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## PICTURE OF A TRUE CHRIST-FOLLOWER (Philippians 1:7-11)

*In his book **Strength to Love**, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “On the one hand, we proudly profess certain sublime and noble principles, but on the other hand, we sadly practice the very antithesis of these principles. How often are our lives characterized by a high blood pressure of creeds and an anemia of deeds! We talk eloquently about our commitment to the principles of Christianity, and yet our lives are saturated with the practices of paganism.”*

*Our world is full of people who confess to be Christians. The message of the gospel, though, is that one who has accepted Christ's gift of salvation and forgiveness will demonstrate that reality in how he lives. As Paul begins this letter to the church in Philippi, he shares a few desires he has for them to give solid evidence of their faith in God.*

*May it be said of you and me that not only did we spend our lives submitting to Jesus, seeking to worship him rightly, but also that we loved him and others through our actions and obedience.*

### PARTNERING ASSOCIATION

*Philippians 1:7 –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.*

Looking at the first six verses, we're reminded of why Paul had such a warm place in his heart for the Philippians. They had been strong partners with him and of his ministry from the earliest days of his in that region. They responded quickly to the truth of the gospel as he shared it with them, then grew in their understanding of the Christian faith. As a part of that growth, they supported Paul with their prayers and finances as he moved on from there to other locations. This likeminded fellowship encouraged Paul greatly and he makes it clear in this opening paragraph that this church is a key partner in his work.

Verse seven is clear that one of Paul's challenges in the ministry was imprisonment, which is interesting because this letter is so full of expressions of joy. Paul even says here that the Philippians were “partakers with me of grace.” He sees his difficulties as positive experiences to grow deeper in his understanding of God and his ways. The Philippian believers were sharing in that same grace, supporting him during times of hardship.

The true believer in Jesus will not be an island. We are not independent contractors, but dependent on the Lord and on each other. That's why the church is referred to as a body – connected and interdependent, hurting and compensating as a whole when one member is injured. If your attitude is one of spiritual isolation, learn from this principle that we cannot make it on our own. Fellowship with other believers is crucial to our spiritual well-being. Even Paul, as great a man as he was, depended on this mutual encouragement from other Christians.

### PROPER AFFECTION

*Philippians 1:8, 9 – 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,*

You can tell a great deal about someone based on what they love. What do they spend their time praising and thinking about? What directs their priorities and occupies their affections? Among other things, Paul loved people and we should as well. But he also had a special desire for his friends in Philippi – that *they* would experience an ever-growing love. But what was this love to be focused on?

Usually when we refer to love, we think of an emotional response to a person, thing or activity. But Paul's aim for this church was based on something else. Their love should be grounded in accurate knowledge and the ability to discern what is right morally. Christians love

what is morally sound and upright. One cannot claim to be a true follower of Jesus while showing indifference to what is right and seeking to love it.

The apostle John would write several years later about the things a believer should avoid loving, which would also be based on knowledge and discernment.

*1 John 2:15, 16 – Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh, and the desires of the eyes and pride of life – is not from the Father but is from the world.*

If one is not loving the things of the world, then he will love seeing that God gets the glory that is due him. The 18<sup>th</sup>-century Puritan theologian and preacher, Jonathan Edwards put it this way:

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GOD MADE THE WORLD THAT HE MIGHT COMMUNICATE, AND THE CREATURE RECEIVE, HIS GLORY; AND THAT IT MIGHT BE RECEIVED BOTH BY THE MIND AND HEART. HE THAT TESTIFIES HIS IDEA OF GOD'S GLORY DOESN'T GLORIFY GOD SO MUCH AS HE THAT TESTIFIES ALSO HIS APPROBATION OF IT AND HIS DELIGHT IN IT.

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## **PURE AUTHENTICITY**

*Philippians 1:10, 11 – so that you may approve what it 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.*

If we grow in loving the right things, exercising knowledge and discernment, then we will not have to fake outwardly living a life that God is pleased with. You and I know that a person can claim one thing, yet live in direct opposition to that claim.

Why does Paul make such a point to be knowledgeable and discerning? **So that** we can approve (examine, test) the things around us to realize whether they are excellent or not. Then after developing that crucial muscle, we will be pure, not just be able to tell what is pure.

Paul uses an illustration here that would have been

common to the readers of that day. When he speaks of examining something to determine its purity and authenticity, he uses a term that had a very practical meaning. In those days of the first century, it was common for pottery to develop cracks when being formed and fired. A deceptive shop would sometimes fill cracks with wax which would be hard to detect when painted or glazed. If one would hold the pottery up to the light of the sun, though, the impurity could easily be seen. Honest dealers sometimes used a stamp that said *sine cera* (“without wax”) to advertise the better quality of their product.

The illustration here is clear. Our verbal claims should be backed up by how we live. Our actions need to prove that we are what we say we are. When held up to scrutiny and examined, there should be no doubt that we are authentic in our outward and inward being. This is a crucial evidence that one has accepted Christ as Savior and is being changed by the gospel of the cross.

Sadly (especially in the world of politics), people claim to have faith all the time when their lives, priorities, decisions, relationships, even their policies run in the opposite direction of God's ways revealed in his Word. There really is no proof that this person has a true desire for God because they hate the idea of being accountable to him and, by extension, having to obey him.

Paul, when writing to the Romans, repeated this important principle. Unless it is taken seriously and there is a desire to live it out, we have to carefully examine ourselves to know if we are truly a Christ-follower.

*Romans 12:2 – Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

## **BIBLE STUDY**

Legislators and Staff (During Session)  
Thursdays, 8:00 a.m.  
Room 153 House Office Building