

WORKING OUT GOD'S GOOD WORK IN YOUR HEART

Studies in the Book of Philippians - Part Four

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HOW TO BE BLAMELESS AT THE DAY OF CHRIST

Philippians 1:9-11 - "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.*"

Paul had already told us that he spent his days praying for these people with thankful joy in his heart - "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..."(1:3-4). Now we come to a different issue. It's more focussed. **What** do you pray for people you love? When **you** are living close to the heart of God and you really **love** those for whom you pray, **what** do you pray for them

What is the **most important** thing God can do for people? That's an important question because **that's** what a truly loving intercessor will pray on your behalf. If I love you I want the **best** for you. And if I can get any help from God's Word as to what the **best** for you is, I want to know that.

Our text covers a lot of ground in a short space because it's all **one sentence**. Paul strings out his heart here. He strings out his best prayer for these people whom he loves. We're going to try to look at the jewels on this string one gem at a time:

1) **HE PRAYS THEIR HUNGER FOR GOD WILL BURN AND NEVER DIMINISH**

Philippians 1:9a - "And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more...."

You cannot **make** people want more of God. You cannot **make** people pursue Him like water in the desert. They have to **want** God. They have to not only **pursue** righteousness, but **prefer** it. Hence, Paul prays their love will **"abound more and more."**

The soul that settles dies. Here is a spiritual law hard learned. It's not the **amount** but the **increase** that counts. How much of God is **enough**? Only **more** is enough. Some hungers are beautiful hungers. Paul prays for a good ache in the belly for **more** - and then **more again**. True spirituality should never be **comfortable** in that sense. It constantly **stretches** and **pulls** the rest of our goals and resources and time in **God's** direction, not **our own**.

Have you ever had a really great cup of tea in some fine restaurant and then become involved in conversation with good friends. Have you ever picked up that same great cup of tea after thirty or forty minutes and carelessly gulped down that last inch in the cup. All the ingredients of the tea are exactly the same. It hasn't become **not** tea. It didn't turn into poison. But it isn't the same if it isn't **hot**.

O, how we need to catch the spirit of those words **"more and more"**. Something burned in Paul's heart that kept him from ever saying **"Now is enough. This much is sufficient."** Go through the Book of Philippians and see how many times Paul uses the word **"more"**:

Philippians 1:9 - "And it is my prayer that your love may abound **more and more....**"

Philippians 1:14 - "And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much **more** bold to speak the word without fear."

What an x-ray of Paul's heart! Here's a man already in **prison** because he **wouldn't** back down from declaring the gospel. And he wants all the believers in Rome to be **more** bold in declaring the gospel. How much boldness is **enough** boldness? **More**. That's how much boldness is enough.

Philippians 2:12 - "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...."

How much obedience to the Lordship of Jesus is **enough** obedience? **More**. That's how much obedience is enough. This is not some **legal edge** commitment. Paul doesn't want people **calculating** how much they're doing to follow the Lord. How do you calculate **more**? **More** is a question of heart, hunger, and attitude.

This is what made Paul's life tick. He bares his heart in this letter. He wants them to see his **own** attitude so they will seek God for it as he seeks God for them and prays for **them**. That's why Paul isn't **boasting** when he paints his heart for them in some of the most famous words of this letter:

Philippians 3:12-15 - "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. [13] Brothers, **I do not consider** [note that verb. How do you think about yourself?] **that I have made it my own**. But one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and straining forward** to what lies ahead, [14] **I press on** toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. [15] **Let those of us who are mature think** [consider - 13] **this way....**"

This is a classic **"more"** passage. Paul chooses this illustration carefully. If there's one illustration of a person who can't stay content where he or she **is** it's a runner in a race. The only thing that counts is the destination the runner **hasn't** reached yet. **"Mature"** Christians think this way, says Paul (**3:15**). Mature people don't count sacrifices. They don't measure their time in church. They don't spend their time contemplating anything but **"more and more."**

I'm sometimes haunted by **Richard Role's** words in his great little book, **"The Fire of Love"** - **"It is a serious waste to let a day go by without allowing God to change us."** What is God **growing** in your heart? I'm not asking what has He **done**. We can all joyfully list dozens of things God has done for us for which we sing songs of praise. But what is He **growing** in your life right **now**? And how is it becoming **bigger and bigger** - **"more and more"** in its manifestation?

This is what Jesus was probing at in His parable of the soils. Remember how He said the **"seed is the word."** It is the nature of seeds to be only the **beginning** of any process. They are not the **end** point. They are always the **germinating** point.

There are **two manifestations** of God's work in particular that Paul prayed would increase **"more and more"**:

2) **THEIR HUNGER FOR KNOWING GOD AND THEIR DILIGENCE IN HONORING GOD MUST BOTH NEVER BE QUENCHED**

Philippians 1:9-10 - "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...."

It is true that Paul talks specifically about their **"love"** abounding more and more (9). But the rest of that sentence makes it very clear that the love he has in mind isn't the typical love we think of - the love of **affection**. The divine love that must grow in their lives is more than **admiration**. It is a constant **choosing** and **shaping**. It is the **internal takeover** of all our **desiring** and **choosing** and **becoming**.

The invading love of God strikes at two key power bases in our hearts:

- a) ***Paul prays for an ongoing thirst for the knowledge of God - "...that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge..." (9).*** Many people aren't that anxious to grow in **knowledge** of God. We're very fond of **forgiveness**. That's because forgiveness is freely given when we sincerely ask. **Knowledge** isn't given. Knowledge is **learned**. So **forgiveness** is easier to get than **knowledge**.

Jesus was constantly proclaiming this distinction. You have to look carefully to see it - **Matthew 11:28-29** - **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."**

Did you catch it? There's a rest **given** and a rest **found**. One comes freely and easily. The other comes from searching and learning and pressing in. There is a darkness from which we are quickly delivered and there's a darkness resulting from our own laziness.

I still remember, in one of his books, Reuben Welch saying, **"God can forgive sin, but what can He do with stupidity?"**

The Psalmist David prayed, **"Make me to know your ways O God...." (Psalm 25:4).** **How much time did you spend last week learning God's ways?** How serious a **learner** are you? People are going to church less and less. How are you **learning** more about God? What are you reading to stretch your mind in the truths of God? What have you learned this past week that you didn't know the week before?

"Why are you making such a big deal about this, Pastor Don? Why do I have to work at growing in knowledge?" That's the question Paul anticipates. It starts to unfold in the next thing he mentions:

- b) ***Paul prays for an increasing development and exercise of discernment - "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..."***

There used to be songs that **taught** the vital, living relationship between **knowing** and **discerning**. There weren't many instruments and the piano was usually out of tune, but not too many services went by before we'd sing, **"More about Jesus let me learn - more of His holy will discern - Spirit of God my teacher be - Showing the things of Christ to me."**

The word **"discern"** means to test things with the idea of putting forward that which is **best**. Paul makes that clear by the way he **explains** discernment in the beginning of **verse 10** - **"...so that you may approve what is excellent..."**

Take a good look at **discernment**. Discernment doesn't choose between good and bad. Discernment chooses between **good** and **best**. That's the mind-set Paul described as **mature** in **3:15**.

Perhaps the idea becomes even sharper when we look at another very famous passage where Paul uses the same word:

Romans 12:2 - "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

Notice, **"...that by testing you may discern..."** I think you can see there is more to the process of knowing the will of God than merely knowing **what the will of God is**. In other words, Paul isn't just

talking about having the **factual awareness** of what God requires and what God forbids.

Discerning God's will means something like **"proving it by comparing,"** or **"proving it by putting it to the test,"** or **"proving it by implication."** So it's a knowing that is really more like **valuing** or **appraising**. Like having your property assessed, it's a knowledge that has **fixed the proper value** of its object.

You can know a great deal about something without knowing its **value**. Let's say I own a gold mine and I hire you to work for me in the mine. I teach you where you are most likely to **find** gold. I teach you to know what gold looks like when it lays bare in the earth. I teach you the best way to extract it from the ground so as not to waste any of it. I even teach you how to tell **real** gold from **fool's** gold.

So you become an expert at **mining** gold. But, let's also pretend I brought you in from some remote place on earth where you've never even **heard** of gold. You don't know what people **do** with gold. And you don't know how **precious** gold is. You know everything there is to know about mining gold because you learned it from me. You know everything about gold except how much gold is **worth**. And I want to keep it that way because I'm giving you a dime for every pound of gold you bring me.

When Paul prays for more and more **discernment** and the **ability to approve what is excellent** he's not just talking about more factual, theological data about God and Christianity. That's very good and important, but just the **starting** point. He means putting a diligent effort into **valuing God's ways** so when desires and schedules compete for your limited resources and time you will have the courage to choose the **best** over the **good**.

So in both the Romans twelve passage and our text in Philippians Paul is merely using different terms to describe the way a renewed mind **discerns** the excellence of the will of God.

You can have a **church upbringing** without having a renewed mind. You can **quote Bible verses** without having a renewed mind. You can have **Christian parents** without having a renewed mind. You can be a **Christian business person** without possessing a renewed mind. You know much **about** the will of God because you've grown up being **taught** the things God wants you to do and the things He does not want you to do.

You can go down into the gold mine and bring out what you've been assigned to do with your Christian life. But you can do all of that with little sense of the **value** of God's will.

And sooner or later, probably later, you will be brought, perhaps by the Spirit of God Himself, into some very specific situation where the **value you place** on the will of God will be **tested**. There will come specific times when you are feeling pulled between the **will of Father God** and some **cherished and seemingly worthwhile personal delight and ambition**.

And it is precisely at those times the Spirit of God will tell you to choose life - to **"taste and see that the Lord is good."** In fact, it's **better** than just good. It's the **best** choice you can make when compared with all other possibilities. That's what growth in **discernment** is all about. That's why Paul prays these Philippian Christians will have this **"more and more."**

Here is a young man. He's dating an unsaved woman. In fact, he's falling in love with her. He's been taught since he was a child that it isn't right for a Christian to give his heart to a woman who isn't a Christian and he never questioned that revelation of God's will because he never **had** to.

Now he's in love and he has to **learn** the will of God. He doesn't have to learn what the will of God **is**. He already knows that. Now the battle is different, and much more difficult. Both the **risks** and the **rewards**

(if he only had faith to see the rewards!) are greater. The test now isn't **knowing** the will of God. The test is **valuing** the will of God. The issue is "**discerning**" and "**approving what is excellent.**"

I pray that silly illustration about the gold mine stays in your mind. We can all think of a thousand ways people, even sincere people, in this age are robbed blind of precious opportunities simply by not knowing the **value** of something. Parents weep when their children squander away money and time by not knowing the value of an education. And many times those same parents don't know the **value** of the will of God. We want those we love to know the value of a buck. So much so that many grow up thinking the buck can somehow fill the place of God in their heart. They're destined for misery.

We are invited to **discern** and **approve the excellency** of God's will in a world of smoke and mirror delights. We are invited to allow the Spirit of God to renew and remake our minds so our brains are more fitted to the values of the Kingdom than to those of Hollywood and Bay Street.

There is nothing in the theaters or televisions to teach you to praise and prize the will of God over all else. This world **soaks** our lives in trivia. Paul prays for the power to **know** this and to **resist** this and to **embrace** the knowledge of the Lord, and then to **choose what is excellent** over what is **shiny** and **easy** and **popular**.

3) **BEING PURE AND BLAMELESS FOR THE DAY OF CHRIST - THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED**

Philippians 1:10-11 - "...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."

I think the key to really savouring Paul's message here lies in not separating it from the context. In other words, when Paul talks about being pure and blameless for the day of Christ - that's the day Jesus comes back to earth again - he means we can't be fully ready for that day just by **not doing bad things**.

The problem with simply trying to stay clear of really sinful choices is you and I are not usually morally strong enough to trust ourselves to **always** resist the temptation when the temptation presents itself. Certainly we're spiritually strong in **some** areas. But we're not equally strong in **all** areas. Each of us can be tripped up under the right circumstances.

That's why Paul prays as he does for these Christians at Philippi. He knows they will be better braced against temptation if they've trained themselves, not merely to avoid **dabbling in sin**, but in **treasuring what is excellent**.

The lesson is I can better keep my life away from even the **edges** of compromise and sinfulness if I train myself to **search for what is excellent and best**. In this way my life isn't getting used to **accommodating** and **justifying**, but is **focussing** and **evaluating options** for my greatest joy and God's greatest glory. You can't just get in your car and drive with no other goal than avoiding accidents. You also have to **know where you're going**.

That's exactly what Paul says in the remainder of our text:

Philippians 1:10-11 - "...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.**"

Let the hunger for God's praise and glory increase **more and more** in the church - right up until the day

of Christ Jesus.