

**Paul's Prayer for Abounding Love
Philippians 1:9-11
Part 1**

We are in a spiritual battle that requires us to pray for one another (Eph. 6:10-18). Let me read for you **Eph. 6:10-18**, “**Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. (11) Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. (12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. (13) Therefore, take up the full armor of God.**” Then it describes the armor and finishes with this final statement. **(18) “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints.”** How important is intercessory prayer in respect to the spiritual battle the church is waging against the spiritual forces of wickedness? Extremely.

Will we stand firm against the spiritual forces of darkness? I don't know. But I do know this: we will be much better able to do this if we pray for each other. We need to understand that God has designed the church in such a way that intercessory prayer is vitally important to our mutual spiritual success.

We have a duty as Christians to pray for one another. If we fail to fulfill this duty, the church of Christ will suffer. Are we fulfilling this duty? Hopefully the answer is yes. But intercessory prayer needs, as we mature in Christ, to go beyond simply being a duty to becoming a passion that we are compelled to lovingly perform (Phil. 1:3-8 cmp. Phil. 1:9-11).

We see this loving compulsion in **Phil. 1:9-11**. Paul has been detailing for the Philippians the various reasons he was thankful to God for them. In **V. 3** he was thankful for his memories; in **VV. 4-5** he was thankful for their participation in the gospel from the first day until now. Finally in **V. 6** he was thankful that the work that the Lord had begun in them would be completed on the Day of Christ Jesus. Then in **VV. 7-8** he explains why he was so confident that this work would indeed be completed and in this explanation he speaks of his affection for them. Listen to these two verses, “**For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. (8) For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.**” And immediately speaking of his deep affection for them he says in verse 9, “**And this I pray**” and he goes on to share with them his prayer of intercession. His prayer of intercession was not simply flowing out of a sense of duty but out of a heart of affection.

Paul deeply and sincerely loved the Philippians. And hopefully it is from this deep affection for the family of God that our prayers will flow. The advantage of this is that our prayers will be much more persistent. Certainly we see this as true in respect to Paul and his intercession for the churches. In **Col. 1:3** he said, “**We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.**” In **Col. 1:9** he said, “**For this reason also, since the day we heard of**

it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” In 2 Tim. 1:3 he said, “I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.” Yes, intercessory prayer is vital for the health and vitality of the church, but for it to be ongoing and enduring we must be motivated by love.

This brings us to Paul’s intercessory prayer in VV. 9-11. “**And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, (10) so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ Jesus; (11) having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.**”

What do we learn from Paul’s prayer for the Philippians? A love that abounds in real knowledge and all discernment will lead to a life filled with the fruit of righteousness. In order to illustrate the truthfulness of this statement, let us first of all consider what Paul prayed for.

WHAT PAUL PRAYED FOR

Hopefully, as we consider what Paul prayed for, we will be better able to see how we ourselves should be praying.

Let us read V. 9, “**And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.**” Notice that Paul’s prayer does not seem to contain any of the typical requests that people commonly pray in respect to each other. He is not praying that their financial situation would be improved, though we know that the Philippian church was very likely poor. He does not pray that they would be freed from the attacks of their opponents, even though we know that the Philippians were under attack. Certainly he could have prayed for these things and perhaps in fact he did, but here in this Scripture he does not. Here he simply wants them to know that he is praying and that he is praying for one very important thing. What is it?

Paul is praying that their love might abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment. This is what Paul is praying for.

It is important to understand that when Paul says, “**And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more**” he is talking about a love they possess but a love that they in fact did not generate. What kind of love is this? It is “divine love.” He wants God’s love, which they are enjoying, to abound more and more.

We know that he is speaking of a divine love because of his choice of words. In the Greek language there are three different words for love. The word for love that Paul chooses to use in this verse is the word “AGAPEI” which refers to the love of God. God’s love serves unconditionally. God’s love is given and extended in serving others irregardless of any extenuating circumstances (Rom. 5:8.) This is the love that we read about in **Rom. 5:8** where it says, “**But God commendeth His love (AGAPEI) toward us in that while we were yet sinners He died for us.**” The world is obsessed with love, but it is not the love of God. It is the

love that comes from the heart of man, which in its essence is self-serving and conditional. If there is any doubt, all we have to do is consider the behavior of man. People on their wedding day will speak of their love for one another and then shortly after their vows they will become bitter enemies.

Paul is praying that their love would abound more and more. He is praying that the love that comes from God would abound more and more.

How important is it that we are operating in the sphere of God's love? Listen to **1 Cor. 13:1-3**, **"If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love (divine love), I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. (2) And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love (divine love), I am nothing. (3) And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love (divine love), it profits me nothing."** If our so-called good works do not flow out of a heart that is being controlled by divine love, a selfless unconditional love, those works have no eternal value.

When we pray for ourselves or for one another, a very good place to begin is in the area of love. Not a conditional love that is generated by forces outside ourselves, but rather a love that comes from God, an unconditional love that is generated by His Spirit when we give ourselves up to Him as a living sacrifice. God does not only want His love to be present in our lives, He wants it abounding. He wants His love to be an ever growing force in our lives; that we would be more and more concerned with serving the Lord and others, than ourselves and with the things that serve us.

Paul certainly experienced this dynamic of abounding love during his lifetime (Rom. 9:1-5; 1 Thess. 2:7-12). We certainly see Paul's abounding love toward believers in **1 Thess. 2**. Initially in this chapter he tells the Thessalonians how he did not come to them and then beginning in **V. 7-12** he tells them how he did come. **"But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. (8) Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (9) For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (10) You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; (11) just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, (12) so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."** Paul's love was so abounding, and he was willing to give up his life in His service for the Church. We would think that is pretty intense and perhaps we aspire to this kind of love as we seek to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. But he even went beyond this in his expression of love for the Jewish people.

Let us read **Romans 9:1-5**, **"I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, (2) that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. (3) For I could wish that I myself were accursed, separated from Christ for the**

sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, (4) who are Israelites to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, (5) whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed, forever. Amen.

How about ourselves? How about our brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we see this same dynamic being worked out? Is our love and the love of our other brothers and sisters in Christ abounding more and more? Hopefully the answer is yes.

What should we be praying for? We should be praying that our love and the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ would abound more and more. But just because we possess God's divine love, and just because this love may be abounding more and more, it does not necessarily mean that we have arrived. It is one thing to possess God's love. It is quite another for that love to express itself properly.

How many times in our lives are we willing to do whatever is necessary to express care for someone or for a group of people no matter how costly, but we just don't know what to do? This is the focus of Paul's prayer request. He is not just praying that our love, that divine love that we receive from God, would abound more and more as he prays in 1 Thess. 3:12, but that it would abound more and more in real knowledge and in all discernment.

Simply being filled with divine love that is abounding still more and more does not protect us from loving wrongly. It does not protect us from loving foolishly. Therefore Paul goes on with his prayer for the Philippians to pray that their love would abound in real knowledge and all discernment. We need to pray that our love would not only abound, but that it would be guided by real knowledge and all discernment.

What does Paul mean by his reference to "real knowledge" (EPIGNOSIS)? In answering this question we first of all need to understand what the Scriptures mean when it uses the word "knowledge" (gnosis). Paul's view of knowledge was largely determined by the Old Testament. To know God meant to be in a close personal relationship with Him. The knowledge (gnosis) of God began with a fear of Him, was linked with His demands, and often was described as knowing His will. I would therefore have to believe that when Paul refers to "real knowledge" (EPIGNOSIS) to describe what we are to pray for, he is using the prefix EPI simply for emphasis. The primary sense of "real knowledge" (EPIGNOSIS) is not so much a knowledge about something, but rather the kind of "full" or "innate" knowing that comes from experience or personal relationship with the Lord and His Word.

It is tremendously exciting for me to see people in our fellowship who are striving to know the Lord in this way as they discipline themselves to spend time with the Lord in prayer and time with the Lord in His word. There are many well-meaning professing Christians who have not yet discovered the importance of knowing God in this way.

Yes, I want my love to abound more and more. Yes, I want your love to abound more and more, but may it abound in real knowledge. May it be shaped and guided by a deepening personal

relationship with God and His Word.

Not only does he pray that their love might abound “in real knowledge” but also in “all discernment” what does he mean by this? The word “discernment” (AISTHESIS) is used only one time in the New Testament. In secular Greek it denotes moral understanding based on experience, hence something close to “moral insight.”

In Proverbs, where 22 out of the 27 LXX occurrences are found, this word is that practical understanding which is keenly aware of the circumstances of an action, manifesting itself particularly in discretion of speech (Prov. 5:2; 14:7; 15:7). “All discernment” is a subset of “real knowledge.”

CONCLUSION

We are in a spiritual battle. We need to pray for ourselves and others that our love, God’s divine love in us, would abound more and more. But beyond this prayer we need to pray that our love, God’s divine love, would abound more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.

This is a good place for our prayers to begin. Will you do this for yourself? Will you do this for your brothers and sisters in Christ?