

December 8, 2019

### **Paul's Prayer for the Saints at Philippi**

*“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,” Phil. 1:9-11.*

These verses contain the contents of Paul's prayer in behalf of the saints at Philippi. A little background information helps us understand some of the reasons for his close feelings for these brethren. To begin with, we state that Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke, in obedience to “the Macedonia Call” (Acts 16:8-12), journeyed from Troas to Philippi (a Roman colony) on what has been called his “second missionary journey” and preached the gospel in that city. The first converts were Lydia and her household (Acts 16:13-15). After casting “*the spirit of divination*” from “*a certain slave girl*,” Paul and Silas were severely “*beaten with rods*,” and then thrown into prison, with their feet “*fastened...in the stocks*” (Acts 16:16-23). However, instead of complaining about the injustice to which they were subjected, Paul and Silas prayed and sang “*hymns to God*,” even at the midnight hour (Acts 16:25). Suddenly there was a “*great earthquake*,” resulting in the prison doors being opened, and all the prisoners' chains being “*loosed*.” At that moment the jailer responsible for guarding them (who had been asleep), woke up and was in the process of committing suicide when Paul cried out, saying, “*do yourself no harm, for we are all here*” (Acts 16:26-28). Providentially, this led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer who after having heard “*the word of the Lord*” being spoken to all in his house, took them “*the same hour of the night and washed their stripes*,” with both he and his family being “*baptized*” (Acts 16:29-33).

Time passed. Paul concluded that journey, and embarked upon his “third missionary journey” (Acts 18:23-21:-21:17). More time passed, and finally Paul was sent to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27-28). This was his first imprisonment in Rome, and during this time Paul wrote four “prison epistles,” Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon (Phil. 1:7,13; Eph, 6:20; Col. 4:10; Phile. 23).

The saints at Philippi had been especially close to Paul, having “*fellowship in the gospel from the first day*” (Phil. 1:4) until the “*now*” when he wrote this epistle. They had sent “*once and again*” to alleviate his necessities, and had even sent Epaphroditus to provide the things Paul needed (Phil. 4:16-18). Hence, not surprisingly, in this letter to the saints at Philippi, Paul could sincerely say, “*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you*,” and then both commend them and to voice his appreciation to them (Phil. 1:3-8).

However, it is one thing to say “I am praying for you,” and another to state the actual **contents** of one's prayer in behalf of another. We now note what Paul prayed for, as he petitioned God in behalf of these saints. He prayed that:

**1. Their love would “abound,”** Phil. 1:9. “*Abound*” is from a word which means to “exist in superfluity” (Weust, in **Word Studies**). Love must exist — not in mediocrity — but in abundance!

He prayed that their love would “*abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment*,” Phil. 1:9. Love must exist; however, it must be governed by certain guidelines, namely “*knowledge*” and “*discernment*.” “*Knowledge*” of God's word comes by following three rules, all summed up in the words “study, study, and study!” cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18). “*Discernment*” denotes depth of insight, and perception.

**2. That they would “approve the things that are excellent,”** Phil.1:9). “Approve” is “from a Greek word which refers to the act of testing something for the purpose of approving it, thus to approve after testing,” (Weust, in **Word Studies**). God wants His people to use their intelligence, to “*test all things*” and to “*hold fast what is good,*” I Thess. 5:21).

**3. That they would be “sincere and without offense,”** Phil. 1:10. “Sincere” is from a Greek word which means “distinct, unmixed, pure, unsullied,” (Weust, **Word Studies**). “Without offense” literally means “not cut against, not stumbled against” (*ibid*, p. 37). A true Christian is not a hypocrite; he strives not to be a stumbling block to others! How long should we be “*sincere and without offense?*” Paul said “*till the day of Christ,*” or until the Lord comes!

**4. That they would be “filled with the fruits of righteousness,”** Phil.1:11. Herein he refers to those “*fruits*” which come as a result of their love abounding “*in knowledge and in all discernment,*” of their approving “*the things that are excellent,*” and of their being “*sincere and without offense.*” “*The fruits of righteousness*” in this verse would certainly include the “*fruit of the Spirit,*” as set forth in Gal. 5:22,23, and those required character qualities which we must give “*all diligence*” to develop, and which are set forth in 2 Peter 1:5-9. “*The fruits of righteousness*” of Phil. 1:11 are said to be “*by Jesus Christ.*” Indeed, these “*fruits*” are “*by*” or through Jesus Christ, for as Paul later said, “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,*” Phil. 4:13. He is our “*example,*” I Pet. 2:21); He is our “*mediator,*” I Tim. 2:5; He is our “*High Priest,*” Heb. 2:17; He is the “*captain*” of our “*salvation,*” Heb. 2:10; He is our “*Advocate with the Father,*” I John 2:1. “*No one comes to the Father except through*” Jesus, John 14:6!

**The effect** of our love abounding in “*knowledge and all discernment,*” of our approving “*the things that are excellent,*” of our being “*sincere and without offence,*” and of our being “*filled with the fruits of righteousness,*” is that it redounds “*to the glory and praise of God,*” Phil. 1:11. And that should be our main objective in life. Paul exhorted the saint at Corinth, saying, “*whatever you do do all to the glory of God,*” I Cor. 10:31. One reason for diligently striving to let our light shine before men is because it results in others glorifying our “*Father in heaven,*” Matt. 5:16. We must live our lives — not for the purpose of doing our “*own thing,*” but for the purpose of glorifying God. And by so doing, one day we can be **with** God in heaven!

**Conclusion:** Please note that Paul’s focus in his prayer for these brethren was not primarily that of their physical comfort and well-being, but that of their spiritual well-being. His real objective was that of their being saved, and of God being glorified. Yes, we can pray for our “*daily bread*” (Matt. 6:11), and our physical safety and well being, but our primary aim should be to glorify and to live for God in the **here** and the now so that we can be with God in **the hereafter**.

\*\*\*\* —B. Witherington