

Essentials for Growth in Godliness, Part 2

Scripture: Philippians 1:10–11

Code: 50-6

INTRODUCTION

In Philippians 1:9-11 Paul says, "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, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God."

Paul's prayer focuses on the essentials for sound spiritual growth. Love, excellence, integrity, good works, and the glory of God are things every Christian must pursue.

REVIEW

I. LOVE (v. 9)

"This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment."

Love is a crucial distinctive of the Christian faith.

The Bible expositor Donald Grey Barnhouse once met a Japanese woman who worked at an airline desk in the lobby of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. She spoke fluent Chinese, Japanese, and English, and was obviously from a very cultured background. In his open and unique way, Barnhouse asked her if she was a Christian. She replied that she was a Buddhist. When he questioned her further, he found out she had heard of Jesus Christ and about a sacred book called the Bible, but she had never read it and knew nothing about Jesus Christ personally.

Barnhouse then asked her, "Do you love Buddha?" She was startled and replied, "Love? I never thought about love in connection with religion."

That challenged Barnhouse and he proceeded to unfold to her the beautiful reality of the love of Christ in contrast to pagan religion, whose gods are hated and feared. He told her that the only God in the entire world who is truly loved is the Lord Jesus Christ. He pointed out that in her country are statues of fierce monsters guarding the temple gates, and the people burned incense and offered sacrifices in attempts to appease their angry deities.

Then he told her how Jesus Christ came to die for all mankind and how Christians love Him in return. He told her how Hindus do not love their gods and Moslems do not love Allah, and remarked again

on how she did not love Buddha. He arranged for a missionary to take a Bible to that young Japanese woman and show her how she might know the Christ of God and enter into His love (Donald Grey Barnhouse, Let Me Illustrate [Old Tappan, N. J.: Revell, 1967], pp. 163-64) .

True godliness begins with love. In 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 Paul writes, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." Nothing has any value apart from love.

II. EXCELLENCE (v. 10a)

"So that you may approve the things that are excellent."

A. The Priority of Love

The words "so that" indicate Paul saw a progression to the elements necessary for growth in godliness. When a person is dominated by the love of God there will also be a corresponding desire to seek and approve what is excellent. You can't approve the things that are excellent apart from divine love.

B. The Product of Love

1. A particular capability

The word translated "approve" (Gk., dokimazo) was used in classical Greek to describe the process of assaying metal to determine its properties and purity. It also described testing money to be sure it wasn't counterfeit. In Luke 14:19 it describes testing the quality of farm animals and in Luke 12:56 it describes assessing the weather. Paul wanted the Philippians to be able to evaluate and determine what is excellent.

2. A particular goal

In Greek the word diaphero (translated excellent) means "to differ." The Philippians needed to know the difference between things so they could establish priorities and seek after what is truly vital and important.

3. A particular focus

Paul was not referring merely to the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Most everyone is able to do that. Paul was concerned about distinguishing between better and best--a capability only a few seem to have. That kind of discernment enables a person to focus his or her time and energy on what really counts. It's what separates the simple from the profound, the weak from the powerful, and the common from the exceptional.

4. A particular mindset

This part of Paul's prayer is a prayer for the mind, just as the first part was a prayer for the heart. Very few people are able to pursue excellence because they don't use their minds. Instead they do whatever impulse, emotion, mood, or their environment suggests that they do. They don't think; they just react. They don't control themselves; their selves control them. They can't pursue what is excellent because they can't discern what is excellent. They are like a ball bouncing off every wall it hits in a new direction.

To Think or Not to Think

An educational study was done in which a group of people were presented a new concept. Fifty percent of the people believed the new concept immediately without thinking and 30 percent didn't; 15 percent wanted to wait a little while before they made up their minds but didn't ask for any clarification or information. Only 5 percent analyzed all the details before coming to a conclusion. Apparently 5 percent of the population thinks, 15 percent thinks they think, and 80 percent would rather die than think! (cited by Tim Timmons, *Maximum Living in a Pressure-Cooker World* [Waco, Tex. : Word, 1979], p. 11) .

It's been said that most of society is on a caboose looking backward: they see only what has already gone by. There's a story about a pilot who came on the loudspeaker during a flight and said, "I have some good news and bad news. The bad news is we've lost all our instrumentation and don't know where we are. The good news is we have a strong tail wind and are making great time." That sounds funny, but it's a fairly accurate picture of how most people live. They have no directional instrumentation and a strong tail wind, so they fly through life with no idea of where they're going.

5. A particular discipline

Beyond the issue of not thinking, many are simply unwilling to discipline themselves to think. I heard of one man who said, "When I work I work hard. When I sit I sit loose. And when I think I fall asleep." It's been cynically observed that man occasionally stumbles over the truth, but most of the time he's able to pick himself up and continue on anyway. Some people are not even willing to think.

6. A particular renewal

The pursuit of excellence requires that we exercise mind over mood.

a) Romans 12:2--Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

b) Philippians 4:8--"Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there's any excellence and anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."

- c) Ephesians 5:8-10--"Walk as children of light . . . trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord."
d) Ephesians 5:15--"Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."
e) 1 Thessalonians 5:21--"Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good."
Christian character is a divinely implanted and growing love controlled by truth and wisdom. Take a look at your life: is it filled with the pursuit of spiritual excellence or the world's trivia?

III. INTEGRITY (v. 10b)

"In order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ."

Love and excellence lead to integrity. The phrase "in order" (Gk., *hina*) , coupled with a verb in the subjunctive mood ("to be") , indicates the presence of a purpose clause. Paul meant that believers love (v. 9) so they can pursue excellence (v. 10) , which would in turn produce integrity.

A. Sincerity

The Greek word translated "sincere" (*eilikrinia*) means "genuine." Paul used it to describe genuineness of character. But there is a question about what the word originally pictured.

1. The analogy of sifting

Some think it originally pictured the sifting of grain. Therefore as used here, Paul would have meant that believers were to have the impurities of their lives sifted out so they could be pure--genuine whole grain.

2. The analogy of sunlight

Others think the word has its roots in two Greek words, one meaning "sun," the other meaning "to judge." Put together the word would express the idea of "testing by sunlight."

James Montgomery Boice in *Philippians: An Expositional Commentary* tells us that "in ancient times . . . the finest pottery was thin. It had a clear color, and it bought a high price. Fine pottery was very fragile both before and after firing. And it was often the case that this pottery would crack in the oven. Cracked pottery should have been thrown away. But dishonest dealers were in the habit of filling cracks with a hard pearly wax that would blend in with the color of the pottery. This made the cracks practically undetectable in the shops, especially when painted or glazed; but the wax was immediately detectable if the pottery was held up to light, especially to the sun. In that case the cracks would show up darker. It was said that the artificial element was detected by 'sun-testing.' Honest dealers marked their finer product by the caption *sine cera*--'without wax'" ([*Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971*], p. 55) .

So just as in ancient times pottery was tested by holding it up to the sun, our lives need to be tested for the wax of hypocrisy. In the church are those who appear as fine pottery but are not. There are cracks of sin in their lives filled with the wax of religious ceremony and activity. When held up to the light of God's Word their cracks become evident. When persecution or difficulty comes, they melt (cf.

Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21) .

Right Recipe, Wrong Procedure

If you take all the ingredients for bread, throw them in a pan, and stick it in the oven, you won't get bread. The recipe requires that all the ingredients be thoroughly mixed. Spiritual integrity means that a person is an integrated whole. Nothing in his or her life is unrelated to biblical truth, so there are no cracks separating one part of the person's life from another, no impurities that make a person any less than wholly genuine. Integrity come from the discerning application (or mixing) of God's Word to all aspects of life.

Hebrews 4:12--Scripture is "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Romans 12:9--"Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good."

2 Corinthians 1:12--Paul wrote, "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves in the world."

2 Corinthians 2:17--"We are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

There was genuineness in Paul's life and that's what Paul wanted for the Philippians.

B. Blamelessness

1. The meaning

The Greek word translated "blameless" in Philippians 1:10 describes relational integrity. It means living a life that doesn't cause others to stumble. Scripture clearly teaches that believers are not to cause others to stumble (e. g. Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8) . First Corinthians 10:31-32 says, "Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God."

2. The test

Some people appear to live that kind of life but the facts indicate otherwise when those they have had the most opportunity to influence--their children and close friends--are observed. Often a pattern of misbehavior in a child can be traced to a pattern of misbehavior in a parent. What that parent was observed to be in church is proved to be at variance with what they are at home.

Those kinds of flaws may also come to light because of various pressures. They may show up at

work, causing fellow employees to stumble over the reality of Christ, or even causing fellow Christians to stumble. Or a child may seem to be fine at church and school, but once he or she gets away from the oversight of those environments and out among friends, the cracks begin to show up and the child may cause other children to stumble because of his or her sinful behavior.

3. The attitude

The kind of integrity Paul desired to see in the Philippians requires a no-compromise attitude accord with God's Word. We are to live deeply planted in the rich soil of biblical truth so that our roots tap deep into divine revelation and we flourish. That means many times you will find yourself standing against the world.

a) Romans 12:2--"Do not be conformed to this world."

b) James 1:27--"This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, . . . to keep oneself unstained by the world."

c) James 4:4--"Friendship with the world is hostility toward God."

d) 1 John 2:15--"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world."

4. The pressures

We need to resist the world's pressures because they cause cracks in our lives. And that often occurs very subtly.

a) Accommodation

We are often sucked into the world by accommodation. This is when we stop being shocked by the world's morals and begin tolerating its values, sin, and wickedness. Though we may think and say various things are wrong, we need to beware of accommodating them.

b) Legitimization

Because some sinful behavior is a part of our culture we can come to see it as less than sin and even normal.

c) Assimilation

Assimilation goes beyond accommodation and legitimization by allowing various kinds of sin to become non-issues. For example, when's the last time you heard a pastor preach against bikini bathing suits?

d) Participation

Participation is when you become personally involved in the world's attitudes and actions. Not only are you not against a particular sin anymore but you go to the movies and watch it, you turn on your television and watch it, you read a book about it, and you indulge it with your money.

e) Amalgamation

In amalgamation worldly values become so fused with your own that you can't tell the difference anymore.

f) Identification

The final point arrives when you have completely identified with worldly values and worldly values are identified you.

5. The Remedy

That process must stop before it starts. The eighteenth-century reformer John Wesley was blessed with a godly mother. I read that when he went away to school she reminded him that whatever weakens one's reason, impairs the tenderness of one's conscience, obscures one's sense of God or takes off the delight for spiritual things, whatever increases the authority of one's body over one's

mind, that thing is sin" (cf. Rebecca Lamar Hasmon, *Susanna: Mother of the Wesleys* [N. Y. : Abington, 1968]) . We need to recognize sin and strenuously avoid it.

Cooked in the Pan of Compromise

Compromise is so subtle that it often takes us in before we realize what's happening. You may have heard the story of the frog in the pan of water. The frog sat in the pan while the heat of the stove was slowly increased. Because the process was so subtle and gradual, the frog was cooked before it realized what had happened (Dr. James Dobson, *Dare to Discipline* [Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1970], p. 15) . The subtlety of the world can be avoided only when we embrace the need for integrity. That's why Paul prayed as he did for the Philippians.

6. The calling

That kind of integrity is to last "until the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:10) . The Day of Christ is a special term referring to the reward of believers (see pp. xx-xx) . On that day believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ "to be recompensed [each] for his deeds in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10) . Then it will be proved whether our works are "gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, [or] straw" (1 Cor. 3:12) . On that day the Lord "will bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts" (1 Cor. 4:5) , and we will be rewarded according to our deeds (Rev. 20:12).

IV. GOOD WORKS (v. 11a)

"Having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ."

A. The Product of Integrity

Integrity will always produce good works. The phrase translated "having been filled" is a perfect passive participle, meaning something that happened in the past with continuing results. Paul desired that when the Philippians look back on their lives on the Day of Christ, they will see they were filled with the fruit of righteousness. On that day there should be a record of good works produced by God in the life of every believer!

"Fruit of righteousness" refers to the fruit righteousness produces--the good works that are produced by love pursuing excellence in a life of integrity. We find that concept in the Old Testament in Proverbs 11:30 and Amos 6:12. In James 3:17-18 it refers to good works produced by God in the lives of believers.

The New Testament mentions two kinds of fruits to be produced in the lives of every believer.

1. Winning people to Christ

a) Romans 1:13--Paul said to the Roman church, "I have planned to come to you . . . that I might

obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles." Paul wanted to win people for Christ in Rome.

b) Romans 15:28--Here Paul described the Gentile believers in Macedonia and Achaia as the fruit of the saints in Jerusalem.

2. Right actions and attitudes

a) 2 Corinthians 9:10--"He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." God produces righteous deeds in our lives when we are faithful to Him.

b) Ephesians 5:9--"The fruit of the light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth."

c) Galatians 5:22--"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

B. The Producer of Righteousness

The righteous deeds and attitudes Paul prayed for come "through Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:11) . Because that is the case He is to get all the glory, honor, and credit for them.

1. John 15:1-5--Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit. . . . Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing." It is God who produces spiritual fruit in the life of the believer.

2. Ephesians 2:10--"We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

The Importance of the Pipe

I remember reading that Lawrence of Arabia once brought a group of Bedouins to London and housed them in a beautiful hotel. The only kind of dwelling they had ever lived in was a tent in the desert. They quickly became fascinated with the faucets in the hotel. In the desert water was hard to come by, but in the hotel they merely had to turn a knob to get all the water they needed. When Lawrence helped them pack up to leave, he discovered they'd taken the faucets off all the sinks and put them in their bags. They believed that if they possessed the faucets they would also possess the water.

Christians often forget that in the spiritual realm they are like faucets. Unless they are connected to the pipeline of spiritual water, they are just as useless as the faucets the Bedouins had in their bags. Spiritual fruit flows out of a Christian only when he or she is connected to the source of spiritual power.

V. THE GLORY OF GOD

"To the glory and praise of God" (v. 11b)

All that Paul prayed for was to the end that God be glorified. He was following in the footsteps of Jesus, who said, "By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit" (John 15:8) .

God's purpose is "that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (Eph. 1:12) . The Holy Spirit was given "as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (v. 14) .

A life of love, excellence, integrity, and good works brings glory to God. The Greek word translated "glory" (doxa) refers to the sum total of God's perfection. So when God receives glory He is receiving an affirmation of His perfection.

CONCLUSION

Paul's prayer for the Philippians is my prayer for you as well. It ought to be the prayer of all Christians for themselves and each other. There are no short cuts in the Christian life, and that means we ought to be on our knees daily, seeking that our love abound more and more in all real knowledge and discernment. We need to pray we will focus on what is excellent so that we will be sincere and blameless on the Day of Christ. We need to petition that God will fill us with His fruit of righteousness so that we may glorify Him. God's way for the believer is simple yet profound: cast yourself willingly on God's resources and allow Him to produce His fruit in you.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What crucial distinctive about Christianity separates it from other religions?
2. What makes a person "nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3)?
3. Paul saw a _____ to the elements necessary for growth in godliness.
4. What process was the Greek word dokimazo used to describe? Describe how the word is used in Philippians 1:10.
5. What was it that Paul wanted the Philippians to be able to distinguish between?
6. Very few people are able to pursue excellence because they don't use their _____ .
7. Many people are simply unwilling to discipline themselves to _____ .

8. The pursuit of excellence requires that we exercise _____ over _____ .
9. Believers love so they can pursue excellence, which would in turn produce _____ .
10. What are two possibilities for the meaning of the Greek word translated "sincere" (eilikrinia)?
11. The Greek word translated "blameless" describes _____ .
12. The kind of integrity Paul desired to see in the requires a _____ in accord with God's Word.
13. List the progression that can lead a person to identify with the world.
14. Why are Christians to live lives of integrity (Phil. 1:10)?
15. What are two kind of righteous fruits.
16. Who produces righteousness in the lives of believers? Be specific (Phil. 1:11)?
17. When God receives glory He is receiving an affirmation of His _____ .

Pondering the Principles

1. We live in a world that tells us truth is relative. That fools many Christians into assuming life is to be a free mixture of Scripture, philosophy, experience, psychology, and whatever else is the most painless solution to any problem at any given moment. As a result the world often sees Christianity as just one of many legitimate ideological alternatives. That is not a new problem. Over 100 years ago Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, "Most of us are vastly inferior to the early Christians . . . who were persecuted because they were thoroughly Christians, and we are not persecuted because we are hardly Christians at all. They were so earnest in the propagation of the Redeemer's kingdom, that they became the nuisance of the age in which they lived. They would not let errors alone. They had not conceived the opinion that they were to hold the truth, and leave other people to hold error without trying to intrude their opinions on them, but they preached Christ Jesus right and left, and delivered their testimony against every sin" (Words of Counsel for Christian Workers [Pasadena, Tex. : Pilgrim Publications, 1985], p. 32) . Are you bold with the truth of the gospel, both to live your life in accordance with it, and to proclaim its message to those around you?
2. In Christian Leaders of the Eighteenth Century, J. C. Ryle describes the ministries of great British Christian leaders--George Whitefield, John Wesley, Daniel Rowlands, and others. Ryle observed that "they taught constantly the inseparable connection between true faith and personal holiness. They never allowed for a moment that any church membership or religious profession was the proof of a man being a true Christian if he lived an ungodly life. A true Christian, they maintained, must always be known by his fruits; and those fruits must be plainly manifest and unmistakable in all relations of life. 'No fruits, no grace,' was the unvarying tenor of their preaching" ([Edinburgh: Banner of Truth

Trust, 1978], p. 28) . In our own time many have come to view spiritual fruit to be an optional characteristic in the Christian life--not a natural product of salvation. Paul said, "You . . . were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God" (Rom. 7:4) . Are you living a holy life that produces fruit that glorifies your Savior?

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