

(3) Philippians 1 vv.7-11

- This chapter begins with a brief *introduction*, greeting the saints at Philippi (**vv.1-2**).
- As is often the case, Paul makes *intercession* for the saints, being thankful to God for their fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now (10 years) and prays for their spiritual development and blessing (**vv.3-11**).
- One of the purposes of this epistle was to give *information* about Paul's circumstances under house arrest. All that Paul has endured has turned out to the furtherance of the gospel (**vv.12-26**). His *inspiration* is Christ (v.21).
- The chapter closes with the first *imperative* of the epistle (v.27) which governs the whole letter. Paul is sure he will see the Philippians again (v.26). In the meantime, they are to live lives worthy of the gospel they preach (**vv.27-30**).

Paul's Intercession [vv.3-11]

v.7. Before outlining the specific content of his prayer (v.9), Paul justifies his feelings of thankfulness and deep affection for all the saints at Philippi (vv.7-8). Indeed, it was **meet** [*dikaios* – translated “just” in its only other reference in Philippians, 4.8] or ‘right’ (appropriate) for Paul to think this way because of their close fellowship in the gospel (v.7b).

The word **think** [*phroneō*] is the first of eleven references to the mind in the epistle. The word does not refer to a specific thought or reasoning, but rather the development of a *mindset* – including attitudes and dispositions. The mindset of the Lord Jesus was focussed on *others* (2.5). The mindset of Libertarian false teachers was *earthly* (3.19). This strong emphasis on the mind continues in all the Prison Epistles. Philippians emphasises the *humble* mind – with the unique example of the Lord Jesus. Ephesians speaks of the *holy* mind, re-fashioned by the word of God to be characterised by righteousness and holiness (4.23-24). Colossians is concerned with the *heavenly* mind – “Set your affection on [*phroneō*] things above, not on things on the earth,” (3.2). The mind of the believer must be guarded, for what a person *thinks* (the mind – rational) affects what a person *wants* (the heart – volitional). This, in turn, affects what a person *does* (the hands and feet – practical). To have a life oriented after the spiritual, we must first have a *mind* concentrated on “things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3.1-2). If the mind is in neutral, we will drift towards sin – that is our natural disposition.

Paul had developed great affection for the saints at Philippi – **I have you in my heart**. William MacDonald says, “In his heart he treasures a lasting memory of how loyally they stood with him, whether he was on trial, in prison, or travelling about in the defence and confirmation of the gospel.” Indeed, the Philippians were **partakers of his grace**, literally, ‘fellow participants’ in “my grace” (with the definite article, ‘the grace that is mine’). Whilst Paul could be speaking about the saving grace of God in which they were all participants, it is more likely Paul has the unique grace of his apostleship in view (Romans 1.5) – he was a messenger of the gospel to the Gentiles. The Philippians shared in this in two ways:

- They shared in his **bonds** in the sense that they stood with Paul despite his imprisonment and supported him financially in his hardship (4.14).
- They shared in his **defence and confirmation of the gospel** because they were involved in the same spiritual work in the face of similar (Roman) opposition in Philippi. Paul was preaching in the *capital* (Rome); they were preaching in the *colony* (Philippi). The favour that was bestowed on Paul to be allowed to defend the gospel in the big place, that same favour was their privilege in the smaller place. This was joint participation in the cause of the gospel.

The Greek word translated **defence** [*apologia*] is the word from which ‘apologetics’ derives. This is a judicial term referring to a lawyer presenting a verbal defence of his client. In his general ministry, but also now in the Roman court before Nero, Paul would answer any critics by presenting a logical, legal defence of the gospel (cf. Acts 17.3; 18.28; 19.8). If this is the negative side, the **confirmation of the gospel** is the positive side – the presentation of evidence to validate the message, whether in the form of signs and wonders (Hebrews 2.3-4) or the testimony of transformed lives. Thus, the gospel was defended by *words* (answering objections and arguments) and *works* (establishing the truth and reliability of the gospel by positive evidence and testimony).

v.8. Before praying, Paul adds another affirmation of his affection for the saints. Paul had spoken of his heart (v.7), but only God could see his heart. Thus, he puts himself under oath and invokes God to witness to the depth of his feeling for the saints – **God is my record** (witness), cf. Romans 1.9; 2 Corinthians 1.23; 1 Thessalonians 2.5. The phrase **I long after you all** [*epipotheō*] carries a preposition which intensifies the already strong term of desire. The word was used of an athlete straining towards the finish line – Paul was yearning for these saints (cf. 4.1). His longing is probably not simply to be with them again, but that they themselves “remain true to the gospel to which they have been so faithfully committed over these years” (Carson). Paul's longing found its *sphere* and *source* in [*en*] **the bowels** [*splanchnon*] of **Jesus Christ**. The term “bowels” can refer literally to the internal organs, but is mostly used figuratively of the innermost feelings, and seat

of the tenderest affections. Wuest writes, “Paul describes his longing, not as his individual emotion, but as Christ’s longing, as if the very heart of Christ dwelt in Paul.” Paul’s love for the saints was a reflection and extension of Christ’s love for them. His heart beat as one with the heart of Christ Himself.

v.9. At last, Paul has reached the *content* of his prayer. The overarching theme of the prayer is love and contains *four* specific requests, the first *three* prefaced with the conjunction “that”. Paul prays about *profusion* (v.9), *priorities* (v.10a), *purity* (v.10b) and *productivity* (v.11) – that, ultimately, they might be like an orchard with boughs weighed down with abundant fruit to the glory and praise of God. Notice the strong emphasis on the spiritual development of these believers, as in all Paul’s prison epistles:

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S PRISON PRAYERS			
A Prayer for Enlightenment (Eph 1:15-23)	A Prayer for Enablement (Eph 3:14-21)	A Prayer for Enlargement (Phil 1:9-11)	A Prayer for Enrichment (Col 1:9-14)
...for a greater grasp of God’s truth (us in Christ)	...for a greater experience of God’s power (Christ in us)	...for a greater maturity, for God’s glory	...for a greater understanding of God’s will
<i>To know what:</i> 1. The hope is 2. His inheritance is 3. Is the greatness of His power to us	<i>To be:</i> 1. Strengthened 2. Able to grasp 3. Filled with the fulness of God	<i>To exhibit:</i> 1. Abounding discerning love 2. Godliness and fruitfulness	<i>To be filled with:</i> 1. A knowledge of God’s will so as to walk to please Him
Knowing	Having	Living	Walking

Source: Michael J Penfold

And this I pray [*proseuchomai*] uses the most common word for prayer in the NT. It is a word always and only used of prayer to God and carries the thought of speaking ‘face to face’ with God. We have the privilege of an audience with Him. First, Paul prays that **their love** [*agapē*] **might abound**. The Greek NT uses three words for love:

- *storgē* describes a natural, obligatory love for family members.
- *phileō* is an affection that responds to love from, or qualities in, another.
- *agapē* is the highest of the three loves. It is not simply an emotion, but an attitude of mind and an action of the will. It is a deliberate and unconditional choice to sacrifice (deny) the comfort of self for the blessing and benefit of others, regardless of their worth or merit.

No direct object is given for their love – whether for God or one another. But one includes the other, as love for God and His people cannot be disassociated (1 John 5.1-2). Paul prays that their love might **abound more and more** – love is not a static possession, but a dynamic principle that constantly grows and increases. Love was to abundantly excel more and more. The imagery is that of a river overflowing its banks during a flood – Christian love must not be a stagnant pool or a slow-moving trickle; rather, it must be a raging torrent. But love is not indiscriminate. Love should grow exponentially, but within the confines (riverbanks) of **knowledge** and **judgment** (moral discernment). Love must be guided by “knowledge” – a spiritual grasp of God, His word and His will. This will give a believer a moral sensitivity to discern between right and wrong – “judgment”. This word was used in secular Greek literature of dogs picking up a scent whilst hunting. Morally, believers have a nose for what is right and wrong because they measure all things by the word of God. Love is therefore *intelligent*, desiring to know and practice the mind of God. Love does not overlook sin but seeks to correct what is contrary to the word of God.

v.10. The use of the word **that** twice in this verse introduces purpose (result). Love that is guided by the banks of knowledge and discernment produces three things – a *brilliant* life, a *blameless* life, and a *bountiful* life (v.11). The first purpose is **that ye may approve** [*dokimazō*] **things that are excellent**. *dokimazō* was the word used for testing metal with a view to approval, thus proving its true value and worth. Paul therefore prays that believers, by their knowledge of the word and will of God, would be able to sift and test life’s decisions with a view to recognising what is the most excellent choice. Paul is not describing the difference between what is good and bad, but between things that are good and the very best (excellent) – between things of lesser and greater value. Paul wants believers to make not merely *good* decisions,

but the *best* decisions in light of the Day of Christ. The good is the enemy of the best. A cheap and shoddy “that will do...” is the scourge of many a contribution to the assembly and its work – whether in worship, or in preaching. But ‘that will do’ is dishonouring to the Lord. Let’s go in for the excellent – my very best! In every chapter of Philippians, choices are made discerningly that are of more value than other perfectly legitimate choices (cf. 3.13). In Luke 10.42, Martha made a good choice; Mary made an excellent choice. We spend a lot of wasted time on things that are not sinful in themselves, but they are not “excellent” either. Christians should go in for spending time on things that are ‘top of the range’.

This kind of living leads to the second purpose: **that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ** – living a morally blameless life. The word “sincere” is *eilikrinēs*, possibly deriving from two other words meaning ‘sunshine’ and ‘to judge’ – thus to hold up to the light of the sun for inspection. An ancient craftsman in marble would sometimes use wax to cover his mistakes, which mistakes were exposed by lifting the sculpture to the sun. Market traders even disguised broken vases by filling the cracks with wax. So, the word “sincere” means pure, unsullied (or unmixed), free from spot or blemish to such a degree as to bear examination in the full splendour of the sun. This is a pure life without pretence or hidden motive. The phrase **without offence** means ‘blameless’ [NET], literally, ‘not to strike’ or ‘not to stumble’ (as by striking one’s foot against a stone). If understood in a *passive* sense, Paul prays that the saints would not stumble or fall themselves in the pathway of Christian duty and service, but would walk with a clear conscience. If understood in an *active* sense, he prays that they would not cause others to stumble, giving them occasion to fall into sin.

This behaviour is **till** [*eis*] the **day of Christ**, or ‘with a view to’ the coming of Christ. The thought is not merely of continuance until the day of Christ, but of the regulating power the prospect of the Lord’s coming exercises over the believer’s motives and conduct (WE Vine). As noted in v.6, the day of Christ begins with the rapture and includes events in heaven for the church. The day of Christ will judge love’s choices.

v.11. Finally, the third purpose of abounding love (v.9) is a *bountiful* life. With OT Scriptures in the background (cf. Psalm 1.3; Isaiah 61.3), Paul’s vision is inspired by the picture of an orchard with boughs of trees weighed down with abundant fruit. The perfect tense suggests these saints have **been filled** with the fruit of righteousness. Thus, the picture is of saints arriving at the Judgment Seat with a full crop. This is the positive side of love’s conduct – not just the absence of what is wrong (v.10), but the production of what is right (v.11).

The **fruits¹ of righteousness** can be interpreted in two ways: either righteousness as the *source* of fruit, or righteousness as the *nature* of the fruit. To put it another way, is Paul speaking about the fruit produced by people who *are* righteous, or is it the fruit which *in itself* is righteousness, and seen in righteous conduct? Whilst both are true, in this context the latter is more likely. Thus, the Christian should be marked by righteous living – doing what is right according to the word of God, attitudes and actions that reflect the attitudes and actions of Christ (2.5-8).

The *source* of this fruit is **by** [*dia*] **Jesus Christ**. The fruit is the evidence of His presence and operation in their lives – He is the Vine; believers are merely branches on which fruit is borne. The *object* of the fruit is the **glory and praise of God**. The righteous character and living of the believer are not for their own reward, but that God might be honoured thereby. References to God therefore bracket vv.3-11 – the apostle begins with thanks to God and ends with glory ascribed to God.

¹ The **TR** reads “fruits” (plural), whereas the critical text reads “fruit” (singular). The singular reading is supported by the earliest and strongest manuscript witnesses.