

BIBLE STUDY LESSON

Paul's Prayer For Growth in Godliness

Philippians 1:9-11 (NKJV)

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹ being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Introduction: When Paul was in prison he was not thinking about his own suffering and confinement. Rather, he was thinking about the Christians whom He loved in Philippi. He had already told them in **V.3** that he thanked God in all his remembrance of them. Then in **V.4** he said that he always offered prayer with joy in his every prayer for them. In **V.7** he told them that he had them in his heart. In **V.8** he called God as his witness how he longed for all of them with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Paul had a very special and close relationship with the Philippian believers. No other church was so faithful and generous to send Paul gifts to help him with his needs, so that he could devote himself to preaching and teaching the Word. Paul's heart went out to them.

We see Paul's love for the Philippians in the prayer he prayed for them in **Vs. 9-11**. We already knew that Paul prayed for them constantly. But when he prayed for them, what did he pray? What was the content of his prayers for them? Well, this passage gives us the answer.

In short, Paul prayed that they would grow in godliness.

There are six things Paul prays that the Philippians will have in their lives: love, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, blamelessness, and fruit. As a Christian this should be what we pray for each other.

Let's look at each of them in turn.

1. Your Love

When Paul prayed for the Philippians, he didn't pray that they would begin to love. He knew that they already loved. He said in **V.9 (NKJV)** **“I pray that your love may abound still more and more...”**

a. Paul wanted them to **abound** (flourish, thrive) still more and more. In fact, I'm convinced that a person can't even be a Christian if he has no love. **John 13:35 (NKJV)** "*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Let us not forget what Biblical love is. It is a self-sacrificial determination to do another good.

b. Paul the churches he had planted and prayed for to grow in love. **In Ephesians 1:15 (NIV)** he wrote, "*For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people.*" Faith in Jesus and love for all the saints. These are the two hallmarks of a true believer faith and love. If there is no faith and love, there is no true conversion. These are the initial marks of the work of the Spirit in the soul of the believer. So, Paul is not praying that the Philippians would start loving. He was praying that the love that they already possessed would grow, and abound, and overflow, more and more.

A very good case can be made that love is the highest grace in the Christian's life. If you had to rank faith, hope and love, how would you do it? What would be the greatest of them? Well, we might automatically assume that it would be faith. However, Paul says in **I Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)**, "*But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.*"

Colossians 3:14 (NKJV) "*Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*"

I Peter 4:8 (NKJV) "*And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*"

c. Love is at the height of all the other Christian graces and fruits of the Spirit. And, thankfully, it exists in some measure in all true born-again believers. We should not be content that we have some love in our lives. We should desire and strive to see our love increasing and abounding.

Notice what Peter said in **II Peter 1:5-8 (NASB)** "*Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Notice that Peter mentions love last, after faith, moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, and brotherly kindness. Love is the height of the Christian life. And Peter says if love is increasing you are neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of Jesus Christ.

2. Knowledge

The second thing Paul prays for is knowledge. Again, look at V.9 (NKJV) “...more and more in knowledge...” Actually, he prays for “real knowledge.” The natural question arises, “real knowledge about what?” The Greek word Paul uses here (epignosis) occurs 20 times in the New Testament and always refers to knowledge of the things of God.

a. Paul often uses this word in the beginning of his epistles. Look at:

Ephesians 1:17 (HCSB) “praying that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

Colossians 1:9-10 (NASB) “For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”

I believe Paul is praying that the Philippians will have a greater knowledge of God, His will and ways. This has been my prayer for myself and the whole church as we are studying the attributes of God. I want all of us to know God better. This should be the chief pursuit of our lives. In our learning, let’s make sure that we are getting to know God better and better. And that can’t happen just by reading the Bible alone. The Bible is extremely important in getting to know God, but if we are to know God experientially, we need to commune with Him, walk with Him, be in prayer to Him.

3. Discernment

Discernment in the Christian life is linked with knowledge. V.9 (NKJV) “...and all discernment...” The more knowledge we have, the more discerning we can be. Why? Look at V.10 (NKJV) “that you may approve the things that are excellent...” Now, what exactly did Paul mean by “discernment?”

a. It is the ability to approve the things that are excellent. Many people can tell the difference between good and bad. But it takes real discernment to tell the difference between good and best. This discernment enables the person who has it to see and choose the best options (the excellent options) for their life.

b. There are many things in the Christian life that are not sin, but they are not the best choice for you. Let us look at **Hebrews 12:1 (NKJV)** “...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.” What are the two things he tells us lay aside?

- _____
- _____

c. Now a _____ and _____ is something which weighs you down, making it more difficult for you to win the race. We are all running a Race and we call it the Christian life. And as you run this race you will have to make decisions about how you will spend your money, time, and energy. We need discernment to approve and choose the excellent things, not just the neutral things.

Examples:

- You may have the option to binge on TV or Netflix movies, or spend some time in the Word, or meet with a Christian friend, or go for a prayer walk, or go out to intentionally spread the gospel. Now, watching TV or Netflix is not necessarily sinful. It may be neutral, but is it the best use of your time, energy, and gifts? That is what discernment is for.
- You may have the option of spending your Sunday on the lake or at the beach, or gathering with God’s people to worship and edify one another. One option may not be sinful, but it may not be an excellent choice.
- You may have the option of just enjoying the company of a non-Christian friend and talk about unimportant things. Or you may decide that the excellent thing is to take the opportunity to speak to your friend about Christ. The first option is not sinful, but it may not be an excellent choice.

4. Sincerity

V. 10 (NKJV) “...that you may be sincere...” The reason Paul wanted them to possess all discernment was so that they would be able to make excellent choices. And he wanted them to do that so that they would be sincere. What does he mean by “sincere”? There are a couple of passages that will help us understand his meaning.

II Corinthians 2:17 (CSB) “*For we do not market the word of God for profit like so many. On the contrary, we speak with sincerity in Christ, as from God and before God.*” Now, what is Paul saying? He’s saying that he and his team were not like many others. They peddled the word of God. They spoke the Word, but not from pure motives. They were seeking to gain wealth through their speaking of the Word. That’s what it means to “peddle” something. It is to sell it. Perhaps they were charging their ministry. I’m not sure. But one thing is for sure. Their motives were not for God’s glory and pleasure alone. They were seeking their own profit as well. They had mixed motives.

I Corinthians 5:7-8 (NKJV) “*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. ⁸ Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*” Paul, here, is comparing the Corinthian believers to the unleavened bread of the Passover. He says that Christ is our Passover, who was sacrificed for us. Then he tells us what that unleavened bread is like. It does not contain the leaven of malice and wickedness. Instead, it contains sincerity and truth. So, what is “sincerity” to Paul? It is something unmixed with evil. It speaks of purity of motive.

a. When you serve in the church, or speak the gospel to the lost, are your motives pure? Do you serve because you want to please the Lord, but you also want others to think well of you? Do you sing and worship enthusiastically because you just love the Lord so much? Or do you also do so because you hope others notice and you will win their approval? Do you see how devious insincerity can be in the Christian life? God wants you to live out the Christian life in sincerity.

5. Blamelessness

V.11 (NIV) “...*and blameless for the day of Christ.*”

We could get the wrong impression here. We might think that Paul is praying that believers would be so holy that there would be nothing that they could be blamed for. If that was what he meant, Paul must have believed in the doctrine of sinless perfection.

a. The Greek word did not mean a life that was so righteous that no one could attach blame to you at all. The Greek word means “not causing offense or stumbling.”

b. Paul is praying that his believers would not lead others into sin by their lifestyle.

I Corinthians 8:9 (NASB1995) “*But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.*”

I Corinthians 8:13 (NASB1995) “*Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause my brother to stumble.*”

Matthew 18:6 (NIV) “*If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come.*”

Until the day of Christ. What does Paul mean? Until the day when Christ returns. Paul is not praying that the Philippians would be sincere and blameless on a temporary basis. He is praying that their lives would be marked by sincerity and without offense from now until they die or Jesus returns.

6. Fruit

V.11 (NKJV) “*being filled with the fruits of righteousness...*”

a. Having been filled. The verb here is passive. That means that the Philippians are not the ones doing the action. They are being acted upon. They are not filling themselves with fruit. God has filled them with fruit. Jesus taught in **John 15:4-5 (NKJV)** “*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 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.*”

b. With the fruit of righteousness. The fruit which God has filled the believer with the fruit of righteous living. In other words, our righteous or holy lives are the fruit of God’s work in us.

c. Which comes through Jesus Christ. The only way we can bear the fruit of a righteous life is through Christ who lives in us. He is the righteous One, and if He lives in us, He will produce His righteousness through us. He is the vine, and the life that courses through the vine flows into the

branches, producing the fruit of the vine. Friends, never make the mistake that the righteous deeds which flow from your life have their source in you. No, they have their source in Christ.

d. To the glory and praise of God. When the fruit of righteousness is produced in our lives, God receives glory and praise.

John 15:8 (NKJV) “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

Matthew 5:16 (NKJV) “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

If we are living the way the Lord wants us to, when others see our good works, they won't glorify us. They will glorify our Father.

Conclusion:

Love – Knowledge – Discernment – Sincerity – Blamelessness – Fruit. These are the things that Paul prayed for the Philippians.

Is this the way you pray for your brothers and sisters? That's the big question that surfaces from this text for me. When I see how Christians pray for others, what I observe is that they pray for protection from danger, and physical health. I constantly hear people praying that people will be healed, that they will have traveling grace, that God would protect them from the seen or unseen danger of life. In these prayers the emphasis is on the physical and material. And it is okay to pray for the physical and material needs. When I read the prayers of Paul, I don't see that same emphasis. He is entirely taken up with His passionate pleadings for their spiritual health and growth in grace. When Paul prays for love, knowledge, discernment, sincerity, blamelessness and fruit, he has not uttered a single word about the physical and material. He is interested with their spiritual needs and desire for their spiritual progress. I think there is a valuable lesson here for all of us. The next time you begin to pray for someone, think about Paul's prayers, and model your prayers after his.