

A Prayer For The Philippians

"For God is my witness how I long after you all in the tender mercies of Christ Jesus and this I pray, that your love more abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that ye may approve the things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and void of offense unto the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are through Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Phil. 1:8-11). Paul's heart ached to see and be with the Philippians again. They had been constant in their help to him; holding up his hands in both the *"defense and confirmation of the gospel"* (1:7). They had assisted him at the beginning at Thessalonica; likely Corinth and much more recently, at Rome: all this notwithstanding they had the same conflict as Paul had (1:2). They had not become so immersed in their own woes that they could not assist others in their desperate needs as well! Thus he prayed, *"That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and all discernment."* Already the Philippians loved, and loved abundantly. Paul's prayer was that that love continue to abound, love for those who were in straitened circumstances (as Paul); love for God; for the Word; love for the world of lost souls of men. But Paul wished their love to be intelligently directed; with proper discernment placed on the objects they loved. We may love life, but it may not be as valuable as to magnify God by a righteous death; we may love our family, this is proper and good, but love of God must have the ascendance. We must love our brethren and be careful for their feelings, but love of truth, although painful, must be valued more.

"That ye may approve the things which are excellent." Footnotes in some translations supply *"that ye distinguish the things which differ."* The phrase *"that your love may abound ... in knowledge and in all discernment"* is connected to these words *"that ye may approve the things that are excellent."* One is likely to fail to *"distinguish the things which differ"* if his love has not developed in knowledge and discernment. Hosea wrote, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"* (Hos. 4:6). The Sadducees of Jesus' day were told, *"It is for this cause that ye err, that ye know not the scriptures neither the power of God"* (Mt. 22:29).

"That ye may be sincere and void of offense unto the day of Christ." The words *"sincere"* and *"sincerity"* appear several times in the New Testament, all occurrences, save one, from the pen of Paul. Further in this first chapter of Philippians Paul wrote that some do not preach Christ sincerely (1:16). He charged in Ephesians 6:24 that we *"love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity;"* commands that we keep *"the feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity of truth"* (1 Cor. 5:8). The Corinthians were to prove the *"sincerity"* of their love by completing their promised bounty for suffering saints in Jerusalem (2

Cor. 8:8). Bear in mind, however, that "*sincere*" and "*sincerity*" are not always translations from the same Greek words for a variety of words are thus translated. These words may mean either holy, uncorrupt, or genuine. In the context of Phil. 1:8-11 (be sincere and void of offense), it means that the Philippians were to be unsullied in life. It was Paul's fervent hope that the Philippians be "*unspotted from the world.*"

"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness." In His Galatian letter Paul cites the fruit of the Spirit, which, in essence, produces the fruit of righteousness. There we are reminded that the fruit of the Spirit is "*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self control*" (Gal. 5:22f). Since Paul tells us that the fruits of righteousness are through Christ and designed to the glory and praise of God, we are reminded that we must "*let our light so shine before men that others, seeing our good works, will glorify our Father which is in heaven*" (Mt. 5:16).

Surely the petitions for which Paul prayed that the Philippians might receive are needed just as sorely today. May we fervently strive to answer Paul's prayer for the Philippians --- and for us!

Jim McDonald