

A Prayer of Purpose

Philippians 1: 9-11

Following a gracious greeting and a word of thankfulness for their partnership in ministry, Paul offers a brief, but pointed prayer for the church in Philippi. Although his prayer is but three sentences long, it possesses great wisdom and reveals the heart of Paul for the church. Philippi was dear to him. He was thankful for the work they had accomplished and Paul prays for further spiritual growth as they labored for the Lord.

This brief prayer challenged me in many ways. It reminded me of the pressing need to pray for one another in our day of difficulty. It is impossible to pray too much for the needs we currently face. It challenged me to reflect on individuals within our church and make intercession for the needs and struggles they currently face. Paul was familiar with the church. Our church is made up of real believers who serve a living Lord. I realize that we each have real needs that need to be brought before the Lord. Paul was also very specific with this prayer. Although it is brief, he mentioned specific needs and addressed specific desires. Much of our praying is too generic. We must care enough to take the necessary time to identify specific needs and pray about them.

As we consider the [specific elements](#) of Paul's prayer, I would like to discuss: [A Prayer of Purpose](#). We discover:

I. His Concern for their Love (9) – [And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.](#) Paul first mentions a concern for their love. He knew love was essential to their effectiveness and productivity. If their love was lacking, the church would suffer; if their love was strong, the church would prosper. He referred to:

A. The Enlargement of Love – [And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more.](#) While it seems apparent that love was present in Philippi, Paul desired their love to abound. This speaks of "*super-abounding; being in excess; excelling or increasing abundantly.*" They possessed love for one another, but Paul knew their love could grow beyond the bounds it currently enjoyed. He wanted their love to increase abundantly, to grow beyond measure!

- I am convinced love is present among us, but I am sure there is room for improvement. Our love for one another and the lost around us needs to increase. We will never be effective apart from genuine love, but where love abounds, there is no limit to what the Spirit can accomplish through us.

B. The Discernment in Love (9) – *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.* Paul referred to their love abounding in knowledge and judgment. This reveals significant truth. While they were expected to possess an increasing love for one another and even those without the church, their love was to be guided in knowledge and judgment. This refers to advanced or precise knowledge applied and portrayed in accordance with the Word of God. Their love was to be derived from the Word and lived out in a manner consistent with the Word. Their love was to always be directed by truth.

- Paul knew the church must possess a love that stood for truth in Christ rather than a superficial love that sought to soothe and appease the desires of men. They were not called to abandon their convictions for the sake of love. In fact, genuine love identifies with truth. This is a lesson that is much needed in our day. We live in a politically correct society that declares we must embrace and approve of one's actions or be guilty of bigotry and hate. That premise is not based on truth. There are times when love motivates a firm, but fair rebuke. Our love must never compromise the truth of God's Word, but seek to reveal and impart that truth to all men. We cannot love as the Lord desires if the expression of our love is inconsistent with Scripture. I know this phrase is cliché and invokes anger in some, but in reality we are to love the sinner, but not the sin. That is exactly what Paul teaches here!

II. His Concern for their Learning (10a) – *That ye may approve things that are excellent.* Along with their love, Paul prayed for their wisdom in Christ. He spoke of:

A. An Examination – *That ye may approve things that are excellent.* As Paul dealt with their daily lives and Christian conduct, he challenged them to approve those things that are excellent. This is an interesting aspect of the believer's life. It literally speaks of *our discernment, the examination of various aspects of life*. Simply, he called on them to put things to the test. They were to analyze the situation or circumstance and measure it by a biblical standard. Their lives were to be lived in light of the Spirit instead of the flesh. Their doctrine was to align with Scripture, not the desires of men or dictates of society. They were to please the Lord, not men.

B. An Estimation – *That ye may approve things that are excellent.* The word excellent in the text is interesting as well. It speaks of things that are different and those that make a difference. He in essence prayed they would approve those things that really mattered. Paul desired them to major on those eternal things. He knew there were good things, better things, and best things. He wanted their focus to be on the aspects of life that were worthy of their time and commitment.

- Churches are filled with those who are engaged in good things, but are we really engaged in the best things? Having fellowship with those of like faith is great, but having an outward focus to share the Gospel in reaching the lost is best. We can't afford to get bogged down with merely good things at the expense of accomplishing the best things!

III. His Concern for their Loyalty (10b) – [that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ](#). Paul also prayed for their loyal allegiance to Christ. He prayed for:

A. Their Sincerity – Paul desired them to be sincere in their faith and walk with the Lord. This is one of my favorite word pictures in all of Scripture. The word literally means “*judged by sunlight*.” It is derived from the Latin word *sine cera*, which means “without wax.” In that day, fine pottery was often thin and very fragile. As it was fired in the kilns to harden, cracks in the pottery were possible. Dishonest dealers would fill the cracks with wax that was unnoticeable when the pottery was painted or glossed. Buyers soon learned to hold the pottery up to the sunlight in order to reveal any impurities in the vessel. The sun's light would reveal the crack and the wax. (Isn't that beautiful and challenging? Our lives are to be judged by the Son's light, free of wax and other impurities! His light will reveal the needed change in our lives.)

B. Their Purity – Paul prayed their lives would be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ, as long as they lived, or until the Lord called for them. He desired the church to maintain a positive witness among the world, being found blameless when examined by others.

- There is probably little praying for purity in our day, and even less preaching on the matter. If we are honest, such behavior has created much harm to the church. We cannot expect to have a positive witness among the world if our lives are lived no differently than theirs. While none are perfect, we are held to a higher standard. We have been bought with a price; we are no longer our own and forfeited the right to live as we please. Those who have no relationship with the Lord will find it difficult to desire if they continually see those who profess Christ living in open sin without remorse. We must live our lives above reproach before the world around us!

IV. His Concern for their Lives (11) – [Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God](#). Finally Paul prays regarding their everyday lives and walk with the Lord. He mentioned:

A. Their Fruitfulness (11a) – [Being filled with the fruits of righteousness](#)... This is a natural desire Paul had for the church in Philippi and every believer for that matter. Paul well understood the initial filling of the Spirit at the moment of salvation, but this speaks of a continual filling throughout one's walk with the Lord. He desired the church to be filled with the fruits of righteousness daily.

- There is much we could deal with here regarding the fruit believers are to bear. Suffice it to say that Paul prayed for the church to live in a way that revealed their faith in Christ, influencing those around them, and honoring the Lord. Each day we live, our lives should bear witness of the grace of God that was shed abundantly toward us in salvation. We are to bear fruit consistent with our relationship with Christ. As others view our lives, there should never be a question regarding our faith and walk with the Lord.

B. Their Filling (11a) – [Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ](#). We discussed this being a daily, continual filling, but Paul also mentioned that the believer's filling and fruitfulness are by and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Although they were aware of their need for continued fellowship with the Lord, Paul emphasized this great truth. The believers in Philippi would not be fruitful apart from the Lord. They must be committed to abiding in Him.

- This great truth remains relevant for us today. Our only hope of bearing fruits of righteousness is to abide in the Vine that produces righteousness. Apart from Jesus, we are unable to bear fruit pleasing to Him. We too must maintain a daily, committed fellowship with the Lord to bear fruit. [John 15:4-5 – Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ^{\[5\]} I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.](#)

C. Their Focus (11b) – [Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God](#). This is simple, and yet a needful reminder. Paul prayed their lives would bring glory and praise to God. He knew this was their purpose in life, and Paul wanted the church to have a proper perspective and maintain the right focus.

- The believer is responsible for much as we walk and strive to serve the Lord. We are obligated to support one another and bear witness of Christ. However, our primary responsibility is to bring glory and praise unto the Lord. If our hearts are right with the Lord, we will have no problem accomplishing this, but we must focus on our priority. It is easy to become some busy in work that we fail to really bring glory and praise to God. At the end of the day, that is our primary obligation as believers!

Conclusion: The prayer Paul offered for the church in Philippi serves as a challenge for all believers. Not only should we be willing to pray for the church, but we should use this prayer as we examine our lives. Are the elements Paul desired for the church evident in our lives? Are we living in a way that edifies the church, reaches out with the Gospel, and brings honor to the Lord? If not, our lives are lacking spiritually. I trust we will seek the Lord and strive to make progress in our walk with Him.

If you are yet unsaved, my prayer is that the Lord will convict you of your need, draw you unto Himself, and save you by His grace. If He is dealing with your heart, I urge you to respond in repentance and faith unto salvation.