



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

A Great Prayer for the Capitol Community

PHILIPPIANS 1:9-11

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In the West Virginia capitol we have the privilege of seeing both chambers of the legislature open up their floor sessions in prayer each day. The prayers are given by a wide variety of clergy from around the state and often by one of the members themselves. As we hear a pastor or lawmaker pray every day, it brings up an important question – how should we pray for our legislators and elected officials? When we think of the challenges facing all those who work in the statehouse, the question expands to how we should pray for all those serving in the capitol community. We can learn a great deal about our own prayer lives from the example of Paul's prayer found in this letter. As we contemplate his intercession and the requests he takes to the Lord for those believers so long ago, we find priorities for our own lives toward which we should strive. Indeed, in Philippians 1:9-11 we find a great prayer for all those serving in the capitol community:

⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment,¹⁰so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ;¹¹having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In the greeting and introduction of Paul's letter we read of his great love and affection for his brothers and sisters in the church at Philippi. This love led him to pray often for them. Paul lets them know, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all..." (1:3-4). Here in verses 9-11 we find exactly *how* and *what* he prayed for them.¹

We see in this petition five areas of growth that Paul wanted to see in the lives of the Philippian believers. These elements are sequential, building upon one another. In essence Paul is praying that the believers would grow in their spiritual maturity. He is entreating God to work in their lives to better "conduct themselves as citizens", to be better "citizens of heaven". In examining this prayer for the believers in the church at Philippi, we can learn important priorities for our own lives and our own

spiritual growth. We can also learn a lot about our own prayer lives and how we should pray for others. Let us take a look at these five elements and consider how they might apply to you as you serve in the capitol and in your daily life. We see Paul praying:

...THAT YOUR LOVE MAY ABOUND STILL MORE AND MORE IN REAL KNOWLEDGE AND ALL DISCERNMENT

Paul prays that the Philippian believers would grow in love. Not just grow, but that their love would "abound more and more". He prays that they would excel or overflow abundantly in love. Paul does not specifically mention an object for this love. Is he praying for them to grow in love for God or for each other? He means **both**. Paul writes vividly of his own love for Christ and uses his own example to encourage them to love Christ more (3:7-14). He also exhorts them to love each other (2:1-5). This certainly reflects Jesus' teaching on love:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." Matt. 22:37-40

Jesus also taught that love for others would be the identifying characteristic of one who is truly a follower of Jesus Christ.

"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35

Paul prayed for another church that their love might grow, not just for their fellow believers, but for everyone: "...**may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people**" (1 Thes. 3:12).

Paul is not encouraging some sort of gushy sentimentality. He prays for love to grow in **real knowledge and all discernment**. Our love for God is based upon a true and accurate knowledge of Him. In nearly all of Paul's prayers he touches upon the importance of knowledge and His Word.² Discernment is a practical insight that affects our actions and our conduct. It is the ability to choose wisely in the affairs of day-to-day living. Real love

BIBLE STUDIES

LOBBYIST / STAFF STUDY: TUESDAYS, 12:00 NOON – TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)
LEGISLATOR / ELECTED OFFICIAL STUDY: THURSDAYS 8:00 A.M., SENATE PRES. CONF. ROOM (M219), 12:00 NOON, TREASURER'S CONF. ROOM (EB 54)

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does not mean we will never disagree with someone or challenge them regarding wrong beliefs or actions. True love will certainly affect our motives and attitudes when we must do so.

How is such love to be demonstrated in the capitol community? In an atmosphere that is often challenging and contentious, believers need to strive to grow in love, regardless of party or ideology. We need to faithfully pray for each other that we might grow and “abound more and more” with this kind of love.

...SO THAT YOU MAY APPROVE THE THINGS THAT ARE EXCELLENT

One who is growing in love in knowledge and discernment will grow in the ability to approve the things that are excellent. In other words, we are able to discern what is best. This is not just developing a greater capability to determine between things that are right and wrong. It is skill in differentiating between what is good, what is better, and what is best. Each of us should certainly strive to grow in this ability.

...IN ORDER TO BE SINCERE AND BLAMELESS UNTIL THE DAY OF CHRIST

“Sincere and blameless” refer to the testimony we have before other believers and before the world. “Sincere” speaks of the absence of hypocrisy while “blameless” literally means “without stumbling”. It means to be free from moral stumbling in our own lives and not causing stumbling in others. It obviously does not mean we will be perfect. Paul later in his letter confessed even he had not attained these goals. It does mean that as our love for God and for others grows, and as our ability to approve the things that are excellent develops, we will also become more sincere and more blameless before others in our daily lives.

...HAVING BEEN FILLED WITH THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WHICH COMES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

The “fruit of righteousness” refers to the godly actions which are demonstrated in a believer’s life. We immediately think of the “fruit of the Spirit” Paul writes about in Galatians 5:22-23. The love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control he describes there are the heart qualities or attitudes that grow and develop in one who knows Christ. The “fruit of righteousness” mentioned here are the outward actions that arise from those qualities. Paul prays that their lives would be filled with such godly actions.

Paul points out that these godly actions come “*through Jesus Christ*”. As always, Paul never exhorts us to actions or good works without tying it to the gospel. We do not earn God’s favor or gain salvation by anything we do. Our sin is against an infinitely holy God and as a result is an infinite offense against Him. We could never do enough good things to pay for the sin we have committed. We gain a right relationship with God only through faith in Christ and His work on the cross. Remember Paul’s desire to “be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith...” (3:9). Our good works are the “fruit of righteousness”—they are the natural result of the new life we gain when we turn from our sin and rebellion and trust Christ.

...TO THE GLORY AND PRAISE OF GOD

Paul wraps up his prayer with the purpose and goal for all that we do – the glory and praise of God. When our love for Him and others abounds, it brings glory and praise to God. When we choose what is best and excellent in our lives, it brings glory and praise to God. When we are sincere and blameless before others, it brings glory and praise to God. When our lives are filled with the fruit of righteousness, it brings glory and praise to God. In this last element we find the best way to pray for everyone working in the statehouse. We should pray, and then seek to demonstrate, that everything in the life of a believer serving in the capitol community should bring glory and praise to God.

CONCLUSION

- These qualities only come about “through Jesus Christ”. Have you trusted Him and His work on the cross to make you right with God?
- We should strive to grow in these elements both in our daily lives and in our work at the capitol.
- We should pray for these characteristics to grow in the lives of our family, friends, and capitol colleagues.

¹ We learn a lot about Paul, his love for believers, and his priorities for their lives from his prayers. We find he prayed often for the believers in the churches he planted. See 2 Thes. 1:11-12; 1 Thes. 3:9-13; Col. 1:9-12; Eph. 1:15-19; Eph. 3:14-19; Philemon 4-6.

² See Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:9-10; Philemon 6