

Essentials for Growth in Godliness, Part 1

Scripture: Philippians 1:9

Code: 50-5

INTRODUCTION

Philippians 1:9-11 says, "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."

A. The Concern of Prayer

Spiritual babies are expected to grow. Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9-11 reflects his constant concern that the people God had sent him would mature spiritually. That concern is reflected throughout Paul's letters.

1. Galatians 4:19--"My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." Paul actually experienced pain because of his concern that the Galatians grow in their faith.
2. Ephesians 4:13-15--The Ephesians were to "attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspect into Him, who is the head, even Christ."
3. Colossians 1:28--"We proclaim [Christ], admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ."
4. Ephesians 1:15-19--"Having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus Christ which exists among you, and your love for all the saints, [I] do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe."
5. Ephesians 3:14-19--"I bow my knees before the Father . . . [and pray] that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man; so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may . . . know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

6. Colossians 1:10-12--Paul prayed that the Colossians would "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience, joyously giving thanks to the Father."

7. 1 Thessalonians 1:2--"We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

8. 2 Timothy 1:3-6--"I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you. . . . For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you . . . [and] I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you."

9. Philemon 4--"I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love, and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake."

Paul's concern for the Philippians was the same that he had for all he served. He began his letter to them by telling them he was praying for them (v. 4) and then wrote down precisely what he was praying (vv. 9-11). Paul didn't pray for physical needs, success, or blessing in general. Scripture doesn't record that Paul prayed such prayers. He prayed for the spiritual needs of the Philippians.

B. The Necessity of Prayer

Nothing better defines the spiritual condition of a person than that person's prayer life.

1. It is a duty

Paul was compelled to pray because of the tremendous work of God's Spirit in his heart. Indeed, prayer is a spiritual duty.

a) Philippians 4:6--"In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

b) Romans 12:12--Christians are to be "devoted to prayer."

c) Luke 18:1--Jesus taught His disciples that "at all times they ought to pray and not to lose heart."

d) 1 Peter 4:7--Believers are to be "of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."

2. It is a compulsion

Prayer is also a compulsion. There are relatively few passages in Scripture that command us directly to pray, but there are many passages that tell us how to pray, based on the assumption that prayer would necessarily and naturally occur.

a) Matthew 6:9--"Pray, then, in this way." He knew His hearers understood they were to pray and would want to know how.

b) Colossians 4:2--"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" (KJV)."

c) 1 Thessalonians 5:17--"Pray without ceasing." Prayer is the outworking not only of an external requirement but also of an internal passion. The deepest longings of a Spirit-filled heart flow out in prayer.

- d) Psalm 55:1--"Give ear to my prayer, O God; and do not hide Thyself from my supplication. Give heed to me, and answer me." No one commanded the psalmist to pray. He was compelled to pray from the condition of his heart.
- e) Psalm 61:1--"Hear my cry, O God; give heed to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to Thee, when my heart is faint."
- f) Psalm 119:58--"I entreated Thy favor with all my heart."
- g) Psalm 119:145--"I cried with all my heart; answer me, O Lord!" Prayer is like breathing--you don't have to be commanded to breathe. Air pressure exerted on your lungs forces you to breathe. Believers exist in a sort of a prayer pressure in which praying is a natural response to their environment.
- h) Acts 9:11--The Lord spoke to Ananias and said, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying." There is no record that Paul was commanded to pray immediately following his conversion. He prayed because his heart was compelled to do so.
- i) Romans 8:15--As believers we "have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'"
- j) Galatians 4:6--"Because [we] are sons, God has sent for the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'"
- k) 1 Thessalonians 3:10--"Night and day [we] keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face." A person can pray earnestly night and day only when it's an internal compulsion.
- l) 1 Timothy 5:5--"She who is a widow indeed . . . continues in entreaties and prayers night and day." The compulsion to pray is generated by the Spirit of God within us. The measure of a person's spirituality is not determined by how well he conforms to the demand to pray but by the extent he is compelled to pray because of an internal passion for others in God's kingdom.

C. The Passion of Prayer

The passions of a person's heart will come out in his prayers. If you examine what you pray for and find you are praying only for your needs, problems, questions, and struggles, that is an indication of where your heart is. If you pray infrequently, briefly, and in a shallow manner, you have a cold heart because prayer is not an inner desire. The call to the duty of prayer will not overcome a cold heart because prayer is an internal compulsion not fulfilled by conformity to an external standard. Lack of prayer doesn't mean that a person is merely disobedient; it indicates selfishness because of a cold heart.

Acts 6:4 says, "We will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." The apostles had a passion to pray and teach the Word. And that passion for prayer should be true of every believer.

Paul had that passion. He was so controlled by the Spirit that his heart was given over to a passion to pray for those he served. He prayed night and day not because he felt obligated to perform a religious duty like a Pharisee, but because his heart drove him to it.

LESSON

Paul prayed that the Philippians would pursue five essentials: love, excellence, integrity, good works, and the glory of God. They are all sequential, meaning that each essential in Paul's list produces what follows it. And even though we'll never arrive at perfect love, perfect excellence, perfect

integrity, complete good works, or perfect glorification of God, those five essentials represent what every Christian is to pursue in his or her life.

I. LOVE (v. 9)

"This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment."

Paul had a great love for the Philippians. In verse 7 he says, "I have you in my heart." They were precious to him, and as a result he was compelled to pray for them. So it's not surprising that Paul begins his prayer with love.

Love Is Greatest

Paul wrote extensively on the subject of love. He spoke of it in his introductions to Ephesians (1:4-6) , Colossians (1:4, 8) , 1 Thessalonians (1:3-4) , and 2 Thessalonians (1:3). Often Paul compared love with two other subjects: faith and hope.

1 Corinthians 13:13--"Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." Since that is the case, it was natural for Paul to begin his prayer with love.

Colossians 3:14--Paul instructed the Colossians to "put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

1 Corinthians 13:7--"[Love] believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Faith and hope are embodied in love, so love is the surpassing virtue. A person without love is nothing (1 Cor. 13:2).

Of faith, hope, and love, Paul affirmed that love is the greatest.

Paul's focus in verse 9 is on loving one another, a concept he expands on in Philippians 2:2: "Being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose."

A. A Divine Love

Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts." Galatians 5:22 affirms that "the fruit of the Spirit is love." John said, "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19). We have the capacity to love each other because God gave it to us.

Paul was not referring to attraction, sentimentality, emotion, or feeling. He prayed for a divine virtue given by God. While feelings and emotions may accompany it, they do not create divine love.

Attraction is unnecessary for divine love to operate--God didn't love us because we were attractive. Paul desired that God would grant the Philippians the kind of love that existed between the Father and the Son.

B. A Defacto Love

Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians might abound. They already had love and Paul desired a greater expression of it. Every believer possesses divine love (Rom. 5:5) , so the Philippians had divine love defacto--it was already there.

1. 1 John 3:14-15--"We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." If divine love is a defacto part of your life, you have eternal life. If it is not you don't have eternal life. Abounding love in the life of a believer is a matter of asking for more of what he already has.

2. John 13:35--"By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Our single greatest testimony to the world is that we love each other.

C. A Decisive Love

1. It is by choice

Philippians 1:9 refers to the highest and noblest kind of love--the Greek word agape. It is the love of choice or the will. It does not depend on attraction, emotion, sentiment, or beauty. Those are the criteria of the world's love, not divine love.

2. It is not by impulse

The world defines love in terms of what is reciprocated. It requires that the lover feel positively about what is loved. But that is not the love of choice. It is the love of impulse. Picture the man who comes home to his wife and tells her he's divorcing her, saying, "I couldn't help it--I fell in love."

But divine love can "help it." Because it is the love of choice and the will it is decisive and in control. When "God so loved the world" (John 3:16) , it wasn't because we were so attractive that His emotions got out of hand and He fell in love with us. There was nothing attractive about us. He chose to love us.

3. It involves sacrifice

Divine love means that whether you're my friend or my enemy, whether you do good or evil, whether you give me anything or take away everything, I still will love you. Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." It's a sacrificial love that chooses to love the unlovely. No matter what a person may do or say to hurt you, you choose to love them. It engages in humble service toward others.

4. It is active

First Corinthians 13:4-7 is full of verbs that describe love: "Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Love is what you do, not what you feel. It reaches out to meet a need.

Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). In the story of the Good Samaritan He demonstrated that your neighbor is anyone you come across who's in need (Luke 10:30-37). Divine love wills to others for their own good and blessing.

5. It is not based on emotion

The church will never survive without that kind of love. It should be the distinguishing mark of the Christian because it is so different from the world's love, which knows very little about the love of the will. Even at its most philanthropic, it plays on emotion and attraction. When the world wants to motivate people to send money to help deprived people, they show pictures of little sad-eyed children. That's because they want to stimulate your emotions.

6. It is all inclusive

Agape love, which the Holy Spirit bestows on every believer, will meet the needs of a repulsive person as well as a little tender-eyed child.

7. It is centered on others

Romans 13:8-10 says that love fulfills the whole law. A law that forbids murder is unnecessary where there is perfect love. If you love someone perfectly, you're not going to covet what that person has. Rules are unnecessary in a house where everyone is acting solely for the benefit of others out of love. Love is the sum of all that the law intended.

Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27). We're to meet the needs of our enemies when the opportunity arises. That is a choice. If you have spiritual character and depth, you're going to choose to love.

So often we don't see that kind of love in the church. Someone says something someone else doesn't like and there is retaliation. The church becomes a place of fractures and friction, Christian against Christian. Love is the only solution to the problem.

D. A Dynamic Love

1. It keeps on growing

In Philippians 1:9 Paul says, "I pray, that your love may abound still more and more." It was already abounding (Gk. , *perisseuo*, "to overflow, wave upon wave, cascading like a waterfall") and he wanted it to abound even more. In the Christian life you can never be content with where you are spiritually.

Paul used the present tense of *perisseuo* to indicate an ever-expanding capacity for expressing love. That's something that has to be worked at. Like the law of entropy, which describes how the physical

universe is winding down, our ability to express divine love disintegrates unless we commit ourselves daily to the Spirit's power. We need continual strengthening and practice in showing love to others.

2. It involves sacrificial service

Christ set the standard for loving. Ephesians 4:32 says, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." He also wrote, "Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2).

After Jesus washed His disciples' feet He instructed them to do for each other as He had done to them. He showed them love by washing their dirty feet, a humble act of service. For every Christian Christ is the model of dynamic, humble, sacrificial love.

E. A Deep Love

Paul prayed that the love of the Philippians would "abound still more and more in real knowledge" (v. 9). Paul used the Greek word *epignosis*, which means "real," "full," or "advanced knowledge." Far from being uncontrolled emotion, divine love is regulated by a knowledge of God's Word. Love controlled by God's Word is deep, anchored in convictions based on the truth.

1. Ephesians 5:2-3--"Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you. . . . But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed be named among you." Biblical love does not start in control and then turn into adultery or fornication. It is sacrificial service based on the principles of God's Word.

2. 1 Peter 1:22--"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." A purified heart obeys the truth and exercises an honest, non-hypocritical, fervent (Gk. , *ektenos*, meaning "stretched to an extremity") love for the brethren.

As Christians we can love to the highest degree when we are controlled by the truth.

F. A Discerning Love

1. It requires insight

A Christian's love is to abound not only in real knowledge but also "in all discernment" (Phil. 1:9). Paul used the Greek word *aisthesis* from which we get the English word *aesthetic*. This the only occasion the word is used in Scripture. It speaks of moral perception, insight, and the practical application of knowledge--the deep knowledge Paul had already mentioned. Love is controlled by theology, and theology must be applied to life with insight.

2. It is not blind

Real love is not blind. Biblical love seeks to know right from wrong, false from true, and seeks to make the right application of truth at the proper moments in life. It seeks to meet the needs of others as it ascertains and understands them. Love as an unregulated impulse is dangerous. But love directed by careful scrutiny and sensitive discrimination will be conformed to the truth. That was the

kind of insight Paul desired for the Philippians.

William Hendriksen wrote, "A person who possesses love but lacks discernment may reveal a great deal of eagerness and enthusiasm. He may donate to all kinds of causes. His motives may be worthy and his intentions honorable, yet he may be doing more harm than good" (Philippians, Colossians and Philemon [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962], p. 60). I'm amazed how many well meaning people, trying to show their love for God, give money to people who actually work against God's kingdom. They fail to exercise divine love because they lack discernment.

CONCLUSION

All Christians should exercise divine love. We all need that kind of love. A book I read did a good job of illustrating that:

Some think the need for love can be met just among their little circle of friends. You may start out with a wonderful loving fellowship. But as the group continues it begins to develop standards that circle in some and web out others. The standard may be based on family relationship or by a kind of cronyism where only your pals and buddies make it into the group. You may deeply care for them and they may deeply care for you--just like an extended family. You feel secure and are fully accepted by your group. Everything is absolutely predictable. There's no risk involved.

As a result you rarely involve yourself with unpredictable people or put yourself into risky situations. You avoid allowing low-status outsiders into your little web. The higher the comfort level of your group's web, the higher the walls that keep other people out. It may reach the point that a common topic in your group is how the people on the other side of the wall would never fit into your group. But the group feels good and you call it love, but you end up totally ignoring real love.

We need to reach out beyond that kind of confinement and work to show love to all who come across our path. Now, we all tend toward the comfortable zone. We all tend to move away from high risk, unpredictable relationships. We fear intrusion into our private lives by people who don't know us well. We like to be comfortable and not on our guard, and we don't like to think we might lose control of our time and resources because someone else has need of them. But God's love calls us to reach beyond the circle and the wall to love everyone--even those people we don't find attractive.

In showing love, we may end up being abused but will never lose out if we look to God for our reward. If we look at relationships not for what we can gain, but for how we can serve, we will come to know the kind of love that Paul desired for the Philippians--and the world will stand up and take notice.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9-11 reflects his constant concern that the people God had sent him would _____ .

2. What kinds of needs does Scripture record that Paul prayed for?
3. What does a good job at defining the spiritual condition of a person?
4. Is prayer a spiritual duty? Explain.
5. Does Scripture support the idea that prayer will necessarily occur in the lives of believers? Explain.
6. Prayer is an _____ not fulfilled by conformity to an external standard.
7. What does lack of prayer indicate about a person?
8. Why did Paul pray night and day?
9. The five essentials Paul prayed would be true of the Philippians are sequential. What does that mean? (see p. 5)?
10. Of faith, hope, and love, which is the surpassing virtue? Why?
11. Why do believers have the capacity to love each other?
12. Is attraction necessary for divine love to operate? Why or why not?
13. Does every believer possess divine love? Explain.
14. What kind of love is described by the Greek word agape?
15. Why can it be said that divine love is active?
16. Why is love the sum of all the law intended?
17. Why did Paul use the present tense of the Greek word perisseuo in Philippians 1:9.
18. How is the expression of love like the physical law of entropy?
19. Divine love is regulated by a knowledge of _____ .
20. Is divine love blind? Why or why not?

1. Prayer is a natural compulsion for a saved person. "Praying is the same to the new creature as crying is the natural. The child is not learned by art or example to cry, but instructed by nature; it comes forth into the world crying. Praying is not a lesson got by forms and rules of art, but flowing from principles of new life itself" (William Gurnall, cited in *The Golden Treasury of Puritan Quotations*, I. D. E. Thomas, ed. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977], pp. 209-10). Is the desire to commune with God a mark of your life?

2. We live in an age that encourages us to focus on ourselves. We have been told to assert ourselves, look out for ourselves, acquire for ourselves, and think well of ourselves. One writer even suggests that self-esteem constitutes a "New Reformation." Contrast those ideas with what the nineteenth-century Anglican bishop J. C. Ryle wrote about charity--the English word the King James Version translators often used to translate the Greek word *agape*: "The charity of the Bible will show itself in a believer's readiness to bear evil as well as to do good. It will make him patient under provocation, forgiving when injured, meek when unjustly attacked, quiet when slandered. It will make him bear much and forebear much, put up with much and look over much, submit often and deny himself often, all for the sake of peace. It will make him put a strong bit on his temper, and a strong bridle on his tongue. True charity is not always asking,--'What are my rights? Am I treated as I deserve?' but, 'How can I best promote peace? How can I do that which is most edifying to others?'" (Practical Religion [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977], p. 171). What situations are you facing now where you need to deny yourself and exercise that kind of love?

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