim. 1:5: The goal of this command (doctrine, teaching) is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*)

2. ***And depth of insight***, -- The Greek word for “depth of insight” is a word which means “perception,” “discernment,” “discrimination” or “tact.” Love must not only be guided by knowledge but tempered with tact. Love demands that we know how to say the right things at the right time and how to keep quiet when the situation demands it. It is possible for a person to genuinely love someone but blow that love because of lack of tact or Christian diplomacy. Often it is not what we say but how we say it which offends people. Love is growing in tact. Love must always be controlled by knowledge and tact. Another hidden goal Paul had for these Philippians is that they should become tactful in their love for one another.
- C. **For Discernment In Love (10a):** ***So that you may be able to discern what is best ...*** -- Loving through knowledge and tact will allow the Christian to discern what is best or excellent. The word “discern” actually means “to put to the test for approval.” As we love others, we are able to test and approve that which is best in them. When we really love, we are able to see the good things in people. We do not look at them with a critical eye, daring them to prove themselves to us. No, love sees the value, the worth of every Christian brother or sister. Love approves what is best in the Christian.
- D. **For Christian Character To Love (10b)**
1. ***And may be pure*** -- Loving with knowledge and tact will allow Christians to be pure. To truly love one must have the Christian character of purity. A better translation of “pure” is “sincere.” To love we ourselves must be sincere. What does it mean to be sincere? This is a picture-word in the Greek which connotes “clearly examined in the sun-light” or “sun-tested.” It is to test something by holding it to the sunlight, such as holding up a jar of honey to see if it is full of junk or is pure honey. The sun allows the honey to become transparent. We Christians are to be pure, sincere, genuine and transparent in our lives, characterized by love so we can genuinely love others. Our lives are to be open, honest and transparent before God and others so that we can truly love with Christ-like love. NOTE: The word “sincere” comes from the Latin *sine cere* which means “without wax” and is related to the Greek concept which means “sun-tested.” The finest pottery in the ancient world was thin and clear-colored. The pottery would often crack when put in the kiln (oven). Dishonest pottery dealers would take the cracked pottery and fill in the cracks with hard, pearly wax that would blend in with the color of the pottery. This made the cracks almost impossible to spot with the naked eye. But the cracks could be easily detected if the pottery was held up to the sunlight and sun-tested. Honest pottery dealers would write upon their wares “*sine cere*” which means “without wax” to assure genuineness, nothing being hidden or concealed. What Paul is saying in the word “sincere” or “pure” is that the flaws in the Christian life are not to be covered up with wax. Our lives are not perfect. We have flaws but we must not cover them up. We must get them out and deal with them honestly before God and

men. Paul is saying that Christians are not to be hypocritical, not to be artificial but real and genuine. We are to be tested by the Son of God, not covering up our flaws, but dealing with them. Christians are to conceal nothing; their lives are to be an open book so all men can read them. The Christian is to appear to be just what he is – an object of God’s grace, growing in God’s grace. Hypocrisy will stop the love of God from flowing through us to others.

2. ***And blameless*** -- The word “blameless” actually means “without offence” or “inoffensive.” This does not mean the Christian is to live a perfect life, but he is to live an inoffensive life. That is, when we sin or offend someone, we confess it to God and right it with our brother or sister in Christ or with an unsaved person. The person who is truly loving does not purposely desire to put a stumbling block before any Christian.
3. ***Until the day of Christ***, -- Christians are to be loving, growing in love and abounding in love through knowledge and tact, being sincere and inoffensive until the second advent of Christ. Actually this could be translated “with a view to the day of Christ.” At the coming of Christ, Christians will be placed before the Judgment Seat of Christ at which time they will be judged for the things they have done on this earth with the view of being rewarded by Christ (***2 Cor. 5:10: For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*** We need to be consciously aware that one day we will give an account to Christ for the love we have displayed on this earth as Christians.

E. For The Fruit OF Righteousness To Evidence Love (11)

1. ***Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ*** -- The fruit of righteousness is in the singular; therefore, it may be referring to the fruit of the Holy Spirit which comes to the Christian as he is depending on Christ by faith (***Gal. 5:22-23: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.***) This is practical, experiential righteousness which comes through the Holy Spirit by means of trust in Jesus Christ. This fruit is produced “through Jesus Christ.” This fruit is produced by abiding in Christ (***John 15:5: I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains (abides) in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***) As we abide, trusting, occupy ourselves with Christ, we will (not may) bring forth spiritual fruit, and the very first fruit of the Spirit is love. NOTE: Paul’s great thesis in the Book of Philippians is that living is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is life. A living one imparts life, and that life will reproduce itself in one who lives. The fruit of righteousness is the product of the life of Christ in the Christian. Paul desires that Jesus Christ, the Living One, may so manifest His life in the lives of these believers that His righteousness may be produced in them. We cannot get this righteousness in our own strength but it comes through a life of trust and dependence on Christ.

Pole Climber Depending on Christ is like someone trying to climb a telephone pole. We have all seen telephone men climbing a pole. He has spikes on his shoes and a belt around the pole and him. When the beginner tries to climb he gets about three feet and slips down and bumps at the bottom getting splinters all up his legs. So up he goes again and he gets about two feet further and has the same

experience. He can't climb the pole in his own strength. But that's where the belt comes in, and the whole key to it is to climb, relying on the belt, leaning on the belt. We have to produce love; we can only do it as we rely on Jesus Christ. We put one foot in front of the other, leaning on Christ. Trusting in Him to produce fruit through us and in us, it will happen.

2. ***To the glory and praise of God.*** -- Whatever righteousness the Christian may produce is produced ultimately by Christ and for the glory of God. It is all of God and He receives the glory for it.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. Saved. What is the message Paul wants the Christian to learn? Love is the all important thing! Remember Paul was in jail. He had been there for perhaps two years. He was facing a trial before a Roman court and perhaps his execution. He could have prayed that they all would be theological giants, or that they would have the biggest church in Macedonia (which in themselves are not wrong) but instead he prays they would love one another with abounding love. I can hear Paul now, "Oh God, please help the Philippians to stop fighting one another and devouring one another, stop their critical attitudes and spirits, stop the division and disunity that they may love one another and show the world they are truly the disciples of Christ!" As he came to the end of his ministry and his life, Paul realized the all-consuming passion of the Christian should be to love one another.

B. Unsaved.

1. Are you without Christ, without salvation and without hope in this world? Are you empty inside and in need to be loved? Christ came to love sinners and to die for them. Christ came to fill the void in your life. He came to meet your need for love (***John 3:16: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 5:8: But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.***).
2. Trust Christ. Receive His love and His salvation. He will fill the void in your life. When you receive Christ, then you will be given power to begin to love as Christ loved. You will begin the exciting adventure of receiving Christ's love and giving out Christ's love to others.