

### Philippians 1:3-11

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. 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.

My name is John Seago, I serve as an Elder here at City Life Church and I'm excited to continue in the series on this great book of Philippians this morning. Before we start...

#### I. Intro

- Husband/Wife Preview routine
  - There is this routine me and my wife have, you may be familiar with something similar. When we're planning a movie night, I have to make a pitch. No surprise we have different tastes in movies. I'm an Inception, Interstellar, Arrival, kind of guy and she's more of a Devil Wears Prada, Gilmore Girls, Twister fan herself (I know, that's a curious list). So, I'll pull up the trailer of a movie I'm gonna pitch on my computer, play the trailer and then do a little commentary to hype it up. I've got to point out themes, possible aspects that appeal more to her. So "yes, there are aliens, but did you see the way he looked at her, I bet there's a romantic subplot there," or "Oh man, see that, touching father and daughter moment, I bet there's some serious reconciliation in this movie." I have to make an appealing enough pitch to get her on board. Not gonna lie, I probably bat a four-hundred... Then the real test is whether my pitch was accurate or not at the end of the movie.
- Our passage today is a bit like that. This opening prayer serves as a trailer for the book. Paul does this in many of his letters. You can tell the tone, purpose, and major themes just by his opening section.
  - Good news is that while sometimes Paul's letters open with ominous prayers, this section in Philippians is a prayer of affectionate Thanksgiving.
  - Paul is thankful to God for the church and is praying the Lord will continue to use them as he has in the past: in gospel partnership, love, and holiness.
- We're going to look at this call to love, Paul's example, and the source for that love.
- Let's pray.

## II. Imperative to Love

- First we have a call to love.
- Look at verses 9-11, “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, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”
- Here Paul tells us that he is praying that the love of the believers in Philippi will “abound more and more.”
- This is at the core of his opening Prayer for that church.
- This is interesting in the context of the whole letter, where Paul is trying to answer ‘What would it mean to give true allegiance to Jesus in a pagan society?’
  - Scripture repeatedly teaches us that a critical aspect of our relationship with God includes loving each other in the church and loving our neighbors.
  - Christians are not to be preoccupied with our heads in the clouds, we’re supposed to be characterized by a unique love for those around us.
  - This keeps coming up in this letter, later in Phil 2:3 he writes “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”
- This sounds good right? This seems like something we could all get behind.
  - Our city, our culture, talks about Love a lot these days, we hear slogans like “Love Trumps Hate,” “#LoveWins,” “Make Love, Not War,” Ok, that last one may be a little dated.
- So, first, what does Paul mean by “love” here?
  - This is the term agape that is different than romantic love or brotherly love. This is a supreme love.
    - First, It’s more than affection. Agape “refers first and foremost to something you do, not something you feel.”
    - Second, It’s a deep commitment to someone.
  - This is the way God the Father loves the Son and how God loves us.<sup>1</sup>
- We can see some of the distinctive nature of this love by the rest of this sentence, look...
  - Paul wants their love to abound in a particular way:
  - He writes “with knowledge, with all discernment, so that they may approve what is excellent.”
- This is odd. What does knowledge and discernment have to do with love? Our culture doesn’t know.
- In this cultural moment, love is unconditional acceptance, tolerance, and passivity.
  - Christian, this morning we have to realize that this call for our love to abound more and move is actually a higher calling than the love we see in our city.

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<sup>1</sup> John 10:17, Romans 5:5.

- Right now, our culture gives lip service to love. But our culture only promotes a love that refuses to intrude on anyone else's lifestyle...Just accept others in all circumstances, that's love.
  - But the biblical call to love is actually more difficult. Our discerning love is counter-cultural act that has very little to do with those trendy bumper stickers.
  - **The biblical vision of love is a deep commitment to someone else's good in God and helping them achieve it.**
- Jesus himself said in John 13:34-35, when talking to the disciples:
  - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
- Look at that, "Just as I have loved you," Well, did Jesus just passively tolerate us? NO!
- Look at how Paul explains Christ's love in Phil 2:5-8, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."
  - That's the gospel.
  - Christ gave himself up to redeem us, to change us, to save us from our sin and its consequences.
  - **So,** love is not just accepting of all things, not just looking past sin or passively getting along with one another.
- We need a discerning love: to determine what is true/untrue, right/wrong, what's holy/sinful, what leads to joy/and what leads to death,
- When we practice this discernment,
  - Paul says "so that you may approve what is excellent,"
  - and this type of love makes us "pure and blameless for the day of Christ"
  - So we will be "Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ"
- Although it's never paraded or celebrated, we can find glimmers of a desire for discerning love in our culture.
  - Think of the slogan, "Friends don't let friends drive drunk."
  - Well, why not?! Isn't that intolerant, pushy, if a friend wants to drive, who am I to say that's a bad idea?
  - Our culture sees that as a good thing by taking that friend's keys. You're looking out for his good and helping him accomplish that good.
  - But that is harder, right? It is much easier to say everything is ok. Discernment is more difficult.
- This is the logic of the discerning love, we are so deeply committed to the other person's good in God that we can't passively tolerate sin. We can't ignore the idols we see driving someone to that sin. We're compelled to help them seek God's wisdom and power to repent and seek the Lord.

- This is the whole purpose of fight clubs here at CLC. We're getting into each others business, saying hard things pointing them back to Christ, asking difficult uncomfortable questions at times, because we are seeking to practice a discerning love.
- This morning, has the Lord put someone in your life you need to love with knowledge and discernment? Are you avoiding saying that hard, but true thing?
  - Have you dodged asking some obvious but difficult questions?
  - What about on the receiving end? Do you get flustered or upset when someone probes you? When someone lovingly shows concern for your holiness or possible idols? How do you respond?
- All the discerning love, our purity and blamelessness, and our fruit is "to the glory and praise of God."
  - Whole purpose of our holiness, love, is not that we'll be better people.
  - The goal is not to contribute more to the community, or even value others like they deserve.
  - Paul wants to us to participate in this supreme love because it brings glory and praise to God himself.<sup>2</sup>
- Well, what does this love look like?

### III. Paul's example of that Love

- Our passage for this morning is so personal, so affectionate, you see Paul's shepherd's heart here. Loving this church and those in it.
- First, he says he is praying out of joy, stemming from his love of wanting their good in God.
  - He says in verse 5 he's thankful for them because of their partnership in the gospel.
  - He is not joyful and affectionate to them simply because they are friends, like each other, or share hobbies.
  - He was thankful for their very practical partnership/collaboration.
  - Application: Do you look to CLC or city group for people you like, have similar tastes, interests, personality types, then decide to partner together? The gospel is what bonds us together, not our mutual love for *Stranger Things*.
- Partnership here means sharing a calling, mutually supporting one another.
  - Paul and his "supporters here belonged to one another with a family identity. What happens to one, happens to all."
  - Later in chapter 4 Paul says they had "labored side by side with me in the gospel."
    - The Philippians partnered with Paul financially;<sup>3</sup>
    - We also see that they had personal investment in his ministry of concern and prayer.

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<sup>2</sup> This hints at one of the main themes and goal of the letter expanded later in 2:12-16.

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 4:15-16

- Here at CLC we have Partners, we have embraced this imagery and we invite you guys to join us in our labor for the gospel. That means giving financially and giving your time, and investing your prayer.
- This leads to deeper community.
- ILLUSTRATION: Deep bonds and connections are made when you're in the trenches with someone.
  - Association for Psychological Science released a study showing that shared trials or joint struggle actually serve as a 'social glue.'
  - One of the scientists explained, "Our findings therefore may have implications for understanding social processes apparent in settings such as boot camp-style physical training programs, team sports, executive challenges, and other physically challenging experiences shared with others. Sharing a spicy meal with friends may even have positive social consequences!"<sup>4</sup>
  - So, if you're going to lunch with someone after church, make it a spicy meal.
  - Paul was laboring together with them for the gospel and the Spirit kindled a significant affection.
  - If you're here this morning and you're just not feeling it. Doesn't feel like your crowd? Join a service team...Come labor with us. Join us in our missional outreaches were we go out and serve the city and love our neighbors.
- When Paul looks back at their service together, he is thankful for their perseverance with him:
  - And this is not nostalgia, their times together in Philippi were not very pleasant.
  - Acts 16:16-24 tells us when Paul and Silas were in Philippi they had an annoying demon-possessed heckler follow them around for several days; they were publicly derided and shamed, beaten with rods, thrown into prison, locked in stocks. Paul and Silas shared the gospel with a suicidal jailer, then political leaders tried to sneak Paul out of the city, etc. It was intense, but not exactly "good times." But you would never know that from the tone of his letter.
- I mean look at all these expressions of affection: In verse 7 he says "It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel."
  - If Paul's love for them was merely an affectionate feelings, or acceptance for who they were, why would he be happy they shared in his trials and imprisonment?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> One scientist explained, "Our findings show that pain is a particularly powerful ingredient in producing bonding and cooperation between those who share painful experiences,"

<sup>5</sup> Paul's imprisonment would have been a serious threat to them. If the authorities are locking up their leader what does that mean they'll do to the followers? We sense from other parts of the book, they were already experiencing that threat. See 1:28-30.

- See, Paul saw trials and labor in the gospel as better for them. Those things scripture tells us draw people closer to Christ and that was more important to Paul than their comfort or using their money in selfish ways.
- And we see a key point in verse 8, “For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.”
  - Paul has a Christ-like love for these believers. “the affection of Christ Jesus,” which means TWO THINGS:
    - 1) Paul wanted greater things for them than comfort and safety: 1:29, “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer his sake...”
    - 2) Paul was willing to lay his life down for others he said that he felt like his life is being poured out as a drink offering and then it was something he was thankful for and willing to do.<sup>6</sup>
- If we love someone, we will want their spiritual maturity, their love of Christ to increase, even if that means the Lord will use a trial, suffering, or a hard season.
  - Recently, I was coming out of very trying time at work and the Lord used this very stressful time to help me realize my utter dependence on him. Something I’m so reluctant to realize and admit. So coming out of this season, I was encouraging a friend of mine, who is in his own trial, that I was thankful the Lord has brought this trial to reveal sin and spur him to more deeply seek the Lord.
  - I was actually preaching to myself... Little did I know that a few days later the Lord would reveal to me, my own trial was not over, but going to be extended. Its an ironic and beautiful thing. The Lord was using my love for my friend to teach me something I myself needed to remember.

#### IV. Source of our Love (Verse 6)

- Now, this call to love, this example of the Affection of Jesus Christ in Paul is a tall order. Who here is confident you can go out today and practice this supreme love? (raise hand)
- Thankfully, there is good news here, there is a sufficient source for this love.
- Paul had the “Affection of Christ” – **Wasn’t just a Christ-like love, but a Christ-provided love:** Jesus Christ is not just an example to attempt to emulate.
- Christ’s love is actually empowering and enabling us believers to love.
- Paul reiterates this point in verse 6, he writes, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”
- God is the one that has already begun a good work in the believers at Philippi and us today.
- Their persevering partnership in the gospel with him, their love for Paul, one another, and their city was the good work of the Lord. He began that in them.
- CLC, this is beautiful truth that the Lord the source of our holiness. Philippians is not about how to be a good person. How to become a better friend or neighbor. It is not about you and it is not ultimately up to you.
  - If you want to be a good person – turn to the perfect savior.

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<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:17

- If you want to be a good friend – seek after the one who sacrificed himself for his enemies
- God is the source of good works and even our own salvation. He does it. Not us. **We can rest in Christ’s holiness not obsess over ours.**
- This may be what you need to hear this morning. Are you exhausted after trying to be perfect? Look holy, be your friends savior? You can rest this morning.
  - Maybe you need to stop running around, stop carrying the burdens of others or your guilt and raise your hands in worship this morning.
  - Christ’s work is done, brother, sister...
- Even Paul, the apostle, says Philippians 3:12, “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”
  - If the Lord has given you faith this morning, if he’s called you to confess and repent, you have been made Christ’s own.
- Look back how Scripture describes the conversion of one Philippian, Lydia, in Acts 16:14-15a, “One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul. And after she was baptized...”
  - Isn’t that beautiful? “The Lord opened her heart...”<sup>7</sup>
- Some of you this morning may sense the Lord opening your heart to understand the gospel. You may be realizing for the first time your need for a savior, your need to confess and repent. We’ll be down here after the service to help you respond, to process, and pray together.
- Scripture teaches us that the Lord begins our salvation by renewing us and he continues it by sanctifying us.<sup>8</sup>
  - We are called to become more holy, to be filled with the fruit of righteousness.
  - Verse 6 sometimes used to take edge off confession and discipline.
  - But look at how Paul explains in 2:12-13, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.**”
- The Lord is the one doing the work in us, and we get the joy of pressing in to that. To seeking to glorify him in that good work he’s done.
- Back to verse 6, look, this walk, is towards “the Day of Jesus Christ.”
- This work the of the Lord in us is future directed to the return of Christ, when he will complete his work in us and the world.

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<sup>7</sup> “God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts; or, to speak more correctly, by bending, forming, and directing, our hearts to righteousness. He completes his work, moreover, by confirming us to perseverance. In order that no one should make an excuse that good is initiated by the Lord to help the will which by itself is weak, the Spirit elsewhere declares what the will, left to itself, is capable of doing: ‘A new heart shall I give you..’

<sup>8</sup> “Our faith rises and falls. It has degrees. But our security does not rise and fall. It has no degrees.” – Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God*

- Our faith, holiness, and love are really previews of the Day of Jesus Christ.
- We're looking forward to that day, that time when Christ himself returns to complete his work on earth.
- Where not there yet, and so we need to hang on to the source of our love,
- John Piper puts it this way, "It is utterly crucial that in our darkness we affirm the wise, strong hand of God to hold us, even when we have no strength to hold him." –Piper, *When I Don't Desire God*
- Church, we need to pray that our discerning love will abound more and more to God's glory.
- One thing we do as a church to reflect on the work of Christ and anticipate his return is the Lord's Supper.
- 1 Corinthians passage.
- Pray