

Pray for the Spiritual Growth of Brothers and Sisters – Philipians 1:9-11

Introduction and Outlines

- Scripture reading: Philipians 1:9-11, Ephesians 1:17-23.
- Paul prays for the spiritual growth of brothers/sisters. He knows God is the only source of sanctification, so he asks Him to do it. It is not mere human effort——We need to follow Paul’s example to pray for spiritual growth!
- If you seldom pray for brothers/sisters’ spiritual needs, consider these two points: 1) Prayer reflects our hearts. What you pray for is what you care about; 2) “The things you pray about are the things you trust God to handle. The things you neglect to pray about are the things you trust you can handle on your own.” If you don’t pray for spiritual growth, it means you don’t think it takes God to do it.
- Outlines:
 - Title: Pray for the spiritual growth of brothers/sisters
 - 1. Love that abounds still more and more (v9)
 - 2. Discernment that knows how to choose the best (v10a)
 - 3. Conscience that is sincere and uncompromised (v10b)
 - 4. Fruit that is produced through Christ’s righteousness (v11a)
 - 5. Praise that exalts the glory of God the Father (v11b)

Love that abounds still more and more (v9)

- “your love may abound still more and more”: This is the main clause and the key of this prayer, and the following verses are its results. The importance of love is often emphasized in NT (cf. 1 Timothy 1:5, 1 John 4:7-8, Colossians 3:14 etc.). “Still more and more” on one hand affirms the love they already have, and on the other, asks God to help them grow further more in love.
- “in real knowledge and all discernment”: The abounding of love is not without boundaries. It cannot be like a flooding river running all over the place. It must abound within the channel set by God so as to irrigate God’s field.

“real knowledge”: Not the shallow head knowledge, but the lived-out knowledge that goes deep and wide. This kind of knowledge often is the core of Paul’s prayer (Ephesians 1:17-18, Colossians 1:9-10).

Knowledge without love is pride; Love without knowledge is compromise. Knowledge without love is cold and harsh; Love without knowledge is selfish lust. It does no good if love does not abound on the foundation of knowledge of truth (cf. 2 John 2 “for the sake of the truth”, 3 John 1 “love in truth”).

“discernment”: The ability to make good judgments in real life with biblical principles. It is translated as “senses” in Hebrews 5:14 where mature Christians “because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” Discernment is such spiritual senses.

Knowledge and discernment are not for boasting, but for love to abound; not for criticizing others, but for loving one another all the better.

Discernment that knows how to choose the best (v10a)

- “so that you may approve the things that are excellent”: The result of abounding love. Love will help us to make judgments, make us think: What are the things that help me better love God and love others according to biblical truth?
- “approve the things that are excellent”: Not judging the basic right or wrong. Paul is asking God to help us to pick from among many good things what is the very best, the most important and most pleasing God.

1 Corinthians 10:23 “All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things edify.”

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 “**But** examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.”

Ephesians 5:17 “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”

Illustration: There is nothing wrong with entertainment, but are there better things to do? The basis for such discernment is the abounding love that puts loving God and others at the center, without which you can’t have the discernment according to God’s will.

Conscience that is sincere and uncompromised (v10b)

- “sincere and blameless”: The subsequent result of discernment. Only by growing continually in spiritual discernment can you be sincere and blameless and come before God with a clear conscience.

“sincere” literally “tested by sunlight” (pottery term, referring to a pot without wax filling). It means being the same inside and outside. The opposite is hypocrisy, where the inside and outside are different. You can be one thing in church and another outside church. You can be one thing in front of people and another in your living room. Or you can say one thing with your mouth and think another in your heart.

1 Corinthians 4:5 “.....*but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of *men’s* hearts.”

“blameless”: The root is “stumble”, it is always connected with conscience in the Bible (as in 1 Corinthians 8, 10 and Romans 14). Blameless is a non-stumbled conscience, a clear conscience

before the judgment seat of our Lord. It will not stumble or be ashamed when the motives of men's hearts are disclosed (cf. Psalm 7:8; 18:20, 23, 31-32).

- “until the day of Christ”: Paul’s prayer is an eternal perspective. The progressive sanctification of Christian is vital because it matters for eternity! If you don’t have a progressively sanctified life, you will have a compromised conscience. You will stumble and be ashamed in the day of Christ.

Jude 24 “who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy

Fruit that is produced through Christ’s righteousness (v11a)

- “having been filled with the fruit of righteousness”: 1) “the fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:22-23 focuses on the inner spiritual character; 2) fruit most often refers to the good deeds of Christians, that is, every good work pleasing to God (cf. Colossians 1:10); 3) The fruit can also mean the work of the gospel where people are saved by the preaching of the gospel (cf. Romans 1:13; Colossians 1:6).

Perfect tense means this will have been accomplished when the Lord Jesus comes again—— Paul prays that they will have been filled with these fruits as they come before the Lord !

- “righteousness”: It’s that which meets God’s perfect standard. This is what God requires of man. It’s a key concept of salvation.
- “through Jesus Christ”: We cannot bear a single fruit of righteousness on our own, for “There is none righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:10). Salvation is through faith in Christ, and fruit-bearing is also through Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:30 “who became to us righteousness”

2 Corinthians 5:21 “He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

John 15:5 “ 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. ”

Praise that exalts the glory of God the Father (v11b)

- “to the glory and praise of God”: The ultimate goal of Paul’s prayer. If the ultimate goal of our pursuit for sanctification is not to the glory and praise of God, then we are still worshipping idols and not the true God.
- “Glory”: Glory is the sum of all attributes of God. All God’s attributes and works are for His own glory to be manifested.

Theological point: God's essential glory does not increase or decrease because of us (cf. John 17:5), but the manifested/ascribed glory has to do with our response. When sinners "fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), they don't take away His essential glory but the manifested/ascribed glory. The purpose of believers' fruit-bearing is to manifest God's glory and ascribe glory to God!

John 15:8 "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."

Summary: From the abounding love to the glory of God, this is the pursuit of every Christian. Don't forget, it must also be our prayer. Only God can accomplish that which glorifies His own name. May the prayer of Paul become our continuous prayer for our brothers/sisters.