

# Give thanks to God, love with understanding

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if you have your Bibles ready, we're going to turn to Philippians, because we're going to make our way through this letter. As we come to the letter, just let me say about the psalm singing.

Who remembers the Easter videos with the songs done? Phil, what was his name again, please? Yeah, Pete Crockett.

Who remembers those? Well, if you look at other stuff that he's done, he's done some really great work on some of the psalms that can be sung by, not just as a soloist, but can be sung by many people.

He might be a good one to, I mean, obviously, he won't be around, but he might be a good one to learn from, even if we just looked at some of his music from his website. Beautiful songs.

Well, of course, they're God's songs put to music. But yeah. So we're in Philippians, chapter 1, verses 3 through to 11.

[ 1 : 03 ] For those who perhaps didn't hear the message last week, we introduced it by saying that by Paul not mentioning his apostleship in the greeting was a very important seed sown to establish the importance of being a servant.

So he's not showing off his authority or position. He's rather taking the position of a servant because this letter is about how salvation produces servants.

And this is ultimately seen in the person of Christ Jesus. We also saw the qualifications of an overseer. For some of you, this took you as a bit of a shock that I would hold to the position that unless my children, if my children did not continue in the faith and were not believers, that I would have to leave the ministry because the qualification is that the minister, the elder, must have believing children in order to hold that office.

And however you want to deal with the verse, it doesn't get rid of the verse. You can neglect it. You can ignore it. But it's still there. This is crucial because it actually will impact the health and future of a church.

Now, I know many ministers don't hold to that. And I'm not going to speak about why they don't. But I really want you to appreciate, and it's not a pressure for me to have this because there are too many promises.

[ 2 : 37 ] There's never too many promises. There are so many promises within the scripture where God promises the salvation of children, the covenant, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

We hear it all the time of covenant succession, and yet sometimes we don't believe it, that God promises. Even the story of the prodigal son, who looks as if he's gone off into the world forever, comes back, and he comes back because of the promises that God has made.

Okay? I really want you to understand that. Nothing is ever too late or beyond reach for God.

You've really got to appreciate that. I don't know how much I can drive that home to you.

So if you do have brothers and sisters, and you have children who, you know, do not seem to be showing the signs of walking with the Lord, it depends on the Lord and his promises, and God works, and you need to hold on to that.

It's not a magic bullet, and everything is solved. But it is something that God wants us to hold and believe and pray through. And God keeps his promises.

[ 3 : 50 ] I don't know how many more ways I can say it or how often I can say it. You've got to really believe. And it doesn't depend on your belief. But without faith in God, it's impossible to please him.

And so I want you to understand the sort of unique position that I'm in, not because I'm, you know, I'm a unique person, not at all. But I want you to appreciate that I'm not holding to something that has no influence over the church, that what I'm holding to has a big impact on the church.

And you may think that I'm holding to something that I shouldn't. I can't do much about that. I'm a bit sorry about it, but I really can't do much about it.

So these things are crucial for the future health of the church. And just because we may not have done them before, it doesn't mean that we ought to start doing them when reading the scriptures.

So we believe in a God who keeps his promises. There's your encouragement. There's your encouragement. You must hold on to that, to believe in a God who keeps his promises.

[ 4 : 57 ] Okay? There's your telling off for this morning. I haven't even got to the Bible reading yet. I've already given you... So, Philippians chapter 1, verses 3 through to 11.

Now hear God's word. I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always and in every way prayer... Sorry, always and every way prayer of mine for you, all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart.

For you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

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 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.

[ 6 : 26 ] Well, we'll leave it at that section for this morning. As I said last week, Paul has sowed the seed that salvation leads to servanthood, that salvation creates servants, and those servants are servants of Christ, and we serve God's will in the world and within the church.

And so by Paul not referring to himself as an apostle, by not drawing attention to himself, he's not having to defend anything, in the same way he defends himself in the letter to the Galatians, where the reliability of his gospel depends on the reliability of his apostleship, because they have held on to a false gospel that isn't a gospel.

He has to retell them the gospel, and the authority that he has to do so depends on his authority to do so, which is his apostleship. But we don't find that here, because what he's trying to establish in the life of the Christian at Philippi is the importance of being a servant.

And what we will see is that salvation leads to servanthood. Now, the greeting is not just to the church, but in particular, he draws attention to the overseers and the deacons.

He does this because they are the appointed servants of the church. And now we come into verses 3 through to 11, we begin to see what that servanthood looks like, what the work of a servant looks like within the church.

[ 8 : 14 ] So here's the summary of verses 3 through to 11. The church is being thanked by Paul because they are in partnership with him in the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul is thanking God and thanking them and thanking God that they are partners with him in the proclamation of the gospel. And immediately what we begin to see is something that we perhaps overlook or neglect or we don't allow it to shape our commitment as often as we should.

And that is the church, or rather the work of the gospel, is undertaken by the whole church. The partnership in the gospel is not directed at the overseers and the deacons or just the overseers, but it is directed at the whole church.

And so Paul is thanking the church that they are partners with him in the advance of the gospel.

And this is what he is thankful for in verses 3 through to 5.

I thank God and I thank you. And in my prayer, beginning of verse 5, because of your partnership in the gospel from this day until now.

[ 9 : 40 ] In other words, their commitment with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel has not decreased over the period of time since it began, from this time until now.

The work of the gospel is undertaken by the whole church. The next thing he says is a word of encouragement in the sense that God who began a good work in you is the one who will bring that good work to completion at the day of Jesus Christ, verse 6.

And this is where Paul's confidence is in the church. He recognizes that it is because God is at work in them that they will continue to be his partners in the gospel.

Because the strength to be a partner and the strength to be continually committed to Paul, even when he has been imprisoned for the gospel, comes down to the fact that God is at work in them to

make sure that they continue to be these partners in the gospel alongside Paul. They haven't abandoned him. From this day until now, they have walked with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel and the confirmation of the gospel.

[ 11 : 02 ] And so naturally, verse 8, Paul has a very deep affection for these people. They've not abandoned him. They have continued to be his partners.

But his confidence in them continuing is in God who began a good work in them is the same God, of course, who will complete that good work in them.

Then he moves on and he prays, verse 8, that their love, verse 9, that their love may abound more and more with knowledge and understanding and or discernment.

The reason follows, verse 10, it is so that as a Christian you can approve what is excellent, what is pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

In other words, one of the most troubling aspects that a Christian can get themselves into is love without understanding. Love without understanding shapes a person in the complete opposite direction to love with understanding, shaping them in the direction of Christ.

[ 12 : 18 ] Their partnership, then, in the gospel. This is the thing that we must consider first. I want you to understand that within the church there are leaders, there are overseers, and there are deacons.

And these are people who must be qualified to serve. And the deacons are the ones who take care of the practical concerns of the church. They're the ones who take people to hospital.

They're the ones who make sure that they have food to eat. They're the ones to make sure that they have enough money to buy some electric to get them through the next week. They are ones, well, the whole church would perhaps participate in that, but the idea is they're the ones who participate in the practical needs of the church.

And we see this in Acts 6 because the condition there was that the church was growing on the account of the word being proclaimed, and the apostles say that we can't stop praying and proclaiming because if we do, and if we do just focus on the church without the world, focusing on the world, then that is not what God wants us to do.

So we'll appoint deacons to take care of the practical concerns of the church. And so the deacons come out of people being overlooked in the dispersion of food, and that couldn't happen.

[ 13 : 40 ] That just couldn't continue. And so that got addressed by appointing leaders who would take care of those practical needs. And then, of course, you have the qualifications of the overseers.

You know, must be a man of one wife. Why you would want two, I'm not entirely sure. I mean, there could be another way of reading this, and that is, is it possible to have two?

Because if you're told that you must be a man of one wife, there must be an assumption that some men have two. And, of course, when you go back and you look at the conditions and how the people lived then and what they thought was appropriate, some men did have two.

And so the qualification for an outer was be, you must be a man of one wife. And, of course, that is, of course, the Christian principle that goes back to Genesis where God gave Adam one wife.

what men did after that was not following God's plan and purpose because the creation mandate is one man, one woman.

[ 14 : 55 ] It's not difficult to work out. So, the New Testament church reflects God's original creation in the sense of being qualified.

There are other qualifications that he must have. Not given over to too much drink, which means the obvious things, you know, issues regarding temper, issues regarding self-control.

There are many other things. And, of course, as we saw last week, the importance of children being believers. But you'll also notice that within this church and the proclamation of the gospel, it doesn't just depend on the appointed leaders, but it depends on those in the church who can participate in partnering with Paul.

Paul doesn't feel abandoned. He doesn't feel let down. He doesn't feel as though this church has walked away from him the moment he has been imprisoned for telling people the gospel.

In fact, it's the very opposite. Paul is absolutely convinced that they will continue in partnership with him because God is at work in them. In other words, I want you to understand how crucial this point is.

[16:11] That my confidence in you in sharing the gospel is really my confidence in God doing that good work in you and bringing that good work to completion.

So my prayer is always to God, obviously, and my confidence comes from God concerning the people of God. God. And this is what Paul is saying to this church.

I recognize that God is at work in you because you've partnered with me in the gospel from the first day until now and the reason I'm convinced you will continue is because God who began a good work in you will bring that good work to completion.

Now, that involves more than just the partnership but it does involve at least the partnership as well. but he also recognizes that these Christians are partakers of the same grace.

Here's a thought. Some Christians know that they are valued by Christ. Not all Christians know that they are valued by the church. I heard that recently.

[17:26] I'm not quite sure what to make of it and I'll tell you for why. Here's why. There is no one can value you more than Christ.

No one can do anything more for you than Christ. No one can tell you who you are in Christ but Christ. Now, given the fact that no one can make you feel more valuable than Christ, why is it that some people believe that they shouldn't do anything in the church or don't feel that they can do anything in the church because they don't feel valued by people?

Is it the case that we have come to love people's approval more before we do anything than actually love the one who really values us with pure motivation?

appreciation. So I find it a little bit strange to understand this appreciation that if you really understand how much you are valued by Christ, you would be laying down your life and giving your all.

You would not be waiting for the approval of value statements from people because you're not looking to Jesus then, you're looking to others. And this is absolutely crucial for the servant to understand especially when we get into Philippians chapter 2 where Paul is trying to tell the church to have this mind among yourselves.

[19:04] Now let no one get above themselves. Understand that Christ who had everything became nothing, became a servant motivated by God's love for the world and of course God's love for the Son.

This is absolutely crucial to understand but it is so often overlooked because people generally look for people's approval more than they look for God's approval.

But you have God's approval and no one can value you more than God and no one can do more for you than what Christ Jesus has done for you and so if you're not motivated by that, you're not going to be motivated by me.

You're not going to be motivated by someone else in the church who tells you how wonderful you are and if you are, it's not God who's motivating you but your ego. I want you to appreciate, really appreciate that the reason why Paul is so convinced that these Christians will continue to partner with him in the gospel is because their motivation comes from the fact that God is at work in them. They're not being praised by Paul saying, well done, what a great job you have done. They are being taught by Paul just how much value and worth God is putting into their lives.

[20:36] And he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. You cannot be the person you are meant to be without God working in you.

You just cannot be the person you are meant to be without God working in you. And you are becoming the person you are meant to be precisely because God is at work in you.

You need to understand, you need to appreciate that beautiful truth. I understand what it's like to be told that you're wonderful. In fact, there was a few years ago there was a book that actually says you ought to stand in front of a mirror and tell yourself how wonderful you are.

And I gave it a go. And I stood at the bottom of the stairs and, you know, just for fun, I didn't really believe the book, but I thought, why not? No one's looking. No one's going to get it.

So I stood in front of the mirror and said, you are great. You are wonderful. You are amazing. You are an overcomer. And my wife come down the stairs and says, who do you think you're kidding?

[21:45] You can get away with it when you're on your own, but when someone knows you, well, they're able to put you in your place like no other. These self-motivational words do nothing.

To be the person you are meant to be requires God to work in you. And as a believer, appreciate what Paul is saying. The good work that God does in you now is the good work that he will bring to

completion in you.

God is at work in you. So they are partakers in the gospel and they are partakers of grace. They are equal. And this is the joy about being in the church.

Not one of us are considered any more valuable than anybody else in the church before God.

Those levels of value only exist between people.

but they don't exist before God. As you sit here before God, we are all equal in his sight. It's only when you approve the value statements of people does that create the value hierarchies of what is important and not important and this.

[ 23 : 04 ] So appreciate your value comes from God. God. And for you to be the person you ought to be and will be, God must work in you.

So secondly, and there is only two points, love with understanding. Paul's prayer in verses 9 through to 11 really has two parts.

The first part is what he is praying for. The second part is the reason he is praying it. So in verse 9, he prays that their love may abound more and more with knowledge and understanding and all discernment.

And then the reason is followed with verse 10, so that you may approve. This is the reason why you must have love with understanding, so that you may approve what is excellent and so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with a fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

What he's praying for, verse 9, and why he's praying for it, verse 10 and 11. Love without understanding means that believers are left in a position where they will not know what to approve.

[ 24 : 27 ] I think anyone who has observed what is happening in the church will observe that the church has approved many things in the name of love that God forbids.

That is love without understanding. When the church approves things that God forbids in the name of love, that is love without discernment.

That is love without understanding. That is love without the conviction that God is at work in them entirely. the other thing that we must recognize is that if you love something that God does not approve of, then the way that you will try and defend your love for it is by saying that the other person is not loving when they don't approve.

So if you're declaring your love for something, and as you declare your love for something that God forbids, and another Christian comes alongside you and says, God does not approve of this, the only defense those type of people have is to accuse you of not being loving.

But that love is love without understanding. And I've been in the ministry long enough now to see people in the church who have been friends with other Christians for 20 or 30 or 40 years, and one of their friends has a big issue that needs to be addressed, and it was never said out of friendship.

[ 26 : 06 ] It was never addressed because we were too close. That doesn't sound like love to me. It sounds like love without understanding, but it doesn't sound like the love that Paul is praying for here, the love with understanding.

And so it's very easy to accuse someone of not being loving because they don't approve. But that definition of love is a love without understanding. And Paul is praying against this because he understands that when you have love without understanding, you're able to get to the point in your walk where you eventually depart from the gospel.

And Paul knows this firsthand. You remember Demas, who was a partner with Paul in the proclamation of the gospel, and we're told in 2 Timothy, that because he fell in love with the world, in love with the world he departed Paul.

So Paul has a partner in the gospel in Demas, they're out proclaiming together, but because of Demas' love in this present world, he departed the partnership of proclamation.

He departed Paul. That's love without understanding. loving. So it is possible for people to come across as though they are saying things that aren't loving.

[ 27 : 29 ] And I understand that. But I think we also need to appreciate there are two defining marks of love here. There's love without understanding that is always defended by the accusation you're not loving.

And then there is love with understanding that actually creates a life that is pure and blameless and filled with the fruit of righteousness. So love and understanding causes you to know what to accept and to know what to be disapproving of.

It allows you to see how God is making you pure and blameless, filled with the fruit of righteousness, rather than accepting anything and determining in your own form what is appropriate to believe, to practice, to be committed to.

Love without understanding is dangerous for the Christian because it takes them away from God rather than towards him. And so Paul prays earnestly that they would understand not only his prayer for them, but they would understand the reason why he is praying it.

So let's go over it again. Verse 9. My prayer is that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and nor discernment. Verse 10. The reason so that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

[ 28 : 58 ] Filled, verse 11, with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. There it is again. For you to be the person you ought to be and will be, God must be at work in you.

And so Paul is explaining it again and again very, very clearly. So in summary, before we come to the exhortation, Paul is really saying two things.

Thank you. I thank God for your partnership in the gospel. My confidence that you will continue is in God who continually works in you and will bring that work to completion.

But on your side, you must grow in love with understanding. You must grow up in such a way where your love is shaped by understanding and discernment so that you can know what to approve.

So that you can become pure and blameless. So that you can become filled with the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. What Paul is praying for is not only that the gospel shaped the people in the world so that they would come to Christ, convert them, but the gospel would continually shape the people in the church to become more like Christ.

[ 30 : 20 ] We never depart from the core gospel message that everything is about Jesus. Here's the exhortation.

Salvation creates servants. And one of the marks of being a servant is your partnership in the gospel, in the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul is thankful to God that he can identify that in these Christians. And yet the work of God in them is not finished because he prays that their love would abound more with understanding so that they would appreciate that if they are to be the people that they're going to be, God must be at work in them.

The reason he is assured and confident is because God is at work in them. And God who began a good work in these believers will bring that good work to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

In other words, there is the fruit of righteousness and there is the pattern of faithfulness. And the pattern of faithfulness is that here that you are partnering in the gospel and that you're growing in your love and understanding so that you may be pure and blameless.

[ 31 : 42 ] That's the pattern of the Christian life. That is the pattern of God's work within the life of the church. Let me say this as we close.

I think we should be thankful for God, to God, for what he has done amongst this church. over the last 40 odd years that it has been in existence.

Very thankful to God for it. But at the same time, we shouldn't get to the point where we think the work of God is finished. And we don't need refining and reforming.

And we don't need to become more like Christ than what we are currently. And so our prayer should reflect Paul's prayer, that our love would grow, would abound more and more.

But it would abound in exactly the same way, with knowledge and understanding, so that we can approve what is good and stay away from what is not good. So that we can please God by doing his will as we partner with him in the gospel.

[ 32 : 48 ] Love without understanding does not lead you to become like Christ. If anything, it leads you away from Christ. Christ. And God's ultimate work in you is to bring you to the place where you are pure and blameless, where you are filled with the fruit of righteousness.

And I don't think any of us are there yet. But where confidence is in God who began that good work, completing that work. Amen.

Amen.