

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

BY

Calvary Chapel Outreach Fellowship

Lesson 23

The Joy of Servanthood

By

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We are in the book of Philippians. In order to understand this letter, I think perhaps as much as with any letter in the New Testament that Paul writes, we do need to know a little bit about the history of this church and the relationship that he has with the people. The birthing of the church in Philippi is recorded in [Acts 16](#), as the apostle Paul is on his second missionary journey and he is making his way across what is known today as Turkey. As he makes his way, Paul attempts to go into the area known as Asia (not the Orient that we think of as Asia today) but Asia as defined in the Mediterranean—which would be southwestern Turkey. He tries to go down into that region, and it would appear that he tried to cross the Aegean Sea to make his way to Corinth, and then on to Athens. Paul wanted to go into that southern portion of Greece, but the Holy Spirit stopped him from being able to do it. So they (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) go up into the northwestern section of Turkey and as they are waiting there, they receive a vision of a man from Macedonia—which is in northern Greece. This man calls out to them: “Come over and help us” (cf. [Acts 16:9](#)). And Paul realizes that they now have the instruction from the Holy Spirit by this vision that they are to go into the area of Macedonia. And so they make their way there; and then ultimately, they go into a city called Philippi.

When they arrive in Philippi, they find that there is no synagogue. Although it was in Greece, Philippi was a colony and it was a Roman city. For a city to be called a “colony” in the Roman Empire, it means that this was a place where the great generals, the military leaders, and the great officials retired. And basically, these cities that were colonies were just a little bit of Rome, but they were far away from Rome. So, it was a city heavily influenced by gentiles in terms of its tone. And when Paul comes into that city as a Christian Jew, he finds that there is no synagogue. This is interesting even for a gentile part of the world because it was a requirement for the Jews, in any city where there were at least 10 adult Jewish males, to build a synagogue. So here you have a city in which there was virtually no Jewish presence; it was almost purely a gentile city.

So, having no synagogue, Paul went with those who were traveling with him (Silas and Timothy) down to the riverside. I do not know if the worship song has anything to do with this, but they go down by the river. When the Jews did not have a synagogue, very often they would go to a beautiful place in nature that spoke of God, a place that spoke of His creation. Water was a favorite place because of the imagery, in terms of God giving the Jews water from the rock and supplying their need. And down by the river there is a group of Jewish women meeting and there is a woman by the name of Lydia who is a seller of purple. This would have meant that she was dealing with something comparable to diamonds, in the ancient world, because it was something very precious and very valuable to wear purple at that time. The cloth was a royal purple color because of an insect, a worm that had to be squished in order to produce that color. It was very, very rare. So, Lydia had dealt in this kind of dye and the shell fish that it came from and all. And the Lord opened up her heart to the things of the gospel. And thus began the first reported convert in establishing the first church in the history of Europe. This was the beginning of the church in Philippi and it is spoken of in [Acts 16](#).

Paul then comes in and begins to preach the word of God in Philippi and a very strong church is established there, as the Holy Spirit works through them confirming the gospel. But it was not without its difficulties. As Paul was preaching the gospel, there was a demon-possessed girl who brought tremendous wealth to her owners by fortune telling and this kind of thing. She was following Paul around for a few days and she said, “Listen to these men. They are servants of the Most High God and they tell us the way of salvation” (cf. [Acts 16:17](#)).

After a few days, we are told in the words of [Acts 16:18](#), the apostle Paul was greatly displeased. He did not need, nor did God need, the advertising of the devil for the fact that they were carrying the truth. This was simply muddying the waters and so he turns to the girl and he casts the demon out of her. Well, that represented a tremendous loss of income for her owners. And they got upset and raised a big riot in the city saying, “These men, being Jews, come into this gentile city and they are teaching things that ought not to be taught here” (cf. [Acts 16:20-21](#)). And there was a riot and Paul and Silas were arrested. Then they were beaten with many stripes and thrown into the heart of the prison in Philippi. As they are in the heart of that prison in stocks, badly beaten, what did Paul and Silas do at night? They began to sing songs to the Lord, which got the attention of all of the prisoners. Paul and Silas were just praising the Lord and He produced an earthquake. Then all of the cells were opened up, and ultimately, the owner or overseer of the prison and his whole family ended up being saved.

Then the Roman governors over the city sent a message the next day and said: “Paul you are free to go now.” In essence, Paul said: “I am not leaving. I am a Roman citizen, who you publically beat.” No Roman citizen was ever to be beaten without a trial. He said, “You have publically humiliated me and my witness before the whole city. I will not leave this jail until you officials come here and ask me to leave” (cf. [Acts 16:37](#)). Which the officials did, and then Paul left. He went to the church and made sure that they were established and strong, and then he moved on in that second missionary journey to the next city.

So this is the history that Paul had with the church at Corinth. They were very close in their relationship with one another because of the history they had together.

Now the theme of the book of Philippians is a theme of joy. That word “joy” is used nineteen times in the book. The reason for the joy in our life and in Paul’s life is recorded forty times in Philippians and that is the name of “the Lord Jesus.” It is used forty times in the book and He is the source of our joy. And joy is superior to happiness because happiness—I am not putting happiness down, I am all for it—but it is inferior in its quality, when compared to joy. Happiness has its basis in our physical circumstances. We are happy when everything is happening very nicely in our physical circumstances. But when things kind of become messy, then our happiness goes. Joy is something deeper because it has its basis in Christ. It has its basis in what God has done for us and what God thinks of us and the promises God has made to us. And it is because those things never change, that the source of our joy never changes.

Let's say that you are doing your taxes and you have done the quick thing and you are going to get a return of eight hundred dollars coming back. Wow! What you could do with eight hundred dollars! And here you are, happy as can be; and then, as you are driving home from picking up your tax return, you start to hear a knock in the engine of your car. And all of a sudden you have this sneaking suspicion that it is going to cost about twelve hundred dollars to fix that knocking. You were so happy five minutes before and now the happiness is gone. This is tied to circumstances and it happens all day every day in our lives. But joy is founded in Christ and He does not change. The source of our joy is always there. That is the reason for the theme of Philippians and it is one of Paul's prison epistles. He writes this epistle from a prison in Rome. He writes this letter that is full of joy, even though he is unjustly accused and he has been sitting in a Roman prison. He can do this because his source is joy and what he lives for is joy and not happiness. He is able to have joy even in circumstances that are so unfair.

Now, Paul writes this letter for a couple of reasons. One of them is to just say, "thank you" to the Philippians for a gift that they had sent to him. Paul has probably been in this Roman prison for as long as two years. At sometime during that two-year period, the believers at the church in Corinth (which Paul founded) discovered that Paul was in prison and that he must have been miserable. In the ancient prisons, they did not necessarily feed the prisoner three square meals a day. Often times in those prisons they incarcerated you, and it was up to your families to keep you fed and keep you clothed. So this church sent an offering to Paul to make sure that his needs would be met. And that meant a lot to Paul. So what he is doing in this letter is writing them a thank-you note.

The Bible says in [1 Corinthians 13](#) that agape love is "well mannered;" and so, Paul has good manners and he is writing a thank-you note to the believers at Philippi. Another reason for writing this letter is that false teachers had crept into the church and they were trying to draw people into legalism, and Paul is going to head those guys off at the pass. And a third reason is that there was a division that started to develop in the church at Corinth. There are two women who are having a fight over something—I am sure quite noble—and they have a position of significance there within the church in terms of their ministry. This disagreement is threatening to spill over to others within that church, who are going to start taking sides—which is dangerous for the church. So Paul wants to address these things in his writing.

In these ancient letters there were four characteristics of the opening. Number one, the letter writer would always identify himself at the beginning of the letter. When we write letters today we sign, "sincerely yours," and we identify ourselves at the end of the letter. They were more practical in the early days because they wrote everything on scrolls; and so, if they had a lengthy letter they had to unroll the scroll all the way to the end, in order to find out who in the world had sent the letter. Then they would have to roll it all the way back, in order to begin reading the thing. So, they identified themselves at the beginning of the letter. Then they would identify who they were writing the letter to, and they would greet who they were writing the letter to and then they would typically begin their letters with some kind of thanksgiving. So Paul, by the Spirit of God, follows that same model.

Notice he begins here in [Philippians 1:1](#), as the writer of the letter—“Paul and Timothy.” Now Timothy is with Paul and they would have known Timothy in Philippi because, by the time Paul goes to Philippi, he had already had a split with Barnabus. Barnabus has gone his way with John Mark, and Paul is now continuing his missionary journey with Silas. And on the way to Philippi, Timothy joins them. So, they would have been familiar with Timothy, but Paul is the writer of the letter. Later on in the book we are going to see where Paul repeats over and over again: “I, I, I.” In other words, this is not the result of some combined effort that both he and Timothy have put together. Timothy just happens to be with him. Paul introduces Timothy, who was saved under the ministry of Paul, and he was with Paul quite a bit in his service to the Lord. But Paul is the writer of the epistle.

Now you can buy commentaries that will make you crazy on different things. There are different commentaries who dispute whether Paul is the author of this letter. Nobody else could be the author of this letter! I mean, the Holy Spirit inspired it, but the very first word in the entire letter is “Paul.” This kind of reminds me of the person who said, “You know when you ain’t got an education you gots to use your brains!” Paul has written this letter and Timothy is with him. And they describe themselves as, “bondservants of Jesus Christ” ([Philippians 1:1](#)).

Now this is interesting because there are only four letters in the New Testament where Paul does not introduce himself as an apostle, at the beginning. When he writes to everybody else it is: “Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is because Paul would typically be writing to a church and he would be correcting something that was being done incorrectly in that church. And so, he would identify himself as an apostle in order to establish his authority for correcting the problem in the church. But to First and Second Thessalonians, the letter to Philemon, and then in this letter to the Philippians, Paul does not identify himself as an apostle. This is because he knows he has a relationship with these people, and he just comes to them as “Paul.” The established relationship means something to both of them, and Paul knows that they will take what he has to say seriously.

So, Paul writes to them describing himself and Timothy as bondservants of Jesus Christ. Now the word “bondservant” has its Old Testament origin in [Exodus 21](#). Here is how that would work. Let’s say both you and I are Jews and let’s say that I owed you a fair amount of money that I had no hope of being able to repay. What I could do is sell myself to become your slave. But a Jew could only be your personal slave or your servant for a maximum of six years, and on the seventh year that person was required, by the law of Moses, to free the slave. And those six years of service would cover the debt.

But let’s say that I have been your servant for six years and we are coming up on the release date, and you have been the greatest master that a servant could ever know. I have come to love you and appreciate you and I think to myself: “I do not want to stop serving this family or serving this man. I know that if I go out into the world I will never find a circumstance superior to the one that I have here. I love this family, I love this man and I want to be a servant on my own free will.” And I make the decision that I want to be their

personal servant for life. If I went to my master and I communicated that to him, then he would take me down to the gate of the city. The gate would have a wooden frame where all of the leading men in the city would gather as witnesses. And then, they would take my earlobe and put it up against the wood and take an awl and drive it through my earlobe into the wood, piercing my ear. That would now be a sign that I am a *doulos*—that is the word in the Greek here. I am now a bondservant.

As a bondservant I have first of all, out of a motivation of love for my master, made a commitment of my own free will to become his servant for life. There are three characteristics of a bondservant and Paul carries that imagery over into his relationship with the Lord. I love my Master, and of my own free will I chose to become His servant for the rest of my life. That is what a bondservant was and Paul proudly wore that Old Testament title for defining his position, in terms of his service to the Lord. There were no business cards handed out identifying him as, “the Grand Poobah of missionary journeys,” or that kind of thing. He just identified himself as, “a bondservant of Jesus Christ.”

Now notice what he writes: “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.” This word “saints” is a very important one to understand. What Roman Catholicism has done to the term “saint,” by and large in the Americas including the United States, is nothing less than criminal—by biblical standards. To be a saint, the word comes from the Greek word *hagios* and it means “to be holy.” To be a saint is to be holy, and to be holy is to be something that was set apart from the world specifically for God’s use. That is what made something holy, and by virtue of the fact that it was set aside for God’s use, made it different from everything else in the world. And that is what a saint is. Our lives were once used for every kind of ungodly thing by our own choosing, prior to coming to know the Lord. But when we came to know the Lord, we said, “God, what is left of my life, I am giving to you to be used for your purposes.” And when we gave ourselves to the Lord we became saints.

Now in Roman Catholicism, in order to become a saint, you have to die physically. And sainthood is a very specialized segment of people. We tend to think that if someone one were to come up to us and say, “Are you a saint?” I would laugh and say that “I am doing my best, but I would not call myself a saint.” But every Christian could make a card to hand out with his name and title. My card would read: “Saint Damian,” and it would be biblically accurate because every one of us, who knows the Lord Jesus, is a saint. However, in Roman Catholicism, to become a saint they have a procedure when a person dies. They have the devil’s advocate and then they have an advocate that tries to lay the case for the fact that this person ought to be deemed a saint. They have this great debate that goes on once a person dies. Aren’t you glad as Christians that God made it easier for us to become saints?

The Catholics would lay a case that a certain person ought to be named a saint. And as part of that process, there had to be at least one miracle that had been done in the name of the deceased. That miracle had to be verified as being true; and then you would have another person called the devil’s advocate, who would come on the scene and he would

try to lay the case for why this person should not be named a saint. If the advocate for sainthood won the case, then the person would be deemed a saint. Obviously, that turns sainthood into this very small and select group of people.

But notice the definition of a saint in the next three words of [Philippians 1:1](#), “in Christ Jesus.” When we give our lives to the Lord and we trust in Him for the forgiveness of our sins, there is nothing else in all of life that we can do to please the heart of the Father more than to trust in His Son. And when we do trust in Christ, God’s Holy Spirit comes into our lives and our life becomes different now from every other life in the world. Whether anybody recognizes us from a religious institution or not, in God’s eyes, what our life is about now is entirely different from what it once was about and what the world is about today. So, every single one of us who knows the Lord is a saint.

And then Paul says, “for the saints who are in Philippi with the bishops and the deacons.” The church at Philippi is prospering. They have bishops and they have deacons. This is a church that is not only growing, but it has a need for some sanctified organization. The deacons were leaders in the early church who took care of the physical things. They were very spiritual in what they did to vacuum and get the church ready and make sure the lights were changed and make sure the temperature was right. This was a very spiritual calling of God on a person’s life. And so, that is what the deacons did and the elders or the bishops took care of other spiritual needs in the church. They were giving themselves to study of the Word and prayer. So Paul greets them also there. And here is his greeting: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Some of you are old veterans of studying this passage and you may think: “Oh no, is he going to do that old grace and peace thing?” Yes, I am. Look at Paul as he writes all of these letters and he begins them with “grace and peace,” “grace and peace,” “grace and peace.” And you may be thinking: “Can’t the Holy Spirit come up with some kind of a new greeting other than this?” And He does not and it is by design. I am convinced that He wants us to hear this thing over and over again, until it is not only driven deep into our lives, but each time that it has been driven into our lives, we would be reminded of the importance of this.

When the Greeks (the gentiles) would greet one another, it was with the word *karis* which means, “grace.” It means “undeserved favor.” So, if I were to see you in a city like Philippi and you are a gentile and I am a gentile, I would say to you “*karis*” and I would be saying: “Grace to you” or “May you have a better day than you deserve” or “May you have a gracious day.” And that is how they would greet one another and how they would say goodbye to one another.

Now the Jews had another word to greet one another with, and they still use it to this day. When you greet someone in Israel or any Jewish person, you would say the word “*shalom*,”—peace. And then when you go to say goodbye, you would say, “*shalom*” again. You may think: “This is a hello and a goodbye with them? Yes, it is. And *shalom* just means “peace.” So Paul takes the great greeting of the gentiles and he takes the great single greeting of the Jews and he unites them in his greeting, but the order is significant.

Never ever does Paul, by the Holy Spirit, reverse the order of grace and peace. It is always grace first and then peace. Never is it reversed because it is only as a person knows the grace of God, that they can then know the peace of God.

If I have a relationship with God that is based on my works, then I have forgotten about the fact that He deals with me every single day on the basis of grace. Every single day He gives me a day that is better than I deserve. This is to say nothing of eternity. So, when Paul speaks concerning the recognition that this is God's heart towards me, and when I recognize it is not based upon works, what happens? Jack LeLaine gets to crank up the mighty Wurlitzer, we get to inhale deeply, exhale, and relax—peace! There is no peace apart from grace because then I would have to work my way to heaven. And so, Paul and the Holy Spirit are just driving it home over and over again. This is all about grace and that is why you can have peace in your relationship with God.

For those of you who think you know all about this and you have heard this grace and peace wrap before, just stop and think about how we go along in our Christian life and then we sin. We miss the mark and fall short in a particular situation, and we are conscious of it. We think: “Boy did I fail! That conversation or that evening would be completely different if I had a chance to do it over again.” And sometimes we begin to think: “Oh no, I cannot go to God in prayer. I have to whip myself for the next three days and then maybe I can go to prayer; and then maybe the peace can be restored. I hope I can get back to God the way that I had before I sinned.” We often put ourselves through this routine and that is when we have a “works mentality.” That is when the relationship is based upon works rather than upon grace, and then our peace is completely gone.

So, God knows how often we need to be reminded about His grace. God knew he was getting a project when He got us, and He knew that we were going to need grace every single day. That is what this relationship is based on, the grace of God. And because of His grace, we can have peace.

Notice in [Philippians 1:2](#) where this grace and peace comes from—“from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Translation—in other words God is saying—“This is the way I want it to be.” So when you are “strong in the grace,” as Peter wrote, then you are strong in the fact that God deals with you in this relationship on the basis of grace. You are not reading something into it that God does not want you to understand about Him. He is the one who greets us in this way: “grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is a beautiful thing too, when the Lord Jesus Christ is coupled with God our Father, as a beautiful evidence of His deity and the grace that comes equally from them. If you put anybody else's name in there: “Grace and peace from God our Father and Damian Kyle,” you would say: “Wow, did we fall off the cliff at the end of that verse or what?” Was that a drop! Did you feel that drop? When the verse says, “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” it speaks of equality.

Then Paul heads into his thanksgiving. He said, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” That is the relationship that he has with this church. It was beautiful, but it was not as if no one had ever failed in this relationship that they had with each other. When Paul stopped to think about them, which is later in life and he is sitting in this prison, he said: “I just want you to know I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” Isn’t that great? This relationship and this church gave the apostle Paul good memories. We look at the apostle Paul and think of him as a great strong apostle and that he probably did not need the encouragement of other people. He could probably just run through brick walls for God and all of this stuff and it did not matter what anybody thought about him. But it did matter to Paul, and this church had a special place in his heart. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,” he said.

There are people of whom I have had the privilege of officiating at their coronation service. They had gone on to be with the Lord and it would come to my remembrance how I missed them. I missed them terribly, and with that loss, part of my heart was being cut off from this world and I was being further planted, day by day, into the world to come. But some of those people meant so much to me and I never got the chance to say anything to them before they departed. Some of them never knew how much I cared in my heart concerning them and now they are gone. It is a beautiful thing to be able to say that about a group of God’s people. Paul says, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” ([Philippians 1:3](#)).

I feel that way concerning the people of this church. I love the staff here and I hope they know it. It is a great staff and we love being here and serving the Lord together. And I walk through this big empty room during the week and I cannot wait until the people of our congregation are back here again. All through the week we are able to say, “Thank You, Lord. Thank You for their lives and for what You are doing.” The Lord works together in all of us this way in the body of Christ.

Now notice that Paul is very strict in his theology and I think he is very careful. He does not want anyone lifted up in pride, so he does not say: “I want to thank you for all the good things you have done and for the memories you have given me.” Notice who he thanks; He thanks God. The apostle Paul knew what was true of the people in Philippi, even in that church among Christians, would be true of him. The only reason we can ever say thanks for any contacts any of us has had with our life is because God has done something to change us and to make us have good memories. And the Lord has done that. Aren’t you thankful for what He has changed us from and what He is changing us into every day, and how faithful He is to that work in us? To God be the glory, great things He has done in our lives—to think that this could be possible even of us!

Paul says, “always in every prayer of mine making requests for you all with joy.” He said, “I am so thankful for you that I talk to God about you all of the time in prayer. And I am thankful for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now” (cf. [Philippians 1:3-5](#)). And of course they had been involved with Paul’s ministry financially, but they were also being faithful to the gospel, to preach the true gospel. And

Paul appreciated that about the church at Philippi. They had stayed faithful all the way through from the first day until now.

And then [verse six](#) is one of these great mountain top verses in the New Testament: “being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.” You know when God saved you and me, He saved a project. He calls us a “work.” But He calls us a good work that He is doing in our lives. And God declares, “what He has begun”—we think that we began something—what He has begun in our lives, He said: “I want you to be confident of this, I am going to bring it to completion.” And what is the good work that He is going to bring to completion? Christ-likeness. Day by day, He makes us a bit more like the Lord Jesus in how we think and how we speak and act. Paul comes in and says, “God is going to be faithful to stay with us until the day that the Lord returns and takes us home to be with Him. And then we will be in our perfect body and we will be just like Him, in terms of our nature; we will be divine like He is. But then we will be like Christ for eternity.

And so Paul declares here that this is something we are to be confident in—He will complete it. I think we need to know that. Do you ever get impatient with yourself? “Man, when am I going to learn that? Why am I still stumbling over that silly thing in my life that is so unlike Christ? I take two steps forward and one step back. Can’t it be forty steps forward and no steps back?” And we can just think we will never be like Him because growing in Christ-likeness is going so slowly. And then the Lord comes in and says, “No, you need to be confident that what God begins He finishes.” He works every single day in our lives to help us to be more like the Lord and He will be faithful to do that all the way till the Lord returns.

God never starts something and then stops it. Aren’t you glad about that? It drives me crazy not to finish something. Now that may be a characteristic of your life and it doesn’t mean that you are worse than me, it just means that we are probably not going to work well together. It drives me crazy. I am not saying that it drives the Lord crazy, but there is that certain kind of person who begins something, gets it eighty percent done, and then stops—loses interest. And then you look back on a year’s worth of their work and there are all of these things that still have remaining items for closure on them. That kind of thing drives me crazy! I have a proof text to reassure myself that I am on firm ground here with God. What He begins He finishes. That is the way He is. God does not begin something and then forget about it or say, “No, that’s far enough.” He brings it to completion.

In [Philippians 1:7](#) Paul said, “Just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace.” And Paul is so thankful that they have stood with him in this ministry and it meant a lot to Paul that they had given financially toward him. It was not so much the money, as it was just that he sensed he was not in this ministry alone—somebody else gets it. Others were supportive of what he was doing.

Then Paul said in verse eight, “For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.” (cf. [Philippians 1:8](#)). Paul was just saying that God is his witness of how much he loved them and how much he longed to be with them. We think of Paul as this great theologian and this great mind and this great valiant force of the faith, but he also had such a heart of love.

And then he begins to speak to them regarding what he prayed for them. “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more.” Well, here is a church that is tremendous in terms of love and Paul said: “I pray all of the time that your love will abound more and more.” As long as Christ is the standard for love (and He is the standard for love) there is always going to be room for growing in that area in our Christian life. Then he defines this love a little bit. “This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment.” Sometimes what we think that love means never saying ‘no’ to another person or you are unloving.

I remember when we were at the other church location there was a woman who came to the church and she was a little odd, to be sure. One Sunday morning she sat right up in the front row and she took out an electric razor and began to shave herself there in the front row. But God blinded me to it. It would have been a fair distraction to me, as I am easily distracted. So she was an odd kind of a character, but what she did then, following the services, is wait until someone left their purse in the fellowship hall in order to go into the restroom—we were smaller then and a little more trusting. And when the owner of the purse was out of sight, this odd lady would go over and she would steal the wallet from it. Well, we caught her doing that and I went over and I said, “Listen, if I do not get to steal from these people, nobody gets to steal from them.” It was something to that effect because I realized I had to have a sense of humor.

But I told this lady that these people in the church did not come here to become victims of what she was doing. I said, “You cannot come here and do this. We are shepherds here and we are going to protect this flock.” She said, “Well, you call yourself a loving church. I am going to go find a church that is loving.” And she threw this whole guilt trip back in my face and I thought that she ought to be on television. Anyway, we never saw her again. But she had the idea that love is always saying “yes” to any whim or anything that anybody asks of them. But Paul says that “love has an element of knowledge and an element of discernment” (cf. [Philippians 1:9](#)). With that knowledge, true *agape* love always does what is best for the other person. That is true love. Sometimes that means saying “no.” Sometimes that is not the easiest way; it can be the hardest way.

So, love can be hard. Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica: “If a man will not work [not cannot work] then he shall not eat” (cf. [2 Thessalonians 3:10](#)). In other words, we are not going to reinforce idleness and laziness in the body of Christ. Well, that was very loving but it was very strong and firm.

So what is the definition of what love looks like in another person’s life? We go to the word of God and the knowledge of the word of God. What does the word say that we ought to do in this situation? That is how I can know what true love is. And so it is to

involve more knowledge and then also discernment. It looks below the surface of the situation to examine what is really happening. It looks at what is really at the core of what is happening in a situation and not just what is visible on the surface. We are to examine how the word of God applies to it; and as I do what God says, then I know that I can be a really loving person.

I have a loved-one in my family, who for years was quite entrenched in the drug culture, and he has since come to know the Lord and loves the Lord; but all through those years he worked at minimum wage jobs. And once he came to know the Lord, he was thankful for that work history. He said that if he had had any more money, then he would have killed himself with the drugs. But he would always come to us for money and that guy had more stories! Some of you who come from that background know the kind of stories that you can come up with in order to get money. And we heard quite a few stories throughout the years. There was always a pressure in the tale that: “If this does not happen, then they are going to do this to me, and this thing will happen, and then I will lose this.” Sometimes it was the hardest thing in the world to say, “I cannot run the risk of giving you the twenty dollars. It will kill you. I cannot live with that.” And I had to know that it was the loving thing to do.

Paul prayed: “That you may approve the things that are excellent.” In other words, Paul prayed that excellence would be what they would aim for in their Christian lives. That was the standard that the apostle Paul set for his own life, and not just doing what is lawful, not just what is expedient. But he aspired to what is good and what is best. He said that these are the things that he wanted to go after. He said that he did not want just an average kind of Christian life. Paul said to the believers at Philippi, “Listen, do not settle for eighty percent, but go for excellence in your life.” We are to test all things that we allow in our lives. Is it excellent? If it is not excellent then we are not to waste our life on anything less. Sometimes we have to be in prison in order to recognize how valuable life is.

We can go to a hospital and get checked in and all of a sudden we realize how valuable a day is and how valuable a week is. And I can realize that I am just frittering away my life by the week, and by the month, and that is when I realize how valuable each day is. I want to live for excellence in my Christian life. Paul realized this and he also prayed: “that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ” ([Philippians 1:10](#)).

Sincere is from the Latin word *sin cero*, which means “without wax.” The word that is used in the Greek language that it refers to means, “to be sun-tested.” They had these statues in the ancient world and when someone had worked on marble for years sculpturing something, all of a sudden while tapping away with some finishing touches he could hit a weak spot in the rock and a crack would go up the entire statue or a nose falls off. What in the world was he going to do? Nobody would buy this statue now! So, what he would do is take some of the granules from the marble and mix it with wax and he would put it into the crack and then he would sell it because nobody could see the flaw. But you know it gets hot in the Mediterranean. And so, summer would come and the heat would rise to 105 degrees, and all of a sudden the wax would begin to run out

of that opening and the buyer would realize that he bought a statue that was not sincere—it had wax.

In other words, Paul is telling us, as Christians, to be without wax or without hypocrisy. What people see in us needs to be what we really are. In the heat of life, we will not be exposed as something other than what we have presented ourselves to be. And so, that is the call to holiness without offense. Again, he is speaking of holiness and that our lives would not offend others. That word “sincere” speaks of what we are inside, and “without offense” means that we are not offending people or living our personal life in a way that is stumbling people outwardly. Paul exhorts us, Christians, “to be holy until the day of Christ” ([Philippians 1:10](#)).

[Verse 11](#) says, “being filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” We live in this agricultural area which is beautiful in July and August. We enjoy driving around out through the orchards, just past the subdivisions, where we can smell those peaches. God bless the Lord for making peaches! That is the greatest smell in late summer when it is just hot and sticky. But they irrigate those fields and there is a coolness coming off of it in the orchards, and then you can smell those peaches! And you can see these trees that are propped up with these props—and I am sure there is a specific name for them. But the branches are propped up because they are so laden with fruit.

Paul was speaking to the Philippians with that kind of agrarian background and he related to them how their lives must also bear righteousness, goodness, and ripeness. Our lives should manifest fruit in a way that a tree just needs some help to hold up the abundance of fruit. And that was his prayer for this church. It was a beautiful prayer. You could not go wrong if someone asked what they could pray for you and you said, “Well, pray the Philippians chapter one prayer for me.” But there is one other prayer that I personally like even a little more than this one and that is the prayer in Colossians. They are all beautiful prayers, inspired by the Holy Spirit and penned by the apostle Paul.

Grace and peace be with you.