

WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM?
Partnership and Perception
Philippians 1:9-11

Two weeks ago, I warned you that you have a big problem, and that that problem is NOT the one that you thought was your biggest problem. **Your biggest problem is your GODLESS PERSPECTIVE on life; that is, your refusal to consider God's sovereign will and purpose as the central issue in all that you face.** We all have problems, but a proper biblical perspective on those problems will be the key to our ability to respond to them with wisdom and joy. **Today, we will go even deeper with that thought by examining HOW we FORM and PROTECT our godly perspective in life.** Before we unpack that, I want us to be reminded of why Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians in the first place. These people were truly remarkable, and their story should inspire and convict us.

The Sayger family has lived on the same corner at Holly Springs Road and Smith Road since 1996. One of the first people that we met here was a man named Robert Smart. You have heard me talk about him many times in messages over the years. Robert is a staple of community in my area. Everyone knows Robert Smart. His little gas station is an OASIS of resources in a remote location. If you need milk, he has milk. If you need a 5/8th bolt and some plumbing fixtures, he can fix you up. If you want a bologna sandwich and some fries, he will whip it up for you right away. That's Robert. And that has been Robert since the first day that I lived in his neighborhood. I like Robert. He is my friend. I preached his father's funeral. I don't want him to go anywhere. Once, he drove to meet me up at his store on Christmas Day because we had a pipe burst and there were no stores open anywhere that could supply what I needed on that cold December day. 15 years ago, we gave Robert a plaque that commemorated his 25th anniversary as a storeowner in Alphaba! For more than 40 years now, Robert has been at his store at 5 A.M. every day (except on Sundays) making biscuits and sausage for the day ahead. I take him for granted, but his LONG-TERM CONSISTENCY is the very thing that allows me to do so! Some of you may be thinking, "What does that have to do with the Philippians?" I'm glad you asked! The answer is: They were stayers!

There is something to STAYING PUT. We RELY on those people who make the hard decision NOT to walk away when things get tough or uncomfortable. You see, we need those who will BE THERE no matter what comes against us. That is true when it comes to store owners and gas stations, and when it comes to servants and soldiers in the Army of the Lord. **This was the essence of the story that you heard from brother Fenel last week in his testimony. He was born into poverty in Haiti, but was led to Christ by some missionaries, and then given a comfortable life and a wonderful education in America. But Fenel made the hard decision to leave America and go back to Haiti for the sake of reaching his own people that desperately needed to hear the Gospel. His decision is saving Haitian lives.** In the same way, Paul loved the people at the church in Philippi deeply because they were STAYERS when QUITTERS abounded. Paul chose NOT to take them for granted. Every thought of

them brought him great joy and filled him with deep gratitude. **Philippians 1:3-5 NLT**

3 Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. 4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, 5 for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.

The saints at Philippi were a rare breed. Did you catch what Paul said about them? They had been his PARTNERS in the spread of the Gospel ever since the first day that he had shared Christ with them. They never backed up and they never backed down. The word that Paul uses here is the word “Koinonia.” It is a Greek word that means “fellowship” coupled with “contribution.” This means that their fellowship with Paul was not just a warm fuzzy of affection toward him or that they loved to eat meals together (the Baptist way!). Koinonia means that they had a PARTNERSHIP with Paul in the ministry that included regular times of serving with him and giving to him. Paul KNEW that he could count on these Philippian believers at all times. He never had to wonder if they were going to be there for him when persecution grew intense or resources grew thin. Later on in this letter, he affirmed just how much they ministered to him when he was in need. **Philippians 4:15-16 NIV**

15 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; 16 for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.

These believers were not afraid to stay connected to Paul when he was in trouble with the law or when he was running short on supplies. **Philippians 1:7 ESV**

7 It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

They were a source of DIVINE PROVISION through PARTNERSHIP for Paul as he went about planting churches all over Asia Minor and Europe. They remained that way for many years, even when THEY began facing deprivation and persecution. **Because of their faith perspective, they were as passionate about the spread of the Gospel as was Paul!** This was what gave Paul such great joy in his own ministry, even when he was locked up in jail. This is what true partnership demands.

Partnership in ministry requires long-term consistency.

I would like to say just a word to all of us here today about this issue. I am deeply concerned about a trend that I see happening in American Christianity during these

days. This trend is infecting the church in dramatic ways, although it is very subtle in the manner that it is progressing. American Christians are making the decision to put the Gospel on the back burner of their lives. They are choosing to put Christian fellowship and ministry lower and lower on the priority scale of their schedules, and their spiritual lives are drying up and dying because of it. There is even a name for this new breed of Christians in America: the DONES. The Dones are people who USED to be very involved in ministry and community with their local churches, but at some point they simply decided that they would rather spend their time on the lake or on the ball field. They have decided that their spiritual life will do fine without regular fellowship with the church, and they eventually stop going to church altogether. They are done. **The “Dones” have LOST their faith perspective.** I have known a number of people at CHC that are now a part of the Dones. I grieve over their loss, and over our loss because of their departure. I also grieve at what their departure is screaming to their own children, and to the UNCHURCHED around us. Jesus said “the world will know us by our LOVE for one another.” If church is a waste of time, then the Gospel is not the most important, most glorious life-changing message in the whole world. It is just another option in the buffet line of choices for those who have nothing better to do.

Are you in danger of being DONE? Are you allowing your commitment to Christ and to his church to waver and wane? Are the spread of the Gospel and the salvation of the lost PRIMARY concerns in your life, or are they just on the periphery of your vision? I plead with you to REESTABLISH your GOD-GIVEN PERSPECTIVE in the faith. Take the time to get alone with God and REAFFIRM your fundamental commitment to God, his Word, and his Church for the sake of your own spiritual life and for the sake of the lost who stand in the balance. This is no small matter! In the final part of this message, I want to show you HOW to reestablish that perspective.

Paul knew that his ministry relationship with the Philippians was driven by their faith perspective, and that biblical worldview was a rare and precious thing! He knew that that perspective would have to be continually cultivated in their lives. This is why he began his letter by telling these saints how he had been praying for them in the context of their ministry partnership. **This prayer is very instructive for us because it reveals how we FORM and MAINTAIN a proper faith perspective on love when life gets confusing and hard.** Listen to the first part of his prayer. **Philippians 1:9-10 NIV**

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 for the day of Christ,

Everyone is talking about LOVE these days. We throw this word around quite carelessly as if love were a simple, easy thing. It is not. And not all love is equal. There is a love that is impure and blameworthy. We know this. **Godly Love requires discernment.** Paul wanted their love [**“Agape” = Unconditional love**] to

abound in KNOWLEDGE and in DEPTH OF INSIGHT so that they could DISCERN (or “APPROVE OF”) that which was absolutely the BEST! These terms teach us an enormous truth! The word **knowledge** is a technical term that means “**precise and correct knowledge.**” In this context, it is referring to knowledge of things ETHICAL and DIVINE. It is the ability to perceive what is TRUE AS GOD SEES IT. **Knowledge like this can only come by divine revelation. It is the TRUTH about God’s MORAL WILL. That moral will and the relational protection that it affords can only be acquired in the way that God has designed.**

Perspective in partnership is formed and protected by accurate spiritual perception.

I have really been wrestling with this concept. I know that all of us been given the physical SENSES that allow us to receive input about REALITY. We can see it, hear it, smell it, taste it, or feel it. Our senses are the means by which we PERCEIVE what is real. **Our perceptions receive the information that needs to be processed by our minds. Our PERSPECTIVE (or WORLDVIEW) has to do with how we FILTER and INTERPRET the information we receive through our senses. PERCEPTION FEEDS; PERSPECTIVE FILTERS. Got that?** It sounds perfect except for one thing: We are broken. **Our physical perceptions alone are not sharp enough to protect us from danger.** Think about the phrase, “Perception is the cruelest form of reality.” This phrase is used to describe the trouble that false perceptions can bring to relationships. It is so true. If I misinterpret something that my wife does, then I will respond to her based upon that misperception rather than upon what is actually true. I may mistake a look on her face as anger when in fact she was reacting to the unpleasant taste of a breath mint that she had just eaten! We need protection against misperception! We need DEPTH of insight. This term (“**depth of insight**”) that Paul uses in Philippians is the Greek word “**Aisthesis,**” which means “**PERCEPTION by the senses AND the intellect.**” It goes deeper than appearances. It has been defined as “**MORAL DISCERNMENT in ethical matters.**” It is the ability to know the MORAL REALITY of a thing. Paul instructed them to guard the moral foundation of their love by using wise, godly discernment. **This means that our relationships must not be simply driven by FEELINGS, but by keen SPIRITUAL SENSES.**

We were created in the image of God in 3 dimensions (Physical, Intellectual, and Spiritual), and we must process life on all three levels. This means that we must learn to take advantage of the SPIRITUAL SENSES that God has given to us for our guidance and protection. This is why Jesus said things like, “**He who has ears to hear, let him hear;**” and, “**There are those who think that they can see, but are truly blind.**” He was speaking of SPIRITUAL SENSES. Think about this. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were told that they could eat of any tree in the garden except one. Do you remember which tree they were forbidden to eat from?

Genesis 2:16-17 NIV

16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

When Eve "saw that the fruit was delightful to the eyes and desirable," she ate of it. Her physical perception failed her because she did not use her spiritual senses. Just because it looked beautiful and felt good did not mean that it was good! You see, it is NOT OUR RIGHT to determine what is good or evil. As soon as Adam and Eve rebelled against this command of God, they died. Moral discernment is a gift of perception through revelation from God. As soon as we decide that WE have the RIGHT to call things good or evil without regard to God's divine decree, then we step into dangerous territory! What we see happening in the name of love today in the United States is a picture of how far we can fall from the moral will of God in our lives, and it always results in the sad destruction of lives. Paul made this clear.

Our spiritual senses are guided and sharpened by the Spirit of God and by the Word of God. Period. If you are confused about what is morally right or wrong, then you must go back to God's Word and choose to accept HIS determination of what is right and what is wrong. He is the FINAL WORD. This is why your time in the Word of God and in prayer is so very important. The world has lost its moral mind, but you have the mind of Christ because of the gifts of his Word and his Holy Spirit! Paul wrote about our spiritual senses in another place. **1 Corinthians 2:14 NIV**

14 The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.

The world will never understand or agree with God's definition of love and morality because they do not have the Spirit of God within them. We do, and we must listen to him. If we do not, then we will remain spiritually DULL! Paul told the Corinthians that they he could not give them rich spiritual truths because they were **WORLDLY**. That is, they were only focused on the **PHYSICAL** and **MENTAL** aspects of life and not the **SPIRITUAL**. What a tragedy! But the Philippians were quite different. Listen to what he envisioned for them. **Philippians 1:11 NLT**

11 May you always be filled with the fruit of your salvation--the righteous character produced in your life by Jesus Christ--for this will bring much glory and praise to God.

God wants our lives to be FILLED with the fruit of righteousness, and this can only come through proper perceptions and perspectives. The word righteous actually means "correctness of thinking, feeling, and acting." That is fantastic! Righteousness is the fruit of accurate spiritual perceptions. God wants you to overflow with good fruit like "love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law!"

(Galatians 5:22-23). I wonder, do you really want your life to overflow with fruit like that? If so, it will not happen if you do not apply your spiritual senses to every decision and every relationship that you encounter. Truly, this was what allowed the Philippian believers to remain committed to Christ and to Paul when their world started falling apart. Paul was not the only one facing persecution. Paul's letter indicated that they were being threatened and persecuted just like him to some degree. But he instructed them to keep the right perspective and STAY TRUE to their mutual ministry no matter what happened. In fact, he said that their spiritual understanding of what was happening to them physically would serve as a further WITNESS to the lost about the truth of the Gospel. **Philippians 1:27-28 NLT**

27 Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. 28 Don't be intimidated in any way by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself.

Did you notice that Paul said that their godly lifestyle ALONG WITH their godly response to persecution would be the strength of their witness to the lost? This is so important. Our righteous conduct is evidence of our faith! But we will only have excellent conduct if our love is "abounding in knowledge and depth of insight."

Christian, are you using your spiritual senses every day in your life? Are you spending time reading God's word and engaging in conversation with God every day? **Are you looking at everything through the lens of your relationship with God and your purpose as a follower of Christ?** You must choose to do this every day. You must decide now that you will sharpen your spiritual senses through time in God's Word, and through communion with him every day. Only in this way will you be able to maintain a healthy perspective of FAITH that will bring you JOY even when times get rough. Like the Philippians, you will have the ability to remember and rejoice in **everything** that God has called you to experience for his glory. **Philippians 1:29 NLT**

29 For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him.

Are you spiritual senses sharp enough to embrace this truth today?

Let's pray.