



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Five Prayer Requests on Your Behalf--Philippians 1:9-11

JANUARY 11, 2011

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Weekly Bible Study Schedule

- **Tuesday, January 11, 7 AM in HHR #5**
-Breakfast Provided
- **Tuesday, January 11, 8:30 PM in Room #225**
(Sen. Bob Dixon's office)

Our first 2011 Bible study for legislators, judges and all staff will be on Tuesday, January 11th at 7am in Hearing Room #5. A second study will take place again Tuesday Evening, January 11 at 8:30pm in Room #225. This is a non-partisan and non-denominational study.

The mission of Capitol Commission is to carry out the Great Commission in the Capitol community. We are not a lobbying group trying to garner votes; we do not strive for changes in legislation but rather labor to see changes in the hearts of the legislators. We are a ministry of the church seeking to present the gospel message and help believers grow through the expository teaching of the Bible. Scripture reveals God's great concern for people, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This forms the foundation for our service to you.

In our first Bible study in 2011, I would like to remind you of the biblical goals of our ministry service to you and with you. The Apostle Paul lays out several of these in a prayer he offered on behalf of the church of Philippi. Of all the things this great servant of God could have prayed on behalf of a church, it is quite interesting that these five requests are what he lifted up for them. It seems to reason, then, that if Paul prayed these requests, they would be quite important for the growth of a believer.

INTRODUCTION

The book called "Philippians" in the New Testament is a letter from Paul, who was imprisoned in Rome, to the church he started in the town of Philippi several years earlier. It is a letter in which he expressed much joy in his memories of them and he wrote to encourage them to be more and more like Christ.

As in the majority of Paul's letters to the churches, he informed the readers of the prayers he continually offered on their behalf. In another letter, Paul noted that there was "the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches" (2 Cor. 11:28)--the prayers were a reflection of that burden. But being in chains did not dampen this concern. Instead of singing the blues, his mind and heart continued to be set upon the welfare of his brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul was truly a pastor for his people—a pastor that all pastors should look to as an example for their ministries.

About his prayer for the Philippians, he wrote:

Philippians 1:9-11 *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.¹*

There are five importance requests found in this prayer that Paul is lifting up to God for these beloved people. These requests still cover vital aspects of the believer's life, even today.

REQUEST #1—YOU WILL GROW IN LOVE

The first of Paul's requests for the church in Philippi is that their "love may abound still more" (1:9a). The importance of love in one's life was established by God in the Old Testament 1500 years before Paul's letter. The Jewish *Shema* prayer, recited every morning and every evening by devout Jews in Jesus' day, states *Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might* (Deut. 6:4-5). Also found in the Mosaic Law is the command "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). These were later quoted by Jesus as the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-31).

Paul continues with this thought in the midst of his teaching concerning spiritual gifts in First Corinthians. He teaches in chapter 13 that even if he could speak in mighty ways or have great knowledge or even give up his

CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, OFFICE #225

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, BROADWAY BUILDING 3RD FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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life for his faith, it would be useless—if he did not love (13:1-3). He concludes the chapter by stating that love is the greatest of all things (13:13).

Clearly, Paul is not talking about the superficial, emotion-based, feeling that passes off as “love” today. God, Jesus and Paul are all talking about the type of love that is motivated by a person’s will and is seen in his or her action. *Agape* is the love that Paul is praying for in Philippians. He is praying that the believers will grow in their conscious decisions to care for and to look out for the interests of God and of others.

A growing love for God is seen in one’s fellowship with God (Psa. 63:1-8), in obedience to God’s law (Psa. 119:165; John 14:21), in trusting in His power and sovereignty (Psa. 31:23), in a delight and contentment in Him (Psa. 37:4). A growing love for one another is visible when one considers others better than him or herself (Phil. 2:1-8) and when the needs of another, whether friend or foe, are being taken care of (Luke 10:15-37).

REQUEST #2—YOU WILL GROW IN KNOWLEDGE & WISDOM

Paul’s request for the church to grow in love is tightly woven together with his second request that the church will “abound in love more and *more in real knowledge and all discernment*” (1:9b). This second request reinforces the understanding that the love Paul is praying for is the type of love that consciously decides to care for another. But how is one to love an invisible, infinite, holy God? What does true love toward another look like? Knowledge and insight are needed to properly act in love.

AS BELIEVERS GROW IN LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE, AS THEY DISCERN AND DO WHAT IS RIGHT, AS THEY ARE SINCERE AND BLAMELESS FOR THE COMING OF JESUS, THEIR LIVES WILL BE MARKED BY THE ABUNDANCE OF SPIRITUAL FRUIT THAT COMES THROUGH JESUS.

The distorted ideas and thoughts of men on this subject are far from what the Bible teaches. The love promoted by our society is defined by how we feel and the good intentions we may have toward one another; and these same characteristics are then used to define our love toward God.

But if one has a good understanding of God, which comes from a thorough study and meditation of what the Scriptures teach about Him, he or she will have a better understanding of how to express that love toward Him. For example, if people grow in their understanding of God’s

holiness, they will realize that staying away from sin is showing love. If they know of God’s sovereignty and goodness, they will know that showing love is trusting Him and not doubting.²

Likewise, an understanding of biblical love for one another also defines our actions toward each other. The old saying “what would Jesus do?” can be applicable here. He showed His love to others by exercising compassion on some, by rebuking others, and by not giving in the desires and whims of the nation, but rather laying down His life to give them what they really need.

We live in a society, and even a church society, that looks down upon a growth in the knowledge of doctrine and Scripture is prevalent. Paul’s prayer for the church then is still needed for the church today. Pay heed to these words of Jonathan Edwards:

“Divine knowledge and divine love go together. A spiritual view of divine things always excites love in the soul, and draws forth the heart in love to every proper object. True discoveries of the divine character dispose us to love God as the supreme good; they unite the heart in love to Christ; they incline the soul to flow out in love to God’s people, and to all mankind.”

REQUEST #3—YOU WILL BE DISCERNING

Paul’s requests that the church would grow in love and grow in understanding and wisdom lead directly into his third request that they “may approve the things that are excellent” (v10a). In other words, he prays that their knowledge and insight will be used in their discernment of the good and the bad; and not just see the difference but also choose that which is good.

The Apostle Paul himself is a great example of the need for wisdom and discernment. In Acts 22:1-5, Paul is standing before the Jewish religious leaders after they apprehended him in the Temple area. In his speech, he talks of the great zeal he had for God; even to the point of persecuting and throwing in jail those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ. His love for God and God’s honor was not doubted, but his ideas of showing that love were not discerning. He had to be shown, in a miraculous way (Acts 9), that he was actually going against the will of the very God for whom he had much zeal.

Most people know that discerning what is good and what is bad is not always easy, therefore much wisdom and insight is needed. But an even harder decision is choosing to do that which is good to do. This is implied when Paul writes “you may approve.” Sometimes, the good and best things are not the most pleasant things. Sometimes, our desires want

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something we know is wrong. It is not a case of ignorance, as in Paul's example above, but rather an instance when the desires and longings of the heart do battle with the intellectual understanding of what is right. Thus, the apostle who deals with this same struggle himself (Rom. 7:14-25) prays to God who gives wisdom generously (James 1:5) that his dear brothers and sisters may be filled with discernment and will choose that which is right.

REQUEST #4—YOU WILL BE PURE WHEN CHRIST RETURNS

Paul's fourth request is tightly tied with the last request. He prays that the church will "approve the things that are excellent" so that they will be "sincere and blameless until the day of Christ" (v10b). Paul prays that they will be found pure when Jesus returns.

PAUL PRAYS TO GOD THAT GOD WILL ANSWER THESE REQUESTS IN THE LIVES OF GOD'S PEOPLE SO THAT GOD'S NAME IS GLORIFIED.

It is true that for the believer God has purified or sanctified him or her at the point of their conversion. Their sins and the punishment due those sins have been taken away and nailed to the cross and the righteousness of Christ is now placed upon (imputed) the believer (2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 2:13-15). Therefore, when God sees the believer, He sees purity—the purity of His Son rather than the filthiness of their sins.

What Paul is praying for is that the people in the church at Philippi may live lives that are growing into the holiness that God has already placed upon them. God made them pure and blameless; now may their lives be a reflection of that grace. One cannot reflect holiness, though, if his or her life is filled with sinful actions, undiscerning knowledge and a lack of love. So Paul, the pastor-evangelist, prays that they may be found pure when Christ returns for His church.

Throughout his letters, the constant awareness that Christ is returning permeates his instructions. He interjects this subtle reminder in verse 10 "Hey, Jesus is coming back." In a world, then and now, when it is so easy to live life without any thought of Jesus' return, it is good to be reminded that we are to be constantly growing in holiness because one day (only God knows when) Christ will return. God's children should be ready to meet their Savior by being "sincere and blameless." Peter writes, *Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless* (2 Pet. 3:14).

REQUEST #5—YOU WILL BE FILLED WITH GOOD FRUIT

Paul's last request in this prayer is that they will be filled with good fruit. It is a culmination of the first four requests. As believers grow in love and knowledge, as they discern and do what is right, as they are sincere and blameless for the coming of Jesus, their lives will be marked by the abundance of spiritual fruit that comes through Jesus. The fruit that is visible in a believer's life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control (Gal. 5:22-23). It will be seen in their humility toward one another (Phil. 2:1-8) and in the hope they have as they await the coming of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-14).

WHY?

"Why?" may seem like an odd question to toss in toward the conclusion of this lesson. But it is necessary for Paul gives an answer in verse 11, although it may not be what we expect. We may be tempted to pray for each other in this manner or seek to help our brothers and sisters to grow in these areas because it is truly what is good for them and it is what will make them happy and content.

Paul gives a different reason at the end of his prayer; he writes, "to the glory and praise of God." Let this be a reminder to all who read this that we are not the center of the universe. All that God does and all the prayers He answers are not solely for our benefit (although all His actions and answers to prayer are in our best interest). God is the One deserving all glory and it is to His honor that we do anything (1 Cor. 10:31). Peter echoes Paul's prayer:

1 Peter 2:12 *Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

The Apostle Paul prays to God that God will answer these requests in the lives of God's people so that God's name is glorified.

CONCLUSION

This is my prayer for you, my friend. These requests are also the things which I strive for in my own life and seek to see grow in yours. Therefore, all that we do in our ministry service together will seek to enhance the growth in these areas we pray for. We desire to see God's name glorified in the Missouri State Capitol (and in capitols all across the country and the

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world) and it is glorified when His people reflect His holiness and love in their lives.

Friend, you will not find righteousness or salvation in any type of man-made discipline, religion or dedication. You cannot make yourself right before God. BUT, through Christ, God can truly forgive all your sins--are you interested?

¹ All Scripture references are taken from the New American Standard Bible updated edition.

² Encompassed in this sentence is big bag filled with much discussion of theology and practical living—which I pray we will open and learn about in our times together.