

'Word on the Web' – a Bible Based 'Thought for the week' No. 2

PHILIPPIANS Ch. 1v.7-11 (NIV)

Dear Friends

A very warm welcome in Jesus Name to the second of our 'Word on the Web' studies in Philippians. This week we're looking at Philippians Ch. 1 v.7-11, NIV, which includes Paul's prayer for those Christians and challenges us in our own prayer lives. May I invite you to add your own prayerful reading and reflections to mine. Additionally I invite you to join with me in watching Copplestone's Palm Sunday morning service, where the Rev Paul Smith will bring a Palm Sunday message.

Let me remind you of v.3-6 - "I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Paul was confident that "he who began a good work" in the lives of the Philippian Christians individually, and in the life of the Philippian Church collectively, would "carry it on to completion" – v.6 – but that did not mean that he could or should stop praying for them! In-fact the word he uses for "prayer" in v.13 emphasises continuous action. He didn't just pray for them once or twice – he made it a "holy habit" to pray and go on praying for them. Luke Ch.18 records the parable of the persistent widow. V.1 introduces it by saying "Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show that they should always pray and not give up". The Lord uses our prayers and again and again in the Scriptures we're exhorted to pray for each other and not give up. Paul had a great love for the Philippians which gave him a real concern for their well being which drove him

to pray for them. How about us? Alec Taylor in his Bible reading notes says “Love for our fellow believers, for unsaved relatives and friends should drive us to our knees!”, does it ?!

We’re going to look at these verses as the Holy Spirit leads under two headings –

- 1. Paul’s concern for the Philippians – v.7-8*
- 2. Paul’s prayer for the Philippians – v.9-11, so*

Firstly, Paul’s concern for the Philippians – v.7-8

v.7 – “it is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the Gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me”. It was right for Paul to feel as he did about the Philippians – indeed it would have been wrong for him not to feel as he did concerning them. He “held them in his heart” – a depth of love and feeling for them as we’ll see again a little later. Do we hold one another in our hearts?

Paul continues – “and, whether I am in chains or defending or confirming the gospel, all of you share in God’s grace with me”. Again please note the repetition of the word “all” – no one is left out. The words “whether in chains or defending and confirming the gospel” are instructive.

There are two shades of meaning here – it may well be that Paul was referring to a specific trial he was undergoing before the Roman authorities. Whether he was “chained” (in prison) or in the court room he saw it as a God-given opportunity to “defend or confirm the Gospel” – an opportunity not to be missed. A film of my youth was called “Dead Poets society” – it had a central theme running through it “Carpe Deum” which means “seize the moment”. Paul most certainly did. He would never have chosen to be in court, but being there, at the heart of the Roman world gave

him the opportunity to speak to those he may never have come across in any other way. And note that the defence and confirmation were not of himself but of the gospel. The word 'gospel' means good-news. This good news was that the Lord Jesus Christ had died on the cross and paid the penalty for sin so that all who believe and trust in him as Lord and Saviour will not perish but receive eternal life – beginning now and continuing beyond the grave. Paul did not remain silent – do we? including when we're in situations not of our choosing. Paul established the validity of the Gospel wherever he went, including in court.

There is also a more general meaning – a reference to all the hardships Paul had suffered and to the defences he had made for the gospel. Let's pause for a moment here. This speaks of cost – there is a cost to discipleship. Jesus never promised us a rose garden. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 11v.24-29 – "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false believers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the Churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin and I do not inwardly burn?". There is a cost! Palm Sunday, Good Friday and Easter Day remind us of the unique cost of our salvation to the Son of God. But also let us be encouraged by some words of the covenant service - "yet the strength to do all these things is given us in Christ Jesus".

“All of you share in God’s grace with me”. We can sing together with joy the words “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see”, because we all share in this amazing grace. There’s a specific reference to prayer also. I like the words of Arnold Bittlinger – “Intercessory prayer, in a very real way, binds the person who prays with the people for whom he prays” – have you found that in your experience?

v.8 – “God can testify how I long for you with the affection of Christ Jesus”. The word “affection” means “inward affection” or “tender mercy” – The heart is involved, and it’s the very “affection”, “tender mercy” of the Lord Jesus Christ, towards the Philippians, towards you and me so closely intertwined was the life of Paul and his Saviour. That’s Paul’s concern.

Secondly, and lastly Paul’s prayer – v.9-11

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and 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”.

Here we see what Paul prayed for the Philippians. Sometimes our praying can be very vague and general, but here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul prays very specifically. “Lord teach us to pray” – Luke 11v.1 - and pray specifically.

Paul prays not simply that their love would abound more and more”, but that their love would abound more and more “*in knowledge and depth of insight*”. To quote Alec Taylor again – “How then should we pray for each other? That our love for God may abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment – v9 (NIV “depth of insight”). Some believers, he says, are all head and have little heart. They have an excellent knowledge of God’s word

and a discerning mind, but, oh, they are so harsh and unloving. We remember that knowledge puffs up and that without love it is useless (1 Corinthians Ch.8v.1, Ch.13v.2). On the other hand, some Christians are all heart and fail to apply themselves to know and work out Scripture in their own lives. They are easy prey to false teaching because they have a sloppy, undiscerning love which is not Biblical". Another Bible teacher says "Love is always sensitive to the mind and heart of the one it loves. If it blindly and blunderingly hurts the feelings of the one it claims to love, it is not love at all. If we really love Jesus, we will be sensitive to his will and his desires ...". It's a prayer for spiritual maturity, and for spiritual maturity we need to get to know the Scriptures and apply them to our everyday lives – "that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight". Paul wanted them to advance in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and he wanted their love to be expressed in accordance with this knowledge. That's what Paul prayed! How about praying that for ourselves and for each other? and acting upon it! ... may our love abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight...

v.10 – "so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ Jesus".

When Paul prays "that you may be able to discern what is best" I believe he's praying that they may be able to distinguish, discern what is good from what is best. It's about discerning the Lord's will in a particular situation and then being obedient to it. I once heard a sermon with the intriguing title "Beware of your bright ideas!". I wondered where the sermon would go! – but the main point was that although many of us have "bright" or "good" ideas we need to seek God's "ideas" – God's plan, God's purpose – His will and his way ... to "discern what is best" – or "most excellent".

“and may be pure” – the word can also be translated “sincere” – and emphasises the believers relationship with God – “and blameless” – that word emphasises the believers relationship with others. It may be rendered as “without offence” and has the sense of giving no offence and causing no one else to stumble. - “for the day of Christ Jesus” – when he comes again. A motto I was taught as a teenager applies – Keep clean, keep close.

v.11 “filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God” – our heart matters! Our life and lifestyle matters! We can only bear this fruit in relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and by his life and power – he is the vine, we are the branches (John Ch.15). May we keep abiding in him. I conclude with the words of Jesus in Matthew Ch.5v.16 – “let your light shine before others that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven”

What a concern! What a prayer! May we reflect on Paul’s prayer for the Philippians and make it our own as we pray for ourselves and others.

In the Name of Jesus Amen