

Philippians 2 - Love and Prejudice

1. Immature love

As Paul wrote about the unity of the believers in Philippi, he emphasized the importance of a mature love that was different than the popular understanding of love that the world has. For example, there are any number of songs that celebrate love. It has been estimated that more than 100 million love songs have been recorded. One analysis noted that a key difference about music from the late 1960s and the early 2000s is that "love" songs have become raunchier. Other sermons and lessons have covered the fact that love is a decision and not an emotion. Love is *selfless* and desires the best for others. In Philippians 1:9-11, which we will look at today, Paul developed a more thoughtful sense of love as he addressed the intellectual aspect of love.

Many Christians know that Jesus taught us (John 13:35) that we will be known by the love that we have for one another.

John 13:35 By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

People in general have an idea that Christianity is supposed to be a religion of love because God is love.

1John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

These are some important Scriptures about love. However, without examination, we can misapply them and end up with merely a warm and fuzzy kind of love that feels good but is practically useless. This understanding may be a starting point, but we must be careful not to grasp this principle emotionally. If we stop there we end up with an immature, naive, and potentially

dangerous understanding of love. There *are* many things that we should feel obligated to do that are consistent with love. But, the immature and naive have been manipulated emotionally with an argument that *also* starts off, "If you loved me you would..." This can be true in churches where some people come in and accuse the church of not being loving because their demands are not being met. Some children think they have it figured out that they can manipulate a parent by accusing them of not loving them because they are not giving in to their demands. Whole sub-classes of culture will try to prey on society by appealing to a sense of guilt for being unloving toward them.

2. Super love

Paul started off his reference to love in a way that indicates that there is way more to love than what the world may imagine. He used four ways to emphasize the importance of the right kind of love. It's kind of like the time I went out to dinner after a hot day's work and drank down my first glass of water and told the waiter, keep it coming...bring me a whole pitcher of water!

Phil 1:9 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

First, Paul used one of Greek words translated *abound*, that speaks of a *superabundance*. He did not merely want them to be *bountiful* in their love, but to go *beyond* bountiful. Next he filled up his glass again by using the word *yet*. This indicates that beyond being superabundant, there is more. Then he said *bring it on, bring me a whole pitcher of love* by saying he wanted them to not only be superabundant, not only to, thirdly, have *yet more* love, but, fourthly, more *and more* love. The world might have come up with more than 100 million love songs and look like it has a

lock on abundance, but Paul wants us to be superabundant in the right *kind* of love, which he covered next.

3. The thoughtful nature of love

Looking again at Phil 1:9, Paul identified two essential *intellectual* aspects of Christian love. The first is a love that is based on *knowledge*. If I were to express my love for Nancy and said, "I really love you," and she responded with, "Really?" I could answer her back according to abundance and say, "Yes, I really, really, really, really, *really* love you." It would be better to answer her according to knowledge and say, quoting Elizabeth Barret Browning,

How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.

I love thee to the depth and breadth and height

My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight

For the ends of being and ideal grace.¹

And if I put some thought into it to try to continue poetically,

I love you for your steadfast faith in Christ

Resisting the lure of easy retreat.

I love you for your love of knowing God
Filling your heart and mind with His Word.

I love you for the love of God in your heart

Reaching the spirit and heart of the lost.

I love you for your love of the family of Christ

Nurturing brothers and sisters in faith.

I am humbled to know that best of all

You share your love with me.

As Peter expressed it,

1Pet 3:7 Likewise, ye husbands,
dwell with *them* according to

¹From Elizabeth Barret Browning, *Sonnet 43, How Do I Love Thee*

knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

As we read the Scripture, the knowledge that Paul has in mind is just a little bit different than merely having or manipulating information. The usual word for knowledge in Greek is *gnosis* which speaks of information we can achieve by observation and experience. When it comes to knowledge, and not just guessing about God, Paul used a different form of the word *epi-gnosis* and refers to knowledge that is *beyond* (*epi* - upon) ordinary knowing of information. There are many things that we can know about the world either by observation or imagination, but knowing God and His character requires a knowledge that is beyond experience. For example, I not only know who Nancy is and what she has done, but I *really* know *her* because she has shared her heart with me. The love that we are able to have starts first with knowing God because He has revealed Himself through His Word and then shared His heart with those who have trusted Him as their Savior.

John 17:1-26 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee:

2As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

3And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.

4I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

5And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

6I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me

out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.

7Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.

8For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

9I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.

10And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.

11And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*.

...

16They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

...

21That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

22And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

23I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

24Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

25O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have

known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare *it*: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

With the foundation of a superabundance of love based upon knowing God through faith unto salvation, we are ready to look at the next intellectual aspect of love, judgment, which gives us the title for this message, *Love and Prejudice*.

Judgment could be understood in two ways: either as perception, or as a conclusion that we come to about a person. The word for *judgment*, in Phil 1:9, refers to *perception*. The trouble that we have is that our perceptions sometimes become our conclusions about a person. We all start off with prejudice about people we meet. People only think of prejudice in its negative form. But, there is a neutral way to understand prejudice when we *pre-judge* them, or have certain assumptions, or judgments, as a starting point to try to understand them. You want to be as considerate as possible and so you try to get a read on them according to your previous experience with those who look like they might be similar to them. For instance, if someone finds out that I am of Polish extraction they might try to sympathize with me about how the Russians and Germans marched back and forth across Poland on their way to war. They might assume that I have a penchant for gwumpkies, kapusta, and pierogies. I do enjoy gwumpkies, kapusta, and pierogies, but I am actually an American and the only thing I care about Germany, Poland, and Russia is that they can learn about the genius of America as it was founded. I not only like gwumpkies, pierogies, and kapusta, but as an American I like hot dogs, fried chicken, panziti, shawarma, souvlaki, lasagna, pen patat, arroz con pollo, and lo mein, although I do draw the line at balut.

The problem comes when your early

assumptions about people are also your conclusions about people. We fail to move on from our initial perceptions to find out more about someone. This is what we usually mean when we refer to being prejudiced. The most common one is that people assume someone's skin tone or the shape of their eyes are indicators of their psychological, moral, or intellectual character.

I believe that the most important thing to think about any person is their need for Christ no matter what they look like or where they came from. We need to look into his eyes and think about how we are going to help him discover God and His purpose for him in life.

Prejudice can be a funny thing. We might not only be unfavorably disposed toward a person, it can work in the opposite way. We can be favorably disposed towards someone who we should actually be wary of. Sometimes we should be wary of someone's character until we have come to know them. We might think someone is better than they are. We might assume that someone knows more than they do. This can be equally problematic as assuming the worst about someone. This is where Paul called for people to have knowledge based on good judgment, which he described in the Philippians 1:10.

Jas 2:1-9 My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord* of glory, with respect of persons.

2For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;

3And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:

4Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?

5Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of

this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?
6But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?

7Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?

8If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

9But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

4. The action of love

Phil 1:10 That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

Paul referred to *approving things that are excellent*. To *approve* something means to *prove it out*. Paul told the Thessalonians

1Thess 5:21 Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.

Having realistic perceptions requires testing our assumptions out. As we deal with people and interact with them, we learn what their strengths and weaknesses are and are able to deal with them more thoughtfully. He then used the word *sincere* which speaks of being *sun tested*. John described being and walking in the revealing light of Christ.

John 3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

21But he that doeth truth cometh

to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

1John 1:5-10 This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

6If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

8If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

9If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

10If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

In the course of our thoughtful love of people, there is an action on *our* heart. Paul described how *we* should love without offense. This does not refer simply to how we see others, but also how we *respond* to others. Being without offense refers to not *stumbling* in sin. It is different than the word *trespass* or *sin* which is more deliberate. Any time we jump to conclusions and take offense at what we are so sure people mean it is an issue of pre-judging. Being in the habit of walking in the light and giving thoughtful consideration will help us to avoid the stumbling stones that trip us up in our Christian walk.

5. The result of love

This section of Philippians 1 ends with the blessed result of such thoughtful love.

Phil 1:11 Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are

by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

Every believer wants a fruitful Christian life. To have fruit requires spiritual husbandry (the science of raising crops). There is a whole science to pruning trees. One type of branch to be especially wary of is called a water shoot. It springs out straight from an existing branch and saps the tree of nutrients. Branch shoots that cross each other, run parallel to each other, hang down, turn inward, or rise straight up are just a minuscule sample of concerns that diminish being fruitful. These branches need to be cut and pruned away. The Christian life is no different. Avoiding people, harboring grudges, assuming the worst about people, withholding the Gospel, having shallow relationships, not encouraging people to join in, are all unloving attitudes that sap you of the power of Godly love in your life. The thoughtful, loving Christian will reap righteousness. It is not merely the contemplative Christian who spends hours in prayer and study, but the Christian who goes out and applies his spirituality to life, which is very much part of what it means to love others.

Rom 13:8-10 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

9For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

10Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law.

God is glorified not just when we say "Hallelujah" and "Praise God." His glory is also greatly manifest when we share His love with those whose lives we touch.

Luke 6:27-31 But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.

29And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also.

30Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again.

31And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

Luke 6:31 is known as the Golden Rule. Other religions have statements that are *similar* to the Golden Rule, but only Christianity teaches that we need to be *proactive*, not just leaving people alone or not being bad. We are to reach out in love, understand them, share God's Word with them, and bring them into our family of faith.

1. Immature love - John 13:35, 1John 4:16
2. Super love - Phil 1:9
3. The thoughtful nature of love - 1Pet 3:7, John 17:1-26, Jas 2:1-9
4. The action of love - Phil 1:10, 1Thess 5:21, John 3:19-21, 1John 1:5-10
5. The result of love - Phil 1:11, Rom 13:8-10, Luke 6:27-31