

“That Your Love May Abound” (Philippians 1:9-11)

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The Text: Philippians 1:9-11:

⁹ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The church in Philippi was the first church Paul founded in Macedonia. Acts 16 describes Paul coming into the city and forming deep relationships with the people who received the Gospel for the first time through his ministry. These were people like Lydia who sold purple cloth and the jailer at Philippi. Later, as Paul traveled in his missionary journeys, these people would send him support in the way of financial gifts. They were not rich, but were just dedicated to the Lord and to the ministry of spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This partnership in the Gospel is what fills Paul’s heart with joy in our epistle this morning. Paul is rejoicing that the Lord who put the Philippians on the road leading to eternal life, will keep them on that road; and will bring them home...just like the Lord will keep you in His grace and bring you home as well! Then, towards the end of Paul’s rejoicing over his people, he is led by the Holy Spirit to be mindful of just one more thing: Yes, these precious people of God – like you – will be brought to completion on the day of Christ, but in verses 9-11 Paul becomes mindful of this too: We are still in the world, therefore while we are on the road to eternal life, we are called

to live in Christ not only to be kept for eternity in Christ, but also for this life here and now to know and to share the benefits which flow from the forgiveness of sins in Christ leading us towards the crown we will receive in glory. The last verse, verse 11 defines precisely what we’re talking about: ***“filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”***

The benefits which I speak of are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. In other words, this life I am describing is the life of Christ Himself shared here in our midst. All of this helps us to understand the very first verse of this letter in terms of Paul identifying himself and Timothy as quote “servants...they are *douloi*, Christians who are joyful slaves, dedicated servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, literally owning new identities and wills. Thus, Paul writes elsewhere in Galatians 2:20: *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”* Paul’s will is now the will of Jesus. Paul’s life is now the life of Jesus. Thus, this conclusion on *benefits or fruit* is not condemning law, but rather the life of Christ showing in His children. Short and sweet: Paul is also rejoicing that the Philippians can now live in the life of their Savior as God perfects them until Christ’s return!

There are three (3) things that jump out. Reading Christians have three benefit fruits given them by the grace of God. So Paul writes, *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and*

blameless for the day of Christ (vv 9-10).” The NIV translation is helpful here: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best.”

Paul is so joyful over these Christians that he does not want *anything* to ever take them away from their faith in Christ. God has put us in His grace, but on account of our sinful nature, we carry the potential with us to turn away. So Paul instructs as he prays and these three benefit fruits come out:

1. *Love, but not just any “love,” but the love in connection to the next two qualities...*
2. *Knowledge and...*
3. *Discernment.*

Let us see how these came together when Paul was in Philippi. Let us consider what is recorded in Acts 16:22-25:

“²² The crowd joined in attacking them, and the magistrates tore the garments off them and gave orders to beat them with rods. ²³ And when they had inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, ordering the jailer to keep them safely. ²⁴ Having received this order, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them...”

I share this with you because it characterizes the kinds of hardships Paul had to constantly endure. But notice what Paul’s reaction was in the life of Christ: He did not wind up in prison pacing back and forth complaining and cursing those who beat him, he was not plotting revenge nor was he feeling sorry for himself. Instead, about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God. They were *rejoicing!*

In Philippians 1:4 Paul describes how he prays for the Philippians. He is not “just” praying, but he is praying with **JOY!** But recall where Paul is when he writes Philippians...he is in jail again (that’s why we call Philippians one of the so-called “prison epistles” or “captivity letters”). So here again just like back in Acts 16, Paul is in prison and he is joyful, praising God, having just a great day!

Now, what in the world does any of this have to do with the three benefit fruits of love, knowledge, and discernment? They are direct expressions of how these *benefit fruits* manifest themselves. This is what I mean: Paul is captivated by the love of Christ that saves His people ***no matter the circumstances.*** He is captivated by the fact that His Savior came to save him, the worst of sinners. As for any hardship that might occur in life, what is that compared to the saving love of Jesus Christ?! Tear my clothes, take away my home, threaten my career...can any of these things rob me of the greatest gift of God’s eternal love for me in Christ? Not a chance! But there’s even more to this love. Paul is also rejoicing in how this love is ***spreading.*** In the midst of the hardships, nothing stops the Gospel from being preached!

In regards to Acts 16, do you recall what happened after the portion we just read? There was an earthquake, the prison doors opened and their chains were unfastened, the jailer in distress was so beside himself that he was going to kill himself...but Paul stopped him. The jailer rushed towards Paul trembling with fear and fell down before Paul and Silas. The jailer asked, ***“Sir, what must I do to be saved?”*** And they Paul and Silas said, ***“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.”***

And this leads us to the fruits of knowledge and discernment. Paul’s love was knowledgeable of the Word of God and the Word of God insured him that the Lord uses the difficult times to work great blessings, the Word of God gave him discernment to know that the Lord uses hard times to the glory of Jesus, to lead people to Christ. Love for Christ and love for people is easy to celebrate when you know that you will be blessed even through the hardships and even through the valleys of life. Paul had the example of Joseph who was sold as a slave in Egypt; he had the example of Daniel who served while Judah was in exile and Paul had the example of the prophets who were rejected and yet filled with astounding strength to endure. Paul had the knowledge and discernment of God’s Word to see through his circumstances. Most importantly, he kept before him the wisdom of the Gospel that the world considers foolishness: that Christ Himself who appeared to be most desperate and weak was saving the world unto Himself.

The weakest, most miserable and most desperate sight in the history of mankind, this poor Jewish rabbi dying on a cross unable to save Himself, was the single most powerful and

glorious event in human history. If this is your faith my friends, what is it to be prison or to face any other hardship?

With this, the Holy Spirit brings discernment. You will no longer judge life’s books by their covers. So here I am about to end another sermon for my flock.

But let me tell you that you will have missed the point if you leave church today and say to yourself, “That was a nice reminder about love, knowledge and discernment, but what is that to my *real* problems?! A struggling marriage, tens of thousands of dollars in the hole, or even worse, a failing health, especially when the doctors offer little hope...what can any of this do for my *real* problems?!” But is this what you see in what the Word of God shows of Paul? Did Paul say to himself that I have my spiritual life in a box over there, but over here, it is something else that I’m in my prison (whatever it may be)?” No, there is no distinction!

This love based on knowledge and discernment is a long way of saying that Christ is with us, among us and in us. That the love that comes from the Gospel of His blood covering our death with His life will not only lift you up, but will lift up our entire congregation! People dying are given hope and congregations struggling are given power, suspicion is replaced with mutual service, fear replaced by hope, complaining replaced by prayer, death replaced by life, our flesh overcome with the life of Christ!

Paul was joyful in these benefit fruits because he knew that in Christ he would no longer have to worry. And if all things belong to Christ, then how could he ever be in want? Please read with me Philippians 4:12-13:

¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty, and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

This kind of love, full of the knowledge and discernment of the Word of Christ, recognizes all enemies, all hardships, all persecutions and all shortcomings as doors for blessing because in the midst of them all, Christ is our love – He loved us when taking all our sin upon Himself; Christ is our knowledge and discernment – as He equips us through His Word and Sacrament to know Him and to discern that His Spirit is given to us to see God working good in our lives not through *some things, or most things, but through all things*. May God’s love abound in you dear Christian in and through the knowledge and discernment that is yours through the Word of Christ, so that you may know true joy no matter what you face on the way to the glory that is yours in Christ!