

Midweek Message

“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.”

(Philippians 4:9-11 ESV)

As we saw this past Sunday, Peter was emphasizing our need to be busy as we await the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. One of the main points in the message was that of fervent prayer and how we should be clear minded and self-controlled so that we can pray. In other words, our lives should be lived in such a way that our priority for and passion in life is focused on what God desires for us as well as His will being done on earth as it is in heaven. In the above Scripture, the Paul reiterates something very similar when he mentions the “day of Christ” which points to our Lord’s return. This passage is framed as his prayer for the Philippians and actually can be a model for our prayer lives as well as we await the consummation of the Kingdom of God.

First, we should pray that we live a life of love. In verse 9 he writes, *“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ...”* Love is the foundation of the Christian life from which all the other virtues spring. Without genuine love everything we think, say, do, and even feel is empty and useless. All believers have the ability to love since this love is an aspect of the fruit of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. However, even though we may have the God given ability to love we also need to understand how this love is to be expressed in each and every situation we happen to face every day. You see, we need to pray that God would help us to grow in knowledge and discernment regarding this abounding love that we’re to express. Love isn’t just about what we feel toward others although it governs our feelings for others. Love isn’t just about what we do for others although it governs our actions toward others. Love isn’t just how we think about, talk about, or speak to others although it governs how we think about, talk about, or speak to others. Love is a behavior we chose to exhibit by which we express genuine care and concern for the well-being of those around us. There are times when love must be tough. There are times when love can be tender. However, in all situations love must always be truthful. As believers in Jesus we’re now empowered to love all persons everywhere and in every circumstance as we are commanded to “do everything in love.”

Second, we should pray that we live a life of excellence. In verse 10 we’re told, *“so that you may approve what is excellent ...”* One of the most important aspects of living the Christian life is found in making good choices as we go about life. This isn’t necessarily about the difference between doing what’s morally right or morally wrong but is about having the wisdom to make the best choice even though every choice we have could be considered morally correct. Choosing what’s excellent has to do with what might be considered most important – not only for ourselves but also for those around us. It has to do with what might be best for our spiritual growth as well as the growth of our brothers and sisters in Jesus. As the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians, *“All things are lawful,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful,” but not all things build up. Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10:23-24 ESV).* Sometimes we can make a decision based solely on what we might desire without having any concern whatsoever for those around us, whether it’s family members, neighbors, co-workers, friends, or even our enemies. God is calling us to take into consideration the effect our choices will have in regard to others within our circles of influence.

Third, we should pray that we live a life of integrity. Let's pick up from where we left off in verse 10 as we're told, *"and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ ..."* This has to do with the morality of our lives and whether or not we truly reflect the truth of God as we go about our lives. Purity has to do with our personal lives, what we think and feel, while blameless has to do with our public lives, what others see as we live each day. We need to understand though that both are connected because what's within us will eventually be seen as it'll affect our overall behavior. You see, the real issue here is about who we truly are and do our lives genuinely reflect those we are? Does our profession of faith in Jesus actually reveal that we're in possession of the new life from Jesus? In fact, we're told much the same in the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus where he writes,

"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

*"Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you."*

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:11-16 ESV)

Listen, we must examine ourselves daily in light of God's Word regarding what it says about life, asking ourselves why we're doing what we're doing, why we're saying what we're saying, or what we're thinking what we're thinking, or why are we feeling what we're feeling. Whether it involves our personal life, our relationships, or our business dealings, or anything and everything else, God calls us to a life of purity and blamelessness.

Finally, we should pray that we live a life of fruitfulness. We conclude with verse 11 where we're told, *"filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."* We all know that as God's redeemed and beloved people we're to live for the honor, praise, and glory of God. What that means is that we live in such a way that we produce fruit of righteousness in accordance with what God has commanded in His Word. This means a proactive objective from our lives by which we are involved with spreading the gospel by the way in which we might go out of our way to help others as well as sharing the good news with those who need to hear it. Listen, there's no such thing as a couch potato Christian who has nothing to say, nothing over which to pray, nothing to accomplish in this life for Jesus. We're all gifted, empowered, and called to works of service for the Lord. As the Apostle Paul writes, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them"* (Ephesians 2:10 ESV). If we live with our eyes open, we'll see plenty of opportunities to do something good for someone else through which God can use to bring comfort, peace, and perhaps even redemption to those around us. We just need to live with the intention of doing something good today and pray that God will help us see an opportunity to do so.

This is certainly a crazy time in which we're living but I want you to remember that regardless of our current struggles our mission is still the same. We're to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. So, keep looking up to the Lord who will help us be the people He desires us to be, working His grace in us as we strive to live for Him.

Pastor Mark