Apostolic prayers - *Paul's Prayer in Philippians 1:9-11*

1. Introduction

a. Today we are continuing in our series on biblical prayers. These are the prayers that are recorded in scripture and in particular we are looking at the *apostolic prayers* – those prayers prayed by Jesus, Paul and Peter.

b. Today we are going to consider Paul's prayer for the believers in Philippi to abound in love and not to yield to compromise nor cause offense, even in the face of the criticism and persecution that they were enduring (Phil. 1:9-11, 29).

Phil 1:9-11 *[9] And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, [10] so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, [11] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

c. Paul, here, is praying for the whole church at Philippi that their love would abound still more and more. We are grateful for whatever the Lord has given us by the Spirit in our life, but we want more and more. No matter how deep we get in the love of God, we want more and more.

d. Then he gives us two qualifiers. He says, "You are going to abound in love by knowledge, and you are going to do it by discernment." We will look at those two things in a moment. The results of this is that we would be sincere—in other words, resisting all compromise—and we would be without offense—you would not do things that injure people's hearts, reputations, and just their lives in general by your actions and words and those kinds of things. And, you are going to stay with this "until the day of Christ," until you meet the Lord. Now the day of Christ is the Second Coming, but if you go to the Lord before He comes to you, that is the day of Christ for you. In other words, sustain this until the end of your life.

e. This is not a short-term, seasonal emphasis of the Holy Spirit. This is a long-term, sustained lifestyle, and the results are that we are "filled with the fruits of righteousness." This is going to happen because of what Jesus did and by interacting with Him. Not just what He did on the cross, but this comes by Jesus, interacting with Him, which is called "abiding with Him." It is that ongoing communication that we have with Him.

f. The net result is that the Father is glorified in this age when others look at lives that embrace this in a deep and sustained way. The Father is deeply glorified by this because it is so counterintuitive for us to live this way. It is so normal for us to just go the natural way. This is very against the current of our natural mindsets and the natural way we think and process information. It is very counterculture.

g. This is an important prayer with prophetic significance in light of Jesus' zeal to lead His people to relate in deep unity as a mature family as the context for the great end-time harvest.

John. 17:21 *that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*

h. Jesus prayed in John 17 that His family would be one even as He and the Father are one. Now that has only happened in a tiny part of the Body of Christ throughout history, so this John 17 reality is an end-time reality. The closer we get to the coming of the Lord, the more John 17 is going to come into open fulfilment that is obvious to see. And, in order to walk in that John 17 family maturity, we have to walk in this Philippians 1:9. We have to contend for this in our lives and in the lives of the people we love and for the Body of Christ.

i. At the same time, as we get closer to the Lord's return, Satan is fuelling a betrayal culture in the Church by stirring up accusations of believers against believers, and this is an end-time reality as well.

Rev,12:10 *And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the* ***accuser of our brothers*** *has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*

Matt.24:10 *And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.*

j. So, two things are happening as we approach the Lord's return. Millions will enter into this "family mature love of Philippians 1:9" by the power of the Spirit which will cause many to see the love of God and bring in a great harvest. At the same time others will be caught up in the betrayal culture and fall away. That is why this prayer is so important – our desire is to see the John 17 reality released and not only that believers would fall more in love with Jesus and abound in love but that this will result in the greatest harvest ever seen in history.

2. Abounding in love

a. We pray earnestly that we would "abound in love" in three specific ways.

i First, we ask the Spirit to cause us to abound in our ***understanding of God's love for us***. We pray for greater understanding of God's love for us. Even in eternity we will never exhaust or fully grasp the fullness of "the ocean of God's love."

Eph. 3:17-19 *[17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

ii Second, that He would cause us to abound in our ***love for Jesus***. Jesus prayed that the Father would impart His own love for Jesus to His people so that they would love Jesus in the way the Father loves Jesus.

John. 17:26 *I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

iii Thirdly, to abound in ***our love for people***. We pray that God's love for others would overflow through us to them.

1 John. 4:12 *No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected (overflows) in us.*

b. Abounding love isn't something we just receive – it is something that grows over time or as Paul says *"more and more"*. Our prayer is that love will grow progressively in the hearts of God's people.

c. How does this love grow? Well Paul makes that clear in this prayer. It is *with knowledge and all discernment.* Walking in greater love begins with understanding the truth about God's personality, the finished work of the cross, Jesus' leadership, how He views His people, and more.

d. It also requires us to love on God's terms. Jesus is the only Man qualified to define love. There are many definitions of love in the culture that are not in agreement with God's Word.

e. We are equipped to abound in love for others by growing ***in knowledge*** of God's heart and growing ***in discernment*** that sees others through the lens of His love—including His delight in mercy and His

gentleness towards them. Jesus' leadership is so gracious and kind. Being treated by God with gentleness and viewing others through His gentleness makes people "great."

Psalm 18:35 *You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great.*

Micah 7:18 *Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger for ever,because he delights in steadfast love.*

3. So that …..

[10] *so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, **[11]** filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.*

a. Committing to seeking out who He is and how he loves so that we abound in love will not only result in a great harvest but will also equip us to walk out our Christian life.

b. ***That you may approve the things that are excellent***: Spiritual discernment enables us to "see" and rejoice in what God calls excellent—His Son, His Word, His godly ways, and His people. One quality that made David's life "great" was to intentionally cultivate God's view of His people.

Psalm 16:3 *As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight*

c. ***God's people are excellent***: Seeing others through the lens of God's grace enables us to see "excellent things" about them, including their sincere desire to obey—seen in their budding virtues that have not yet matured—instead of defining them by their failures and deficiencies.

1 Cor. 4:5 *Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes…**[to]** reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God.*

2 Cor. 5:16-17*…from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh…**[17]**If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new*.

d. We need to agree with God's divine narrative of their lives not the secular narrative. The divine narrative is based on the profound reality that the Lord does not see as man sees. The outward appearance of one's life as seen by others includes "the facts" about their *main accomplishments*, their *failures* and their *deficiencies.* These facts do matter but are not the *primary determining factors* in God's narrative for people. Satan uses "these facts" to accuse people in his dark narrative.

e. God looks at His *sovereign call* on one's life, their *sincere motives* (seen in their countless 10-second thoughts or conversation with God that reveal their intention to obey) and
His interpretation of their *main accomplishments*, *failures,* and *deficiencies*. We ask the Spirit to empower us ***to see*** what He sees, ***to feel*** what He feels, and ***to say*** what He says when He looks at the lives of others. We want God's narrative for both believers and unbelievers.

f. ***God's commands are excellent***: God's commands are debated in the culture and the church. Studies tell us that many today define love, truth, and justice by *what they feel is right,* without reference to God's Word. We must define love and truth according to His Word.

Rom.7:12 *So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.*

g. ***That you may be sincere***: We pray for grace to walk out our sincere intentions to love and obey Jesus and sincerely seek to see, feel, and speak about others in a way that is in agreement with God.

h. ***That you may be without offense***: We pray for grace not to act or speak outside of God's will so as to give "offense" to God or to others by not walking in godly virtues and kindness towards people.

Also, not to trick, trap, nor injure others—their finances, property, feelings, reputation, position, etc.

Acts 24:16 *So I always take pains to have a clear conscience towards both God and man.*

1 Cor. 10:31-32 [31] *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* [32] *Give no offence to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God*

i. ***Filled with the fruits of righteousness***: This starts by receiving Jesus' *free gift* of righteousness and results in us walking in a *lifestyle* of righteousness. Simply put, *filled with righteousness* speaks of being filled with "the right views of God and His Word" in every area of our life—our view of ourselves and of others, together with our view of our money, words, sexuality, time, etc.

j. ***By Jesus***: By receiving His gift of righteousness and in our on-going interaction with Him.

John 15:5 *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

i Paul connected "abounding love" with walking in a lifestyle of righteousness that flows from "love-based obedience" (Jn. 14:21). All of God's commands are motivated by love. They produce love in us as we embrace them. Our decisions to obey Him express our love for Him. Jesus loves us with all His heart. Out of gratitude we seek to love Him with all our heart.

John. 14:21 [21]*He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.*

ii One of the primary lies being promoted today is that God's commands are burdensome—they are out of reach and cause us to lose out on "real life" as they hold us in religious bondage and contradict true love. This false teaching claims that, because we have freely received grace, "hungering for righteousness" is harmful because it makes us proud and legalistic. But John tells us *"His commands are not burdensome"* (1 John 5:3)

4. To the glory and praise of God

a. Paul finally summarises the purpose for all that he has prayed. The reason we pray this prayer for ourselves and our brothers and sisters is that it is all unto *"the glory and praise of God"*

b. When human beings go through this process in verses 9, 10 and 11, "God is glorified!" They are not perfect, but they are abounding in love in those three ways. They are doing it by growing in knowledge of God; they are putting effort in. They are seeking to discern the things that are excellent, and they are trying to walk out godly sincerity and resist compromise.

c. They are trying to walk it out and not cause offense and not be harmful or hurtful or putting down other people in any way but trying to love them. Being filled with right thinking, right choices, and all of this is because of Jesus' glory and interacting with Him. and the Father would say, "I am glorified when you go in that way and stay with it, even until the day of Christ, till the day that you meet the Lord."

5. Conclusion

a. As we enter into this new era this prayer is central to the transformation that needs to take place in the church. This prayer, combined with Jesus' prayer in John 17, cries out for a people who abound in love and resist accusation and offence with a desire to see God glorified and a great harvest of souls. Amen.