

A Prayer for Unity

Philippians 1:9-11

Philippians 1:9-11: *“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, **10** that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, **11** being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”*

Background Notes

Philippians is one of the letters the apostle Paul wrote from his first Roman imprisonment, when he was under house arrest. Acts 28:30-31: *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*

That doesn't sound like much of an imprisonment, does it? Well, it actually was, because Acts 28:16 says, *“Now when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; but Paul was permitted to dwell by himself with the soldier who guarded him.”* So even though Paul was allowed to live in his own rented house, he was chained to a Roman guard at all times.

However, he was free to have visitors in his house. He could preach and teach, and he could write letters. In fact, from this prison situation, Paul wrote four books of Scripture, the four “Prison Epistles”: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon.

Paul's letter to the Philippians was written because a man named Epaphroditus had come to Rome from Philippi to seek out the apostle Paul. He brought Paul a gift from the church at Philippi, and answered Paul's eager questions about how the church was doing. Epaphroditus must have shared that there was some disagreement in the Philippian church, because throughout this letter, Paul urged the Philippians to strive for unity.

It's clear that the problem causing the lack of unity was not a major doctrinal problem, or Paul would have straightened it out in no uncertain terms! For the most part, the letter to the Philippians is a very happy and joyful letter. So the problem causing the disunity was not a major theological error.

Maybe they could not agree on what translation of the Bible to use – the King James Version or the NIV! *[laughter]* (Well, we know that wasn't the problem, because those translations were yet hundreds of years in the future.) Maybe they couldn't agree on what hymns to sing. We don't know exactly what the problem was. In any case, although the problem was minor, Paul knew that if the Philippians did not come to unity, this minor rift could become a major split.

Against this background, Paul prayed for the Philippians to “come to unity.” We’ll break verses 9-11 down into four prayer requests that the apostle made. You can be sure that if you pray these four requests, God will answer - because all four of these requests are within God’s will. God answers prayer requests that are in His will!

Doctrinal Points

1. Prayer for love that is knowledgeable and discerning is in the will of God.

Verse 9: “*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.*” The word that’s used for love here is “*agape*.” “*Agape* love” is not an “if” type of love – it’s not an “I’ll love you if you see it my way” kind of love. And *agape* love is not a “because of” type love – it’s not an “I love you because you agree with me” type of love.

Agape love is an “in spite of” type love. It’s an “I love you in spite of the fact that you don’t see it my way - that you don’t agree with me” type of love. That’s the kind of love Paul wanted the Philippians to show to one another – to *love each other in spite of their differences!* That’s the kind of love God wants us to show to one another. He wants us to love one another *in spite of* our differences of opinion - especially in minor matters.

Notice that this love is to be “*in knowledge and all discernment.*” It’s not a blindly sentimental love that just sweeps all problems under the rug. No. The idea here is that we really can love one another in Christ - in spite of our different opinions about the church’s music program, or the youth program, or the hymnals, etc. We can rise above our petty feelings and see the big picture – to see what God wants to do in our church fellowship! That kind of love has **depth of insight** and **moral perception**. That’s **love with knowledge and discernment**.

Can you have that kind of love in your church? Pray for love that is knowledgeable and discerning – it’s in the will of God!

2. Prayer for wisdom to make the best choices is in the will of God.

Verse 10, “*That you may approve the things that are excellent.*” Paul prayed that their sensitivity to what really counts would be increased. He wanted the Philippians to increase in wisdom, so that they would not just make good choices, but the **best** choices. The Lord wants **us** to do this, too.

Sometimes a good choice is the enemy of the best choice. Everybody under forty: you have a lot of decisions to make in life – decisions that will determine the course of your lives. Do you want to make just good choices, or do you want to make the **best** choices? Pray for wisdom to make the **best** choices. You can be sure that kind of prayer is in the will of God, and God will answer.

In your church, ongoing decisions must be made. Do you want the church leaders to make choices that are merely good - or do you want them to make the **best** choices? We should pray that the spiritual leaders, the elders, would make the

best choices for the unity and growth of our churches - even though what **we** want may only be a good choice! Let's ask the Lord to give them wisdom, that they would make the **best** choices.

Pray for wisdom to make the **best** choices – it's in the will of God!

3. Prayer for character that is sincere and blameless is in the will of God.

Verse 10: *“that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.”* The word “sincere” comes from the Latin words *sine* and *cerus*, meaning “without wax,” and it meant “making a judgment in sunlight.” How did that come about? In the 1st century, pottery sellers would sometimes hide blemishes by filling little cracks in the pottery with wax. To check out the purity of the pottery, a buyer would hold the piece of pottery up to the sunlight to check it out – to see if it was “sincere.” The wax wasn't visible until the pottery was held up to the sunlight – but in the sunlight, cracks that had been filled with wax could be clearly seen.

Thus Paul prayed that the character of the Philippians would be pure and blameless - no hidden cracks, no hidden agendas - sincere and blameless. The “blameless” here did not mean sinless, but blameless as to Christian character and to motives - no *hidden* sin or *hidden* motives that would stumble other believers.

That's the kind of character God wanted to see in the Philippians, and that's the kind of character God wants to see in us - until the day He returns, until the day of Christ. Our lives need to be held up to the sunlight of God's Word, and to the sunlight of our Savior's life. Are there “cracks” in my character that I have attempted to hide, rather than dealing with them? In the “sunlight” of God's Word we can see those “hidden cracks” - those hidden impurities and insincerities.

Maybe something we need to think through is how sincere we are. Why do I do what I do? Why do I want what I want? Do I have underlying selfish agendas? For example: “Why do I really want to get on that ministry committee at church? Is it really for the good of everyone in the church - or is it that I want to promote my own ideas?” Is there a hidden agenda? Let's pray that our characters are sincere and blameless.

Pray for character that is sincere and blameless – it's in the will of God!

4. Prayer for a life that is filled with the fruit of righteousness is in the will of God.

Verse 11: *“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”* The fruit of righteousness is the fruit that is produced by righteousness. It's the “fruit” of walking with Jesus, in step with the Spirit. The “fruits of the Spirit” in our lives are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23). Are those fruits evident in your life? Those characteristics are the “fruit of righteousness” – the fruit of the Spirit.

Notice that the fruits of righteousness are *“by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God”* (v11). We can't generate this fruit ourselves. Remember the illustration of the vine that was given by our Lord in John 15? The Lord Jesus is the Vine, and we are the branches. How many of us want our lives to be filled with the fruit of righteousness? If so, we need to remain “in the Vine” – close to Jesus Christ (John 15:4). And we need to expect some pruning to take place. In John 15:1-2 the Lord Jesus said, *“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”* Pruning is painful - but if you want to bear the fruit of righteousness, expect some “pruning” (training or discipline) to come into your life.

Hebrews 12:11 says, *“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”* Pruning is not pleasant, but if you want to bear fruit, you should expect it.

But don't fear! It's a good prayer request! Pray for a life that is filled with the fruit of the righteousness – it's in the will of God.

Practical Application

Let's pray more “Philippians 1 prayers” - for ourselves, and for one another!

What better application could we make from this prayer for unity? When was the last time you prayed “Philippians 1 prayers” for yourself, for your family, or for your fellow believers?

Normally we all pray for things like good health, or a job, or for travels, or for our studies, or for safety, and for good relationships. All of these items are good prayer requests, but it's also important to pray for:

- ***Love that is knowledgeable and discerning.***
- ***Wisdom to make the best choices.***
- ***Character that is sincere and blameless.***
- ***Lives that are filled with the fruit of righteousness.***

Let's pray more “Philippians 1 prayers” - for ourselves, and for one another!