

Philippians

Part 3 – “A Powerful Way to Pray”

Philippians 1:8-11

The opening material of Paul’s letter to the Philippian church is remarkable for its especially affectionate language. He even invokes God as his witness to drive home all the more the sincerity of his love for them (vs. 8).

Among Paul’s opening remarks is a report to the church concerning the content of his prayers for them. This is not unusual for Paul. Many of his epistles have such prayer reports. His letter to the Ephesian church contains several actual prayers. As in the case of his words of thankfulness these prayer passages are not mere conformity to the conventions of written correspondence. The apostle’s prayers are lessons in how to pray well. They reflect proper priorities and motivations and goals for the Christian.



It seems that Christians often lament their unsatisfactory prayer life. Either they do not pray enough or perhaps believe that their prayers accomplish little. Few Christians if any have not experienced those frustrations. It is important then that we turn to God’s Word for the rationale, the content, and the promise of prayer. As we read the ways in which the apostle Paul prayed for the Philippian church we will learn how to pray for one another.

Main Idea: Paul prays that the Philippian Christians would have a love abounding in knowledge and discernment so that their lives would grow in righteousness for the glory of God.

Vs. 8 – Paul calls God as his witness to drive home the sincerity of his deeply felt affection for the Philippians. Indeed his affection for them is very affection of Jesus Christ at work in him.

Vs. 9 – Love is the highest of Christian virtues. But it is not love as the world tends to conceive it. Christian love is fundamentally selfless and characterized by both knowledge and discernment.

Vs. 10 – Love which is accompanied by knowledge and discernment will produce a preference for that which is excellent over that which is profane or trivial. Paul invokes “the day of Christ” as a reminder that our actions matter in light of eternity (1 Thess 5:23).

Vs. 11 – Christian love is inextricably linked to righteousness. Love is not a private feeling. It works itself out in righteousness for the glory of God.

1. The love Jesus desires for us to have

a) Love abounding in selfless giving

Vs. 9a – “And it is my prayer that your love...”

- Paul did not pray that the Philippian Christians would become loving. He refers to “your love” as something already in existence. It is clear in the letter that the Philippian church possessed genuine love. Indeed, their love was characterized by selflessness and generosity.

b) Love abounding in knowledge and discernment

Vs. 9 – “And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.”

- Christian love is characterized by substance and sobriety. We must never pit love against truth and wisdom. It is true that knowledge can tend to “puff up” (1 Cor 8:1). But it is also true that love “rejoices with the truth” (I Cor 13:6). A love that acts on behalf of the well-being of others must understand what is truly good and right for others.

2. What this love produces

a) Approving Excellence

Vs. 10 – “...so that you may approve what is excellent...”

- The word Paul uses for “approve” carries with it the idea of discernment. Picture a discerning buyer who only purchases the highest quality product. Christian love produces a discernment which recognizes the difference between what is excellent from what is profane or trivial (Phil 4:8). Love knows what is good for the beloved. Likewise love understands what damages the beloved.

b) Growing Righteousness

Vs. 10b-11a – “...and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness”

- Pure means that which has not been watered down or adulterated. In the present context it refers to a life free of mixed motives and has nothing sinful or degrading to hide. A blameless life is one which does not bring scandal upon the name of Christ.

c) Glorifying God

Vs. 11c – “...to the glory and praise of God.”

- The work of God in the life of the believer ultimately results in glory and praise to God. The highest goal of our growing righteousness is the glory of God. The fruit of righteousness which will be born in our lives must point to the righteous God.

3. Where this love comes from

Vs. 11b – “...that comes through Jesus Christ...”

- How does God turn naturally self-centered and foolish sinners into those whose delight is to glorify God with selfless and discerning love? Paul’s answer is found in the brief but monumental clause in verse 11 – “through Jesus Christ.” In the first 11 verses of chapter one Paul has mentioned the name of Christ seven times. In the next few verses he writes about “preaching Christ” three times (vv. 15, 17, 18). After that he declares, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (vs. 21). In chapter three he declares that all of his worldly accomplishments are rubbish compared to “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (3:8). It is through Christ and Christ alone that God pours his love into our hearts and makes us his own. It is only through Christ that we are reconciled to God and given a righteousness that is not our own but that which comes from God through faith in Jesus (3:9).