

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/19/93 PM  
Philippians 1:9-11 "Prayer: An Essential for Helping Others Grow"

**Intro:**

Great men of God are great men of prayer.

Illust: Dr. Adam Clarke, in his autobiography, tells the following story about John Wesley. Mr. Wesley was returning to England by ship. Contrary winds hit the sea vessel. Wesley was reading at the time. When he realized the confusion on board, he asked what was the problem. When he was informed that the wind was not cooperating, he simply replied, "Then let us go to prayer."

Here's what Wesley prayed, "Almighty and everlasting God, Thou hast sway everywhere, and all things serve the purpose of Thy will; Thou holdest the winds in Thy fists and sittest upon the water floods, and reignest a King forever. Command these winds and these waves that they obey Thee, and take us speedily and safely to the haven whither we would go."

Do you know what happened? Wesley simply got up from his knees, said nothing more, but took his book, and continued reading. Dr. Clarke went on deck, and to his surprise, found the ship under sail. The wind had changed, suddenly and favorably, to Clarke's surprise. Wesley made no remark. It was as if he expected to be heard and took it for granted that he was heard! (in *Bounds, Purpose*, 29-30)

Quote: Henry Martyn (in *Bounds, Purpose in Prayer*, 38), "Let me burn out for God. After all, whatever God may appoint, prayer is the great thing. Oh, that I may be a man of prayer."

Q: How's your prayer life?

Last week we began a Sunday PM series, "Learning to Pray More Biblically." Our aim is just that, to learn to pray more biblically.

Approach of Series: To explore a sampling of prayers recorded in the NT.

1. Romans 1:8-10
2. Philippians 1:9-11
3. Colossians 1:9-14
4. Acts 4:23-31
5. I Timothy 2:1-2
6. James 5:13-18
7. II Thessalonians 1:3-4, 11-12

Tonight, we want to look at the apostle Paul's prayer for the Philippians. You'll find it recorded in Philippians 1. We're going to see that prayer is an essential for helping others grow.

READ: Paul's prayer in Phil 1:9-11

**Proposition: Paul prayed that the Christians in Philippi would experience maturity, in two areas of their lives.**

I. Paul's Thankfulness (3-7)

II. Paul's Requests (9-11)

A. Paul prayed for Maturity in their Love (9-10a).

1. An Abounding Love (9)
2. A Discerning Love (9)
3. A Love Committed to Excellence (10)

B. Paul prayed for Maturity in their Character (10b-11).

1. Character before God
2. Character before Men

The church at Philippi held a special place in Paul's heart. That impacted the way he prayed for them. Before we actually look at his prayer, look at his intro...

**I. Paul's Thankfulness (3-7)**

V 3 "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you"

Q: For what did Paul express thanks to God, concerning the Philippians?

1. For their fellowship/partnership in the gospel (5)
2. For the confidence assurance of their continued growth (6)
3. For their involvement, even when in danger, in the gospel ministry (7)

Life was dismal for Paul. He was chained as a prisoner in Rome. Execution was a glaring possibility. Yet one group of people lit up his life. That was the Philippians. Of all the churches Paul started, the one at Philippi was the only one that chose to support his missionary efforts with financial gifts (4:15).

Humanly speaking, there was little Paul could do in return for them. Yet, he could write. And he could pray.

Key: Prayer is a vital, effective means to help another person mature.

Illust:

**II. Paul's Requests (9-11)**

Paul prayed for maturity in 2 areas of the Philippians' lives. Notice the first area.

A. Paul prayed for Maturity in their Love (9-10a).

V 9 "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more"

Paul prayed that his friends would experience maturity in their love. What does that mean? He asked God to grant them a love marked by 3 traits.

*1. An Abounding Love (9)*

V 9 "I pray that your love may abound yet more and more"

You say, "If the Philippian church was such a solid, dependable, and obedient church, why did Paul pray this?"

Please observe that Paul doesn't pray that they would BEGIN to love, but that their love would ABOUND. Paul is not suggesting by his prayer that the Philippians

had a glaring problem, that there were holes in their lives. But even successful Christians have not arrived.

"abound" = to be over and above

Picture a cup. When you take the pitcher and start pouring, the level rises from 1/4 to 1/2 to 3/4 and finally, it's full. What happens if you keep pouring? The cup overflows. It can't contain the contents.

That's the kind of love Paul wanted to see in his friends' lives. An abounding love. An overflowing love.

Challenge: We need to learn to love with an abounding love!

eg--

Paul prayed for a mature love, an abounding love. But abounding love can be mislead. So Paul prayed for a second trait...

## 2. *A Discerning Love (9)*

V 9 "in knowledge and in all judgement"

Love, if it's to be biblical, must be based upon "knowledge" and "judgment." Those are the boundries in which love is exercised. If we go beyond the boundries, it's no longer true love.

Love must be more than sentiment. Please don't get the idea Paul has in mind some gushy, emotional feeling. The word for love is "apape". Agape love is that which originates from a person's will, and then involves every part of the person.

Mature love takes discernment.

Warning: When love is not based upon knowledge and judgment, you can actually do more harm than good to the cause of Christ. Sincerity is not the boundry. Knowledge is.

Illust: I'm watching TV, and hear a plea for help for starving children in Ethiopia. I'm moved. And so I should be. I see the 800 number on the screen. I get out my master card, and wire them \$50. Did I do the right thing? Did I check out the organization that's handling the money? Does it operate by integrity? Is it a cult?

Love must be checked by knowledge.

There's a positive side to that too. Since true love and knowledge go hand in hand, guess what? We can't love if we don't know. Paul prayed that the Philippians would mature in their knowledge and judgment.

We need to grow in our knowledge of God, His Word, and His plan. We need to grow in our knowledge of people too. Why? So that our capacity to love can grow.

Illust:

## 3. *A Love Committed to Excellence (10)*

V 10 "That ye may approve things that are excellent"

"approve" = approving is a two-part activity. First, it means to put to the test. Then, as the result of the examination, to accept as tested.

Often the word was used to describe the process of testing coins to see if they were genuine. But notice what Paul prayed that the Philippians would accept...

"things that are excellent" = to differ, to make a difference; things which excel  
It's sad, yet true. Many times in our lives we get distracted, even sidetracked.  
We're prone to set our sights on things which may not be bad, but are not the best.

Paul's not praying that they'll choose the good over the bad. He's burdened that they pick the best over the good.

"I pray that you will love the things that really matter in life."

Application: Men, it's fall. It's time for the pigskin to start flying. We need Paul's reminder, don't we? Is there anything wrong with football, and watching a game? No. But does it really matter for eternity whether the Browns beat the Bengals?

Are we choosing the best over the good when we miss church to take our family on a picnic? When we buy a new car yet can't afford to give to missions? When we enroll our children in every activity coming down the pike, yet forsake their Christian education?

May God help us to love the things that really matter in life. May God help us to pray for the things that really matter in life.

Illust:

Tran: Paul prayed for maturity in their love. He asked God to give them an abounding love, a discerning love, and a love committed to excellence.

### B. Paul prayed for Maturity in their Character (10b-11).

V 10b "that you may BE"

Character is not what we do. It's what we are.

Illust:

Paul prayed that they would experience maturity in 2 aspects of their character.

#### *1. Character before God*

V 10 "that you may be sincere"

"sincere" = to be clear when examined in the sunlight

Q: How do you check to see if your sunglasses are clean?

A: You hold them up to the light. The light reveals the spots.

Paul prayed that the character of the Philippians would be clear and clean when held up next to the THE Light. There's no room for a facade, for pretense, for wearing masks in the Christian life. God knows us through and through.

That's another aspect of maturity in character.

#### *2. Character before Men*

V 10 "without offense until the day of Christ"

The word means to "arrive at a destination without being morally injured by sin." That's a rare thing these days. It's hard to find someone who doesn't have a chink in his armor.

What Paul prayed for the Philippians was the standard he held for himself.  
eg--When he stood before Felix, he shared his ambition--Acts 24:16,  
"And in this do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offense toward  
God and men."

If you want to know how to pray for me, pray this--that I would be without  
offense before God and men. A man of character.

Q: How can we tell if we possess this kind of character?

A: Fruit--v 11.

V 11 "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness..."

Please don't miss this. We can't produce righteous fruits on our own strength.  
True fruit is the product of what?

"which are by Christ Jesus"--True fruit is produced by Christ in us.

Q: Do you know how to tell the difference between religious activity and fruit?

A: Religious activity is something we do in our own strength. Genuine fruit  
must be produced in us by Christ. Religious activity impresses men. Genuine fruit  
results in praise to God.

### **Conclusion:**

There's Paul's prayer. Think about something with me.

Q: Why do you think Paul wrote down his prayer for the Philippians? Why did  
he tell them what he prayed for them?

A: To motivate them to keep growing! It's like he put a challenge before them.  
"Here's what I'm asking God to do in your lives. Now cooperate with the Lord, and  
make it your aim too!"

There's another reason God saw fit to record Paul's prayer. It's a model for us,  
a model for how we should pray for other believers.

May I offer this challenge. Pray this prayer for this church--for your SS class,  
for your Awana group, for your teen group, for your own family.

Problem: E. M. Bounds offers this critique, "...Prayer with so many of us is a  
form of selfishness; it means asking for something for ourselves--that and nothing  
more." (Purpose, 37)

Challenge: It mattered to Paul whether his fellow Christians grew. It should  
matter to us, too. We need to pray for maturity. Maturity must be our goal.

See: Col 1:28 "...that we may present every man perfect in Christ"

May God be pleased to help us to pray more biblically.

Illust: David Livingstone was one of the great missionaries of all time.  
He was also a great man of prayer. It was his habit every birthday to write a prayer.

On his next to last birthday, this was his prayer: 'O Divine One, I have not loved Thee earnestly, deeply, sincerely enough. Grant, I pray Thee, that before this year is ended I may have finished my task.' One day the following year, Dr. Livingstone's faithful men checked in on him. As they looked in his African hut at Ilala, while the rain dripped from the eaves, they saw their master on his knees beside his bed. He had died on his knees in prayer. (Bounds, Purpose in Prayer, 35)