

Philippians: Joy in All Circumstances

Three Transforming Outcomes of God's Perfecting Work, Philippians 1:9-11

Philippians 1:9-10 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;

Two requests with three outcomes...

I pray that your love may abound

True love is not static. It is not an emotion that comes and goes. True love is a dynamic process; it grows and increases.

Paul will expound on this in the following chapters, but humble service of others and mutual care for the sake of the unity of the church is a vital aspect of this love.

Impossible to say we follow Jesus and yet fail to imitate Jesus in the way that we serve one another.

I pray that your love...may be in real knowledge and discernment

True love is also anchored in knowledge and discernment. There is a risk of love without knowledge and knowledge without love.

I Corinthians 13:2 If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

Knowledge AND discernment. Applied knowledge. A knowledge that actually leads to greater wisdom.

Three outcomes

So that, three words to consider: Excellent, Sincere, Blameless

Excellent (or "What is Best") In Philippians 1:10, the phrase translated as "approve the things that are excellent" (NASB) or "discern what is best" (NIV) refers to the ability to test and choose what is superior or most valuable.

The underlying Greek term here is derived from the verb *diapherō*, which means "to carry through," "to differ," or "to excel."

Excellent or “What is best”: This word implies not just distinguishing between good and bad, but discerning even the degrees of goodness—identifying what stands out as superior among various options.

It carries a practical significance for early Christians: in a diverse, often hostile cultural environment, believers were encouraged to focus on what truly matters for spiritual growth, rather than superficial or lesser goods, preparing them for Christ's return.

Sincere (or "Pure") The word "sincere" (or "pure" in some translations) comes from the Greek which literally means "judged by sunlight" or "pure when examined."

It breaks down etymologically from helios (sun) and krinō (to judge or examine). The idea is of something tested in bright light to reveal any impurities—unmixed, genuine, and without adulteration.

It was often applied to materials like pottery, marble sculptures, or even honey: for instance, dishonest artisans might fill cracks in marble with wax to hide flaws, but holding the item up to the sun would melt the wax and expose the deception.

A "sincere" piece was one without such hidden defects—pure and transparent.

In a biblical context, this translates to moral and spiritual purity: Christians are to live lives free of hidden sins or hypocrisy, fully transparent before God and others, ensuring they are unblemished as they await the day of Christ.

Blameless is a compound word from a negative prefix meaning "without" and to strike against, stumble, or offend. It conveys being "without stumbling"—not causing offense to others, not stumbling in one's own path, and thus irrepensible or inoffensive in conduct.

In Greek and Jewish cultural contexts, this term drew from ideas of smooth paths or unobstructed journeys, metaphorically applied to ethical living.

It could refer to avoiding social or legal scandals, while in Jewish-Christian thought, it emphasized not hindering one's relationship with God or causing others to falter in faith.

For Paul, this blamelessness is eschatological—oriented toward being faultless on the day of Christ's judgment—encouraging a life of integrity that withstands scrutiny from both human and divine perspectives.

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“until the day of Christ”

Philippians 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

What is this “day of Christ”?

Philippians 2:9-11 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow...and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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Paul now pictures that day for these believers...the Day of Christ

Philippians 1:11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.