

2014 June 29
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Philippians: The Blueprint for Joy #2

Welcome to OIC. We are glad you are here. Currently we are working our way through the letter that the apostle Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. He wrote this letter in AD 62 and you can see that it can be directed towards a second generation of Christians. This was a church that Paul had started and he had fond memories of his time there. And now he writes this letter from prison as a means of encouraging them. His continuing theme throughout the letter is JOY. Chapter 1 is all about joy in suffering. He was in jail. Last week in verses 1 through 8 Paul expresses the affection he had for the church at Philippi from day 1. Our support text this week is Philippians 1:9-11.

Philippians 1:9-11

⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,
¹⁰so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,
¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

If you've ever thought to yourself "I wish I were more mature and consistent in many areas of my Christian life" then Paul has given us these verses to put into practice. This text today is for everyone who desires a closer walk with Jesus and a closer connection with other believers. Imagine you are at a prayer meeting and a special guest attends. It's the apostle Paul. The leader of the meeting asks for prayer concerns and the list that people bring forth are everyday things like sickness, job related concerns, and family relation matters. But over in the corner you notice the apostle Paul with his hand raised and he says "would it be possible if the church could pray that everyone would discern how they could show Christ's love more and would the church also be praying about having excellence in all they do rather than being satisfied with good enough is OK". One more thing, he would say, could we pray that all of us would be filled with the fruits of righteousness that comes from our relationship with Jesus. Sounds to me like he was desiring spiritual maturity in the group. My question for us here at OIC is "what does God want to accomplish in us?" I found 2 things in Paul's request. Let's examine them today. We should see, within this passage, some essentials for sound spiritual health. He focuses on features of true spirituality, elements of the Christian life, that every Christian must pursue.

REQUEST #1 For an increasing love

Philippians 1:9a

⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more

Paul gives us some characteristics of love that we are to cultivate and manifest in ourselves as a church. Love is a choice, not just an emotion. We must make a conscious choice to love. Look carefully, as I read this it says to me that love should be increasing, not decreasing. Not only in our capacity to love but in the number of people we extend our love to. It speaks of how we need to reach out to the unlovable. We all have our "special groups" of friends and we think it truly is agape love that we experience with them but soon our little groups develop parameters and new people are not welcome because they have not met the unspoken criteria of the group. Many people don't like to involve ourselves with unpredictable people and these people are sometimes excluded from our group. Sometimes the higher the comfort level in our little groups, the higher the walls are around us. You know if you are in one of these little groups with the high walls when you begin to talk about people on the other side of the wall and how they wouldn't fit well in your group. But Paul

says he wants us to have a heart of love. This is not easy to accomplish but if we let the Spirit of God direct us, it can be done. We can't stay in our close knit groups and never reach out to others. This increased capacity for love should be demonstrated when we are mature Christians.

Luke 10:27b

'Love your neighbor as yourself.

Who is our neighbor? We learn from the rest of that passage in Luke that our neighbor is everyone. We cannot pick and choose who we love.

REQUEST #2 For an increasing sense of knowledge and discernment

Philippians 1:9b,10a

in knowledge and depth of insight, ¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best

Sometimes our choices are not just between what is good for us or what is not good for us. The choice between good and bad should be obvious for Christian adults. We have the Holy Spirit acting as the gatekeeper to our conscience, helping us discern what is good and bad. Also we have the Word of God that is a lamp unto our feet, giving us direction. Sometimes we must make the choice between what is good and what is best. True discernment will give us the ability to know what is best and also the courage to choose it. Can you see how this can transport us to Christian maturity? Sometimes we just go merrily along in our lives, not really growing spiritually because we aren't making the right choices. It's like the airplane pilot that comes on the PA system and says "I have good news and bad news. I'll give you the bad news first. We have lost all instrumentation. We don't know where we are. The good news is... the plane is operating perfectly and we have a great tail wind so we are making terrific time." Can you see, just sometimes moving along in our lives, without consciously having a sense of knowledge and discernment won't necessarily take us where we should be going... growing in Christlikeness. If you have one prayer for your children it should be that they will make wise choices under pressure. Even adults when under pressure sometimes make bad choices. God tells us in a very nice way don't settle for second best. If we look carefully at these few verses we can also see that Paul expects results. Let's see what those results should look like.

RESULT #1 a pure and blameless life

Philippians 1:10b

and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

If we look closely at what Paul is concerned about it probably includes moral discernment and Christian integrity... in other words, who we are when no one is watching. We must grasp and hang on tightly to our sense of Christian morals and values. The pure and blameless life can be directed by God's Holy Spirit and supported by the Word of God. Within that framework of the pure and blameless life, can we look back at our plan to become more mature in many areas of our Christian life. Can you see the pure and blameless life should come with maturity. Some of these areas of maturity should and must include our Christian character. Also our Christian responsibility. Take for example supporting the church financially. Can you ask yourself with a clear conscience "is my treasure where my heart is?" Because if your heart is with God, then your treasure will be also. Also the pure and blameless life should spawn Christian growth. Are we taking advantage of the Bible studies we offer here at OIC. Are we doing the very simplest things for growth, including the SOAP program? I care about you as Christians and I want what Paul wants. I want us all to lead a pure and blameless life.

Hebrews 5:13, 14

¹³ For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. ¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

We really can't expect God to honor our lives if we are not honoring Him. Especially if we know better. Are we partaking of solid food and are we putting into practice the things that we know, that help us discern how to be the best that we can be?

RESULT #2 A life filled with the fruit of righteousness that glorifies God

Philippians 1:11

¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

This includes all the character traits flowing from a right relationship with God. These should include the fruits of the Spirit. Let's review them again. I'm sure many of you are familiar with them.

Galatians 5:22-23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Ask yourself this. When people see you, do they naturally think about God?

Conclusion

Do you see what I see? There is a sequential order to what Paul is expressing here. True love that abounds in our relationship with God and his people will lead us to excellence. Excellence will lead to sound Christian integrity which will lead us to good works which will glorify God. Remember the thought we all had at the very beginning? Ever thought to yourself... I wish I were more mature in many areas of my Christian life. Then we can see by today's study that God has given us a way. These prayer requests of Paul put the life of God in the soul of man. Prayer is not a ritual but a matter of the heart. When our hearts reflect godly traits, we will think Christianly and not worldly. Why should we be concerned about these prayer requests? Because if you want the best for others, if you want the best for yourself, and if you want the best for our church and if you want God to rescue you from spiritual mediocrity, these should be the prayers of our life. Let's pray.