

Pray it Again, Saul

The Recorded Prayers of the Apostle Paul

Text

Philippians 1:9-11

It's being called "gray divorce." It is the phenomenon of older couples, who have been married for decades, getting divorced.

According to the *NY Times* article I read,

In 2014, people age 50 and above were twice as likely to go through a divorce than in 1990, according to the National Center for Family and Marriage Research at Bowling Green State University in Ohio. For those over 65, the increase was even higher. At the same time, divorce rates have plateaued or dropped among other age groups.

Let's leave it to the sociologists to suggest all the various reasons why familiar couples divorce. One thing is certain: They have fallen out of love with each other.

Love is an incredibly important characteristic of biblical Christianity. God is love, and He so loved the lost world of mankind that He sent His only begotten Son to die on the Cross for our sins.

We are individually drawn to Jesus by His everlasting love. Robert Gromacki writes, "when a sinner believes unto salvation, the love of God is shed in his or her heart by the initial infilling and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He or she not only loves God, but also loves the children of God in whom the same

Savior abides. He or she is taught by God to love his or her brothers and sisters, and this fact alone gives an assurance of personal salvation."

Then Gromacki adds: "this implanted seed of love, however, must grow. It must be cultivated and manifested daily. It must not be limited or contained."

Our love for the Lord can go gray, in a sense. We don't divorce Him, but we can leave our first love for Him, and for His children.

Paul prayed for the Philippians that their love would abound:

Php 1:9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

Php 1:10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

Php 1:11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

We're looking at some of the prayers of the apostle Paul, in chronological order. This is the second prayer of his we find in his letter to the Philippians.

Php 1:9 And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,

He's talking about God's supernatural love, shed in our hearts by Him. If you got saved later in life, you probably had a profound rush of Holy Spirit love shed in your heart.

Do you remember that scene in *It's a Wonderful Life*, when George realizes he has a second chance? He runs through town, shouting, "Hello, Bedford Falls! Merry Christmas! Merry

Christmas, movie house! Merry Christmas, Emporium! Merry Christmas, you wonderful old Building and Loan! Hey! Merry Christmas, Mr. Potter!"

You feel like that when you get saved - only a million times more.

Fast forward a few decades of walking with Jesus, and a lot of believers become the Church Curmudgeon.

(Church Curmudgeon began tweeting on November 19th, 2010 and is still going strong today, with over 70,000 followers. It's mostly harmless poking-fun at Christians).

But a lot of believers really are curmudgeons - bad tempered and surly.

Paul wanted love to "abound," or we could say, overflow. Steppenwolf sang, "Get your motor runnin.'" In our case, we need to get our love flowin.'

It should flow, overflowing, between the banks of "knowledge" and "discernment."

The "knowledge" Paul had in mind was knowledge of God's truth, and His will, gained from His Word. In Colossians we're told to be "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (1:9).

We know an awful lot, because God has revealed so much to us.

- We know folks are headed to Hell unless they believe in Jesus. That knowledge directs our love to overflow by telling them about the Lord; and by supporting those ministers and ministries that preach the Gospel.

- We know believers are being perfected day-by-day, transformed into the image of Jesus. That knowledge directs our love to overflow by telling them to press forward, to serve, to endure suffering, to not lose heart. It directs us to have fellowship with others, serving and being served in the household of faith.

The greatest knowledge we are exposed to is, of course, the Person and work of Jesus. By Him God is revealed to us - God Who is love. As we follow Jesus in His ministry, and hear His words, we see love incarnate.

We also need "discernment." What did Paul mean? I think he tells us in verse ten.

Php 1:10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,

There might be a slight inference here that our love can get too lax. In the name of love, we can begin to accept all manner of compromise, especially as the surrounding culture continues to deteriorate.

This was certainly the case in Corinth. That church was compromising with the world in terrible ways; it wasn't loving.

Probably sooner than later, every Christian must decide whether or not you will attend a same-sex wedding. It might be a family member; it might be a friend; it might be a colleague.

Some of you have already confronted this, and you made a decision one way or the other. Don't think of my comments as judging you, one way or the other. It's not an easy decision.

I bring it up here because the over-riding argument people use to say that you not only can, but should attend such a ceremony, is that it reveals the love of God. Contrariwise, to refuse, even politely, is said to be unloving.

Let me say that our church - and all churches - should welcome *anyone* and *everyone* to attend, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. For too long, homosexuality was held-up in churches as an almost unpardonable sin. Believers who were themselves involved in sexual sins like pornography and fornication and adultery, condemned not just homosexuality, but in many cases the people themselves. It was a terrible hypocrisy.

We also hold to the clear teaching of God's Word. In the case of sexual orientation, we stand with the Word of God on traditional marriage between one biological man and one biological woman for as long as they both shall live.

So, should I, or shouldn't I, attend a same-sex ceremony. For me, the answer is, "No." I believe that my attendance can only give an approval to the union.

True, if I refuse it may seem unloving. I admit, it is difficult to see how *not* going to the ceremony demonstrates love and care for the persons.

But in this case, I know it's not unloving, so I can't be held hostage by that accusation.

You're free to disagree with me - so long as you are exercising discernment. I won't argue with you.

This is not a full-blown teaching on the subject of same-sex unions. It's an example of overflowing love needing to be guided by discernment.

Notice Paul does say, "that you approve what is excellent." If I do something, and say it's because of God's love, I need to be able to show how it approved what He says is excellent. What I do and say, and don't do and say, can show approval or disapproval. Sometimes disapproval is the more loving choice in the long run.

Discernment directs my love so that I remain "pure and blameless for the day of Christ." If it weren't for discernment, I might rush in to a lot of strange situations, thinking I was sharing the love of Jesus, when in fact I was being soiled by the world.

Php 1:11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

You are declared righteous by God when you believe in Jesus Christ. As you walk with Him, you are able to bring forth fruit - spiritual fruit - that springs from your salvation.

Don't think, however, that you produce fruit from great discipline or preparation or any such thing. It "comes through Jesus Christ." He is compared to a vine; we are the branches. Fruit is the natural result of abiding in the Lord.

Ultimately everything God has intended for us, and that He will complete in us, is to His glory and praise.