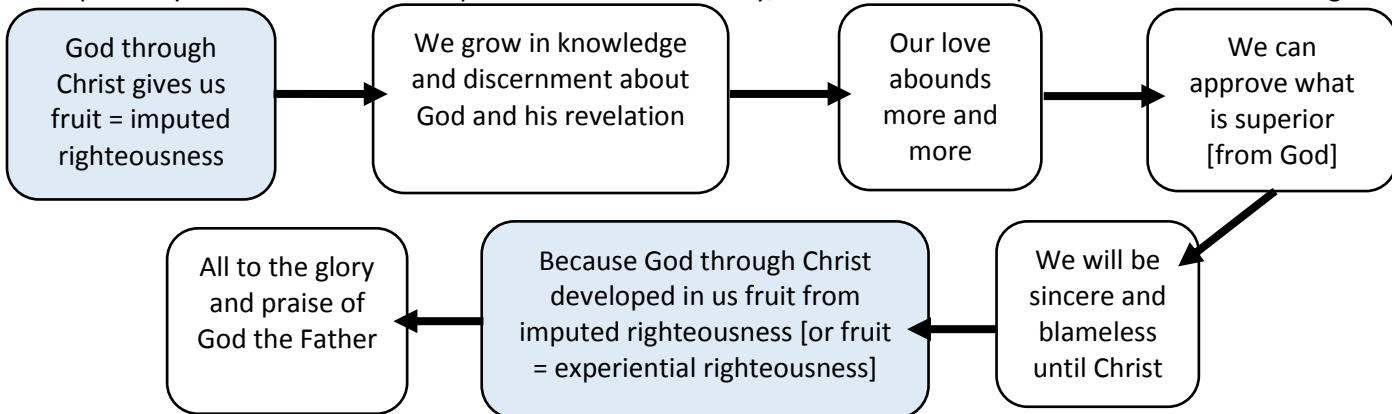


# Reflections on Philippians 1.9-11

by Will Groben

## Day 1

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.1-11. Recall what Paul is discussing: he is affirming their past partnership with him in the gospel and gospel mission of Christ, and trusting that God will continue that work in them. In 1.9-11, Paul prays that they will be spiritually mature enough to know what doctrines and practices are godly, which would result in their continued alliance with him. These verses are one complex sentence in Greek [as in most English Bibles], and Paul does not always organize his thoughts in linear order. For example, notice the love he speaks about is grounded in knowledge and insight, so if we were creating a flow chart, knowledge and insight would come first. It is not perfectly clear if all Paul's concepts are connected linearly, but we could attempt a chart like the following.



Don't worry for the moment about there being two boxes for righteousness, we will discuss that later. When we are saved [when God accounts or imparts to us the righteousness of Christ], we are made alive spiritually for the first time, which makes it possible for us to truly know God and accurately discern spiritual things. Also at that time, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us, providing insight, empowerment, and spiritual growth.

**Reflect:** The word for knowledge here is the Greek ἐπίγνωσις [eh-PEE-gno-sis]. In Paul's usage, it referred to knowledge of God through Christ in the sense that we come to know him, know about him, and thus become like him. How can we grow in knowledge about God's character, relational knowledge of God, and knowledge about his way of life for us? If you are not sure, talk with others about this. Insight or discernment is the Greek word αἴσθησις [ICE-thay-sis], which meant your capacity to understand, especially morally. As you gain knowledge of God, you will come to discern his voice, the prompting of the Holy Spirit more clearly, and you will come to know God's character and thus better be able to judge situations yourself. Think of experiences in which you felt led by the Spirit on important decisions, warned or convicted by him about sin, or affirmed and instructed to counter negative voices in your head. Pray to grow in this.

## Day 2

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.9-11. Paul prayed for their love increasingly to abound. As we come to know God better relationally, he changes our heart, our character. As we learn more about God's character and we grow spiritually, we reflect his character better and better. One result is that we begin to love like God loves: sacrificially, unconditionally, with depths that would have astounded us before we came to faith. Paul hopes his readers will become transformed by God's love such that they have God's kind of love for each other, and for him too.

**Reflect:** Notice this love is based on spiritual knowledge and discernment. Love is not an emotion in the Bible. You might feel something, but the important thing is that you choose to love and you act on that decision. How hard is it for you to continue loving someone when they hurt you or are living badly? Sometimes even in church, we avoid the people we do not like, but Paul said he loved *all* the Philippians, even though some had doubted him and turned away. Pray for God to show you people you should love, even though they seem unlovable. How willing are you to sacrifice for others, to give up your pride, to give up some money or things, to give up some time or activities, if that is what is necessary to help them and show love? Later in this letter, Paul says to put the cares of others ahead of your own. Pray for God to show you whether you could improve in showing sacrificial love at the church.

### **Day 3**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.9-11; try a different translation each day. As we grow in spiritual knowledge and discernment, and as we grow in love to reflect God's character, we can "approve that which is superior," meaning we can determine what is godly and embrace that, while jettisoning what is not. The Philippians needed to determine which was the correct gospel and correct teaching, what was correct thinking about their relationship with God, and what was the correct Christian lifestyle. Paul prayed that they would succeed in this, because he knew that would result in their continued partnership with him in the gospel mission of Christ.

**Reflect:** There are many cults calling themselves Christian today, offering false gospels. There are more traditional churches which are moving away from biblical truth. We are surrounded by both pagans and fellow believers who choose to live unbiblical lifestyles. We too need to approve what is superior, from God, and adopt that for our way of thinking and our way of life. Previously in this series, you should have reflected on your ability to defend and confirm the gospel of Christ and other key Christian doctrines; you should take steps to protect yourself by strengthening your knowledge in these areas. You also should have reflected on your participation in the gospel mission through evangelism and global missions support; you should work to improve in that way. Think overall about your time management, your financial decisions. Even if you are not overtly sinning by doing something bad, how much of your time and money goes to frivolous things and activities? Would Jesus consider some of this a waste of time and money? If so, should you change to better serve the cause of Christ and reflect Christ in your lifestyle? Pray whether you might invest more of your time and money into doing God's work.

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### **Day 4**

**Learn:** Prayerfully read Philippians 1.9-11. If we can grow to approve what is superior, godly, for ourselves, then we can learn to live sincere and blameless lives, as we wait for our king to return. As we experience spiritual growth, the progressive sanctification process, we become less corrupt and more righteous in character, and that leads us to live more righteously, to have "experiential righteousness." This would be fruit that comes through Christ in that it began with our salvation through Christ's sacrifice and it grew through further sanctifying grace that is only available to the believer in Christ. As the Holy Spirit renews our mind and thus transforms our character and thus brings life change, all this is to the glory of God, because it all is the result of his grace.

**Reflect:** None of us can be perfect, but we should grow more and more righteous as the years go by, right up until the end when we die or Christ returns. How can you tell whether you are growing more righteous? How can you measure this? If you are not sure, ask one of your pastor-elders or your small group leader! Pray for God to show you one area of your life in which you could grow to be more righteous, more reflective of his character. Give trusted believers permission to provide encouragement and accountability. A small group is good for that!

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### **Day 5**

**Learn:** Prayerfully take a look at that chart in Day 1. This whole process begins with salvation. In that moment, God grants us "imputed righteousness." This is the righteousness of Christ, which God accounts or imputes to us, because we have trusted in Christ to pay the penalty for our sins. This imputed righteousness counters the "imputed sin" [guilt] we all have as descendants of Adam. With his complicated sentence structure [and Greek word order meaning something different than it does in English], it is possible that Paul meant "imputed righteousness" in 1.11, that the whole process he mentioned was because of the fruit of imputed righteousness [salvation]. Or Paul might have meant experiential righteousness, summing up the experience of being sincere and blameless. It is always worthwhile to work at figuring out what the biblical author meant, but in this case, both imputed righteousness and experiential righteousness fit what Paul was saying [which is why we included both on the chart].

**Reflect:** If everyone suffers under imputed sin [guilt], but some of us are set free by an act of grace, totally unmerited, unearned, through the gift of imputed righteousness; and those of us set free are then by grace grown to be more experientially righteous; do any of us have reason to boast? Read Ephesians 2.8-10. If we are saved and progressively sanctified as a gift of grace – based on Christ's righteousness and faithfulness, not our own – could we ever lose this gift by not being good enough? If you are not sure, read John 10.27-29; Romans 8.30; 1 John 2.1-2. Pray thanks for the grace evident in you and your loved ones. Pray for those you know who are still unsaved.