

## Paul's Prayers No. 2 – Philippians 1: v. 9-11.

We continue our series in prayer. So far we have learnt many things. From the Disciple's prayer we learnt the following;

1. We need to have a personal relationship with God before we can call Him Father and enter into a conversation with Him.
2. God's name is "Holy" and we must respect His name in our conversation. We must also remember that when we come to prayer that this is a privilege. It is only available to us because of Jesus who was punished for the sins that we committed. Every time we pray we must remember the cost of our Salvation.

Therefore we begin our prayers with praise to God for who He is and what He has done. Knowledge of God's names in the Bible will help us to pray.

3. We learnt that it is O.K. to pray for our daily needs. God provides for what we need and not what we want. It is our job to discern the difference. Also God will meet our need for the day, we shouldn't always expect things in advance of that need.
4. We learnt that when we come to prayer that "Forgiveness" is important. We must be prepared to "Forgive" other people because we are "Forgiven" people.
5. We also learnt that although "Temptation" is something we face every day in the Christian life, we can obtain victory over it. Satan attacks our minds and we need to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
6. Finally in the Disciple's prayer we learnt that thanking and praising God is a good way to finish prayer.

Two weeks ago we learnt that All Church united prayer is very important for a number of reasons. We studied 4 passages in Acts and discovered that we should never be too busy for united Church Prayer. United prayer produced amazing results for the early Church and it can do the same for OIC too.

Last week we began to look at Paul's prayers in the New Testament in order to discover the kinds of things that we should be praying for in the life of OIC.

The first main thing that we learnt from his prayer to the Church at Colossae was that we need to pray that our lives will be pleasing to Jesus Christ.

We were given 4 characteristics of what a life is like that is pleasing to Jesus.

1. It is a life that is bearing fruit by serving Jesus in some way.
2. It is a continuous growth in the knowledge of God.
3. It is being strengthened by God in our suffering.
4. It is being joyful in all things, being thankful people.

We are now going to look at another of Paul's prayers which is contained in the book of Philippians Chapter 1: v. 9-11.

However we will read from chapter 1: v. 1-11. First.

**Paul** and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: <sup>2</sup>Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup>I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

<sup>4</sup>**always** in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, <sup>5</sup>for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, <sup>6</sup>being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

<sup>7</sup>**just** as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. <sup>8</sup>For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

<sup>9</sup>**And** this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup>that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,

<sup>11</sup>**being** filled with the fruits of righteousness which *are* by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

### Introduction

Paul founded the Church in Philippi on his second missionary journey. The Holy Spirit clearly guided Paul and Silas not to go into Bithynia but through a vision to go over to Macedonia.

It was in this important Roman Colony that the first Church in Europe was founded.

It appears that this Church was a good Church that Paul respected. They had supplied his needs many times. Paul was now in prison going through difficult times and yet he made time to write and encourage this little Church.

One of his concerns was that there were divisions starting to creep into the Church and he wanted to deal with them. However it is his prayer for this Church that we are going to concentrate on this morning.

This is one of Paul's prayers that may have been designed by him to deal with spiritual dryness and a lack of faith. It will help us overcome our excuses for not praying. It is a simple prayer but very profound if we dig deeply into its meaning.

We will break up the prayer into three stages.

### Firstly Paul prays for excellence in the life of the believers – v. 9-10a

Paul prays in v. 9 that the believers' love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment. However as we read on it becomes clear that the love for which Paul prays is not an end in itself, but a means to an end.

Paul tells the Philippians that he is praying that their love will increase so that they may be able to approve the things that are excellent.

What is immediately clear here is that Paul is not happy that Churches remain content as they are. Paul's idea here is that Churches should always be moving forward towards excellence.

Paul knows that excellence is not something that you order on the internet or arrives at Church one day. It is to be something that is discerned and approved.

So what are these excellent things that Paul is praying for?

The answer is always in the text.

Firstly Paul assumes that if the Philippians are going to discern and approve what is best, their love will have to abound more and more in knowledge and discernment.

This is why Paul prays for this love. So the excellence that Paul wants these believers to have is not easily discerned. To approve of what is excellent must be discovered through abounding love?

We can all understand Christian love, but what is Christian love that has knowledge and discernment.

The best way of understanding this is to look at Christian love without knowledge and discernment.

In many Churches in the U.K. and the U.S.A. they are approving of "Gay" marriages between men and men and women and women. We call them same sex marriages. They say that we must love all people and show them Christian love. That is love without any knowledge of the Bible or any discernment whatsoever.

So you see that some Christian's ideas of love are totally wrong. They bear no resemblances to the love of God revealed in the Bible. It is easy to take a wrong turning when thinking about love and to be persuaded by human love which approves everything and is not love at all.

A love that approves of sin is NOT the love of God.

The love that Paul prays for is a love that TESTS and APPROVES of what is right in God's sight.

Secondly Paul says in the NIV "discern what is best" or NKJ = discern the things that are excellent.

Paul's idea here is that in life there are lots of decisions to make where it is not just a question of making a decision between right and wrong. It is easy in the case of Gay Marriage to say that it is wrong. However there are other things where it is not quite so simple.

In these cases we really need depth of insight and knowledge and discernment.

The point that Paul is making here is that Christians must abound more and more in this type of love if they are to test and approve of what is excellent.

There is another clue that helps us to understand what is "best" or what is "excellent".

We need now to turn to v. 6.

<sup>6</sup> being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ;

What Paul is saying here is that he is looking for an improvement in their discipleship.

Paul is not happy that the believers remain as they are, He is looking for spiritual growth and development in discipleship.

Paul very honestly includes himself in this growth and development when he says later on in chapter 3 v. 10-14 these words...

<sup>10</sup> that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, <sup>11</sup> if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

<sup>13</sup> Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

So we have discovered that in order to grow as mature disciples, the love of Jesus must grow in us through knowledge and discernment of the scriptures, through the help of God's Holy Spirit, which is the power of His resurrection.

We must also be prepared for the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus Christ. This is not an easy thing to accept.

Many Christians don't accept that having the fellowship of Christ's sufferings is part of the Christian life. They only want the happy times.

However you will never grow or mature as a Christian without some sort of suffering.

It is never easy to go through difficult times in the Christian life. It is as we suffer a little, we grow closer to Jesus, and draw strength from Him.

We now come to verse 11.

In the Bible there is a comma between the day of Christ and being filled with the fruits of righteousness. It is all part of what Paul is praying for the Philippians.

Q. What does it mean to be filled with the fruits of righteousness?

Firstly we need to turn to Gal. 5: v. 22-23.

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Paul is saying in these verses that the natural result of walking in the Holy Spirit produces these characteristics. It is the result of the activity of the Holy Spirit within us that produces the fruit. It is not natural, it is supernatural, and it is part of the overflow of the "Spirit Filled" life.

It is the life of God, working in and through us. It is not something we can do without the Holy Spirit.

So Paul is saying here that if the love of Jesus is abounding more and more in knowledge and all discernment, then you will grow as mature disciples and bear fruit to God's Glory, knowing that it is God that works in us to produce His fruit.

This is a wonderful thing to pray for in our own lives and in the lives of all of us here at OIC.

Let us pray for this in our prayer time to day. It will be wonderful to see God answering these prayers.

Remember that fruit is a natural result of a good plant. A tree will produce lots of fruit if the tree itself is healthy. Therefore we need to concentrate on making our lives spiritually healthy, so that we will produce fruit for God's Glory.

We need to obey God's word in our life and draw close to Him in prayer and be willing to let Him change us through His Holy Spirit.

We must pray for the work of God to be done in our lives.

Look at Philippians 2: v. 13.

<sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure.

We see very clearly that God has to do a work in us. It is like praying for "Revival" in your own heart.

Finally Paul finishes his prayer with these words “to the Glory and Praise of God”

N.L.T “For this will bring much praise and glory to God”

Right at the end of Paul’s prayer he is concerned that as we see God working in and through our lives we must be careful to give God all the praise and the glory for what He has done in or lives.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a famous preacher in England for many years.

(I have heard his messages on tape many times.)

A few weeks before he died, someone asked him how he was coping with life after decades of fruitful ministry. He just had enough energy to get out of bed and sit in a chair.

He replied to that person from the words of Luke 10:20,

“do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven..”

In other words, don’t tie your joy, or your sense of well- being, to power in ministry.

Your ministry can be taken from you.

Tie your joy to the fact that you are known and loved by God. Tie it to your Salvation.

Tie it to the truth that your name is written in Heaven.

This can never be taken from you.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones replied “I am perfectly content”

However blessed we are in ministry, remember it is God doing His work through us, He gets the praise and the glory. We get to go to Heaven when it’s finished, that’s our reward.

Suggested Prayers in the open Prayer time of prayer.

Pray for “excellence” in the life of the Christians at O.I.C.

Pray that this will be achieved by the love of Jesus growing in us through discernment and knowledge of God’s word.

Pray for the fruit of God’s righteousness to be displayed in our lives.

Pray that we will give God all the Glory as He works through us.

