

The sermon

Intro

How should we feel about our fellow believers in this church? Where should our heart be?

Let's be real. There are obstacles to affection: different theological conclusions, different moral convictions, personality quirks, personal preferences, etc.

How should we pray for our fellow believers in this church?

I know their name and they're a part of this church, but I don't know them that well. How should I pray for them?

Good question. What did Paul pray? is a good place to start.

Let's turn to Paul's guidance on life together in the church.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

Last week Paul shared how he prayed his gospel partners with thanksgiving and joy.

Point 1: Affection for gospel partners (1:7-8)

It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart,

“this way” = thankful and joyful for them.

It's right for Paul to feel this way because he treasures them!

The heart being our inner self. Our thoughts, understanding, attitudes, desires, loves (what we treasure), affections, emotions. The Philippian church (its people, the organization) is heavy in Paul's thoughts and feelings and desires.

for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

“partakers” is in the same word family as for koinwni,a (fellowship). Being partners, Paul and the Philippians share common experiences: persecution (imprisonment) and opposition (defending and confirming the gospel).

Imprisonment could be translated chains. Paul is literally chained to a Roman soldier. That's restricted movement, under the control of another, and the chafing of skin.

Acts 28:16, 20 speaks about Paul's Roman imprisonment where Paul stayed “*by himself, with the soldier that guarded him*” and was wearing a chain.

defense and confirmation of the gospel

Defense means speaking against distortions of the gospel and false accusations like Jesus wasn't really God (JW's), we can become gods ourselves (Mormonism), the atonement is divine child abuse, God will accept me because I'm a good person (works salvation).

The church (us) defends the one true gospel against false ideas!

Confirmation means demonstrating, verifying the gospel is true and certain. How do we verify the gospel? We verify the gospel is true and certain with the Bible. That's why when we debate that Jesus is God we use Bible in our arguments. We settle these matters with Scripture.

Yes we can appeal to creation. A building requires a builder. Creation requires a Creator. The creation's complexity (DNA) and diversity witnesses to a powerful Creator with divine abilities (Rom 1:20).

But the Bible is our sure and certain source for gospel understanding. God moved on the human authors to write what they did. The Bible is perfect, without error because of the source behind the human authors: God. The God who's able to create the world from nothing by speaking it into being and raise Jesus from the dead is able to ensure the words he wanted written were recorded as he wished.

Gospel

The good news of salvation from sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's salvation past (forgiveness of sins), salvation present (progress in killing sin and developing righteous character), salvation future (glorification = bodies that can't die or sin).

The good news (gospel) is that you, a sinner, can be rescued from your sinful condition by trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus died on the cross to rescue sinners. Be rescued by confessing your sins and turning from them by trusting in Jesus' death for your pardon.

On the cross the Father treated Jesus as if he lived our sinful life. In we trust Jesus, God treats us as if we lived Jesus' sinless life.

I had to see my need. I needed to trust.

partakers with me of grace

Grace means unmerited favor. Something God gives to us. Something we don't earn. Something we don't deserve. Something God isn't obligated to give to us.

Grace in context doesn't sound like much of a gift. The gifts are persecution (imprisonment) and opportunity to defend the gospel (defense and confirmation). Paul is saying t's an undeserved blessing from God to suffer for him and engage in gospel proclamation. Opposition isn't a punishment. It's a gift. Evangelism isn't something we do out of drudgery and guilt. It's a gift.

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

"you all" highlights Paul's affection for each and every Philippian believer.

"yearn" = to long for someone because of a great affection. Used of longing to see someone, longing for glorification, longing for spiritual milk.

affection of Christ Jesus

affection: deep feeling, love that touches our inner being. Physically affected. Feelings. Emotional upheaval.

"*affection of Christ Jesus*" means Paul's affection stems from Jesus. Jesus has worked his love for the Philippians inside of Paul's heart. Jesus is loving the Philippians through Paul.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. – Galatians 2:20

Application

In Philippians, Paul corrects the church for division, selfishness, and a lack of love (2:1-4). He specifically corrects Euodia and Syntyche for failure to "*agree in the Lord*" (4:2). Despite correction, Paul affirms his affection.

So we can yearn for a brother or sister we have to correct. One who's causing division. One who's acting selfishly. One who's lacking in love. One we don't agree with. Why? Because Christ is in us working in us working to produce affection for each other.

What does yearning affection mean for our life together as a local church?

- 1) Do everything we can to be here every week together.

We spend time with those we have affection for.

- 2) Consider other opportunities besides Sunday morning to spend time with each other.

I understand the limitations that come with aging.

- 3) Be thankful for each brother and sister.

The ones who don't see everything just like me. When there's disagreement, we're tempted to see a brother or sister as the enemy. We're tempted to fight. We're tempted to get others against them. We're tempted to give up and go elsewhere. We're tempted to despair.

So we need to think and feel like Paul.

- 4) See each other as gospel partners.

God, in his wisdom, has chosen to bring us together, in this place at this time, so that we could be fellow partakers of the graces of gospel opposition and gospel defense. **God wants us to experience these graces together!**

Conflicting theological interpretations are inevitable. Conflicting moral convictions are inevitable. What can we do? One thing is remind ourselves that we're gospel partners.

- 5) Believe it's possible for us to have affection for all.

That's confidence in Jesus' work in our hearts!

- 6) Pray for each other.

Affection drove Paul to pray!

Point 2: Prayer for gospel partners (1:9-11)

Paul told them he's been praying for them. 1:9-11 is what he's praying. The application is pray these things for each other. **Systematically praying through our church directory is the way to do this!**

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more,

Love for each other stands out because of internal problems in the church.

abound = an abundance, a lot, a large quantity of love

more and more = more than they already have...then more than the amount they increased to = an ever-increasing quantity of love.

This is the doctrine of sanctification. The process of spiritual growth. Putting sin to death and putting on godly character, habits, patterns. Like love.

Our love for God and each other can increase. There will always be room for our love to increase.

with knowledge and all discernment,

Love must be accompanied by knowledge and discernment.

knowledge = knowing more information about God and his word, increasing competence in understanding our Bibles. Our knowledge should keep improving over time.

discernment = insight, moral perception, practical understanding, wisdom. The ability to apply knowledge in a wise way.

so that you may approve what is excellent,

We acquire knowledge and discernment for the purpose approving the right things and chose the right course of action.

approve = regard, judge something as good after careful examination.

excellent = the thing that excels, is superior, of most worth when compared with other options = **the best choice**.

We need knowledge and discernment so that we'll make the best choice among the competing options before us. We love best when we know how to choose the most loving option.

and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ,

Approving what's best results in lives that are consistent with God's will/instruction.

pure = pure, godly motivations. This hints at selfish ambition later in the letter (2:3).

blameless = not doing anything worthy of causing offense.

Selfish and sinful motives bad. Offensive actions bad. Righteous conduct good.

Righteousness = the moral, practical righteousness of the believer = conduct, not the imputed righteousness we have in Christ. When we trust Christ, Jesus' perfect, sinless life is credited to our account. We're treated as if we lived Jesus' sinless, perfectly obedient life. That's true, but that's not Paul's concern here.

Paul's talking about lives that are increasing progressing in conduct that conforms to God's will, instruction, character (= sanctification). He wants their conduct excellent when Jesus returns ("*the day of Christ*"). **Our confidence we can do this is Christ's presence in us!**

Note any righteous transformation is a product of Jesus indwelling us ("comes through Jesus Christ"). Like Paul's affection for the Philippians resulted from Jesus' affection inside Paul, our righteousness is a result of Christ in us. Jesus gets all the glory. We get none. Any good in us results from Christ in us. Left to ourselves, "*the fruit of righteousness*" is impossible!

to the glory and praise of God.

A loving people transformed by the indwelling Christ brings God glory and praise.

glory = lives that honor God because their conduct is consistent with God's will, instruction, character.

Why love? Why learning? Why righteous conduct? So that God will be honored and praised. When God indwells sinners he changes them. When God changes sinners some people take note. And praise God who transforms sinners!

Summary

In sum, Paul prays that his gospel partners would increase in love, which comes through knowledge, so that their conduct would be altered and God would be honored and praised. The highest goal is always God's glory and praise. That's a

God-centered spirituality. John Piper put it this way: “Missions exists because worship doesn’t.” The greatest goal isn’t the salvation of the sinner. The greatest goal is always God’s glory. God is God-centered. He cares about his glory. So should we.

Meditation

Paul is big on increasing in knowledge and discernment. He prays the same things in Colossians. He believes knowledge increases love and results in righteous conduct. He views knowledge positively. So do I. Being gifted and called to teach, I have an affection and passion for learning. I need a rich depth of knowledge, wisdom, doctrine, etc. in order to fulfill my calling and develop my teaching gift. I need to be able to answer your questions.

But what about the Christian who isn’t called to teach publicly in the church? How much knowledge should that Christian have? If I push doctrine, doctrine, doctrine, interpretation, interpretation, interpretation, am I just pushing my God-given bent on others God hasn’t bent that way? Good questions.

A few thoughts.

- 1) Paul is praying for the whole church, so every Christian should be increasing in knowledge and discernment.
- 2) Letters like Romans and Ephesians are written to whole churches, not just the leaders. So every Christian should know the doctrines in these letters.
- 3) Every Christian is expected to evangelize, so every Christian should grasp doctrine well enough to present the gospel, answer questions, etc.
- 4) Every Christian parent is expected to teach their children God’s ways, like beliefs and conduct. Christian parents should grasp doctrine well enough to explain who God is (Father, Son, Spirit), explain what salvation is, answer any questions children might have, etc.
- 5) Every Christian needs to know the Bible well enough to be able to obey God. We can’t obey what we don’t know.
- 6) Satan scatters lies. It’s good to know the Bible well enough to detect lies. If we can’t detect lies, we’re susceptible to them. Not a good thing.
- 7) Psalm 1 speaks of every believer meditating on God’s law day and night, not just teachers. It’s the expected experience. So every believer should be in their Bible frequently, not just the teacher.
- 8) So I would say the Christian who isn’t called to teach doesn’t have to have a firm grasp on sublapsarianism versus infralapsarianism, the nature of the millennium (I was unsettled for over 10 years), exactly how Jesus is fully God and fully man, how God works all things for good without committing sin or robbing us of responsibility. It’s good to consider these things because God chose to reveal them to us. But mastery of the nitty-gritty details isn’t necessary for living a faithful Christian life.
- 9) But the Christian does need to know their Bible well enough to function as a Christian in their world. We’re helped when we understand God, understand ourselves, understand the way of growth, understand the way of wisdom, etc.

A final caution...

- 10) Doctrine isn’t for argumentation purposes. Doctrine isn’t intended to stop at the mind. Doctrinal knowledge is given to shape practice. **Knowledge leads to practice in Paul’s prayer!**

Conclusion

Have affection for gospel partners. See your brothers and sisters as partners.

Pray for gospel partners. Pray the things Paul prayed for your brothers and sisters.