

Philippians 1:9-11

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[0:00] Well, good morning. For those of you I've not met, my name is Dave. I'm one of Shoreline's elders or pastors. Last week, as Paul gave the Christians in Philippi an ironclad assurance.

He said, I am sure of this, verse 6, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. And friends, what a treasure is that confidence.

What a reassurance. God has good plans for you, and he will see them through. But we asked, what exactly are those plans?

What is this good work that he began, and how will he bring it to completion? Find these answers and more as Paul goes in verses 9 through 11 to intercede for these same Christians.

Perhaps you remember from last week that we saw Paul's love for the Christians in Philippi. Today, from that love, he seeks their good before the throne of grace.

[1:37] Saying, it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Friends, this is God's word. Let's pray. Lord, may our love abound more and more in knowledge and discernment to the praise of your glory.

We ask this in your holy name. Amen. God has begun a good work in every single Christian, and he will bring it to completion on the day of Christ.

And the result of that good work is that we will be pure and blameless, filled with the fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God. And my question to you, before we tear that apart and look at it deeply, my question more fundamentally is, is that what you want?

Be honest. Is that what you want? God has an unshakable plan for you, that you would be pure and blameless.

[3:23] Is that what you want? That you would be filled with the fruit of righteousness. Is that what you want? Right?

Sure, we live in a culture that says, shout your abortion, and sing songs like, in hell I'll be in good company. But pure and blameless is out. Right? Now, I suspect that if you're here today, those things don't resonate with you.

And just, you know, like, that's not like new. We are not some particularly debauched society.

Right? Paul wrote Romans chapter 1 in the first century. There's nothing new. We know to reject that.

You wouldn't be here today if that was your attitude. But if we're honest, right, thinking that holiness is boring, that's not just out there.

I suspect many of us today, right here, also think, holiness is kind of boring. Do you really want the fruit of righteousness?

[4:33] Is that your desire? Now, you might say yes because it's the answer you've been taught. The answer you feel is expected from you.

But really, is that what you want? Or does it sound boring? Because, let's be honest, sin's exciting. Right?

Bad boys are sexy. Right? Bad girls have more fun. would you prefer it if the good work that God was doing in you was something else?

Would that be more exciting to you? Making you more successful? So you could, you know, share, spread your Christian influence, of course. Right? Make you happy.

So you can, you know, show the world how great it is to be a Christian. Of course. Of course. Or make you rich. So you can support missionaries. Of course. Of course. Right? But, God's plan for you is being pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

[5:39] How do you feel about that? Honestly. It won't make any difference if we examine and exegete every last bit of this prayer in verses 9 through 11.

If we don't actually want what Paul prays for. I've heard it said, if you really want it, you'll find a way. And if you really don't, you'll find an excuse.

We will only walk in this if our hearts are turned towards it. Which is why Paul prays for their love to abound. Right? So do you truly desire to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God?

Do you want that? Not in a theoretical way. Not in a reluctant way. Not in a sure, I mean, I want to save for retirement, I guess, kind of way.

Do you actually desire holiness? Do you want what God wants for you? I think so many of us, myself included, often that's not the thing I most want.

[6:59] And so let me offer you something today. Sigh. Let me offer you joy in this thing which the world, perhaps, perhaps likely, you, find boring.

What is best? Best of all? What is most valuable? We all know it's not really money.

Even though we act many times like it is. We know that money isn't the most valuable thing. Rich people are often miserable. Poor people, are often happy.

A prominent 20th century philosopher once mused, I don't care too much for money. Money can't buy me love. And love is then much closer to what's best, isn't it?

love? So, what should I be looking for to love? To address my love to? And if I want love, what should I be cultivating in myself to attract, to receive, to be worthy of love?

[8:23] And so now we're actually right back at the same question, aren't we? What's best? I need to think on those things. what's most valuable so that love can, I can appropriately place my love and so that I can appropriately attract it.

And I won't beat around the bush what is best, what is most valuable, it's God. God is best by far, brighter than any star, wiser than all the heavenly hosts, greater than the universe he made, lovelier than a fiery sunset, his perfections are beyond counting.

In all the world, in all the universe, in realms we cannot see, greater than it all, there stands one great God, whose splendor outshines it all.

And how can we describe him? Oh, how can we describe him? What would you say? What word best describes this God?

Loving, omnipotent, that is all-powerful, glorious, gracious, righteous, infinite, unchanging, like we don't need to come up with the word ourselves.

[9:55] He's shown it to us. He has given us the word. Here is how the God of unending perfections has his angels describe him.

Isaiah chapter 6. Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.

The whole earth is full of his glory. Holy, as the Bible uses it, is something of a category term.

it is the declaration that contained in God are all perfections. Every last good finds its source in him. He doesn't measure up to some external standard of goodness. All goodness issues forth from him as he weaves the moral fabric of the universe by his very being.

[10:59] holiness sums up all of God's perfections and declares that he is the unchanging glorious one.

When I say unchanging don't think of God's holiness as some inert static thing. God is unchanging like an endless hurricane.

A ceaseless firestorm. His perfections are active awesomely active. His glory is not static it blazes forth. His love is not emotionless like satisfied thing it is a fountain that overflows in acts of creation and redemption.

He is unchanging in his emotion which actually overflows from the motion of his very being because at the core our triune God in his essence is a father loving his son pouring out his love upon his beloved son in the bond of their one spirit God's very essence is love set in motion and that never

changes.

All this is why the cry holy holy holy pertains to God and what it points to the manifold perfections of the living God.

[12:29] God is what's best by far. There is no contest and holy is the word for that. And if you were here last week I told you we were going to return to verses one and two to the greeting that Paul makes.

It says Paul and Timothy servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi with the overseers and deacons Christ to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

To whom does Paul write? To all the saints saints in certain traditions and just the way our society uses the word you might have often heard people use the word saint to refer to especially pious people.

People are free to use words as they like but that's not the way the Bible in places like this use this term. Here and elsewhere the scriptures apply the title saint to everyone verse one who is in Christ Jesus that is everyone who has repented and believed in Jesus Christ he has joined them to himself by his spirit that's why we can say we are in him so that he that we are united the the theologians was called as a union with Christ when we are united to him by his spirit he then can actually inherit our guilt and bear justice for our sins on his cross so that we could inherit something from him the Greek word is hagios when it's used as a noun we translate it saint when it's used as an adjective we translate it holy the saints are the holy ones because they are in Christ who is holy so what is best what is best by far the Lord every conception we have ever had of his goodness and his greatness is vastly incomplete and the word for that is holy and with what name does he name his people holy that woodenly verse one reads Paul and Timothy slaves of Christ Jesus to all the holy ones in Christ Jesus the great Scottish preacher Eric Alexander put it this way it is a very significant thing that this is the name God applies to himself he is the holy one the very name that

[15:58] God uses that brings you nearer than anything else in scripture to what God is like that's the word that's used to describe what you and I are to be like Christian God has marked you with his perfection he has marked you with what is best which is why on the day of Christ on the day when he returns with resurrection and judgment for the whole world you will stand guiltless before the judge he has extinguished all your guilt and given you his righteousness but here we also see that Paul's concern is that that truth ripples backwards from that day into your today so that we might joyfully live this reality holy today because that is what's best by far for you because

God is what's best by far and offers to you to make you more and more like him yourself not just like legally but actually in your life why would you put that off for a second have you ever heard of someone say or have you ever felt yourself that they'd like to become a Christian they want to put it off for a while so that they can kind of keep enjoying their sins before they get forgiven then they'll become a Christian and be bound by boring rules or do you feel like you living the Christian life are missing out because non-Christians get to indulge in sin and you have to be holy does it feel like a raw deal to be a Christian and have to behave now and miss out on fun friends holiness is not delayed gratification that's not what it is you aren't foregoing pleasures now to one day be rewarded with a better one

God is trying to show you that he is what's best by far and his plan is to conform you to his image so this moment what's best by far is to walk in holiness and yes Christians who delight in holiness seem to the world like weirdos who have learned to like kale right but holiness is not bitter in salvation in our new birth God is awakening our spirit's taste buds so to speak to taste and see that he is good and is awakening our desires to be near him and to be like him God has placed his mighty hand on you and said this one's mine it is my delight to save him it is my delight to perfect her do you desire holiness does it sound like second best or does it sound like best by far with that understanding in hand we can look to

Paul's prayer his prayer for our holiness verses 9 through 11 and see that it's not a boring prayer this is the most loving thing you can pray he asks the Lord to give them in their lives what's best by far the prayer breaks down into two parts sort of a cause and effect relationship there's a split in the

middle of verse 10 actually here's the cause and it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent and here's the effect and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through

Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God often it is a wise idea to begin with the end in mind so let's first look at the desired effect the second half the effect that we would be pure and blameless and filled with the fruit of righteousness that sounds familiar to what we've been talking about already today the blanket here and for all this is holy we need to make some observations first when he says pure and blameless for the day of Christ he's talking about being ready now right yes God will for sure complete us on that day but he also wants us to be pure and blameless for that day if you say be ready for this thing whatever that thing is you're not saying get ready when it comes be ready for means right now be ready because you don't know when it's coming

[22:09] Paul's prayer is that you and I that we would walk ever more in holiness today and tomorrow so that you arrive on the day of Christ looking a lot like Christ it is fitting and we've seen it is a joyous thing that we be today as he has made us eternally holy another thing we notice in this effect last words to the glory and praise of God right we've already been discussing why we would want to walk in holiness today it's walking in the paths of what's best by far so it's your best life now if you will right and Paul adds to it another reason to the glory and the praise of God it is praise worthy that

God justifies sinners makes righteous the unrighteous not only technically in a legal sense in the courtroom of heaven but actually in their very lives it's glorious that he does this so we as we walk in holiness affirm him affirm his work and praise his name as we walk in his way another thing we might notice in this effect what Paul desires for his people is that it is an active thing I mentioned before we could confuse!

God's unchanging nature for like God being static inert holiness we could also confuse holiness for stop all that bad stuff and certainly holiness does mean being unstained by sin and that's clearly in view here when Paul says pure and blameless for the day of Christ but holiness is not simply found in avoidance it is also productive we already said that God's holiness is effusive it is outflowing it is generative so Paul continues for us that we would be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ not only are we to be holy in what we avoid but also in what we produce blessed are the peacemakers this language of fruit might remind!

Paul's other letters in Galatians chapter 5 he lists out two lists one is the when we think about holiness right often all we're thinking about is don't do the works of the flesh don't do the bad stuff that's not all that holiness is holiness is active and productive there is this thing the fruit of the spirit and that's what he's talking about here as well!

righteousness isn't solely found in what's prohibited but what is also generated in the life of the believer and so holiness isn't just stop that it's also cultivate this and that in particular is the joyful side if we have eyes to see it literally because joy is one of the fruits of the spirit and because all of the fruits of righteousness they're beautiful because God is beautiful beyond all and holiness is being like him and so that's the goal that's the effect in this cause and effect relationship that's the end towards which Paul prays so how do we get there for that we look at the cause part of this cause and effect relationship and that's verse nine in the first half of verse ten it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent what leaps out at you in this what's the main thing he's hoping for grammatically here's the logic

[26:52] Paul prays like we've been saying for a cause and effect relationship the cause the thing that will produce the desired result is not the knowledge not the discernment that your love yet more and more may abound knowledge and discernment are modifiers they describe what's going on but it is with or in knowledge and discernment the main idea here is love because friends we do what we love where there's a will there's a way we said earlier if you really want it you'll find a way and if you really don't you'll find an excuse!

we live out of our deepest desires which is why the first half of this sermon was me trying to lead you to love holiness now how does this produce what we want what Paul wants for his people what the Lord wants for his people what's that relationship between them first we might observe that there's no object here set forth for the love he didn't say love of God or love of the scriptures or love of others or go on and on I think he did that on purpose Paul is very fond of being very detailed in his argumentation and so when he doesn't describe it

I think what he's doing here is leaving this quite open ended because we because I am very particular about the things I set my love on and the things I completely ignore how about you God's church ought be marked by a broad love like God's love who loved the whole world what about that knowledge and discernment bit at the very base how can you love what you do not know did you walk in here today desiring more holiness loving holiness as much as you are this moment having brought your mind to engage with the idea love is not opposed to reason but when we set our eyes on his word when he shows us what is most valuable when we engage our minds in the pursuits of Christ if we're doing it right love is the outcome because we see him as he is as he has revealed himself to us and we see that he is glorious and then we see around us men and women boys girls who were made in his image every one of them no matter where they are from no matter what they do for a career no matter their race no matter their culture no matter their disability status no matter anything they are made in his image and if we love him we love the ones that he made in his image the one he shed his blood for and the result of this discerning love it gives us the ability to approve what is excellent that is to know and to desire the path of holiness this day and every day what does that look like practically how do these two cause and effect how do you walk out this door and how do we live this out well first what happens when love abounds more and more it crowds out hate and malice and envy and other sinful things love eradicates in our lives the works of the flesh and it produces something new

I'll give us a handful of examples as we close what this looks like first let's think about envy right you can't just say stop it don't don't envy that person it doesn't it doesn't work like that we don't work like that you can't even reason with envy right you can't say to yourself you're envying someone well if I'm being reasonable here envy won't actually even get me that thing that I want that they have so I'll do something else because that's still self-centered that's still envious right even reasoning with envy doesn't work because the heart of envy is still there but when I see someone who has a blessing that I would desire for myself but if

[32:55] I have love for them in my heart I will understand that God has given them a blessing and I will be glad for them but only if I already love them right when someone that you love gets something good you're happy about that when someone you don't like gets something good you're unhappy about that the answer to envy is not getting the stuff or reasoning with yourself the answer to envy is love if we love others we will be glad that they receive good if we have love for God we will recognize that we already have the greatest good the greatest good by far because he has given us himself that was if you were here this past fall when we did that short series on contentment that's the conclusion you already have what is best his name is

Jesus the blessing that I envy in someone else is dust if I have I have the eyes to see it that's how love conquers envy how about another prominent sin not just in the world around us but also within the church if the statistics are alright porn use using porn is a profoundly unloving thing in many directions clearly it's unloving towards using the person whose images are there but it is also unloving to yourself because it is degradation for yourself it's dishonoring towards the ideals that the Lord has set for the world in marriage it's a picture of the gospel so it's unloving towards God the moment that I start loving God more in that moment than pleasure

I don't want the porn anymore the moment that I actually start loving myself saying this is degrading to me I stop wanting it the moment that I start loving other image bearers I don't want them to be degraded and used in that way love love love now I mentioned we've been looking here right pure and blameless that's the put off the envy put off lust what about this generative part the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ right I haven't given you an example of that yet I will answer this in two parts neither of them will be satisfying it's kind of a one hand on the other hand on the one hand this is actually intuitive

I'll give us an example that probably most people in this room can relate with it is not the highest sense of love but it is a sense of love infatuation like the butterflies effect when you first get into a romantic relationship with someone most people in this room have probably experienced that there are a couple babies who probably haven't yet I hope that infatuation effect do you have to think real hard right when Aaron and I met at the Coast Guard Academy and I was insufferable I mean I was the worst like we had different summer assignments and I was just the worst like my classmates were like Dave shut up about your girlfriend like you are just stop it and you don't have to think about kind words to those you love you don't have to think about kind actions you don't have to think about

I really shouldn't screw them over right like you don't think that way when you love it is intuitive and so the productive fruit of righteousness when you love is intuitive largely because it is just the outflow fruit trees produce fruit they don't think about it it happens because of what they are and if what I am is loving fruit of righteousness fruits of love will be produced and on the other hand that's what the whole rest of the book of Philippians is about so let us set our hearts and our minds on God's word as we journey through it together as a congregation and so find that we can walk in what is best by far let's pray our great

[38:12] God and Father may we have eyes to see your great goodness and long to be like you and walk with you which is best by far and we thank you Lord that that is indeed your will for us your desire for us and your unconquerable plan for us we praise you and we will praise you forever amen