

Paul's Prayer For The Philippians

Introduction. There are several notably beautiful prayers in the Bible. One is reminded of the prayer of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10), David (Psalm 55:1-23), Jonah (Jonah 2:1-9), Mary (Luke 1:46-55), and of course, Jesus (Matthew 6:9-13; 26:39; John 17:1-26).

In Philippians 1:9-11, Paul writes a very tender prayer for his beloved Philippian brethren. Paul demonstrated that he practiced what he preached (Colossians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:17). We pray for whom we love and whose welfare we seek. We desire their happiness, and there is no more appropriate way of expressing that desire than to go to God in prayer. Our hearts are never closer to God than when we go to Him in prayer.

In this passage, Paul enumerates the blessings which he sought for them. It is worthy of observation that he did not ask for riches, or for worldly prosperity, but that his supplications were confined to spiritual blessings, and he sought these as the most desirable of all favors.

I. *The Petition*

A. He wants their love to abound more and more.

1. Paul's prayer was one that had a definite aim and he could not have prayed for anything better than for their love to abound. This is truly the law of Christ's kingdom (1 John 4:7). The Christian idea of love involves the will, therefore it can be learned and commanded. The word "abound" means "to exceed a fixed number or measure." Paul approved of the abounding love of the Philippians and prays that it might increase. The only way their love can increase is by knowing more of the will of God.
2. This is directly opposite of the Pentecostal point of view. They believe that truth is determined by emotions; that is, if one "feels" right, they are right. However, the Bible states that if we follow the truth, it will generate emotion (Philippians 4:4).
3. Although their love was great, it needed to be set within bounds. Like a river that is overflowing its banks, their love needed to be brought within limitations lest it work harm rather than bring a blessing. Their love exceeded their knowledge. There was an eager and enthusiastic spirit among these new converts, but a lack of a deep understanding of the truth, and also a lack of a perception. Love cannot be blind.

B. He wants them to have real knowledge and judgment.

1. Their love needed guidance. The word for knowledge is an intensified word which means a full knowledge gained by experience. The Jews had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). The Philippians needed a better understanding of God's

word (Hebrews 5:14).

2. The word "judgment" comes from a Greek word which refers to sensitive perception and quickness of tact. It is a tact and instinct which perceives what is right and shrinks from what is wrong. Another way it could be stated is that Paul desired "intelligent affection" for them.

II. **The Goal**

A. They should approve the things that are excellent.

1. The word "approve" is from a Greek word which refers to the act of testing something for the purpose of approving it. It was used of the standing of candidates for the degree of doctor of medicine, who had passed their examinations and were now certified physicians. Here the word refers to the ability of the saints to sift or test something and thus recognize its worth and put their stamp of approval upon it.
2. The phrase has also been translated "distinguish the things that differ." To Christians, what is excellent and what is valuable is radically different from the world's judgment. We need to learn how to distinguish between what is good and evil, wrong and right in terms of doctrine and moral life. Even though we try to distinguish between the two, they are one and the same. The same zeal which we apply to living right, we should apply to knowing the true doctrine. Hence the need to question, study, and search (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2:15; Acts 17:11).
3. The only way we can recognize a counterfeit \$5 bill is by knowing what a real \$5 bill looks like. When we know true doctrine, we can recognize false doctrine. The Lord sternly condemned the doctrines, commandments, and traditions of men (Matthew 15:8-9). This was profane, unclean, and vain worship. The only way our worship and lives can be true and holy is by following God's word (John 8:31-32; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Jeremiah 5:31; 23:14-16).

B. They should strive to be sincere and without offense.

1. The word "sincere" means "judged by the sun." The English word is derived from two Latin words, *sin* (without) and *cere* (wax). Italian marble and porcelain vendors hid flaws in their merchandise by filling cracks and blemishes with wax, but the more reputable dealers advertised their wares as "sincere." Busts and other pieces could be set out in the sun to see if the wax would melt away. Therefore, the meaning is "without deception or hypocrisy."
2. We may feel as though we can hide from one another, but we cannot hide from God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14; 2 Corinthians 5:10). We will all be judged by the sunlight of God's word in the day of Christ

(Hebrews 4:12-13). Our whole life must be a preparation for that great day, for it is in that day that the true character of every person's life will be revealed, and everyone will be judged according to his work.

3. Paul also prays that they will be without offense. This word can mean either not causing others to stumble or not stumbling ourselves. This was why the Jews did not accept Christ. They stumbled over Him because they were reading out of the wrong book (Mark 7:7-8). They were not stupid; they looked to men for their answers. We need to be studied in the scriptures so that we will not fall on our faces.

III. ***The Result***

- A. They would be filled with the fruit of righteousness.
 1. Paul prays that the Philippians would reap a rich spiritual harvest, consisting of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is easy to render service with the lips, but it is more difficult to render service with the life. These are fruits that are produced by the right relation between God and Christians. No person is ever able to produce these by their own unaided efforts. They only come through Christ. Apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5; Ephesians 2:10).
 2. These fruits of righteousness grow more abundantly as our love abounds more and more in knowledge and discernment. The phrase pictures a tree that was laden with fruit (Proverbs 11:30; John 15:8). I hope our lives reflect a similar picture. When you stand before Christ, make sure your life has been filled with this kind of fruit.
- B. They would be a glory and praise to God.
 1. All glory and praise does not belong to us, but God. He is the one who gave His Son to die on the cross (John 3:16) and redeem us from sin so that we might produce fruits of righteousness (Romans 6:22).
 2. The glory of God is His majesty in itself; praise is the acknowledgment of this majesty by the voice and heart of man. The glory of God is the end of all Christian effort (Matthew 5:16). God must be magnified and recognized, and there can be no more noble effort in our lives or prayers.

Conclusion. I hope and pray that our petitions, goals, and results are the same. Congregations need people who are abounding in their love, who have full knowledge and judgment, who approve the things that are excellent, who strive to be sincere and without offense, and who bear fruit for the

Master. If you are here as a child of God whose life has not reflected these aspects, then you need to do some serious soul-searching. If you have committed sin, then you need to repent. If you are not a child of God but wish to begin a journey in Christ that will reflect all these things, then come forward and render obedience to the gospel.