

Praying with Jesus & Paul
Paul's Prayer for the Philippians (1:9-11)

Introduction

As the consummate pastor, Paul begins his letter with warm and sincere thankfulness for his audience, and then offers a prayer for their continued progress in the faith. He assures the Philippian fellowship that his prayers are grounded in joy as they share in God's grace through the Gospel.

I. Paul's Prayer (1:9-11)

The whole of Paul's prayer is concerned with the Philippians behavior, born out of an abiding pastoral love for them. Here there is neither judgment nor criticism; only an intense longing for God's glory displayed in their maturing lives. Paul already told the Philippians that he regularly prayed for them (1:4). Now he tells them the *what* and *why* of his prayers.

A. Paul Tells the Philippians What He Prays for Them

1. *For a growing love that permeates into all of life.*
 - a) For Paul, love is the chief attribute of believers and evidences the Spirit's presence (cf., Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 13:13).
 - b) Where unity is threatened (2:1-4; 4:1-3), love brings together (cf., Col. 3:14). Love's function is to unite. Love and unity are combined in 2:2.
 - c) Paul does not explicitly list the object of love, but no doubt he had love for fellow believers in mind as he prayed the same for the Thessalonian congregation (1 Thess. 3:12).
2. *For increasing maturity in knowledge and depth of insight.*
 - a) Love is to be informed, not merely felt; discriminating, not merely spontaneous emotion.
 - b) The single preposition governing both nouns ("*in* knowledge and depth of insight") suggests Paul has one idea in mind. That is, knowledge and discernment go hand in hand. Possessing the former without the latter, though possible, stifles true Christian growth!
 - c) This is a petition that God would grant the Philippians the ability to determine what really counts in life.
 - d) While some decisions are of little to no moral consequence (for instance, which socket to plug in a tea pot), other judgments have huge moral implications and *really do matter!*
 - e) This kind of discernment is not merely making clear decisions between right and wrong, but the ability to see how choices differ and choosing the best option between two seemingly harmless choices.
 - f) This knowledge and insight includes not only examination and evaluation, but also determination in doing what is optimal for Kingdom living. No compromise!
3. *For purity and blamelessness in righteous living.*
 - a) "Lack of moral stain" (i.e., purity) along with "not causing others to stumble" (i.e., blamelessness) is the natural outcome of increased love for others enabled by moral wisdom in decision-making.
 - b) The righteousness Paul has in mind here is that of Christ's, imputed to us at salvation (2 Cor. 5:21) and unfolding in our lives on a daily basis as our discerning love grows for God and others.
 - c) This righteousness "comes through Jesus Christ" and is not our own (cf., 3:9). Indeed, we can produce nothing of our own accord (Jn. 15:1-4).
 - d) Paul will soon tell the Philippians that their works must be in "fear and trembling" *because* it is God who is doing the work in them (2:12-13).
 - e) "Until the day of Christ." This is the second time he appeals to Christ's return as a basis for ethical living (cf., 1:6) – a common petition in Paul (1 Cor. 1:7, 8; Col. 1:12; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:11, 12). Our future must always have an impact on our present. A forward focus is quintessential for maturity (Heb. 12:3; 1 Jn. 3:3).

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B. Paul Tells the Philippians Why He Prays for Them

1. [Verse 11] In such lives where love is increasing and radical discernment is taking place in every area of life, the outcome of which is purity and righteous living, God receives the "glory and praise."
2. Paul's supreme ambition in life is the glory and praise of God (cf., Eph. 1:3, 6, 12, 14).
3. *Praise is the spontaneous, exuberant response to all God's glorious attributes and works expressed in grace to us as undeserving sinners.*
4. If sin is diametrically opposed to God's glory (Rom. 3:23), then righteous living expressed through moral wisdom and increased love for fellow believers beautifully articulates God's glory here on earth! What a blessing to be a means of expressing God's glory!

C. Application

1. Paul's prayer does not involve mere maintenance of the Christian faith, but maturity in all its splendor and vigor. *No compromise!*
2. So many pastors are caught up in endless activism, surrounding themselves with church "ministry." Yet, here we can learn a great deal about a pastor's priorities in prayer. How is your pastor doing in this area?
3. In our postmodern age where discretion between alternatives is not only missing, but virtually impossible due to the disregard for absolute truth, we must be a people whose choices are derived from what is best and not merely what is good! How are you doing in this area?
4. Do you pray for your family members and fellow believers to know and choose what is best for them?
5. What really counts in your life? Relative financial and material comfort in retirement? Peace among the nations? What *do* you pray for? Compare your prayer life with the catalog of Paul's prayers (Rom. 1:8-10; 10:1; 15:5-6; 2 Cor. 13:7-9; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philip. 1:3-11; Col. 1:3-14; Ph. 4-7) and note that:
 - a) He always prayed that God would work in and through circumstances, rather than merely change them.
 - b) Paul's focus in prayer was primarily for others, not for himself.