

Philippians 1:9-11

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[0:00] Okay, we're in the letter of Philippians and this morning we're going to look at this wonderful prayer verses 9-11 of Philippians 1.

! So if you've got a Bible, it's page 1179. And if there are latecomers that come, do pass them a Bible and tell them where we're speaking from, if you would.

Let us hear the word of God. The Apostle Paul writes to the Philippians, And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent and so may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you that it is a light and a lamp. We thank you that it gives life. We thank you that it is sweeter than honey and that it is more precious than gold.

And we pray that it is more precious than gold. We thank you that it is more precious than gold. And we pray that your Holy Spirit will take your word now and you would teach us by your Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen. Think for a moment about your prayers. Think for a moment about the people you pray for the most. Think about the Christians that you pray for. And I wonder what do you pray for them?

[1:45] Think for a moment about the people you pray for them. So I expect, if you are like me, as you think about the prayers you pray, I am slightly embarrassed by some of the things that I pray for.

Because as I look at Paul's prayer, and that I have just read, I am embarrassed about what I pray for people. And that is because Paul has given us this prayer as a great example to us. So do you remember last week, if you were here last week, we saw that the Philippians, the people in the church in Philippi, they had a gospel identity.

They were saints, weren't they? They were set apart. They belonged to God. And we saw that they were in gospel partnership with God and with each other and with Paul.

They were working hard. They were giving and they were sending and they were receiving. And they had this gospel confidence, didn't they? That what God had begun in them, God would bring to completion.

They realised God does not do unfinished symphonies, that what he's begun in your heart, he will bring to completion. Gospel identity, gospel partnership and gospel confidence.

[2:59] And we also saw, didn't we, which runs right the way through this letter of Philippians, gospel affection. It is so warm, isn't it? He yearns for them. He prays for them. He gives thanks for them. He has no problem in telling them that he loves them.

And this letter is full of gospel warmth. And so he goes on this week in verses 9 to 11 to tell them how he prays for them. And I want us to see what Paul prays for the Philippians. And he prays for spiritual growth.

He prays for spiritual growth. And if I've got one aim this lunchtime, it's that for us, those of us who are believers, to be praying this for one another.

And that we would be growing Christians. Now just look down at verses 9 to 11 and do note with me what Paul doesn't pray for. There is no mention of being happy.

And no mention of staying healthy. Those are the things that we pray for, don't we? That's what we pray for those who we love. My little boy, I pray to him every morning before we go to school.

[4:03] He's already rushing out the door. I pray, Lord, please keep Noah safe. Please give him favour with his teacher. Please help him to work

hard. Please help him not to be ashamed of the Lord Jesus.

I think you can possibly find one of those in the book of Philippians. Now people's needs are endless, aren't they? And we want people to be well fed and healthy. But my prayers often show that I am more concerned for people to be well and to be happy than for them to grow in the Lord. Or even sadly for them to be saved. Now look again, just look again at this verse. Paul doesn't mention numbers, does he? And we live in a church culture, in church life culture in this country, which is obsessed with numbers.

How many people go to your church? Paul doesn't pray for that. Paul doesn't mention their problems, does he? The book of Philippians tells us that they had problems. There were these squabbling women in chapter 4.

But his concerns are bigger than the world's concerns. Paul's prayer is frankly more godly. He prays for moral and for spiritual qualities that will stand the test of time until Jesus comes again.

[5:12] And so let me speak to you if you are a Christian this lunchtime. What do you think your greatest need is? And what do you think your greatest need is in the church that you go to?

Lots of people give me endless advice over what our church needs. And what we do need is we need more godliness. We need more godly people.

And if you've been a Christian for a week or for a month, you will know that. You will know that. And that will be the desire of your heart. But I don't know about you, but I find the longer that I go on, the more often that I find it very easy to forget that.

So I find myself saying, what this church needs is a new building. What this church needs is a new minister. What this church needs is for... What this church needs is for you and I to be more godly. And that's Paul's prayer. Let me try and divide it up. Two things. Pray, first of all, for a discerning love that leads to holy living. Pray for a discerning love that leads to holy living.

[6:15] And then, number two, pray for fruitful lives to the glory of God. Discerning love that leads to holy living. Fruitful lives to the glory of God. So discerning love that leads to holy living.

We're in Philippians chapter 1. So Paul ties these things together, doesn't he? In verse 9, he speaks of love. Now we all agree with that, don't we? All you need is love.

Even the Beatles agree with that. Everybody agrees with that. People of all different religious persuasions agree with that. Atheists could come and say a hearty amen to that. We need more love.

But then, where does he go? Christians need to be more loving. Where does he go next? He tells us we need knowledge and discernment. And we need those to discern, to choose, to approve what is best.

He ties in love and knowledge. He puts heart and mind together. Paul is talking of Christian love. Love that is for God, for the Christian, for the unbeliever.

[7:15] He's talking about love which is like that of Jesus Christ. One's like love that is self-sacrificing. He's going to speak of it in Philippians chapter 2. That gives and gives and gives again.

That lays down its life. And that is the love that the Apostle Paul speaks of in Philippians chapter 2. But he prays that the Philippians would have in chapter 1. And we know that from the rest of the New Testament.

That that is the distinctive of the New Testament church. A church that loves one another. So a church without love is not actually the church of Jesus Christ. Now let me say, don't switch off there. Because Paul goes on, doesn't he? He doesn't just stop at love. He isn't saying all you need is love. He's saying you need love with knowledge. And he binds those two of love and knowledge together.

It's pretty basic stuff, isn't it? If you love someone, to show that you love them, you've got to know them. Love is an action based on knowledge.

[8:14] So on a personal level, if you don't know what I like, you're not going to be able to please me. So it's my birthday at the end of the month. I know you all know that. You didn't.

You didn't know. And you ought to buy me something for my birthday. And you think, well, do you know what? I really think he loves ballet. I think he's the kind of guy who loves ballet.

And you buy me tickets for the ballet. I hate ballet. I test ballet. Now if you know me at all, you think, well, I know he likes Swansea football club. I know he likes rugby.

And if you bought me tickets for a Welsh rugby match, it would be very different, wouldn't it? So if you love me, you'll find out what I like. And that's the key, isn't it? We've got to know what God loves and what God hates.

And love is an action based on knowledge. So for example, in church life, we are not free just to do what we want. We are not free just to worship God in any way we want. We often say, don't we, rightly, we say God looks on the heart.

[9:10] And that is right. But actually look all through the Bible. And God does say what you do is vitally important. And so just because there's love in a relationship doesn't make it right, doesn't it?

You can have somebody who is in an affair with another married person. And there is great harm being done in a relationship. But there's real love there. There is real love. Does that make it right? Of course not. You know the Bible is clear. We need that knowledge to help us get it right. It's corny, isn't it? But we must know before we can show. And that is the same with our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Now I've looked a little bit about love without knowledge. But the equal danger for us here, probably a bigger danger for someone like me, is knowledge without love. And there's no good in just having a head knowledge.

Knowledge just of the mind. There's no good in just having warm feelings. Christianity must be known in your head and felt in your heart. In fact the Bible never makes that division.

[10:09] And so the aim of somebody who preaches the gospel, a preacher of God's word, is to feed your mind. But also to fire your heart. And so all of us are faced with these two dangers this afternoon.

The one is to be dependent on your feelings. You know that kind of thing. It's my experience that makes me different. And many Christians never move on from their experience. They tell us. But the way to the soul of men and women is not through the mind. It's through the heart and the emotions. But the Bible doesn't say that. But there's the other danger. The other danger of being so interested in the minutia of doctrine and preaching.

And Christianity in this theoretical, abstract, academic way. And none of those things are bad in themselves. But it never gets to your heart. And it never makes you worship.

It never makes you bow down with tears running down your cheeks and say, My Lord and my God. It just feeds the pursuit of your mind. It's very possible, isn't it? Tragically possible.

[11:17] That you can be in the church. And you can debate and discuss and quarrel over the gospel without ever having known the love of the gospel. And you need heart and head.

Now don't misunderstand me here. Dr. Martyn O'Jones says this. The people who are most frequently thrown off balance in the Christian life are those who are most lacking in knowledge. Every Christian must be a Bible student.

And we live in days of great biblical illiteracy. Is it something like 10% of churchgoers regularly read their Bible? I don't know. Never believe those statistics really. But we must know God's word.

So that we know God. So that we can show love. We need cool heads and hot hearts. And churches in the UK are full of the opposite, aren't they?

They're full of hot heads and cold hearts. And God preserve us from that. So the next part of the verse. Can you see it? Verse 9. My prayer is that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

[12:19] If you've got a different version. That you may be able to discern what is best. That's very helpful, I think. It's exactly what we need, isn't it? It's not to discern what is wrong. Most choices in the Christian life. Most issues when people come and see me with a choice.

They are not between the right and the wrong. I find those issues are quite easy to discern, aren't they? But between what is good and what is best. In fact, I was talking to somebody before the lunchtime talks.

That they have a meeting where they have to discern. What is best? And Paul is saying to us here, we need knowledge to know what to love. And discernment to know how to love. Somebody who

possesses love but lacks discernment.

Well, they will be one of the most eager and enthusiastic church members. Their motives may be worthy and their intentions very honourable. They've got love but they lack discernment.

And that kind of person in church life does more harm than good. Don't we need to pray this for each other? I wonder what you pray for your church leaders.

[13:22] I wonder what you pray for Christian brothers and sisters. Look at verse 10. So that you may approve what is excellent.

And so be pure and blameless. I would say to you, please pray that for your Christian leaders. Why do Christian leaders fall?

Why do Christian leaders leave their wives? Why do Christian marriages break up? Well, let me tell you. It is because they have not remained pure and blameless. If you've been a Christian any length of time, you will have heard of maybe a minister that you knew who has fallen.

That happens. So pray for the men in the congregation. I was in Hanwell Cafe this morning. Each of my feet in the air grow as I changed it.

I went to pick up the newspapers. And there was not one newspaper that I could pick up and read. Because none of them passed the test of verse 10. None of them. Even the front page. Let's pray for each other.

[14:31] Let's pray that we'll keep pure and blameless. And Paul gives the great motivation factor to say, Why be pure and blameless? Because the day of Christ is coming. The day of Christ is coming. And as we think on that day, and as we live for that day, it will change our behaviour.

He's coming. Pray for discerning love that leads to holy lives. And then secondly, Pray for fruitful lives. To the glory of God. Look at verse 10.

So that you may be approved of what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Fruitful lives.

Well again, our minds go, I don't know whether it's completely right, but our minds go to Galatians 5, 22 and 23. To the fruits of the Spirit. Where we know what a fruitful life looks like, don't we?

What does a fruitful life look like? It's full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. And so what Paul is praying for, I'm not absolutely clear what the fruit of righteousness is, but he prays for a rich spiritual harvest in their lives.

[15:46] This image of fruit is one that is so prominent, isn't it? In Jesus' ministry, he says, By their fruits you shall know them. And Paul is talking about, when he speaks of the fruit of righteousness, a life that is right with God, both in relationships with God, and in our obedience to him.

How does fruit grow? Well, it grows in a steady and a consistent way. And there's something of that in these verses. These verses are not teaching about some new kind of wonderful, zapping Christian experience, are they?

There's no shortcuts. How does fruit grow? It grows slowly. So it's living the Christian life. And Paul is praying for transformed lives as proof that God works in believers.

He's speaking of the spiritual fruit that comes from Jesus Christ, produced in them by the Holy Spirit. So some of you, I know a little bit of your lives, and some of you really wish that you were more godly. And you really wish that it was harvest time, but the fruit is still growing.

The fruit is still growing. How do you live the fruitful life? Well, it comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus says to his disciples, I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me, and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

[17:01] And then he says straight away, doesn't he, apart from me, you can do nothing. So you abide in him, you remain in him. It's a bit like the story of Lawrence of Arabia. When Lawrence of Arabia, who I thought was a cartoon character, but it's real.

Lawrence of Arabia, he was in Paris after World War I with some of his Arabian friends. And Lawrence, I took some time to show them the sights of the city, show them the Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe, Napoleon's tomb, Champs-Élysées.

But his friends, they weren't interested at all in those things. The thing that really impressed Lawrence of Arabia's friends was the taps in the bathroom in their hotel. They'd never seen anything like it.

Every time he went into the room, they were turning the taps on and off, and on and off, and on and off. They wanted to get all the water they could. So when they were ready to leave Paris, and return to the east, Lawrence found them in the bathroom with wrenches, trying to attach the taps.

And they said, it's very dry in Arabia, what we need are taps. And if we have the taps, we'll have all the water we want. And Lawrence had explained to them, the effectiveness of those taps, lay not in themselves, but in this immense kind of waterwork system.

[18:11] He had to point them to behind the taps, lay the out. And that's how people try to live the Christian life, don't they? They live lives as dry as dust, as dry as the desert, but they've got taps.

They've got their works, they've got a church, but they've got no connection, no organic connection, to the Lord Jesus Christ. They must, and all of us, must come to God through Jesus Christ.

We must live all our lives, going to the lifeline, and the supply line, through Jesus Christ. Of being in a relationship with Him. We love the Bible.

Why do we love the Bible? We love the Bible, because it shows us Jesus Christ. There's a danger, isn't there? Particularly in churches like ours, when we love the Bible for the Bible's sake, the Bible is a means to an end, if I could put it like that.

And that's why, if you're not a Christian this afternoon, you will never ever live a fruitful life. You can do all sorts of things, all sorts of good things, all sorts of good works, but it will not be fruitful.

[19:18] Because it must all be done, if you see that phrase, verse 11, through Jesus Christ. And if you're not a Christian this afternoon, you go to the lifeline.

You forget trying to live, the Christian life before you're a Christian. That is a terrible thing. Go to God. Go to Him. And then we have to say, the Christian life is intended to be fruitful.

And this verse reminds us, that the means to this, is the living Lord Jesus. And the goal of the Christian life, well it is nothing more, nothing less, than the glory and praise of God.

And all the praise and all the glory, belong to God, not us.

It's not a selfish prayer, to pray this for others, and to pray this for yourself. See the tragedy of modern man, is the tragedy of the ugly ducklings. You know the story of the ugly duckling? You know the ugly duckling?

[20:24] He didn't fit, did he? What was the problem with the ugly duckling? He was actually a, a swan. And that's the problem with human beings. They live in this world, like the ugly duckling.

They know they don't, they know they weren't meant for this world. They live like beasts. But actually they were meant, to be in relationship with God. They were made in the image of God, for the glory of God.

And the goal of Paul's prayer, is also the reason for your existence, and the reason for our church's existence. So what is the chief end of man? The most depressing day of my ministry, on Sunday, when two of my elders couldn't tell me to answer the short of cascades.

But anyway, man's chief end, is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. And you must be a Christian, and we must be a church, which is passionate about, above everything else, about the glory of God.

And I hope that is the purpose of your life, and my life. And what will you do this week? Can I ask you to do something? Can I ask you to pray for this, for one person, in your church family?

[21:33] Send them a text this afternoon, or send them an email, or even speak to them, if you have to. But go through 9 to 11, each day, pray it for yourself, and pray it for someone in the church.

And tell them, you're going to pray it for them. And then tell them next week, if you've done it. Let's read together.