

# Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 29 December 2019

Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[ 0 : 00 ] How's your character? Interesting question. Well, of the 13 character clusters evaluated by the Christian Leader Profile, the Barna Research Group has identified the strongest attributes associated with Christians who are involved in church and those who are more so involved in leadership within the church.

And they are sensitivity to sin, morality, godly demeanor, humility, values, faith maturity, and trustworthiness.

Attributes that were not as strong included using appropriate speech, having a controlled temper, and teaching ability. And those character traits that rated the lowest according to that survey were possessing a loving heart, modeling servanthood, and having godly wisdom.

Now, isn't that interesting that the character traits that were found the least are the ones that the Apostle Paul is praying that the Philippian believers would possess?

And as a matter of fact, they're the character traits of the Lord Jesus Christ, mentioned over and over and over again, possessing a loving heart and also possessing godly wisdom and using that wisdom in practical ways as we lived out our lives.

[ 1 : 33 ] So this morning, without further ado, let's get into God's Word. We're going to look at the Bible.

We read in verse 9, Paul knew from thanksgiving, if you remember, the last time we were together here in Philippians, Paul was thanking God for the good work that God had begun in the Philippians' life.

Part of that good work we saw based on the text was salvation. God saved them through faith, and that's the work that God started, and he would continue to work on it until it came to completion when we are received up to the Lord Jesus Christ when we go home to be with him.

But part of that good work was all of the things that God was doing in their life, and part of that was the financial gift that the Philippian Christians had sent to Paul by way of Epaphroditus.

And so Paul is considering also that good work that he'd begun. He's thanking God. He says, He says, He says,

[ 4 : 33 ] So before Christ comes back, God's goal is to produce finished character in us. So the moment we trust Christ as our Savior, new life begins.

And just as in the human realm, the physical realm, when a person is born, physical life begins. And from that moment, growth occurs.

If there is a healthy organism, growth will naturally take place. And the goal is the ultimate completion or growth of that individual.

So in a Christian's life begins with salvation. We grow as we grow as we become more like Christ, as we learn how to avoid sin, as we learn how to apply the spiritual disciplines in our life, Bible reading, prayer, sharing our faith, and so on and so on until ultimately when Jesus Christ comes back and we're ushered into his presence, He would be able to say, He would be able to say, Well done, good and faithful servant.

Because what I started, I completed, and you have completed character. So this prayer contains two basic petitions.

[ 5 : 48 ] We see that in what are called that clauses or hena clauses in the Greek. They're purpose clauses. So when Paul is praying, what we see in the construction of what he wrote, he prayed for two things.

Now you see the word that occur more than twice. But what we find is the second time in verse number 10 that the word that occurs, it's not the Greek word hena, it's the Greek word ace.

And that second time, it carries with it the idea, it's a marker of intent, and so it's the implication of an expected result.

So Paul prays for one thing, and he said, When you do that, there's going to be a result. The second thing he prays for, If God accomplishes that, there's going to be an intended result of that. So Paul, first of all, in verses 9 and the first portion of verse number 10, prayed for a growing love. And then secondly, he prayed for complete character.

[ 6 : 53 ] The second part of verse number 10 and verse number 11. So that is going to make up our two main points this morning. Growing love. So if we are followers of Jesus Christ, if we are part of the body of Christ, then our love will be growing, and by the time Jesus Christ comes back, we will have completed character, or at least to the point where we have grown and matured as a follower of Jesus Christ.

So we go to our first point, and that is this. As followers of Jesus Christ, our love should be growing. We should be growing in love.

We should be learning how to love. We should be learning how to practically show that love to others around us. Our love for God should be growing. Our understanding of who God is, and therefore, just like in the natural realm, the more you get to know someone, especially someone that we love, that there's an initial love there, an initial attraction, and if we love that individual with a selfless love, the more we get to know them, and the closer our relationship becomes, we grow in love with each other.

So Paul thinks about love first as he's thinking about their growth in Christ. Maybe because it was the Philippians' love that was demonstrated in their gift that they gave to him.

Or maybe that the Apostle Paul was thinking that love summarized, or love summarizes our entire life.

[ 8 : 35 ] Do you realize that love summarizes the Ten Commandments? We see in Deuteronomy chapter 6, 5, and Luke chapter 10, verse 27, love also epitomizes the Christian's responsibility toward one another.

Why is love so important? Well, I believe that love is so important because it mirrors the nature of God. The Bible says God is love, and also it's the bedrock foundation upon which society rests.

Think about this for a moment. The Ten Commandments are based on love. The first few commandments are directed toward God.

If we love God, we will have no other God before him. If we love God, we will keep his commandments. So the first few commandments are directed and are based on love for God.

But the rest of the commandments are based on our love for others. It talks about stealing. It talks about lying. It talks about all of these other things that are right and we should avoid because if we loved one another, think about this.

[ 9 : 55 ] If we were able, if we could be able to extend God love to everyone else, we would have no crime, no war, no one would hurt another human being on purpose.

Think about that. If you loved everyone else with a God-like love, you wouldn't steal anything. If you loved everyone with a God-like love, you wouldn't lie to them.

If you loved God like we were supposed to, we wouldn't lie because God says don't lie. We love him and so therefore we don't lie. If we love others with a God-love, we wouldn't hate anyone else.

And so on and so on and so on. Well, you say, well, that would be heaven. Well, you're exactly right. And so one day when we are perfected and we are ushered into the presence of God, we will truly be able to love as God loves.

And there will be no war. There will be no crime. And there will be no hate in heaven. And so everything in today's, everything in life is built on love, is based on love.

[ 11 : 06 ] Relationships are based on love. Society is based on love. The city of Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. Think about it. If we cared about other people, really cared about other people, we would be taking care of one another.

We wouldn't be worrying about other things. There would be a whole lot less people on welfare.

You say, well, why is that? Well, not only would we be helping those who truly have a need, but those who have a need and are able to work would work because they love other people and they wouldn't want other people to have to be, they wouldn't want to be a burden on other people.

And so really society rests upon love for one another. So then Paul adds his own insights into this bedrock foundation of love, this obvious command concerning love.

So if the Philippians' love abounded toward God and toward others, they would be well on their way to Christian maturity. They would be well on their way to maturing as followers of Jesus Christ. So here, what we're going to see this morning is Paul describing the nature of a growing love, the environment for growing love, and then lastly, the result of a growing love.

[ 12 : 26 ] So the first thing that we see is the nature of a growing love. What's involved in growing love? What's the nature of love that grows? What is the dynamic behind a growing love?

We see in verse number nine, Paul said, and this I pray. This was Paul's prayer. The first thing he prays for, the Hena Clause, the Purpose Clause is, I pray that your love may abound, that your love may abound still more and more, and that the result would be you would be growing in knowledge and in all discernment.

So the first thing we see is the definition of love given here. We see that in the term that Paul used when he wrote this letter to the Philippians.

He chose the term agape, agape love, God love, loving the way that God loves and loving only the way that God loves.

And so in order for us to be able to exhibit God love toward others, it has to be through the Holy Spirit working within us. What's clear, I believe, here for Paul is this word for love emphasized the self-sacrificial aspect of love.

[ 13 : 45 ] We sacrifice for others. We are selfless. It is a selfless kind of love. It's the love of Christ. It's a selfless love.

And this selfless love is selfless action that benefits someone else. Selfless action to benefit someone else.

That's agape love. What does a parent do for their children? They sacrifice. You want to see true love in action? Have just two pieces of pie and have three kids.

Mom won't get any. Mom will divide and divide and divide until everyone has something. And typically she'll say, well, I'm not hungry. That'll be a response. Or dads that will work sometimes multiple jobs just to make sure that their bills can be paid.

That's sacrificial love. That is selfless love that acts for the benefit of others. And the model for this love is Jesus Christ. He gave himself up willingly for your sin and for mine.

[ 14 : 56 ] So Paul is saying our selfless love, our self-sacrificial love for others should be growing and it should be abounding still more and more.

Now, the sacrificial nature of this love, now this is important here. I think it's an important point that we have to see, is the self-sacrificial aspect of love here has no object in mind.

You say, well, what do you mean by that? Well, this love, this agape love, means it's the characteristic of the one who loves, regardless of the object of the love.

Meaning, we love whether a person deserves it or not. We're to love fellow believers, but we're also to love our enemies. That's what Paul told the religious leaders.

We're to love our enemies. Well, they don't deserve our love. Well, it doesn't matter because agape love is a characteristic of the lover, a characteristic of the one who loves. And so we don't wait and determine, well, you know what?

[ 16 : 01 ] They deserve my love, so I'll love. Oh, wait a minute. This person is wicked, so therefore they don't deserve my love. Therefore, I will not love. That is absolutely contrary to the concept of agape love.

Agape love has to do with the person who loves, not the object of the love. The Bible says, God is love. Remember, as we said, love mirrors the nature of God.

And so love is a characteristic. Love should be part of our character, being loving people. Jesus taught this in the parable of the Good Samaritan, that he loves someone that typically a Jew would not have taken the time to take care of someone else because typically they were hated.

Also, the nature of growing love or the dynamic of love, I think, is presented two ways in the clause here. First of all, we see the verb abound.

So what he's saying is, I pray that your love may do what? Come on, talk to me this morning. Our love might abound. And it means to be present in abundance, to have a lot of it.

[ 17 : 16 ] As a matter of fact, to have so much of it that it's spilling over everywhere. So our love should abound. And it occurs in the most dynamic expression in the present tense and with continuing.

And so what he's saying is, your love should keep on abounding. Our love should continue to grow and grow and grow. It's just like a bad weed.

It just continues to grow. And our love should abound. And he continues. He uses the adverbial expression. See, it would have been enough if Paul would have said, I'm praying that your love might grow, abound.

But what does he do? He adds on to it. How should their love abound? Still more and more. And the Greek actually has the term still more and more.

Now, it would have been enough for Paul to say, I pray that your love would abound more. That would have been enough to bring the point home. But then he said, I want your love to abound still more.

[18:30] That would have been even better. But Paul doesn't stop there. Paul says, I'm praying that God would cause your love, or that your love would continue to abound still more and more.

He expressed that dynamic aspect of a growing love. Keep on abounding. Still more. And still more. And still more.

The expression builds layer upon layer to make the point. And that is what we're seeing here. Obviously, the Philippian believers showed love.

So much so that they sent a gift of money to Paul to help him with his expenses while he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel. But because Paul prayed for their love to abound or keep on abounding still more and more, I think it was obvious that even though they loved a lot, they hadn't reached perfection yet.

There was still room to grow. And I think if we look at our own lives, that would be true. We could say, you know what? I'm a loving person, but there's always room for me to grow.

[19:45] So, the nature of an abounding love. Then we see the environment of a growing love. The nature of a growing love is growing more and more and more still, more and more, continuing to abound, continuing to grow until the Lord Jesus Christ comes back.

So, that's the nature of love. Now, what about the environment? What about how do we love? Where do we show our love? How do we show our love? So, that's the second thing. Second point under, point number one, the environment of growing love.

Again, verse 9, and this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more. How? In knowledge and all discernment.

So, the prayerful exhortation to love came with instructions about how to implement it. So, it wasn't enough just to say, I want you to love more and more and more and more.

This is how I want you to put it into practice. This is how I want you to implement it. The words knowledge and discernment or depth of insight gives us, I think, a two-fold environment for where love grows.

[20:54] As a matter of fact, they're the most basic elements that foster love. The first aspect is knowledge. And the Greek word for knowledge here is gnosis.

And there could have been different words that Paul chose. Now, this word for knowledge here, actually, it's a compound word with a prefix to it that really gives it more meaning.

Another word for knowledge that Paul could have used would have been, you open a book and you learn something new. That's knowledge. We get new knowledge every day.

You open the newspaper. You open up your phone and read Fox News or whatever, however you get your news. Turn on the TV and listen to the broadcast.

Or you go to the library and you read a book about history. And you learn something and you have new knowledge. You could have knowledge about, well, that was something that the boys were talking about this week.

[22:00] Knowledge of, somebody was talking about volcanoes. Volcanoes. Well, you know what? I've got knowledge of volcanoes. I remember science and how the molten crust of the lava of the earth and it, you know, it spews out because of the pressure.

And we had the people in Hawaii that were killed because of, was it Hawaii? New Zealand. New Zealand. That were killed because of the spew of a volcano.

So I have knowledge of a volcano. Do you know what? I have no experience. I know it up here. I've never seen one. I never, I've never seen a live volcano and I've never seen a volcano spewing lava everywhere.

And I've never had to run from a, an active volcano. So therefore I have knowledge about it, but I don't have any experience. And that's the word that the apostle Paul chose to use.

Knowledge that we learn by experience. Has anyone ever touched a hot stove? Has anyone ever stuck your finger where it didn't belong, where electricity was present? And you know what?

[ 23 : 14 ] You learn very quickly. I don't want to do that again because that's experiential knowledge. And so we're very, it's, it's a knowledge that sticks. It's a knowledge that stays and it's a knowledge that's practical.

You know what? There's a lot of those that do well at trivial pursuit. Sometimes I've known two or three who could have won every game of trivial pursuit, but they literally had no common sense whatsoever.

They didn't have enough common sense to get out of the rain, but yet they were smart and they had a lot of knowledge. So Paul is saying here, I want you to love.

I want your love to abound more and more and more. But I want your knowledge to have the aspect of knowledge that you gain by experience so that you can love properly and also a depth of insight in our loving.

And the root word epi is added to it and it's part of that, that, that explanation that makes it even more colorful and it lends itself to relationships that we learn and how we learn how to love.

[ 24 : 34 ] And I think it provides the process of learning as well. And the compound heightens the definition of it. So Paul added judgment or discernment to this as well.

So our love should be according to knowledge that we learn by experience and how we apply it in our relationships. And he also added judgment or depth of insight.

The moral environment to knowledge, the term discernment or depth of insight occurs only here in the New Testament. That word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament.

Root word of it occurs in Hebrews chapter 5 verse 14. But it conveys a sense of moral discretion between right and wrong, discriminating between right and wrong.

So morality also affects the way that we love and affects our love. Failure to discipline the moral life hinders love, hinders the way we live.

[ 25 : 39 ] So attention to both of these realms promotes a positive and a healthy Christian life. I heard a, I read an interesting explanation of the practical aspect of knowledge and discernment as it applies to love.

Jesus taught that we're to love everyone, correct? Yes. Yes. Jesus said we are to love our friends as well as our enemies.

Correct? Yes. And Dr. J. Vernon McGee talks about when he first moved to Los Angeles to pastor. And he said he hadn't been there very long. And someone came in, attended a worship service one Sunday morning. And he said after the service, he came up and said that he wanted to be saved. And so after the service, Dr. McGee opened the Bible and showed him how to be saved. He prayed the prayer. And he said, I made the mistake of asking him, so how are things?

[ 26 : 49 ] And he said, well, following on hard times, and I had to leave the hotel where I was staying, and I had to leave all my luggage there, and I owe them \$7.

Now, that was back probably in the 40s or 50s. So \$7 in the hotel room would have been quite a bit. And he said, so I felt compassion for him.

I, you know, love for my fellow man. And so he said, I reached out, and he said, I gave him \$7. And he went on his way. And he saw in the newspaper a week or so later this guy's picture in the paper. He goes, what gives? And so as he read the article, this man was arrested for grifting. And if you know what that means, it's when you go out and you're trying to get money out of people, scamming them or getting money from them.

And when he was asked about why he did it from church to church to church, he said because they're all saps. Or they're all suckers.

[ 27 : 54 ] And so Dr. McGee said, I went to a fellow pastor in town who had been there a few years. And he said, did you give this guy some money?

Did he go to your church? He said, yeah, he came. He said, did you give him any money? He said, no, I didn't. He said, Vernon, you're going to have to learn. Some people are going to be deserving of it.

And some people are going to lie, cheat, and steal to get things. He said, you've got to learn to know the difference. And when you think about it, we're to love everyone, right?

But do we love everyone in exactly the same way? No, of course not. And people have done this here quite often. They've come and they keep coming.

And the only reason they want it is they want something. And they say they need medicine for their kids or they need something. And they're driving a nice vehicle and they have whatever.

[ 28 : 57 ] And I've checked with other pastors and they say, yeah, they've been here. Every few months they come and they say they need something. And some people just live that way off of others.

And so I love them, but I won't necessarily help propagate their sin, if you know what I mean. So we have to love with discernment. We have to love in all knowledge.

That was an interesting way of putting this. So moral insight exposes the rightness and wrongness of everything that we think and we do.

Thirdly, as we continue along, try to get finished with this this morning. The result of a growing love. The first part of verse number 10. That you may approve the things that are excellent.

That you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. So Paul envisioned that these Philippian believers would have the ability to discern what was best for them.

[ 29 : 58 ] To discern, I believe, God's will for their life. He directed his prayer toward that end. The word approve means to test by trial.

And it has more so the idea to prove that it's right. And it would be used in assaying. If someone brings you some gold and you test it, or the assayer tests it, what is he testing for?

He's wanting to make sure that it's real gold. People bring jewelry to a pawn shop. What do they have to do? They have to determine whether it's real.

Real gold, real silver, or real whatever. So that's the approving. That's the testing that Paul was referring to. And he says, test what? Those things that are excellent.

Testing the things that are best for us. The phrase I don't think necessarily stresses the idea of determining between right and wrong.

[ 31 : 04 ] I think more so the idea that is in the context of this verse is, you know, there are a lot of choices we can make in our life. Choice of who we marry. Choice of what job we get.

There are a lot of choices that we can make. But there are certain choices that are better than others. There are certain things that are just best for us.

And so I think Paul is talking about, he's praying that they have knowledge and discernment, and also that they may be able to test and prove what's best for them to do.

So that they might be able to learn the will of God in all things. The result of a growing love. As our love grows, we'll be able to determine not only what's right and wrong, but we'll also be able to determine the better of what we ought to be doing.

And then secondly, the second thing that we see, the second purpose for Paul's prayer. First purpose was to love and for that love to be growing. The second thing that Paul prayed for, that second purpose clause, is spiritual growth results in completed character.

[ 32 : 19 ] Paul prayed for a mature character. Paul prayed for a complete character. Discerning what is best develops our character.

Just think about that. We make a lot of choices during the day. We make a choice whether or not we eat that fourth cinnamon roll. Or we make a choice whether or not we're going to maybe take a nap when something needs to be done around the house.

Are we going to be lazy? Or are we going to just do something and get it done? Those are choices that we make. And, you know, young people, your parents will say, or you'll ask, well, why do I have to do this?

And they'll say, well, it develops your character. You know what? It's true. When we have to do something, even though we don't feel like doing it, but it's good for us to do, it develops our discipline and ultimately growing into a character that will do what's right and do what needs to be done when it needs to be done, no matter how we feel, just because it's right to do.

And character, it's been said that character is what we do when no one else is watching. And no one will ever know whether you did it or not. True character just simply does it because it's right.

[ 33 : 32 ] So in his second petition, Paul saw the end of life and or the end of our time here on earth. And he's talking about a completed character.

So the first thing we see is the nature, the nature of a complete character. We see that in the first part of verse number 10. He says that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may

be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.

So sincere and without offense or pure and blameless, blameless. Strictly defined, they're two different ideas. The term for sincere is without admixture or without being adulterated.

We get our English word sincere from the Latin word sincerus. And it means without wax. So those of you who studied the Bible or studied different languages or heard a message on this before, there were times when, have you ever broken something and glued it together?

Yeah, ceramic or something that meant a lot to you and you glued it together. But if you put it up to the light, what were you able to see? You were able to see the cracks, where it broke and how it was repaired.

[ 34 : 53 ] Well, apparently, this was a way for unscrupulous art dealers or people who sold things to sell broken stuff. And they would use wax to hold it together.

Well, someone would put it out on their patio. And guess what? Someone would come out and be back in pieces. And so when someone would buy something, the idea would be to hold it up to the sun so that we could see whether or not it had been repaired.

And it was without wax. And so that is what, if people hold us, if people would hold your life up to the light, what would they see? And that's the whole point of what Paul is saying.

If you went on trial for something, if you went on trial for being a Christian, could they find enough evidence? If they accused you of something, let's say they accused you of some immoral thing, the point would be that they couldn't prove it.

Because there will be nothing there to prove. We would be sincere. We would be also, that second word there, without offense, actively and recurs very rarely in the New Testament.

[ 36 : 07 ] And it means to cause blame or to be a stumbling block. So he says, be pure, be complete, but also be blameless and be without offense.

Meaning, don't, don't, let our life not be an offense to others unjustly. Now think about this. Just sharing the gospel, we're going to offend people.

Now, if you go and you, you grab people around the, around the collar and you say, you need to trust Jesus. Well, you know what? That's offensive and that's just wrong. But if we're saying, you know what? The Bible says we're all sinners.

And the only way for us to be right with God is for us to trust Jesus Christ and his work on the cross as finished work. And that is the only way to be right with God.

And they say, well, you know what? That's offensive. And your point is because the cross is offensive to many. And so we are to be without offense in the sense that we're not a stumbling block to others.

[ 37 : 13 ] Paul hoped they would have a blameless life. And then the means to a complete character. The means to a complete character, first part of verse 11, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ.

And so Paul, I think, is providing a context for our character. The first one, he talked about morality, judging what is right. And secondly here, I think he's saying that what are the fruits of character?

I think we have some talking about the Holy Spirit here as well. Paul used an agricultural term talking about fruit. Parallels Galatians 5.22 and the fruit of the Spirit.

Righteous living would protect the church. Paul prayed that they would grow and grow. Paul prayed that they would have a mature character. If we were expressing mature character, would that help the church or hurt the church, the body of Christ?

It would help the church, of course. So maturing character is what is best for the body of Christ. So this passage teaches that if those who are righteous by God's grace through faith and live as they should, the fruit of their lives would be true blamelessness.

[ 38 : 33 ] No one would be able to justly condemn them and they will stand the test on judgment day. And then thirdly, what's the purpose?

Why in the world would we want our love to grow and grow? And why in the world would we want complete, mature character? Well, we see it in the last part of that verse because it's to the praise and the glory of God.

Living a moral life, discerning what is the best for us, and living a blameless and pure life glorifies God. And hopefully we'll move others to praise God and say something.

There's got to be something to that person because that's just not natural. And people will praise God because of what God is doing in our life.

So Paul concludes this portion, this prayer, with a reference to the glory of God. The day of Christ characterized, I think, Paul's thoughts. The glory of God motivated Paul's actions.

[ 39 : 44 ] Everything Paul did, he did it to glorify God. And our chief end, as God's creation, is to glorify God.

So with this prayer for God's glory, Paul ended this first section of the letter. We're going to end that section here. We're going to continue on with our next. And the Apostle Paul says, grow in your love and end up with complete character.

So as we close, is your love growing? Is your love abounding still more and more? And are you learning how to practically apply that knowledge that you have?

Are we utilizing that love and learning how to use it in our relationships here? And then secondly, are you growing in character? Is your character more complete today than it was last week?

We all still have room for growth. So let us grow in our character as we grow as Christians. Let's pray. Father, this morning we're so thankful that you love us, you care for us.

[ 40 : 55 ] And dear God, I ask that you would, through your Holy Spirit, help our love to abound still more and more in discernment and knowledge.

And also, Father, I pray that we would be growing in character as well, that you would be honored and glorified in everything that we do, think, and say.

Amen. We thank you for this. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.