

'A CHURCH TO WIN YOUR HEART'

Philippians 1:1-11

Dr. John Crocker. Crossroads Church, Albert Lea, MN.
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The British are apt to come up with dandy expressions, some of them ruthlessly honest. Like, *The more I see of some people, the more I like my dog.*'

I admit there have been times when I wished I had a dog to prefer to some people.

In my case those people have always been church people. The nicest people I have ever met have been in church, so have the nastiest.

Ray Stedman quoted some lines of Christian doggerel about this: *'To live above with saints we love, Oh that will be glory! To live below with saints we know, now that's a different story.*

That's not a nice thing to say about a church, but it is the tragic truth about too many churches. There is precious little that is attractive about them, and it's puzzling to think that anyone would want to belong to them.

- There was even a church like that in the New Testament. Paul told the members of the Corinthian Church that their meetings did more harm than good (1 Corinthians 11:17). Then, amazingly, later in the letter he said, *You are the body of Christ.*' (12:27)

In the Book of Revelation we read what our Lord Jesus Christ said about the church at Sardis, *'You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.'* (3:1) And his assessment of the Church in Laodicea was no better, *'You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked.'* (3:17)

Thankfully, churches like that are more the exception than the rule in the New Testament.

None were perfect or close to perfect, but some were lovely and healthy.

- Outstanding among these was the church at Philippi.

I introduced the city and the church to you last Sunday.

The Apostle Paul was extremely fond of the Church in Philippi, Macedonia. It had a special place in his heart.

- In the opening section of his letter to the Church, Paul tells about this church that had captivated his heart.

¹ Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

² Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³ I thank my God every time I remember you.

⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy

⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,

⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

⁷ It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.

⁸ God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

⁹ And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,

¹⁰ so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,

¹¹ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ-- to the glory and praise of God.

The Apostle called the Christians "saints." It's the Greek word *hagioi*, which means literally, "holy ones."

This was the standard New Testament word for Christians—those who by trusting Christ as Savior are holy, or set free from captivity to the corrupt way of life in the surrounding fallen society. A healthy church is a community of authentic Christians like that.

In a healthy church it's safe to get close to one another. You don't have to be afraid of being hurt by each other.

Why? You are different from people who are still trapped in a corrupt culture.

Let's take a look at some qualities of a good church, drawn from Paul's remarks in Philippians 1:1-11

I. A LIVING CHURCH (1:3-6)

Is there such a thing as a dead church?

Yes, and unfortunately they are not rare.

They're just religious institutions where people go through dreary rituals that are comfortably familiar to them.

I have seen several lists that contrast living churches with dead churches:

Living churches are always open to change; dead churches don't have to change

Living churches have lots of noisy children and youth; dead churches are quiet and solemn
Living churches are constantly planning for the future; dead churches worship their past
Living churches have so many new people that you don't know everyone's name; in dead churches everybody has known everybody's name for years
Living churches are always in need of more money; dead churches don't know what to do with the money they have.

In living churches the worship is a celebration; in dead churches it's an endurance.
Living churches dream great dreams of what God will do; dead churches relive nightmares.
A living church is a church that brings joy to your soul whenever you think about it.

1:3 *I thank my God every time I remember you.*

1:4 *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy*

The Apostle Paul said: *'I'm praying for you in Philippi. In fact, just thinking about you all makes me joyful.'*

- Christians often talk about agonizing in prayer; prevailing in prayer; praying with urgency.

What about praying with joy? Don't miss out on it!

I pray for seven churches specifically every morning, and for many of the people in them by name.

One of those churches is Crossroads, and I pray with joy.

- Paul shows us specific characteristics of a living church that should stir up joy in our souls.

In a church that is alive the Christians are active in the work of the gospel (5)

Also, God is obviously active in the life of the church and in the lives of the Christians (6)

The church at Philippi aroused joy in the Apostle Paul because the members were active in the gospel of Christ (5) and because God was clearly at work in the lives of the members (6).

1:4 *In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy*

1:5 *because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now,*

What thrilled Paul's soul was the Philippian Church's commitment to the gospel—the good news of forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ our Savior.

- When Paul and his entourage set out to take the gospel of Christ to people in Asia Minor and in Europe, the Christians in Philippi, Macedonia became his partners.

In fact, at the time of this letter they had been partners for more than ten years.

Paul writes in 4:15, 16, *Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only; for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid again and again when I was in need.'*

The Philippians had also helped Paul when he was in Corinth. *'And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed.'* 2 Corinthians 11:9.

- It was this intense commitment to the gospel by the Philippians that won Paul's heart.

It wasn't a light, frothy sentimentality.

- A church committed to the good news of Jesus Christ gets involved in something that can be quite messy.

You're reaching out in love to people whose lives are not squeaky-clean and antiseptic.

Some of you have heard of D.L. Moody. The famous Moody Bible Institute in Chicago is named after him.

God used Moody as an outstanding evangelist—like the Apostle Paul in many respects—in the US and in Britain. Moody was not a cultured young man accustomed to the social niceties of a polite religious society. There was something about him that made upright and uptight Christians feel uncomfortable.

Kimball, the man who led Moody to faith in Christ told that when Moody applied for membership in the Mt. Vernon Church in Boston, they didn't want to admit him. One member of the committee said they had seldom met anyone who was more unlikely to be a good church member and useful worker than Moody.

He had a hard time expressing himself with the religious jargon the seasoned church leaders thought necessary. One deacon actually told Moody, *Young man, you can serve the Lord better by keeping quiet.'*

The committee ordered that Moody go through a whole year of special preparation before he was finally admitted to membership. We can all thank God that Moody didn't keep quiet. Through his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ hundreds of thousands of people came to faith in Christ.

True Christian work is all about reaching people with the life-changing truth of Jesus Christ.

The Philippian Church was Paul's partner in reaching out to spiritually lost people.

- That is why Crossroads Church exists—to reach people for Jesus Christ and to grow them to be like Jesus Christ.

Our Church Chairman, Dr. Dean Leonard, is coming now to speak to us about where Crossroads Church stands on this matter of making the gospel of Jesus Christ our priority.

- The Apostle Paul shows us that in a church that is alive God is at work changing people's lives.

God was at work in the Philippian Church.

1:6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*

Paul explained to the Corinthian Church that for Christians the old hopeless life has gone, the new has come.

Then he added, *'All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ'* (2 Corinthians 5:18).

- A living church is God's work zone.

Crossroads Church is God's work zone. God is doing amazing things among us.

A Sculptor was working in his studio, chipping away at a large block of marble. A young boy walking by peeked in the open door and watched the sculptor chiseling at the shapeless rock for a while. Then he lost interest and moved on. Many weeks later the boy walked by the studio again and looked in the door. The sculptor was just putting the finishing touches on a magnificent statue of a lion. The boy was speechless with wonder. Then he asked the sculptor, *How did you know there was a lion inside that rock?*

We are in God's studio. It's awesome to see what God can do with the ugly misshapen mess that becomes the lives of his children.

God is transforming something ugly into something beautiful for himself.

In a living church God does things we can't explain because we can't do them ourselves.

At Crossroads we expect this to be the norm.

Dr. Bob Cook said, *'If you can explain what's going on in your ministry, then God didn't do it.'*

II. A LOVING CHURCH (1:7-8)

1:7 *It is right for me to feel this way about all you, since I have you in my heart; for whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me.*

I'm glad Paul said, *'You're in my heart.'* and not *'You get on my nerves!'*

Christians are supposed to have strong feelings for each other.

Paul got rather soppy when he thought about the Philippian Church. But he wasn't embarrassed about it: *'I'm not at all embarrassed to have these feelings for you. It's right for me to feel this way about you.'*

1:8 *God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

Affection: splagxna is a Greek idiom for the seat of emotions.

The KJV renders this: *'... I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.'*

In polite society we don't discuss bowels except in the privacy of a physician's office. But the idiom is actually quite credible.

It's such an intense love that it registers like a knot in the pit of your stomach.

It's good if pastors and churches are in love with each other.

- When Paul had moved on from the church at Philippi, he left it spiritually alive and healthy.

Ginseng is a wonder herb, prized by Asians, especially the Korean Ginseng from Kanhwa Island. They covet it for its efficacy in preventing diseases, anti-aging, and general improvement of health. Cultivated ginseng takes from four to six years to reach maturity, and it depletes the soil so thoroughly that nothing will grow in that spot for at least ten years after the harvest. It extracts all the energy/nourishment from the soil. The Ginseng is rich in value, but it leaves the soil worthless.

Some pastors are ginseng pastors. They sap a church of its energy. When they move on, they leave behind a church so depleted that it takes years before another pastor can lead the church in a fruitful ministry.

Paul was not like that. He served the church. When he moved on the church was flourishing. The ground was fertile.

- A good, healthy church will be a loving church—love that binds you into a strong healthy Christian fellowship

III. A GROWING CHURCH (1:9-11)

This is church growth that is not measured in numbers.

1:9 *And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,*

1:10 *so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ,*

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

The Church at Philippi was a loving church.

Paul prayed that their love would grow, or abound.

- How do you know if your Christian love is growing?

Do you just have stronger feelings?

According to the Apostle Paul, love grows *'in knowledge and depth of insight.'*

Let me use a romantic analogy. A young man meets a young lady and is smitten by her. His emotions are stirred. They begin a relationship. That's the infancy of love. It's mostly feelings. They don't know enough about each other for it to be much more.

Then their relationship grows deeper and stronger. In due course they marry. The strong emotions are still there, but their relationship has grown deep, and they focus on things that really matter.

When Christian love grows and matures like that, then you are *'able to discern what is best'* and are *'pure and blameless'* (v. 10)

Then the fruit of righteousness that delights God our Father fills the church (11).

- In a growing church you will find that most of the people grasp the truth about what really matters most.

Mature Christians don't get side-tracked to major in trivial issues—things that don't produce what God is looking for in our lives and in our church.

Is there evidence of God at work in your life? Are there things you can't explain because only God could do them—or is everything predictable, and stagnant? Are you languishing spiritually? Will you ask God to make you part of what he wants to do in and through Crossroads?

Do you have a deep, strong love for your fellow-Christians in the church? Is it in your heart? That's the ideal. That's the way it was with Paul and the Philippians. It shouldn't be an exception.

Has your Christian life matured beyond the ups and downs of emotions? Have you grown to the point where you are not guided by feelings but by truth? Is your faith real—focused on what is best and matters most to God: a vital connection to Jesus Christ?