

# Philippians

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May 20, 2020



## Philippians 1:6-11

### Vs. 6

- This verse strikes at the very heart of Paul's view of the Christian life. The Greek words used here for "began" and "perfect/complete" are two words that are impossible to reproduce in modern English, because they are the technical words used for the beginning and ending of Greek ritual sacrifice. The word for "perfect/complete" means both, for when the ritual was properly completed it was the perfect sacrifice. The whole feeling of the sentence is that of sacrifice. This is a theme of Paul's as we see in Romans 12:1 where we are to present our bodies as a "living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." We are to view our lives as being sacrificed to God, given over freely to Him so that our old life is slain and we are raised up, new creatures in Christ, perfect and complete. For we **are** to be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48).
- But let us not miss the other major point here: I cannot complete my own life. Secular wisdom over the past 300 years has taught us that WE are in charge of own lives, and we fiercely defend that proposition...even when we intuitively know its not true. Even on the face of it, I had nothing to do with being born, neither the where or when, or who my parents were to be. Nor is it likely that I shall have any say in how my life ends. Typically, a person dies suddenly as a young person or by the ravages of old age and the older you get the less control you have. I saw a bumper sticker once that read: "Be nice to your children. They're the ones who'll choose your nursing home!" But Paul's meaning here goes deeper than the obvious limits of human control: we cannot be complete without God. The Rich Fool in Luke 12 believes that if he only had more barns to hold all his stuff, he

would be complete...but there's a reason why the story is called The Rich Fool – more stuff never makes you complete. What fallen, sinful, corrupt human beings cannot seem to admit is that the singular source for what we need to be complete lies beyond our reach. What we need to be complete lies with our Creator, for only He fully knows His creation, and He is willing to freely give us what we need, but it is only through Christ, the divine conduit between God and ourselves, that God can give us what we need to be complete/perfect.

Vs. 7

- Paul justifies his holding the Philippians in such high regard and with such high hope because they have proven over years their willingness to partner with him. In this he sees their spiritual growth, otherwise they would have given up and lost hope long before.
- There is a hint here that Paul's trial before the emperor has begun. The word here for "defense" is *apologia*, a legal term for a court defense. Paul has always maintained since his arrest in Jerusalem that he was in chains and on trial for the cause of Christ. The charges may be legal and political, but for Paul his trial is all about "the confirmation of the Gospel" and confirmation here is another legal term meaning "a plea supported by convincing evidence".
- So because Paul feels as if the Philippians were fully present with him in spirit if not in body, he credits them with being full partners in the grace, the spiritual benefits of this defense of the Gospel

Vs. 8

- This is a fun verse to translate into English. Literally it says, "I love you with all the bowels, all the inward parts, of Christ Jesus." The Hebrews believed to lower abdomen was the source of human emotion. The Greeks looked further north and believed emotion to spring from the upper intestines, the heart, the liver, and the lungs. To put it in our own language, "I long for you with the very heart of Christ Jesus." The love that Paul feels for his

Philippian family is the very love of Christ Himself. “Love one another as I love you” is what Jesus said in John 13:34.

Vss. 9-11

- When Christians talk about love, it is never as sentimental thing. Christian love always runs deep. Here Paul is speaking of the connection between love and knowledge, real knowledge. Love, even on a surface level drives knowledge. If you love a subject, it will drive you to know more about the subject. If you love an author or an actor, it will drive you to know more about them. But Paul is speaking here of something deeper. In scripture, the language that speaks of the intimacy between husband and wife is that they **know** each other. Close, lifelong friends can be said to truly know each other. Yet Paul here is pushing even deeper. Just as he loves the Philippians with the love of Christ, he desires for them to have the love of Christ that gives divine knowledge and discernment. How often did Christ in the gospels look upon people and know them and discern their hearts and minds. In Mark 12, when the Pharisees and Herod’s people were trying to trap Jesus on the question of taxes, we are told in vs. 15 that Jesus “knowing their hypocrisy” asked why they were testing Him. Paul desires that the Philippians have that level of “knowledge and discernment” so that they will know truth when they see it and hear it in the hearts and minds of those they meet.
- “that you may approve the things that are excellent” literally means “that you may test the things that differ.” God desires you have the knowledge and wisdom that comes from the love of Christ that allows you to know not just good from evil, but helps you know what is merely good as opposed to what is best. Greek writers used the term to differentiate between what is essential versus what is secondary.
- This way we are “sincere and blameless”, that is “pure”. The Greeks themselves were not really sure where the word came from, but it can mean “tested in the sunshine”. Market places in the ancient world, and still today in many parts of the eastern Mediterranean, were close and dark,

and often it was hard to judge pottery, or glassware, or cloth, so you had to get the item out in the sun. Often pottery or statuary that was cheaply made would have the stone or clay filled in with wax and painted over. In the sun the wax would melt, the painted wax would peel, showing the imperfections. So through the love of Christ we can pass the test of sunlight. Paul urged the Ephesians to “walk as children of Light” (Eph. 5:8): tested, shown to be true and pure, blameless. The word may also mean to “whirl round and round as a sieve” so all impurities are removed.

- Therefore, both in ourselves and in others, through the love of Christ Jesus we are able to know and discern not just good and evil, but know how to discern good from great, and to remove evil from our own lives so that we can walk/live in the light for all to see.
- “until the day of Christ Jesus”: Paul says this twice in this short passage, in vs. 6 and again in vs. 11. He knows his time on earth may be short, but he still held to the firm belief that Christ’s return was immanent and that the Philippians, indeed the whole Church, would only have to hold on a short while before Christ returned, even if he did not live to see that day.
- Until that time, the living Christ fills the church with “the fruit of righteousness”. It is not enough to live faultless, that is merely “being good”, rather we are to live with excellence, bearing fruit, **BEING** righteous. But righteousness is not something we produce, it is that **COMPLETENESS** that comes to us through the divine conduit, Jesus Christ. “We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). As God’s love flows down to us through Christ, we can produce the “fruit of righteousness”. And because it comes to us from God, we have no righteousness of our own to speak of. It is all to the “glory and praise of God.”