

## MY PRAYER FOR YOU (Philippians 1:9-11)

As the lady was doing her grocery shopping there was a product sitting on the shelf that caught her eye. It was a bottle of juice that read, "Blueberry Pomegranate, 100 percent juice, all natural." On the label was a picture of a ripe pomegranate with its glistening seeds spilling onto a mound of plump, perfectly round blueberries.

The discerning shopper picked up that bottled turned it around and read the ingredients list: "Filtered water, pear juice concentrate, apple juice concentrate, grape juice concentrate, natural flavors," whatever that is. She was wondering, "Where's the blueberry? Where's the pomegranate?" On a list of nine ingredients, they were fifth and seventh. There was just enough blueberry and pomegranate to add a bit of flavor and a dash of color.

In the bottom corner of the front label, in small, easy-to-miss type, she found the tell-tale words: "Flavored juice blend with other natural ingredients." She concluded that the enticing pictures and clever labeling were simply decoys to sell a diluted, blueberry-pomegranate *flavored* product, disguised to look like something it wasn't. She put the juice back on the shelf and continued on her way.

As this Christian lady left the store, she wondered to herself, "What if I had an ingredients list printed on me? Would Jesus be the main ingredient? If not, how far down the list would He be?"

After reading her story, I thought to myself, "How would my ingredients list read?" It might include: Western, North American, Bible-belt reared, churched, Baptist educated." But where would Jesus fall on the list? And what about you? Would Jesus be at the top of your ingredient list or would He be far down the list as simply an additive? Is your life Jesus-flavored, or is it Jesus-filled?

When we are Jesus-filled people, our lives become refreshing to others. Others are blessed when we share our lives and words with them. If, however, our lives are just Jesus-flavored there will be no eternity changing impact.

When Paul wrote a letter to his friends in Philippi, he included a prayer early in that letter. Last week, we looked at **why** he prayed for them. Today, we will consider **what** he prayed for them. Last Sunday, we examined **the foundation** of his prayer. Today, we will study **the content** of his prayer. I believe this prayer illustrates the difference between being Jesus-flavored and Jesus filled.

Look with me at Philippians 1:9-11. This was Paul's prayer for those he knew and loved. I have been borrowing Paul's words and prayer. I'm going to show you what I am praying for you. I am praying three things for you and me.

### May Our Love Be Ever Growing

Look again at v. 9. There is a vast difference between true love and warm sentimentality. Much of what passes for love in this culture, even the church culture, comes nowhere near how the Bible portrays love. Our love just might be a cheap

imitation of authentic, Christ-like love.

I am reminded of the definition of puppy love. Puppy love is that feeling you feel when you feel that what you feel is a feeling you've never felt before.

In the church of Jesus Christ, we need something more substantial than just feelings. Correctly understood, love is much more than feelings. Love is about commitment to the welfare of the one you love. Real love impels us to act.

John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16 both speak of love. The verse in the Gospel of John tells us what God did because of His love. The verse in John's first epistle tells us that what Jesus did. It teaches us how to recognize what true love is and how true love acts. Let me read for you 1 John 3:16-18.

A real, godly type of love goes beyond words. It makes itself known by what it does, and what it does is usually costly to the ones who do the loving. True, godly love involves the expenditure of time, energy, effort, and money.

Paul is specific as to area in which he wants the love of his fellow believers to grow. He wants their love to grow in knowledge and discernment. Paul is saying he wants them to be able to figure out what is important and what is not, what is a valuable and what isn't.

You have heard the story about the man who struggled to climb the ladder of success. At the moment that he reached the summit and got to the top, he realized that his ladder had been placed against the wrong building. Such a man had talent, but he lacked discernment, and as a result he made a terribly, poor choice. He wasted years of his life pursuing the wrong goal.

We need to cultivate the ability to give ourselves away to those who matter and to the things that matter.

Do you know the story of Wrong Way Riegels? Roy Riegels played as the center on the offense and as the nose guard on the defense for the University of California Golden Bears. Riegels was known as an excellent football player. He was selected as a 1<sup>st</sup> Team All-American, and he became the team captain for his squad. Despite all of his success on the field, he will always be remembered for one play that went badly, very, very badly.

In 1929 his football team played against the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets in the Rose Bowl. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter the game was still tied at zero when a Georgia Tech running back fumbled the ball. Riegels scooped it up and headed toward the endzone. He was hit by an opposing player, bounced off of him and got turned around. He proceeded to run 69-yards in the wrong direction. His entire team was yelling at him to turn around, but he was too focused on heading toward the goal line—the wrong goal line. A teammate finally caught up with him and tried to turn him around, but Riegels was immediately swarmed by Yellow Jackets who tackled him at the 1-yard line—99-yards away from his goal line.

The Golden Bears tried to punt from their endzone, but the punt was blocked resulting in a safety thus giving Tech a 2-0 lead. Despite heroic play in the second half, Riegels and his team lost the game 8-7, meaning that his error cost his team a win in the Rose Bowl.

The entire time that Riegels was running with the ball, he thought he was doing the right thing, but he was headed in the wrong direction.

Likewise, you and I can be sincere. We can be earnest. We can be committed. We can be dedicated. We can be zealous. Proverbs 19:2 warns us though, “Zeal without knowledge is not good; a person who moves too quickly may go the wrong way” (NLT).

My prayer for you and me is that our love would grow deeper, and stronger, and wiser—that we would give ourselves to who and what is really important in life.

### **May Our Lives Be Ever Blameless**

Look at v. 10. Here we find why we need a discerning kind of love. He uses the word *so* twice. He is giving us the purpose behind having a love that is growing in knowledge.

Paul is saying that one day we will all stand before Jesus. This Day of Judgment will follow Jesus’ return. It is Paul’s hope and prayer that the believers in Philippi would be able to stand before Jesus with a clean record and a clean life. It is true that when Jesus died on our behalf, He took away our sin, and in its place, He gave us His righteousness.

That is why I can stand before you and say, “In God’s eyes, I am as righteous as Jesus Christ is righteous.” It is through our faith in Jesus that we receive His righteousness. We could call this positional righteousness. I am righteous because of the position I occupy. I am in Christ.

There is another kind of righteousness. Instead of positional righteousness, it is practical righteousness. To be practically righteous is to live as we ought to live, to do what we ought to do, to not do what we ought not to do. Practical righteousness does not get you to heaven because we cannot earn or work our way into heaven. Practical righteousness does mean that we are living a heavenly, godly kind of life, a life that God can bless. That is what is in view in v. 10.

When studying the Bible, it is sometimes helpful to employ what is called “the Principle of First Mention.” What that means is that if you wish to find help in understanding the meaning of a word, look for how it is used the first time it shows up in the Bible. I do not think this is a hard and fast rule, but I do believe it is often helpful. I took this word *blameless*, and I looked for how it was first used in the OT and its first use in the NT.

*Blameless* is only used twice in Genesis. It is first used as a description of Noah. We are told in Genesis 6:9, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation.” Because Noah walked blamelessly, God was able to use him to preserve both humanity and all wildlife from total extinction. The first time it was used as a description of the man God used.

The only other time we find *blameless* in Genesis is in Genesis 17:1. This time it is used as a prescription, a command given to Abraham. God said to Abraham, “I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless.” It is helpful to realize that one chapter earlier, Abraham had come into relationship to God by faith. We read in 15:6, “And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD declared him righteous because of his faith.” Abraham was not saved by having lived a righteous life. He was saved by His

faith in God. Now that he had come into relationship with God by faith, God expected him to live righteously, to walk blamelessly. Abraham did, and God used him, and God blessed him.

It is interesting to note that the first people who are called righteous in the NT are a couple named Zechariah and Elizabeth. Just like Abraham and Sarah, they were also older and childless. God was also able to use them and bless them. Just like Abraham and Zechariah, God gave them a baby boy in their old age.

God saves us by faith, but if we want God to use us in His service, we need to live holy lives.

You may not be where you want to be. You may not be where God wants you to be in terms of living a righteous life. The good news is what we saw last Sunday. It is right there in v. 6. God is still working on us, and He won't quit until He completes His work of fashioning us to be like His Son.

I like a story that John Stott told. It concerned the life of Charles Simeon. I'll let Stott tell the story:

Charles Simeon was the senior pastor, or vicar, as we call it in the Episcopal Church, at Holy Trinity Church in Cambridge for 54 years. He had an enormous influence upon generations of students in Cambridge University, and he really changed the face of the Church of England. When he began his ministry, he was a very angular gentleman by nature and disposition—hot tempered, proud, and impetuous. One of his biographers writes that on his first visit to Henry Ven, Ven's oldest daughter Nellie wrote, "It is impossible to conceive anything more ridiculous than Mr. Simeon's look and manner. His grimaces, the faces he pulls, were beyond anything you could imagine. So, as soon as he left, we all got together in the study and set up an amazing laugh."

But their father summoned his daughters into the garden. And although it was early summer, he asked them to pick one of the green peaches. When they showed surprise, he said, "Well, my dears, it is green now, and we must wait. But a little more sun and a few more showers, and the peach will be ripe and sweet. And so it is with Mr. Simeon." As the Holy Spirit got to work within him, his character and conduct were beautifully refined and changed.

And so it will be with you and me. As we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us, He will refine us, and mature us, and grow us to be more like our Savior.

We come to my third pray for this church.

### **May Our Labor Be Ever Fruitful**

The concluding part of Paul's prayer is found in v. 11. In the NT, fruit is used as a metaphor in a couple of ways. One, it is used to speak of the graces in our lives that are wrought in us by the Holy Spirit.

The story that was told by John Stott was gleaned this past week from a sermon of his that I read; it was called, "A Vision of Holiness." He drew his message from Galatians

5:22-24 where Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit. You remember that passage. Paul says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is . . .” and then he lists nine qualities that should characterize your life and my life as followers of Jesus. He mentions: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

John Stott makes much of the fact that the first fruit mentioned is love. Love is the pre-eminent characteristic of a true Christian. He calls it *the chief distinguishing mark of the child of God*. What truly authenticates you and me as true followers of Jesus is not our faith, nor our understanding of Bible doctrine, nor our service, nor our Christian experiences with God. Listen to what Stott said:

Where there is no love, there is no life, and there is no authentic Christian commitment. Holiness begins with love and ends with love. There is no holiness without love. That is the first thing I learned from my text. Love is the pre-eminent Christian grace.

It all starts with love. When we love, the other graces follow. When we love, we experience joy and peace. Love enables us to be patient, kind, and good. The loving soul will be faithful, gentle, and self-controlled.

Are you letting the Holy Spirit grow the fruit of Christian graces in the soil of your life?

There is at least one other way that the word fruit is used as a metaphor. Notice what we read in Colossians 1:9-10. In addition to the fruit of Christian graces, there is also the fruit of deeds or works. These are the things we do to serve God. Turn to John 15, Jesus told His disciples the secret to bearing such fruit. He said, “I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (15:5).

Specifically, what are some of these good deeds or good works? The passage itself offers one example of fruit. Look at v. 7. Answered prayer is a fruit. Look also at v. 8.

It occurs to me that apples trees bear apples. Orange trees grow oranges. From peach trees we get peaches. What do we get from Christian trees? We should get Christians. One important way in which we are to be fruitful is that we are to be fruitful in evangelism. If we are letting God and His word indwell us, we are going to speak that life-giving word to others, and they will come to life in Christ.

I want you to notice the first word of v. 11 and the last phrase of the same verse. Look at that word *filled*. Some fruit is better than no fruit, but Paul’s pray was not that the believers bear a little fruit. In keeping with Jesus who promised that if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit, Paul prayed that his friends would be *filled* with fruit. We are the branches, and our branches should be laden with fruit.

I want you to participate in this evangelism initiative called “Who’s Your One.” The idea behind it is that we want God to put one person on our heart. During the course of one year, we want to share the gospel with that one person and lead them to faith in Jesus. That is a good thing that we should seek to do, but I think that it should be renamed. Instead of “Who’s Your One,” I think it should be called, “Who’s Your First One” or “Who’s Your Next One.”

What would an apple farmer think if he inspected his apple trees and discovered that each branch only bore one apple each year? One is better than none, but I think he would expect more. Nevertheless, let's start with one, stay close to Jesus, and see what He does through us.

Now, look at the end of v. 11. The result of our being fruitful is God is praised. This is also in keeping with what Jesus said in John 15. He said, "By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be My disciples." The purpose of fruitfulness is not to bring honor to ourselves but to bring honor to God.

My prayer is that:

- Our Love Would Be Ever Growing.
- Our Lives Would Be Ever Blameless.
- Our Labor Would Be Ever Fruitful.

There is strong interplay and relatedness to each of our three verses. Basically, v. 9 says, "You need to know what is important." This results in the message of v. 10, "You will value what is important." The result of knowing and valuing what is important is that you will do what is important (v. 11a), and the combined result of knowing, valuing, and doing what is important is that God will be praised.

Let me summarize these three verses with an illustration from the world of electricity. Verse 9 is illustrated by voltage, v. 10 by amperage, and v. 11 by wattage. Let me explain. Volts have to do with pressure. They measure that pressure by which electricity is being pushed. The higher the number, the greater the pressure that is being exerted. Amperes, more commonly called amps, has to do with the speed at which the electricity is moving; it is the flow rate. Watts are simply a measurement of the power that is being used.

Here is the equation of determining the power: volts x amps = watts. The greater the amount of pressure and the faster the speed at which it is moving, the greater the amount of power is being used.

Verse 9 is the volts, the pressure. God's love is pressing in on us. It is impelling us. It is moving us forward. Verse 10 is the amps, the flow rate. If there is sin in our lives, the flow is restricted. When, however, we are walking blamelessly, the flood gates are opened wide. The Spirit of God can move in and through us unhindered. The result of vv. 9 & 10 is verse 11. Verse 11 is the wattage, the power of God at working producing much fruit in our lives and God is being glorified.

Join me in praying:

- Lord, let my **love** be ever **growing**.
- Lord, let my **life** be ever **blameless**.
- Lord, let my **labor** be ever **fruitful**.
- Lord, **be glorified** in and through me and Liberty Southern.