

**Series:** The Church — A People with A Purpose

**Title:** Love the Church

**Text:** Philippians 1:7-11

**Date:** June 19, 2022

### **Verse 7**

In verse 7, Paul continued his salutatory remarks by expressing his strong love for the church at Philippi. He said, “Indeed, it is right for me to think this way about all of you, because I have you in my heart, and you are all partners with me in grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel” (Philippians 1:7). The statement “it is right for me to think this way about all of you” referred back to everything Paul said in verses 3-6. In those verses, Paul expressed his gratitude for the Philippians. He also remarked on his partnership with the Philippians and he spoke of the ongoing work of sanctification within the church. Now, in verse 7, the apostle affirmed that his comments on such things were justified.

Paul said that it was “right” for him to think about the church in the way he did. The original language of the text employed a word that was often used of righteousness in the New Testament. The same term appeared in Romans 1:17 when Paul said, “The righteous will live by faith.” As used in our current text, the term indicated that Paul’s love for and partnership with the Philippians was a matter of Christian righteousness. Those who are right with the Lord will aim to be right with the church. They will seek holy and healthy alliances with the body of Christ.

For contemporary Christians, Paul’s profession is relevant. There is a need for a revival of righteous zeal concerning the church of God. Yes, church is often messy. The body of Christ has its quirks and problems. Still, however, the body belongs to Jesus. She is His bride. As such, she is His plan for spreading a radiant witness for His gospel to a lost world. A love for the people of God needs to be renewed and recaptured. The Lord has ordained the church to be an instrument of evangelization of the world (Matthew 28:18-20) and a means of encouragement and edification for the people of the Lord (Ephesians 4:11-12; Hebrews 10:25). Those who become cynical and jaded toward the church should search their hearts. If Jesus loved the church, even when He had betrayers and deniers within it, we should too.

An investigation of Paul’s language in verse 7 reveals that the apostles zeal for the church was something that affected both his emotions and his cognitions. Both his mind and soul were involved in His love for the church at Philippi. Notice his use of the words “think” and “heart.” In using the word translated “think,” Paul revealed he had a certain attitude, or frame of mind, toward the church. Some translations render the text as if the apostle was speaking of some sort of “feeling.” It is best to view Paul as speaking about the content of his thoughts; however, his language does involve the idea of emotions. His words, as one has said, denote “a general disposition of mind including both feelings and thought, emotion and mind.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Paul referenced his attitude toward the church because he knew some within the congregation had less than ideal thoughts toward their congregation. Consider Philippians 4:2. The thinking of some of the Philippians was unhealthy. Paul

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 448.

held up his attitude as an example for the church to follow. He would later do the same in regard to the attitude of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

On top of this thinking, Paul said, “I have you in my heart.” The body part of which Paul spoke was a figurative representation of the inner-man, the immaterial part of humanity from which desires, emotions, attitudes, and choices flow. The apostle’s language figuratively depicted him carrying the Philippians in his soul. One has rendered his words as meaning, “I am holding you in my heart.”<sup>2</sup> Another has said that Paul’s words formed, “an expression of heartfelt love on the part of the apostle toward his readers.”<sup>3</sup>

When it comes to a love for the church, the heart of the matter is often a matter of the mind and heart. To be strong in his or her affection for the church, one must first cultivate biblical thinking toward the church. Transformation of the mind (Romans 12:1-2) will then produce a transformation of the soul. As the inner-man, or inner-woman, develops a zeal for the church, a new attitude and perspective toward the body of Christ will grow. Service, sacrifice, and stewardship for the church and the Great Commission will flourish.

With both his mental and soul state having been affected, Paul was compelled to regard the Philippians as being “partners with” him in gospel ministry. The word rendered “partners” is one the apostle used back in verse 5. It depicted one who was a companion, or one who had a mutual share in a thing. For Paul, the church at Philippi was a partner in regard to “grace” and the “gospel.” The first concept referred to God’s position of kindness and favor towards His people. The latter referenced the Christian message that revealed such grace. The gospel message concerning the one true God (Genesis 1:27), His intent for humanity (Genesis 1:27), the problem of sin (Romans 3:23), and God’s remedy for man’s sin problem (John 3:16).

Though he faced “imprisonment,” the literal shackles of a Roman prison (Philippians 1:13, 14, and 17), the Philippians partnered with Paul in his “defense and establishment” of this message. For the apostle, such an apologetic defense of Christ’s gospel was the thrust of his ministry, his calling if you will (Philippians 1:16). Through tireless efforts, he aimed to “establish” (i.e. “make stable and strong”) the gospel throughout the known world (2 Thessalonians 3:1). The language of verse 7 was legal and technical jargon from the first century world. It was used in the world of law to refer to the act of providing something that guaranteed security for an agreement.<sup>4</sup>

Since the conception of their congregation on a riverside, the church at Philippi had stood with Paul for the sake of his ministry (Acts 16:1-40). The apostle made reference to their fellowship in the gospel several times in his letter (Philippians 1:15; 2:1; 3:10). The church at Philippi had stood by their founding pastor in a missional sense (Philippians 1:5), a spiritual sense (Philippians 1:7), and a financial sense (Philippians 4:15).

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<sup>2</sup> Robertson, 436.

<sup>3</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 448.

<sup>4</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 448.

A heart of love for the church will always involve a sense of camaraderie similar to that which existed between the Philippians and Paul. As believers, our hearts have been knitted together through the experience of grace. We have been given a common mission. If we, like the early Christians, will lead our hearts to be focused on these things, we will position ourselves to grow in our love for the church.

### **Verse 8**

Paul continued his profession of love for the church at Philippi in verse 8, saying, “For God is my witness, how deeply I miss all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:8). Invoking the Lord as a guarantee, a permissible yet reverentially serious act in the Hebrew mind (Leviticus 5:4 and Psalm 116:14), Paul confessed his sense of profound love for the church at Philippi. He similarly conveyed warm feelings of charity towards the church in Rome (Romans 1:1-4).

The apostle’s word selection depicts strong emotive force. In saying “how deeply I miss all of you,” he used words that spoke of intense desire. Undoubtedly, Paul’s imprisonment (Philippians 1:12-13) had produced sharp pain, loneliness of isolation, and a burning desire to be reunited with the assembly of God’s people. Maybe if modern believers were forcefully prevented from worshipping, they might grow in their desire to meet with God’s people. An eagerness to gather with the redeemed should permeate the mature believer’s life (1 Thessalonians 3:6; Romans 1:11, and 2 Timothy 1:4).

On top of this desire, Paul had “affection” toward the church. In the ancient world, Paul’s language was literally referred to inward parts of the human body— the bowels, liver, and viscera. Such human anatomy was seen as the seat of human emotions for both the Hebrews and Greeks.<sup>5</sup> It was regarded as the place of the deepest and most tender emotions. Paul meant to convey his deep, heartfelt desire toward the church.<sup>6</sup> The apostle’s confession revealed the type of love that should exist amongst believers. God’s people ought to have holy desires towards the place of worship and the people of God.

### **Verse 9**

In verses 9-11, Paul continued his confession of love for the church at Philippi by sharing of the way he prayed for them. The apostle’s words remind us of the priority of intercessory prayer for the church. A true love for the church involves intentional intercession for it. Do you pray for your place of worship, for the fellow believers in your life?

Prayers for the church should be a part of our regular prayers (1 Timothy 2:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). Many know that they ought to offer supplications for the body of Christ, but they often fail to do so. When some do pray, they struggle with distractions and focus. Prayer often seems weak, generic, and misdirected. This breakdown is often the result of ignorance in regards to how to pray. Fortunately, both our Lord (Matthew 6:9-13) and Paul (Colossians 1:9-14) often provided examples and patterns

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<sup>5</sup> Martin, 70.

<sup>6</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 354.

for prayer. One such pattern is found in our current text. Through Paul's words, we see three ways in which believers can pray for their church.

First, verse 9 teaches us that our prayers for others should be focused on love. In particular, we should pray that our brothers and sisters in Christ grow in their love for the Lord and others. Basically, the entire Christian life boils down to a battle over desires (Exodus 20:1-8; Matthew 22:37-40). The key question for Christian devotion is, "What do you desire?" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5; 1 Corinthians 13:13). One becomes like what he or she wants; consequently, the direction of desires is of paramount importance.

Knowing this, Paul prayed that the Philippians might increase in their passion for the Lord. He said, "And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment" (Philippians 1:9). He used the Greek word *agapē*, one that was often used of the charity Christ requires of His people (1 Corinthians 13:4-7), that affection towards God and man which is based upon a conscientious commitment of the will (1 John 4:10; John 15:13). Such love is the supreme motive behind true devotion to God (James 2:8). By keeping one's heart in such love, one guarantees that he or she will naturally do the things the Lord requires (Romans 13:9-10; Galatians 5:14).

Paul wanted this virtue to "keep on growing" amongst his churches. His language could literally be rendered "I am praying that love is *more and more abounding*." The words depicted an overflowing of abundance amongst the congregation. From Epaphroditus' reports (Philippians 2:25; 4:18), Paul knew that the church was in need of a resurgence of Christian charity (Philippians 2:1-4; 4:1-2).

Lest the church mistakingly believe that love was nothing more than blind, sentimental acceptance and tolerance of others, Paul qualified what type of love he prayed for the church to possess. He said he wanted them to have a devotion characterized by "knowledge and every kind of discernment." The first term referred to true knowledge, a mental grasp of God's truths.<sup>7</sup> Paul probably used the word as a jab towards the supposed special knowledge of the gnostics who were wielding some influence in the church. The second term portrayed spiritual and moral insight that involved making the proper distinctions that would lead to proper beliefs and behavior.<sup>8</sup>

Considering the deluge of deceived doctrine within Philippi (Philippians 3:1-21), Paul knew that the church needed charity that was tempered by truth. One can profess a love for God, but if he or she departs from the commands of Jesus, that love can become compromised and corrupt. Real Christian love "rejoices in the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6). It isn't just a passive passion; it involves discernment and discretion that leads one to reject the godless things of this world and to pursue Christ.

When you pray for your church, pray regarding love. Pray that God would give the members of your assembly an ever-increasing passion for Him. Furthermore, intercede and ask that such love would be sincere. Supplicate so that your local gathering of believers might have a devotion tempered with discernment. In a world full of a competing ideas that often don the label "Christian," there is great need for a

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<sup>7</sup> Martin, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, [CD-Rom].

revival of Scripturally-sound charity. Only the Spirit of God can produce such a love (Romans 5:5), so pray that He might work to make it abound in your church. When agapē is present, the church will naturally be and do all that God desires.

### **Verse 10**

Second, verse 10 teaches us that prayers can also be offered for the discernment of the church. The need for godly wisdom amongst God's people is always great (James 1:5). Paul knew his congregation in Philippi was in danger of deception; thus, he prayed that the church would "approve the things that are superior and...be pure and blameless in the day of Christ" (Philippians 1:10). The word translated "approve" is one that referred to something being tested.<sup>9</sup> It was used in the ancient world of the process whereby coins were examined to see whether they were genuine or counterfeit.<sup>10</sup> In the context of Philippians 1:10, the language refers to the act of examining in order to make to make important decisions about God's truth.<sup>11</sup>

A.T. Robertson has noted that such discernment isn't "always easy in our complex civilization."<sup>12</sup> The task was equally difficult for the Philippians. They lived in a culture that offered a smorgasbord of religious, philosophical, and moral opinions. Paul wanted the church to place value on things that were "superior." The original language referred to something that was worthwhile or excellent.<sup>13</sup> Such things were things that mattered, or things that were of greater value than the cheaper and more mundane things of life.<sup>14</sup> The apostle knew that the church was being tainted by worthless doctrines (Philippians 3:1-21). Furthermore, there were some within the flock who were bickering about things that were of no account (Philippians 4:2).

Paul prayed that the church would have the heaven-sent ability to discern what was best. By doing this, the congregation would "be pure and blameless in the day of Christ." The word rendered "pure" was a compound Koine Greek word that strictly meant "tested by sunlight." It was used in the ancient world of the act of holding up an item in the sun for the purpose of examining potential faults or impurities.<sup>15</sup> Used morally and spiritually, the term depicts one who is free from moral or spiritual defilement (James 1:27).

The term translated "blameless" referred to that which was without fault. Some think of this quality as being one of perfection, but such is not true. Perfection won't be fully realized until the culmination of human history (1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 John 3:1-2). The condition of blamelessness is that state whereby one's life is free from any

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<sup>9</sup> Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 119.

<sup>10</sup> Martin, 72.

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, 475.

<sup>12</sup> Robertson, 437.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 449.

<sup>14</sup> Zodhiates, 444-445.

<sup>15</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 449.

major sin or major defilement that could generate an occasion for great criticism against Christ. One has referred to it as a type of character that provokes no spiritual stumbling by others.<sup>16</sup> The apostle himself aimed to live such a life (Acts 24:16 and 1 Corinthians 10:32) and he encouraged leaders within the church to do so as well (1 Timothy 3:10).

Paul prayed that the church would persist in such a godly lifestyle up until “the day of Christ.” His language was eschatological, referring to the end-time event wherein Christ will return to judge all (1 Thessalonians 5:2-4 2 Peter 3:10). The apostle’s point was that he wanted his church to value the valuable things of Christ continually — all the way up until the point of Christ’s return or death, whichever came first.

When you pray for your church, pray like Paul. Ask the Father to work amongst your congregation by His grace so that the church might possess godly discernment. Beseech the Father to change hearts so that true doctrine, godly living, and pure worship might be highly esteemed. The end result of such praying will be lives that reflect the purity and blamelessness of our Lord. Through such prayer, and its accompanying results, the Lord shall receive great glory amongst the community that surrounds your place of worship.

### **Verse 11**

Third, verse 11 teaches us that prayers can also be offered for the spiritual development of the church. Paul prayed that the Philippians would be “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1:11). The language that spoke of Christians being “filled with fruit” had the basic meaning of filling a vessel or container. As in other New Testament occurrences, the imagery was used to depict the way in which the lives of believers can yield moral and spiritual fruit as a result of an abiding relationship with Christ (Galatians 5:22; Romans 6:22; Hebrews 12:11; John 15:5).

The produce in view was “the fruit of righteousness.” The qualifying word referred to that which was morally right by virtue of it being in alignment with the character and decrees of God. Thus, Paul was speaking of the fruit of a godward life — good works that are in conformity with God’s ways, God’s Word, and God’s will. The presence of Jesus within His people produces these good works as lives are yielded to Him through faith (see Romans 8:9; Colossians 1:27; and James 2:14-19).

When believers produce such fruit, the end result is that God gets glory and praise in the midst of a fallen world (Matthew 5:16). Thus, the church should have a passion for such fruit production. Indeed, we should pray, like Paul, that the Lord would help our churches bear much fruit, so that He might get praise where He is not praised.

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<sup>16</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 449.