

Having already told the Philippians that he regularly prayed for them (1:4), Paul now spells out the details of his prayer in 1:9-11, which is born out of an abiding pastoral love for them and an intense longing for God's glory displayed in their lives.

Paul Tells the Philippians What He Prays for Them

1. For a growing love that reaches into all of life

- ✓ As the chief attribute of all believers, love evidences the Spirit's presence in us (cf., Gal. 5:22; Rom. 5:5; 1 Cor. 13:13) and is always the place to start in prayer.
- ✓ Our present lives are to be lived on the **principle** of love after the **pattern** of Christ for the **purpose** of God's glory until that "day of Christ" (v 10) is revealed.
- ✓ Paul does not explicitly list the object of "love," but no doubt he had love for others in mind, since unity is a key theme in the letter (1:27; 3:17; 4:2) and his prayer for the Thessalonian congregation is similar (1 Thess. 3:12).
- ✓ **Paul prays that love would "keep on growing" (NLT). This is not a virtue that we obtain in its fullest measure. Though we always aspire, we never attain.**

2. For increasing maturity in knowledge and depth of insight

- ✓ For Paul, love is not mere affection but action; it is practical through and through. A biblical love is informed, not merely felt; discriminating, not merely spontaneous affection. **Paul's prayer, therefore, is that the Philippians would get to know one another better and, by doing so, have increased love for one another.**
Discussion: Do you find that sometimes knowing others better results in less love for them?
- ✓ The single preposition "in" governing both nouns "knowledge and depth of insight" suggests Paul has one idea in mind. That is, we cannot have discernment without knowledge; they go hand in hand. **Having insight about others is to have knowledge about them so we may love them more.**
- ✓ **Verse 10:** This is a petition that God would grant the Philippians the ability to determine what really counts in life. While some decisions are of no moral consequence (for instance, which socket to plug in a toaster), other judgments have huge moral implications. Moreover, choices made now have consequences that reach into the future. **All the more reason we need knowledge and moral discernment about others so our love for them is effective!** Prayer is the primary means of gaining this wisdom.
- ✓ 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. This knowledge and insight includes not only examination and evaluation, but also **determination in doing what is optimal for loving them well.**

3. For purity and blamelessness in righteous living

- ✓ The natural outcome of increased love for others enabled by wisdom in decision-making about relationships results in a lack of moral stain ("purity") along with not causing others to stumble (blamelessness).
- ✓ "For the day of Christ" is a way of saying we must keep our focus and orientation toward that day when Christ is revealed. 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 certain future must always impact our present living. A forward focus is quintessential for Christian maturity (Heb. 12:3-4; 1 Jn. 3:3).**

- ✓ The “fruit of 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). **His pure and blameless life is our model for striving in loving others more.**

Paul Tells the Philippians Why He Prays for Them

- Verse 11: Where love is increasing through keen discernment about others, the result is purity and righteous living that produces the “glory and praise of God.” Paul’s supreme ambition in life is the God’s glory and praise (see esp, Eph. 1:3, 6, 12, 14). *Praise is our spontaneous, exuberant response to all God’s glorious attributes and works expressed in grace to us as undeserving sinners.*
- 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 (see esp. Jn 17:20-24; Col 3:12-14)!

In many respects, this prayer is a model for all prayer (as with the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6). Whether pastors, teachers, parents, or children, who among us does not need to grow in discernment and insight so we may choose what is best in loving others well? Who among us does not need to increase our purity toward and blameless treatment of others? Who among us does not need to increasingly be filled with the righteous life that Christ modeled so that a bright light shines through us and on God’s glory primarily by our love for others?

So What?

- Paul’s prayer does not involve mere maintenance of the Christian faith, but maturity in all its splendor and vigor. *No compromise!*
- In our postmodern, post-Christian 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 or expedient! How are you doing in this area?
- Do you pray that your family members and fellow believers will know and choose what is best so their love increases for others?
- 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:
 - ✓ He always prayed that God would work in and through circumstances, rather than merely change them.
 - ✓ Paul’s focus in prayer was primarily for others, not for himself.

Next week: Prayer for Power (Ephesians 3:14-21)