



Following the upward call through Philippians ...

## "God Is My Witness"

Real Christian love is decision-based, not feeling-based. When Jesus looked at the earth with its lost masses and twisted generations, He wanted to torch it off. "I have come to cast fire upon the earth," He animadverted, "and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). But He was not going to do that just yet because He knew there were lost souls who could be saved. His decision-based *agape* love dictated that He die for those who had sinned and alienated themselves from the Father. "God demonstrates His love toward us," Paul stated, "in that while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). But apostle used even more pointed language to describe our abject condition: "While we were *enemies*," he noted, "we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (Romans 5:10). That is LOVE!

- **Real affection** — God allows Christians to go through tribulations and testing that the dross of their characters might be removed in the refining fires, fires that are part of living on earth. This, said the apostle, occurs so that the result is "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5). Paul had gone through many of those fires, and had his opportunity to exhibit his true love for those who would eventually obey the gospel. Thus it was with the brethren in Philippi: "For God is my witness," he affirms, "how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:8). The saints in Philippi, along with the overseers and deacons, knew this was a true statement on the apostle's part, and many would have willingly returned that same affection.

- **Pass it on** — God earnestly desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. But the only way this is going to happen is for the saved to take the gospel of grace and mercy to the lost. However, the saved are not going to take the gospel to the lost unless they really love the lost. Likewise the saved are not going to make the efforts to preserve the other saved unless they really love the saved. "And this I pray," avers the apostle, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment" (Philippians 1:9). Love is not disconnected from "real knowledge" and discernment. Saints know that there is a tremendous spiritual war going on for the soul of every living and breathing person who currently occupies planet earth, and love requires that significant efforts be made to rescue the perishing. But it is war involving knowledge, knowledge that the Bible is the word of God and knowledge that Jesus is raised from the dead. The earnest prayer of the apostle is that their love might "abound" still more and more in that knowledge. Similarly, discernment is a necessary component in waging this war and in strategizing to engage in the spiritual search and rescue operations. "Solid food," said Hebrews' writer, "is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to *discern* good and evil" (Hebrews 5:14). In the battles for the soul — the individual's own and others' — discernment of the difference between good and evil is a major component in effective warfare. It stands to reason that the apostle would be praying that the Philippians' love would abound more and more in all real knowledge and discernment.

**Their love needed to abound in real knowledge and discernment.**

The love, appreciation, and concern that Paul has for the brethren in Philippi flows out of every word he is penning in this epistle. That love, appreciation, and concern is buttressed by his earnest prayers on their behalf. He was "always offering prayer" for them, expressing it in terms of "my every prayer for you all." "God is my witness," is his powerful statement, "I long for you," and "this I pray." His love, appreciation, and concern are worthy of imitation!

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