

[the constant gardener]

:: philippians 1.8-11 ::

Spiritual fruit. It is the topic of much of the New Testament, not to mention Jesus' teachings. In fact, in John chapter 15, He said:

John 15.4 - Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

Our lives are about production and growth. But who produces the fruit? Is it us or is it God? Do we have to go out and make the fruit on our own, or can we just sit back and wait for it to appear by itself?

Neither is true. The Christian life is all about producing the fruits of righteousness and Godliness, which comes directly and only from the Lord Himself. However, He has given us a responsibility to tend the garden of our lives so that fruit is cultivated, protected and used for His glory. We are instrumental in allowing God to accomplish His good pleasure in and through our lives.

That's what we're finding in Paul's letter to the Philippians. He wants us to know that God plans a life of *full* production for His people. Now, he's not talking about wealth or prestige or power. No, instead he's talking about what really matters. A life lived *for* heaven, as we continue on our journey *toward* heaven. And Paul explains to us that we have been filled with all sorts of heavenly assets so that we can live a life that glorifies and praises God. The Lord has planted spiritual seeds in us that He is growing and maturing so that He can bring out fruit and fullness and we get to partner with Him in that work.

But what we also discover is that we have other seeds planted in our hearts. Seeds of sin. Seeds of godlessness. Seeds of selfish ambition. Seeds of worldliness. We're full of them. As Christians we have to deal with the fact that on this side of eternity, there are Godly seeds and fleshly seeds taking root in our hearts. What we want is to be full of God's fruit and clear of the production of sin.

But how do we get there?

We get some wonderful, practical insights in our next verses in chapter 1.

Beginning in verse 8 we read:

Philippians 1.8-11 - 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, so that you may approve what is 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.

Paul very plainly reminds us that one day we are going to stand before God in eternity. Our lives are going to be evaluated and reviewed and judged. That which is Godly will survive and will be

rewarded. That which is *not* Godly will be burned away. Those things will be unrewarded, because they did *not* glorify God or accomplish His plan.

And Paul looks at the Philippians, and by extension you and I, and says, "I want you to be **FULL** on that day. I want you to be purified and glorified before the Lord." And on our way to eternity, God graciously gives us opportunity and equipping and empowering to do things that will glorify Him and invest in His Kingdom.

If that's what we want, then we have a few applications this morning.

First, in verse 8, we read:

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,

This section starts out talking about our love lives. Not our romantic love lives, but our agape love. Paul was being very personal and candid in this letter. He was expressing his Biblical, Godly, compassionate love that he had for the Philippians.

Right now, it's popular in certain circles for Christian men to take on this sort of overly-macho, non-emotional, cage-fighter persona. Certain pastors and teachers act like it's wrong for a man to be tender or emotional or kind because it's not 'manly.'

You'll see interviews or hear sermons about how wrong it is for a man to sing that he *loves* Jesus because that isn't how a man's man is supposed to talk.

That sort of teaching simply isn't biblical. Not everyone has to be a burly, muscle man. Not everyone has to be a weepy, emo kid. God fashioned each of us to be a little bit different. Some guys will be more emotional and some will be less. And that's ok. We don't all have to adopt the same personality.

But if we disdain or are offended by a heart of compassion, a heart of affection, a heart of tenderness, then we are going to have some problems. Because, right here, Paul says, "I have affection for you. Godly affection, and my prayer is that your **love** would abound more and more." Not their toughness. Not their manliness. But their love. Speaking from the original language, his prayer was that their love (and our love) would superabound in an excessive amount.

Because, when God looks down and sees love in our lives, compassion in our lives, mercy in our lives, grace in our lives, He is pleased.

John 13.34-35 - A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

So, primarily, if we want to get to the point where we will stand before the Lord full and complete in His grace, the best start is in our love for others. We need to develop a Godly, Biblical love for the people around us. Again, this is agape love, which is unconditional. The love that Christ has for us. A love that is willing to die for an enemy. To reject that idea is to reject a foundational teaching of Jesus

Christ. So, if we think it isn't manly to have affectionate, compassionate love, we can take it up with Him.

But how do we cultivate agape love in the spiritual garden of our hearts? How do we partner with God to grow it in our lives?

We cultivate love by asking for it. We cultivate love by choosing to look at people the way God sees them, whether they be unbelievers who are on their way to an eternity in hell, or whether they be other Christians, who are our brothers and sisters, who the Lord loves and cares about.

God **IS** love. The fruit of the Spirit is love. The reason we are saved is love. Therefore, love is the primary cultivation that we should be working toward in our lives and it's something we can all work on today, simply by asking for it.

Next, Paul spoke to them about *knowledge* and *discernment*.

Knowledge meaning the precise, correct understanding of Divine things. Throughout this book we're finding that how we interact with people is very important, but it isn't *more* important than **what** we believe. The two go hand in hand, paired together inseparably.

Quick example. In God's word you are commanded to love your wife. You can't Biblically love your wife if you don't have the correct understanding of what Godly love is. And vice-versa. If you have the kind of understanding that God wants you to have, then the result must be action and sacrifice and application. So Paul calls us to a Godly life, full of love, but we must have a proper knowledge of those things. Precise and correct knowledge is essential to our lives and to spiritual growth.

James 1.22 - But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

Precise knowledge which results in action.

Third, Paul mentioned discernment. Perhaps your version says *judgment*. This has two parts and two applications for us.

First, we're called to discernment to know what to do in a given situation. God has provided us His Holy Spirit for guidance and direction. Therefore, in any situation, the Spirit can give us heavenly discernment to know what to do, what to say, how to respond. Sometimes the Spirit directs us to walk by a person, sometimes He directs us to stop and engage that person. That's how we are to go about life, walking by faith but with a confidence in our leading.

The second application of this trait is to know what is **right**. Discernment in weighing out what we're hearing or reading and determining whether it is really Scriptural or not. Just being a good Berean. Being a man who is willing to pause and think critically before simply accepting things that we're told are Godly.

Paul's desire for the Christian was that our discernment would grow and abound in our lives so that we will more and more know what to do and what is true.

The way we cultivate a fullness of discernment is, again, to ask for it. To pray for wisdom and direction. But also, we must meet that desire with choice and action. We must choose to make decisions only after we've heard from God. We should be familiar with the Scriptures so that we can measure out the things we're hearing. That's how we partner with God in bringing forth discernment in our lives.

Paul then goes on in verse 10 and says:

Philippians 1.10-11 - ...so that you may approve what is 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.

We are meant to praise God, to glorify God, to be a testimony for God, but if we refuse to garden in our spiritual lives then the level of production is going to be drastically limited. And so, along the way in our text, Paul is giving us these ways to cultivate spiritual fruit, to cultivate Godly love, to cultivate prayer and grace in our lives and much more as we'll see.

But we're also told here that we should be **purifying** our lives, that we might be blameless. We do that by hearing from the Spirit, who will give us discernment, by hearing from the Bible, which gives us God's revelation and measure, and rejecting those things which are not Godly. We're told that we can be sure that we're not limiting fruit production by removing sin from our hearts. Paul says that he wants us to stand before the Lord on that day pure and blameless, therefore we should pursue those things in our lives.

If we don't care about being holy or being pure or being blameless in this life, then there's a problem. Because what we do in this life matters. This life is going to be evaluated by Jesus Christ and there are only 2 categories that things can fall into. Something that lasts and is rewarded, or something that burns away as waste.

James 1.21 - So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

When Kelly and I first moved into our house we had a pretty sizable garden. One of the things we learned was that a lot of gardening is about protecting what's planted. Keeping pests from destroying new fruit, clearing out weeds which suck off the water and keep the plant from being healthy, those sorts of things. If we wanted to have a tomato, it took a lot more than dropping a seed and wishful thinking.

You and I have everything we need to be Spirit-filled, Spirit-led, dynamic, fruitful Christians. And that *IS* what Jesus wants for us as well. He wants us to superabound more and more and more. He *wants* to reward. He *wants* to complete. He *wants* to fill.

The question is this: Is today going to burn away before the Lord or is it going to be rewarded? Will this 16th of June be worthwhile or wasted? Because the Spirit of God is within us to guide and direct and empower us to bring forth Godly fruit. And we have been given the ability to remove sin and develop those activities and characteristics that will be rewarded one day. Not only that, but we are given the tools necessary to help people come to heaven with us. But if we jettison love and ignore the Spirit and believe anything we hear, then a lot of weeds are going to grow in our garden, the spiritual man isn't going to be healthy and a lot of fruit is going to be wasted. So, let's hit the garden.