**PETITION PRAYER FOR INCREASED LOVE AND FRUITFULNESS**

***And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,*** ***10so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,11filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God***

 **Philippians 1:9-11 (NIV)**

Paul’s prayer can be more easily followed when broken up like this:

Paul prays (1) for their love to abound yet more and more

 that (2) this might happen by full knowledge and moral insight

 so that (3) they might approve those things that really matter

 so that (4) they might be pure and blameless when Christ returns

 as (5) they are now full of the fruit of righteousness

fruit that is (6) effected by Jesus Christ

 and (7) for the glory and praise of God

As with the thanksgiving, the prayer anticipates the content of the letter. That their love overflow toward one another is the basic urgency of the exhortation in 1:27-2:18; that they might be full of the fruit of righteousness is the ultimate reason for Paul’s personal testimony in 3:4-14; that they might be found so on the day of Christ is a concern that surfaces throughout; that their knowledge of God and moral insight into His will might increase finds further expansion in the exhortation in 4::8,9 and in the practical application in 2:3,4; and that they might thereby be in a position better to determine what really counts anticipates the long warning in 3:1-21. That all of this is through Christ and for God’s glory is the dominant predicate of the letter.

Paul’s prayer here is in part a continuation of the very things for which he has just given thanks. Both the thanksgiving and the prayer reflect the same framework – present existence in Christ as both ‘already’ and ‘not yet.’ Paul’s prayer for them is that they might live the life of the future in the present, so that they might be blameless at its consummation on the day of Christ. The concern is with the present life in Christ – that they might live for Christ now, and do so in light of His coming day.

At the beginning of his thanksgiving (1:4), Paul told the Philippians that he prayed for them on a regular basis, and that he prayed with joy. Now flowing directly out of his own longing for them ‘*with the affection of Christ Jesus’* (1:8) he tells them what he specifically prays.

First, he prays ‘*your love may abound more and more’* (1:9). We can become over familiar with the word ‘love’ and miss Paul’s concern. ‘Love’ first of all points to the character of God, and to God’s actions toward His people based on that character. God’s love is demonstrated especially in His forbearance and kindness (1 Corinthians 13:4), demonstrated ultimately in the death of Christ for His enemies (Romans 5:6-8). Its primary meaning is not affection as in 1:8 but love in the sense of placing such a high value on a person that we actively seek the benefit of the one we love. This is what Paul prays will ‘*abound more and more’* (1:9) among the Philippian Christians. The rest of the prayer emphasises love not as affection but as behaviour – behaviour that is both ‘*pure’* (from right motives) and ‘*blameless’* (giving no offence).

The qualifier ‘*abound more and more’* means they already display a measure of this love. His concern is they not let behaviour motivated by ‘*selfish ambition or vain conceit’* (2:3) undermine their testimony (c.f. 2 Corinthians 8:1-6)

Second, he prays for a similar increase ‘*in knowledge and depth of insight’* (1:9). Paul’s word for ‘*knowledge’* is not knowledge about something or someone, but rather the ‘full’ knowing that comes from experience or personal relationship. A better knowledge of God and His ways would promote greyer harmony within the church and give the Philippians a clearer understanding of their mutual relationship as fellow believers. The word for ‘*deep insight’* carries the thought of moral understanding based on experience and is a synonym for ‘wisdom’ (*sophia*) or insight/understanding (*sunesis*).

While the NIV firmly links their *‘love abounding more and more’* with *‘knowledge and depth of insight,’* grammatically the prayer for knowledge and insight could equally be a new area altogether. If so, Paul is now praying that along with an ever-increasing love, they may also experience an ever-increasing knowledge (of God and His will) and moral insight. An increased knowledge of God would be needed for them to walk ‘*worthy of the gospel’* (1:27).

‘ … *so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ’* (1:10). The opening of the prayer for ever-increasing love accompanied by ever-increasing knowledge and moral insight has two purposes in mind – so that they ‘*may be able to discern what is best’* and ‘*may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.’*

They needed an overflow of knowledge and insight so that, firstly, they would be ‘*able to discern what is best,* ‘ so that the faculty for making proper assessments about what is absolutely essential regarding life in Christ would increase as well. For the Christian to live an authentic life, some things matter and some things don’t. In 1 Corinthians 7:19 Paul writes ‘*keeping God’s commandments is what counts’* which in Galatians 5:6 is interpreted as ‘*faith expressing itself through love*.’ Because Paul will later contrast the fruit of righteousness (1:11) with righteousness in terms of law-keeping (3:1-11) this is the kind of insight he prays for them to have so that they will continue to be able to discern what counts.

They needed an overflow of knowledge and insight so that, secondly, they ‘*may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ’* (1:10). The word Paul uses for ‘*pure’* appears twice in 2 Corinthians to describe Paul’s apostleship as completely sincere, without the mixed motives he ascribes to his opponents (2:17). In 1 Corinthians 5:7 it is used of a pure lump of dough, ‘unmixed’ with leaven. In the Philippian context then it most likely refers to purity/sincerity of motive in the context of relationships within the community. The other word, ‘*blameless*,’ isn’t Paul’s usual word (used later in 2:15 and 3:6) that means behaviour without observable fault. Instead *aproskopos* means blameless in the sense of not offending, not causing someone to stumble.

Paul’s choice of words here reflects his great desire that on that final day the Philippian believers would be free of mixed motives and not be a potential source of offence – that they would not have offended others through compromised motives. He must have seen the latent possibility of this happening and sought in prayer to see it gone.

‘… ***f****illed with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God’* (1:11). Paul has just explained that his prayer for the Philippians is that they be ‘*pure and blameless for the day of Christ’* (1:10). He now explains that he wants them to arrive at that day ‘***f****illed with the fruit of righteousness.’*He wants them ‘full’ of the fruit of righteousness. Paul could have in mind here either (1) the fruit that comes from the righteousness Christ has provided, and so emphasising the kind of fruitfulness that has God’s gift of righteousness as its *source*, or (2) the fruit consisting of the righteousness that marks one who belongs to Christ, and so emphasising the kind of righteousness that, coming through Christ, has a new kind of *content*. Both are complementary. The following clause ‘*that comes through Jesus Christ’* lends support to the first while the context, ‘*for the day of Christ,’* suggests the second. On the day of Christ, the test will search out both: have we trusted in Christ’s righteousness for salvation and have we lived the kind of lifestyle that pleased God?

What does the fruit of righteousness look like? It centres in Christ and our serving by the Spirit. This is how God’s character is formed in us and is evidenced by how we live. It means going the way of the cross, self-emptying so as to become a servant of all (death to selfish ambition). It means in that servanthood, humbling ourselves to the point of willingness to die for others (death to all pride). This is what it meant for Paul to know Christ (3:10).

This righteousness only comes ‘*through Jesus Christ’* (1:11). It has nothing to do with being religious, which for Paul was just another form of ‘*confidence in the flesh’* (3:4). In this sense both dimensions of righteousness (both of which come through Christ) come together: the gift of Christ’s righteousness means a life of righteousness, without either of which there is no righteousness at all.

This righteousness and this righteousness alone is ‘*to the glory and praise of God’*(1:11). This is our goal. In 1:6 Paul reminded the believers that the ’*good work’* begun in them was God’s doing, as also will be its completion. Now he prays for them that the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ might increase among them more and more – so that God will receive glory through the work He is doing in their lives. Everything is to that end. Love that reflects God’s own love is the only righteousness that counts, the only righteousness that is to God’s glory and praise.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

*Paul’s letter to the Philippians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) by Gordon Fee (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995)

*Philippians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by Ralph Martin (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1987)

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*The Holy Bible (New International Version)* (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO., USA, 1984)

*The Prison Letters* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)