

Tested, True and Triumphant

To The Citizens of Heaven, Part 7

Philippians 1:10-11

One of the challenges in life is the variety of decision that you have to make. Some decisions are easy . . . some are difficult.

Some decisions are incidental . . . some are life changing.

Life involves making a lot of decisions about right and wrong, and God has given us a conscience in order to help us make those decisions – to accurately read the context and determine the right conduct.

The problem is, the heart – the seat of conscience – is deceitful and desperately wicked (*Jeremiah 17:9*) and it doesn't always give accurate readings.

It's like a thermometer in an urban area.

I have read that if you put an outdoor thermometer on the back of your house – perhaps just outside your back door on your deck; if your house sits near a major road or expressway; or if there's a drive-way, a parking lot or another building nearby – or even if your house is painted dark or made of brick, your thermometer can give readings 5 or 10 degrees above the actual temperature.

These elements absorb and reflect heat.

To get absolutely correct temperature readings, the National Weather Service has strict guidelines . . . Tom Skilling, a chief meteorologist, writes in the Chicago Tribune, "A thermometer (or its sensor) should be located over grass in a white, ventilated shelter 4–6 feet off the ground, at least 100 feet from all paved surfaces and at least 500 feet from any building."

Get this – he writes – unless you meet these guidelines, you cannot trust the reading on your thermometer.

In the same way, this author concluded, you cannot necessarily trust your conscience or your heart to give accurate readings either.¹

I would agree.

Not only is it virtually impossible to get the right temperature reading in the city – surrounded by buildings and people and pavement – it's also virtually impossible to get the right character and conduct reading because of influences around you . . . including your own heart and mind.

We need a spiritual thermometer that will tell us the truth – and it needs to be located somewhere else . . . somewhere beyond ourselves and our culture that can't be distorted by outside influences.

That's exactly how we find the Apostle Paul praying, as we move through his prayer list in Philippians chapter 1.

He wants us to get the right reading for life; he doesn't want us conformed to the definitions of our world, he wants us conforming to the definitions of life, revealed in Holy Scripture.

We've already found in Paul's prayer list:

- A prayer for our passion – our agape love to overflow its banks;
- A prayer request for our progress – for our love to be defined, not by what we think love is, or how we want to express love, but love according to knowledge – Biblical knowledge;

- Then we saw Paul praying for our practice in life to be guarded and guided by godly discernment.

Passion – Progress – and Practice.

1. Now Paul continues in *verse 10* to pray for our partiality.

Let me show you what I mean . . . let's back up to *verse 9* and get a running start; ***And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10, so that you may approve that which is excellent.***

In other words, I want believers to become partial to that which is excellent.

The verb Paul uses for approving is *dokimazein* (δοκιμαζειν) which means to examine or to test.ⁱⁱ

- It can refer to testing something to determine if it's true or false;
- This word can also refer to evaluating the difference between things that are good and things that are better – in other words, testing something so that you not only determine what's good, but what might be better – or what might be best.
- The word can also refer to determining the difference between things that matter and things that don't matter.ⁱⁱⁱ

So where's the standard by which we judge all these things.

Thermometer readings we get from people and culture around us might be 5-10 degrees off . . . or worse.

- Who's to say what kind of activity or habit or practice is good, but there's something better;
- who's to say what belief is true and what belief is wrong;
- who's to say what really matters in life and what doesn't matter?

It's helpful to know that this word was used for a number of different kinds of testing – which helps us understand a little better Paul's intent.

In classical Greek writings, this verb “to test or to approve” was used in testing money to determine whether or not it was counterfeit.

Counterfeit money was around hundreds of years before Paul wrote this letter. Counterfeiters would coat copper coins with a thin coating of silver and pass them off as more valuable, solid silver coins.

The word was also used in the political world for testing and approving a political candidate – to question them to determine their actual stance on issues. A good practice to this day – as we prepare to head to the voting booths.

The word even shows up in the writings of Herodotus (500 B.C.) who referred to testing oxen so see if they were fit for sacrifice.^{iv}

In fact, the Lord used this verb in *Luke 14* for a man who excused himself so that he could go back home and test some oxen on the family farm.

He wanted to make sure they pulled in the harness together . . .

We use the same word when we go to the auto dealer and we pick out a car we like; but before we would ever think of signing our name on the contract – what do we do? We take it for a test drive.

We got to test it.

We do that same thing in a clothing store – we try it on – we test it first to see if it fits. Well, women do that more that we do, right?

Have you ever thought about the fact that women never buy their blouses from stores where they are already folded up and packaged in plastic wrapping? No they're on hangars to be tried on.

Not men. In fact, the more expensive the men's shop, the less likely a man will even be able to try on the shirt. It's packaged – even has a paper ribbon around it; lots of pins sticking it all together.

Doesn't matter . . . we look at the shirt through the package . . . looks like it's got some buttons . . . probably has two sleeves . . . you can see the collar . . . we're good . . . it'll probably fit.

Paul is actually praying that we'll assume anything. He even wrote to the Thessalonians, ***“He that is spiritual tests everything.” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)***

Put everything to the test . . . make sure it's excellent – it's not only good – but better – and even best – for your heart and your walk and your life, and your mind.

Test it to make sure it's true instead of false – and you don't get this from reading the polls – or watching your friends – they might be giving off false readings.

The thermometer is inspired scripture.

Paul moves on in his list to give us some help in determining what exactly is excellent.

He not only prays that we learn to develop partiality,

2. He also prays that we develop purity.

Notice *verse 10*. ***So that you may approve through testing what is best/excellent – notice – and so be pure.***

In other words, testing and choosing the best things will always lead you toward purity, away from impurity.

The word Paul uses is found only here and in 2 Peter 3:1 where Peter writes that he's attempting to stir up their minds toward sincerity.

The word (εἰλικρινής) derives from the Greek words for sunlight and judgment.^v

I love this – Paul says, “Take it out and judge it by the light.”

Paul prays, I want you to live lives that can be judged by the light of day and found to be pure.

The believer is light-tested.

Dwight Pentecost, now with the Lord, wrote on this word in the text, “Whenever I read this passage, I think back to my childhood to the days when my mother would make jelly to provide for us through the winter months. I never knew Mother to make a batch of jelly without taking one of the newly filled and sealed jars out to the back porch to hold it up to the sun, to examine the jelly in the sunlight. If it was clear and unclouded, she would approve; if the sunlight revealed cloudiness, she would be disappointed because [there was something in the recipe not just right] – it hadn't passed the test of being examined in the sunlight.”^{vi}

- David wrote, ***“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet – a light unto my pathway.”*** (*Psalm 119:105*);
- ***The unfolding of Your word gives light*** (*Psalm 119:130*)
- Paul refers to the gospel as ***the glorious light of Christ*** (*2 Corinthians 4:4*).
- ***We've been called out of darkness into a marvelous light*** (*1 Peter 2:9*).

Listen, the test of your character is not determined by a thermometer planted in the middle of your city – your campus – your office; the readings are probably distorted.

The purity of your life is not measured by what people approve or what your student body approves or your neighborhood or board room, but what the Word of God and the God of this Word approves.^{vii}

Paul is writing, “I'm praying for you – because I know so much of what you thought was right, is

wrong – and so much of what you were taught was wrong, is actually right.”

I'm praying for you to hold your attitudes, and your actions and your habits and your desires up to the light of Jesus Christ – the light of the world . . .

Hold your life up to the light of God's word!
Now what do you see?

Is it cloudy?

Compromising?

Corrupt?

Or clear?

There's another aspect to the context of this word in Paul's day.

This is especially pointed to the believer to avoid hypocrisy of any form.

In Paul's generation, one of the largest industries in their world was the pottery industry. And pottery varied in quality just as cars and computers and clothing do today. The cheapest pottery was thick and solid and didn't require much skill to make. Archaeologists have unearthed truckloads of it. I have some in my office – thick, orange pottery.

But the finest pottery was thin and delicate. It had a clear color and brought a high price. Fine pottery was fragile both before and after firing and it would often crack in the oven.

Dishonest dealers would take a clear pearly wax and fill in the cracks and crevices where it would blend in with the color of the pottery. The cracks were nearly undetectable in the shops, especially when they were glazed or painted. But the wax was immediately detectable when the pottery was held up to the light of the sun.

Latin was the official language of the empire and honest merchants would stamp on the bottom of their pottery the Latin caption, sine cera – which gives us our word sincere. It meant, without wax.^{viii}

With this in mind, Paul isn't saying that the Christian's purity should be flawless. That you shouldn't have any cracks.

The truth is, we're all broken . . . in this vocabulary, we're all cracked pots.

Paul is reinforcing honesty and transparency – don't cover up and try to pass yourself off as fine china . . . it's okay to be an inexpensive thick, cracked, jar. Just don't try to pass off yourself as anything but . . .

Paul might very well be implying that genuine Christianity isn't about your image – or your public appearance.

Be real – be sincere – be honest – one author wrote, the gospel doesn't pour very well from a Christian whose life is a sham.^{ix}

In fact, Paul writes to the Corinthians – *“We have this treasure – this gospel treasure – in jars of clay (that’s who we are – cheap jars of clay – why? to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not us. (2 Corinthians 4:7).*

Paul says, “I’m praying that you will develop a sense of partiality for what’s best – and become genuine and pure in the process.

Thirdly, he prays for:

3. Their Prudence

Notice *verse 10. So that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless...*

One British New Testament scholar wrote that purity referred to the inner person and blamelessness refers to the outer behavior.^x

The word (απροσκοπος) means “without stumbling”.^{xi}

Be prudent in your behavior. Prudence simply means cautious discretion. It means, being careful.

Paul is praying earnestly and fervently for these believers to live pure, morally transparent lives, free from stumbling because they are careful in their Christian walk.^{xii}

The older you get physically, the more careful you have to be when and where you walk. I have this theory that our automatic pilot begins to wear out as we grow older. I used to be able to drive for miles – have absolutely no recollection of where I was for how I kept the car in the middle of the lane, but everything was fine. Now that I’m older, if I daydream, I’ll change lanes. If I look to my left I’ll drift to my right. I have to be all the more careful.

That’s true spiritually as well. The older you become in the Lord, the more careful you need to be . . . the battles don’t grow easier; they grow more deceptive and dangerous with time.

Now there’s some issue here as to whether or not Paul is using this word in an active sense, or passive sense.

In other words, Paul is either telling us to walk with caution so that *we* don’t stumble – that’s passive – or he might actually be telling us to walk in such a way that we don’t cause someone *else* to stumble – that’s the active sense.^{xiii}

Either understanding works, simply because if you walk in such a prudent and spiritually careful

manner, you are not only less likely to stumble, but those who are following you, or imitating you, won’t be led to stumble either.

Paul lived this way . . . he didn’t just live for himself – but for those around him to be benefited and encouraged and protected by his example.

One of the marks of maturity in the life of any believer is that they want to be a stepping stone and not a stumbling block.^{xiv}

You see, here are two questions I think Paul is suggesting for prudent believers:

- If someone else imitated you, would you be alarmed?
- If Jesus Christ watched you, would you be ashamed?

That’s Paul’s progression in this prayer list as he adds this closing thought at the end of *verse 10. We are to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*

We’ll call this the fourth prayer request – a prayer for:

4. Their Perspective – notice again, *“and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.*

This is Paul’s second reference to the day of Jesus Christ – that day when the believer will be rewarded for his service and is assigned his place as he prepares to return with Christ to establish the Kingdom.

The church is described as wearing white linen, riding to earth with Christ to establish His Kingdom on earth for 1,000 years.

Jesus doesn’t come for His church, in Revelation 19:14. He’s returning to earth with His church – they are already with Him – clothed in white linen and arriving back to earth with Christ in victory.

Paul effectively says, “Live for that day.” Live for everything that day means – a day you will be evaluated (I Corinthians 5) – that day you will stand before Him – that day when you will give an account for the 1 talent He gave you – or the 5 talents or the 10 talents – that day when you will be rewarded and assigned to your regal post in His Kingdom.

Live with anticipation for that day.

Everything you’re doing for the glory and pleasure of Christ on earth is only a prelude to the privilege of serving Him for His glory and His pleasure during the coming Kingdom.

Paul is trying to elevate our perspective.

For Paul the day of Christ wasn't some kind of prophetic obsession, it was a way of thinking . . . and deciding . . . and living.^{xv}

So Paul effectively says to them and us – I am *praying* that in light of Christ's *appearing*, you will be *pursuing* what is best.

With that then, the next prayer request naturally and logically follows:

He prays for:

5. Their Productivity

I'm praying – *verse 11 that you will be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.*

A good reminder that anything good that we do for Christ is Christ *working in us to do of His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).*

The cause of fruit in our lives is the work of Christ. The agency at work *internally* is the Spirit of Christ and as we submit to Him we display *externally* the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of righteousness is simply the fruit of a right relationship with God.^{xvi}

The Apostle Paul dares to assume that you and I are not only forgiven, we ought to be fruitful.

And by the way, fruit doesn't happen because that limb tried really hard to pop out some fruit come summer. Fruit hangs from that limb in July because that limb is connected to the tree.

Let me change the analogy to drive this point a little further.

When Lawrence of Arabia was in Paris after World War I, he took some of his Middle eastern friends who had never seen the sights and sounds of a modern world. They say all the amazing sights of Paris. But what captured their attention and gripped their imagination were the faucets in their bathrooms. They couldn't get enough of simply turning the faucet on and off – amazed at how the water spilled into the sink at the turn of the handle.

When it came time to pack up and leave, Lawrence found these men in their bathroom, trying to detach the faucets. They still hadn't figured it out and they pleaded, "It's so dry in Arabia, we need these faucets so we can get all the water we need."

Lawrence had to stop them and try to explain that the effectiveness of the faucets were not in themselves, but to the pipes and the reservoir to which they were connected.^{xvii}

A faucet by itself will never produce water.

Jesus Christ said, *You believe in me and out of you will flow rivers of living water (John 7:38).*

Jesus said to His disciples, *You abide in me – you stay connected to my strength and my vitality and my power – and you will bear much fruit for without me you can do nothing (John 15:5).*

Otherwise, you're just a faucet packed in somebody's bag; you're just a limb lying on the ground.

You see here, Paul isn't just praying that we'll bear fruit, he's praying that we will understand we must stay in fellowship and submission and communion with the One who produces fruit.

With that, Paul now concludes his introductory comments to these citizens of Heaven, stationed temporarily in the city of Philippi, belonging to and serving through God's embassy, the local church.

He is diligently praying for:

- Their passion – in love
- Their progress – in knowledge
- Their practice – in discernment
- Their partiality – toward excellence
- Their purity – with integrity
- Their prudence – with carefulness
- Their perspective – with anticipation
- Their productivity – in fruitful living

And now, it makes perfect sense for Paul to end his prayer list by adding a final prayer request for the choicest fruit of all.

Finally, Paul prays for:

6. Their priority – in thanksgiving

He ends this paragraph, *11. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – notice – to the glory and praise of God.*

Paul is saying to these citizens of Heaven, "I want you to have a bushel basket filled with spiritual fruit – and let me tell you what the choicest fruit is.

It is the fruit that ultimately gives *glory and praise to God.*

The writer of Hebrews picks up the same approach as Paul when he writes, *Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name (Hebrews 13:15).*

I remember a demonstration of this from one of my children – when he was only around 5 years old. He was actually terribly ill at the time; it was

obvious to Marsha and me that he'd come down – yet again – with another case of strep throat. Marsha stayed home with the other kids and I took him to the doctor's office.

Not exactly my favorite place in the world – especially at the end of a long day already.

Our little boy was feeling terribly, as you can imagine – his face and cheeks red with fever . . . not much energy in him at all.

We eventually made it into the examination room – after bribing the receptionist – and the room, of course, was made of tile and everything echoed.

When the nurse came in, I told her our best guess was strep – yet again – and she said, "I'll need to take a swab of the back of his throat. She said, "Open up," – he opened wide and she put a long cotton tipped probe back into his mouth. He gagged . . . I gagged too, of course.

She left and he was sitting on the examination table completely wiped out . . . he just looked so pitiful. I said, "Hey, son . . . come over and sit on my lap." He did . . . we just sat there – for different reasons entirely – completely wiped out. Then he said, "Hey Dad, let's sing."

That's not what I normally do in Doctor's offices.

I said, "What do you want to sing?"

He said, "Let's sing that chorus, Hallelujah."

I wanted to say, "For what – this is a doctor's office . . . you've got a fever – this is no time for Hallelujah."

I said, "Okay..." and we sang "Hallelujah" and it echoes all around that examination room. The nurse hadn't shut our door completely and I actually had the very unspiritual thought run through my mind as to whether or not I could somehow shut that door without disturbing the music.

I mean, he wasn't holding back either . . . he was singing with total abandon.

We finished . . . silence again . . . and then he said, "Hey, Dad, let's sing another stanza." I wanted to say, "You've obviously got a fever, it's messing your mind up." Instead I said, "Well, what stanza do you want to sing?" And he said, "Let's sing, 'I love Jesus, Hallelujah.'"

And we did.

Listen, I'm not going to be rewarded for any of that . . . but he will be. He was offering the fruit of praise and I came limping along.

If we were following the thermometer readings in that doctor's office, we would never naturally conclude, "This is the perfect place for singing Hallelujah".

The thermometer readings in the city of Philippi would have read the same. This was one of the Roman Empire's strongholds.

If Paul was reading the settings from where he sat in Rome, chained to guards and under house arrest, he would never have ended his prayer list in this manner – with a note of triumphant joy.

But he did . . . and in so doing, modeled for us this kind of

- passion
- and progress
- and practice
- and partiality
- and purity
- and prudence
- and perspective
- and productivity
- and this priority of the choicest fruit

And he sang, to the *glory and praise of God*.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 10/19/2014 by Stephen Davey.

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- i Adapted from Craig Brian Larson, editor of PreachingToday.com; source: "Ask Tom Why," Chicago Tribune (8-4-07), Sect. 4, p. 10
- ii Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, The Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 545
- iii Adapted from The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 12, Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, editors (Zondervan, 2006), p. 195
- iv James Montgomery Boice, Philippians (Baker, 2001), p. 46
- v Rienecker/Rogers, p. 545
- vi J. Dwight Pentecost, The Joy of Living: A Study of Philippians (Lamplight Books, 1973), p. 26
- vii Ibid
- viii Boice, p. 47
- ix Ibid
- x J.A. Motyer, The Message of Philippians (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 53
- xi Rienecker/Rogers, p. 545
- xii Adapted from Boice, p. 43
- xiii Expositor's, p. 196
- xiv Adapted from Sam Gordon, An Odyssey of Joy: the Message of Philippians (Ambassador, 2004), p. 40
- xv Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel (Crossway, 2007), p. 43
- xvi Life Application Bible Commentary, Philippians, Colossians & Philemon; editors: Grant Osborne & Philip W. Comfort (Tyndale, 1995), p. 30
- xvii Gordon, p. 41