

A Pastor's Passionate Prayer - Phil 1:9-11

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Philippians / Love / Philippians 1:9–11

Introduction

Verses 3-11 of the opening chapter of Philippians form a single paragraph that functions as an introduction to the whole of the book and as such introduces many of the themes and motifs of the letter.

Here in v.9 Paul highlights the content of his prayer using the same technique as he used in Phil 1:6: a forward-pointing reference comparable to “Hey, get this!” in English. Paul’s prayer for the Philippians is highlighted because it forms the big idea for this section of the letter. Paul prays that their love would abound, emphasizing still more and more. This assumes a love is already present and Paul focuses on its development.

Now in the vv.1-8 we've seen the breadth of Paul's thanksgiving for the Philippians, as well as the depth of Paul's incredible affection, and so we come to Paul's prayer for the Philippian believers in vv. 9-11.

Paul expands on his joyful prayer in v. 4 by making prayer the rising emotional climax to his introduction. Paul's first words — "And it is my prayer" — informed the Philippians, and us, that this is how and what Paul prayed for them.

This short text is both humbling and uplifting.

This love Paul refers to is grounded in knowledge and all discernment, not some warm, fuzzy feeling.

Why is it grounded in knowledge and discernment you may ask?

Verse 10 provides the answer: *to be able to discern what is excellent in order to be sincere and blameless at Christ's return.*

Verse 11 elaborates on the idea of being sincere and blameless by describing what brings these things about. Being filled with the fruit of righteousness is the key in case we think that this fruit is something we can obtain through our own activity, but Paul qualifies it as the kind of fruit that comes only through Jesus Christ.

Now I have divided the prayer that Paul prays into 4 parts as you see in the notes.

1. Prayed for Abounding Love (9A)

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more...

Paul begins with a beautiful statement: And this I pray... It is beautiful because "love" has no object here. He does not say, *"that your love for God may abound more and more,"* or *"that your love for one another may abound more and more."* This is because Paul prayed for boundless love to flow up to God and out to one another.

Paul, who was always rooted in the Old Testament, knew that the two tables of the Ten Commandments were laid out in this manner.

The first four commandments demand love for God, while

the next six demand love for others.

Vertical love comes first, followed by horizontal love.

As a result, Paul prayed for the Philippians' love to overflow all dimensions in a lavish, ongoing, limitless love — an unrelenting geyser of love up to God and a flood of love out to others.

According to the late Latin commentator Bengel, *"the fire in the apostle never says, It is enough."*

Paul is enthralled here, more love, more love!

2. Prayer for Knowledge and Insight (9B)

... in full knowledge and all discernment,

At the same time, we know Paul was not praying for an uninformed, shapeless outpouring of love because the entire verse 9 reads:

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in full knowledge and all discernment,"

2.1 We need Knowledge.

Paul is speaking of the right kind of knowledge in v.9.

Love is very sentimental in our existential, postmodern culture. *"All you need is love,"* we've been told since the 1960s, as if other-directed goodwill is the answer to life.

"Love is blind," a modern proverb says, implying that blissful ignorance is a part of love and Frank Sheed coined a phrase to describe such silliness:

"A virtuous man may be ignorant, but ignorance is not a virtue."

It would be a strange God who could be loved more by being less known.

Love of God is not the same as knowledge of God.

Love of God is infinitely more important than knowledge of God; however, if a man loves God knowing a little about Him, he should love God more as he learns more about Him: for every new thing known about God is a new reason to love Him.

The more we learn about God, the more reasons we have to love him.

The word Paul uses here to urge that our outpouring of love be "*with knowledge*" (**epignosis**) is used by Paul fifteen times in his letters to mean knowledge of God and Christ.

For Paul it is a matter of personal experience. Our knowledge of God must be profoundly existential, relational, and responsive."

And Paul was super-zealous about his converts gaining this knowledge. In fact, at the end of his introductions, all four of the "prison epistles" pray for this.

Ephesians 1:17 LSB

that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you *the* Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the full knowledge of Him,

Philippians 1:9 LSB

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in full knowledge and all discernment,

Colossians 1:9–10 LSB

For this reason also, since the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please *Him* in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and multiplying in the full knowledge of God;

Philemon 6 LSB

and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the full knowledge of every good thing which is in you for the sake of Christ.

We need to understand that Christian love is never sentimental.

Christian love is the result of the Holy Spirit's work in revealing Christ through God's Word. And the more you spend time in the Word, the more you will learn about God and Christ, and the more your love will overflow.

All of the Scriptures mention Christ!

John 5:46 LSB

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.

Each new thing you learn about him will give you a new reason to love him.

Remember: a shallow love for God is a sure sign of a

shallow knowledge of God.

As a result, we must prioritise gathered worship with our ***Bibles and hearts*** open to God.

This is why we must open the Scriptures for ourselves and teach them to our children on a daily basis.

This is why we must read both the Old and New Testaments with our eyes firmly fixed on Christ, whom God has revealed (cf. John 1:18).

This is why we need the Gospels and epistles in our hearts. The more you learn about him, the more your love will flow to him and out into the world!

This is why Paul prayed that *"love would abound more and more, with knowledge."*

2.2 We need Insight.

There is, of course, another key word here because *"knowledge"* is paired with *"all discernment"* or, more precisely, *"all insight."*

This Greek word appears only once in the New Testament, but it is used twenty-two times in the Greek translation of Proverbs, where it means *practical insight*, the insight that informs conduct — practical conduct.

What a remarkable movement we see in Paul's prayer for his beloved church. An unending outpouring of love to God and others, combined with a growing knowledge of Christ and God (both mutually increasing the other), all of which produces practical insight for living.

What Paul is including in this "practical insight" he refers to

is: “common sense” that should be added to Theology, Church History, and the Bible!"

Indeed. That is evident in Paul's prayer, which invokes practical insight for day-to-day living for his closest friends. Who says theology is unimportant? Again, overflowing love combined with a growing personal knowledge of God leads to practical insight for common everyday living — the kind of quality required not just for eldership but for Christian living in general.

This is what we all desire as we seek to lead our families and the elders the church.

3. Prayer for Discernment (10A)

so that you may approve the things that are excellent,

The idea here is to examine or test what is in front of us in order to determine what is excellent or what is the best. Originally, this was used to determine the best among metals or livestock but now it refers to what is best for our lives as Christians, or followers of Christ.

This is described by Markus Bockmuehl as *"the Spirit-bred ability to discern that which God has already marked off as essential or 'superlative' regarding life in Christ."* This ability includes not only distinguishing between right and wrong, but also between the best and second best.

Life is a series of choices for everyone, especially believers. What we do on a daily basis will shape the course of our lives.

We will be unprepared for the coming King if we make foolish decisions.

Little decisions determine our spiritual vitality because they govern bigger decisions. Most of us have little difficulty distinguishing between major issues. We all know that stealing and murder are wrong, but generosity and justice are right.

However, in the **grey area**, choices involve a variety of options that are not always moral or clear-cut. It is here that we have difficulty determining the best.

What perplexed lives so many Christians lead because they lack the ability to discern what is best.

False vision is worse than blindness.

A person who is so blind that he cannot tell the difference between the road and the ditch next to it may still be able to feel which is which, but if they see the road as the ditch and the ditch as the road, they are in big trouble... And many people today are in serious trouble.

However, if God's children have a growing personal knowledge of God and Christ, as well as practical insight, they will be able to discern and choose what is superlative:

- the best over the second best
- the best over the good
- the best in God's knowledge
- the best in priorities
- the best in habits
- the best in pleasures
- the best in pursuits

— the best course of action for themselves and their families.

What a lovely prayer Paul offers for his beloved! May our prayers for one another include discernment of what God has designated as best. That is what you require, fathers. That is what you require, mothers. That is what you require, leaders. And it is for this that Paul prays.

4. Prayer for The Day of Christ (vv. 10B, 11)

*...in order to be sincere and without fault until the day of Christ,
having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

Paul's brief description of his prayer process concludes with his ultimate goal for the Philippians in these verses. This is the second mention of "*the day of Christ*," which Paul already mentioned in v. 6.

Paul desired that the Philippians be prepared. You can sense the urgency in the Greek, which literally translates as "*against the day of Christ*." Paul wants them to withstand divine scrutiny.

"Preparation for the Lord's Day was for Paul neither a pious platitude nor a millenarian obsession, but a way of life" says Professor Markus Bockmuehl.

Christian development was not an end in itself, but rather a

means to the end goal of standing before Christ. Paul was sublimely preoccupied with the arrival of that day, and this graced preoccupation guided his prayer for his beloved Philippians.

His prayer was for them to be "*pure and blameless*" in the face of that great day (v.10b).

The term "*pure*" refers to "*unmixed*," as in unmixed substances. It represents heart transparency, a heart with pure and unmixed desires.

"Blameless" means "without stumbling," or "not stumbling." And the metaphorical sense adds to the picture. Paul's prayer is that the Philippians live pure, morally transparent lives, free of stumbling, and thus stand upright and pure on that day in the dazzling presence of Christ, who knows everything.

If we only prayed for each other in this way!

But Paul desires more than that the Philippians stand pure and tall and acquitted before Christ; he also desires that they be filled with the fruit of godly deeds...

"filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ"

...that Christ's righteousness be evident in righteous and fruitful living.

This means, first and foremost, that the heart qualities Paul refers to as the fruit of the Spirit "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and*

self-control" (Galatians 5:22, 23) would manifest themselves in the substantive fruit of godly deeds.

A fruit-bearing tree, extols the gardener's care!

John 15:5 LSB

"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

John 15:8 LSB

"My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

When Christ returns, Paul desires that the Philippians be like fruit trees at harvest, with their branches hung low and laden with the good deeds that Christ has worked in and through them.

Works and good deeds that are to God's praise and glory, for the glory of the KING!

Conclusion

Paul concludes with a doxology, as one would expect. *All for "the glory and praise of God" (v. 11b).*

This is an appropriate conclusion to not only the prayer, but to the entire paragraph.

As John Piper puts it, *"all who cast themselves on God find that they are carried into endless joy by God's omnipotent commitment to his own glory."*

The thought of God's glory delighted Paul. Later in Philippians, at the climax of the Christ hymn, we read in

Phil 2.10

Philippians 2:10–11 LSB

so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

and that EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS that Jesus Christ is LORD, to the glory of God the Father.

The letter will conclude with the climactic doxology:

Philippians 4:20 LSB

Now to our God and Father *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Such happiness! What joy!

This magnificent introductory paragraph has now concluded with Paul's description of how he prayed for the Philippians, which began with Paul's thanksgiving for them and then moved to his affection for them.

This is the substance of real prayers, offered repeatedly by a real man in real time, space, and history. This is not a religious babble. Paul prayed in this manner and for this purpose.

What the apostle has said is important for those of us who care about our families and the body of Christ.

We must certainly pray for our jobs, our finances, our health, our children's grades, and their friendships. But if that's all there is to it, we've missed it.

We require unending love to flow up to God and out to

others. We must expand our knowledge of God as revealed in Christ Jesus, because the more we know about him, the more we will love him.

All discernment, practised insight and common sense for living must be developed. We must be able to weigh our options and select what is excellent, the best.

In living our Christian lives as witnesses and ambassadors of Christ, we must be prepared for Christ's return.

In that day, we must be transparently pure and stand upright before Christ. And as we stand tall, the fruit of the righteousness that comes through Jesus must be hung heavy on our lives. As part of the endless, joyful commitment to God's glory, we need our lives to be a doxology to the glory and praise of God.

Furthermore, this is what we must pray for one another.

This is what we as parents must pray for our children and grandchildren.

This is a call for genuine prayers from and for genuine people in our present time.

Amen.

Doxology

Philippians 4:20 LSB

Now to our God and Father *be* the glory forever and ever.

Amen.