

## A WORTHY PRAYER: MORE LOVE, O CHRIST, TO THEE

*1* <sup>9</sup>I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all insight, <sup>10</sup>so that you may discern the things that are worthy, in order that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ—<sup>11</sup>being filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)

### **Introduction**

Elizabeth Prentiss was the wife of a Presbyterian minister. She was described by her many friends as “a very bright-eyed little woman ... who cared more to shine in her own happy household than in a wide circle of society.”

But there came a time in the life of this “bright-eyed little woman” when she met with a great deal of personal sorrow; the loss of two of her children within a short span of time. For weeks Elizabeth was inconsolable. In her dairy she wrote, “empty hands, a worn-out exhausted body, and unutterable longing to flee from a world that has so many sharp experiences.”

During this period of grief, Elizabeth began meditating upon the Old Testament account of Jacob. She noted how the Lord met him in a very special way during his moments of sorrow and need. She prayed earnestly that the Lord would do the same for her.

While she was meditating and praying one evening, these words came to her mind:

More love to Thee, O Christ,  
More love to Thee!  
O hear the prayer I make  
On bended knee;  
This is my earnest plea;  
More love, O Christ, to Thee.

Once earthly joy I craved,  
Sought peace and rest;  
Now You alone I seek,  
Give what is best.  
This all my prayer shall be:  
More love, O Christ, to Thee.  
(*Amazing Grace*, p. 57)

That is a worthy prayer. That is also the Apostle Paul’s prayer for the church. May it also be our prayer: “More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee.”

God's desire is that our love for Christ should increase to an ever-greater degree. In order that God's purpose for our lives may be realized, let us pray that our love for Christ would increase in accordance with the apostle's prayer.

## **I. Pray that Your Love for Christ would Increase in Fervency (vs. 9)**

The apostle informs these Philippian Christians—people in whom God is very evidently working—that he is praying for them.

We pray for the conversion of the lost; we pray for fellow believers in times of special need; but we tend to discount or even omit a continued ministry of prayer for healthy, vibrant Christians, (like these Philippians.) We often tend to view prayer as a rescue operation, rather than as ongoing life support. Prayer is not an occasional vitamin supplement; it is rather a part of a regular balanced diet of daily spiritual nourishment.

Then, too, we tend to lose sight of Christ's desire and purpose for His people. His purpose is not to "freeze dry" converts only to be "thawed out" on the day of His return. His desire is not only to reclaim Christians who wander away, returning them to the fold of God. His desire and purpose is to see the seeds of faith that have been planted by His Holy Spirit grow into a beautiful and fruitful garden for the glory of God His Father. This is why we find the Apostle Paul praying for this spiritually healthy body of Christians, and this is why we should pray likewise for one another.

More specifically, the apostle informs these Philippian Christians that he is praying that *"your love may abound more and more."* The love of which the apostle speaks is a broad, all-encompassing Christian love; it is love for Christ's kingdom, love for Christ's people, and above all, it is love for Christ Himself. Christ is the supreme object of our love; and as our love for Him increases, that love will be extended to His people, and it will also embrace His cause; after all, what is dear to the beloved will become dear to the lover.

The heart, the root, the capstone of this love is love for Christ Himself. This is the love the Lord Jesus sought to solicit from Peter when He asked, *"Simon, do you love me more than you love these, (these who are your companions and your own brother]?"* (Jn. 21:15.) The Lord Jesus declares, *"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me"* (Matt. 10:37.)

The love to which the apostle refers in Philippians is the kind of love the LORD attributes to Israel at the time of the Exodus when they followed Him out of Egypt. Israel is compared to a bride who follows her husband to an unknown and desolate place out of love and devotion to him, as the LORD reminds Israel through the prophet Jeremiah, *"I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness"* (Jer. 2:2.) It is the love that was

exhibited in the life of the Apostle Thomas. When Jesus set out for the village of Bethany, which was a suburb of Jerusalem, the disciples, out of fear of the Jews, hesitated to follow Him, but Thomas urged them, *“Let us also go, so that we may die with him”* (Jn. 11:16.) This is the love David expresses for the LORD in Psalm 63:1, *“O God, you are my God; earnestly will I seek you. My soul thirsts for you; my flesh longs for you.”*

This is the love the Lord commands of us: *“You shall love Jehovah your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength”* (Deut. 6:5.) This is the love the Lord demands of us; addressing the church in Ephesus, our Lord rebukes them with the words:

*I know your works, your labor and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles, but are not, and have found them to be false. <sup>3</sup>You have persevered and endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup>But I have this against you: you have forsaken your first love.* (Rev. 2:2-4)

This is the love the Holy Spirit creates in the Christian’s heart and which the apostle prays would *“abound more and more”* in our lives as Christians. This is the great need of the hour; namely, that our love for Christ would increase in fervency: that we would let go of the world and embrace Christ with both arms; that we would follow the Lamb wherever He leads; that we would join the apostle in saying with all our heart, *“for me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”*

Pray that your love for Christ would increase in fervency; and be sure to follow up on your prayers with the action the Lord desires. Where necessary, heed our Lord’s counsel, which He found necessary to issue to the church at Ephesus: *“You have left your first love. <sup>5</sup>Therefore, remember from where you have fallen, and repent, and do the works you did at the beginning”* (Rev. 2:4b-5a.) The *“works”* of which the Lord speaks are the works of faith and labors of love for which He commends the Thessalonian church in 1 Thessalonians 1:3. Remember your initial love for Christ, the love you felt the day you first met the Savior, or remember the high point in your Christian experience, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, rekindle that love. Repent of any secret sins, or ungodly patterns of living, that block your communion with Christ and threaten to quench your love for Him or usurp the place of devotion in your heart that must be reserved for Him alone. Imitate the example of Mary who gave her undivided attention to Jesus, in contrast to Martha who allowed the necessities of living to distract her from the one necessary thing:

*Mary ... sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. <sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me! <sup>41</sup>Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and*

*upset about many things, <sup>42</sup>but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.* (Lk. 10:39-42)

## II. Pray that Your Love for Christ will Increase in Knowledge and Insight (vs.9-10)

The apostle's prayer is not only that our love for Christ would increase in our hearts, but also that it would involve our intellect; as the Lord Himself commands, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind"* (Matt. 22:37.) So it is that the apostle informs the church: I pray that your love may abound *"in knowledge and all insight."*

The knowledge of which the apostle here speaks is first and foremost knowledge of God Himself, as he exhorts the Colossian Christians, *"walk in a way that is worthy of the Lord ... bearing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God"* (Col. 1:10.) Furthermore, this knowledge is the knowledge of the truth of God, (i.e., biblical doctrine,) as Paul writes to Timothy, *"God our Savior ... <sup>4</sup>... desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth"* (1 Tim. 2:3-4.) This knowledge is a knowledge that has intellectual content, (as opposed to mere emotionalism,) and a life-changing purpose: it is *"the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness"* (Titus 1:1.) The *"insight,"* or, discernment, of which Paul speaks, is the ability to apply biblical knowledge to the situations and decisions of life. It is also the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, truth and error, good and evil, on the basis of biblical knowledge.

Paul further explains that the purpose of our growth in (biblical) knowledge and discernment is in order that we may *"discern the things that are worthy."* The Greek term (δοκιμάζω) translated, *"discern,"* has first the meaning of putting something to the test and thereby causing its true quality and identity to be revealed—so that it may be discerned or made known. That usage can be found in 1 Corinthians 3:13, *"[let it be known that] each man's work will be revealed. The [Judgment] Day will make it evident, because it will be revealed with fire—the fire will test [δοκιμάζω] the quality of each man's work."* The second meaning of the term means, to accept that which has passed the test and thereby has shown itself to be approved. This usage of the term can be found in 1 Corinthians 16:3, *"when I arrive, I will send the men whom you approve [δοκιμάζω], along with letters of introduction, to deliver your gift to Jerusalem."* Paul is recommending that the Corinthian church appoint men who have shown themselves to have passed the test of integrity and are thus approved to accompany the apostle to Jerusalem with the church's offering for the needy. The phrase translated, *"the things that are worthy,"* is literally, *"the things that are different,"* derived from the Greek verb, διαφέρω. The apostle is speaking here of the things that stand out as spiritually and morally good, right, superior; the things that are worthy of applause, acceptance and imitation, note Philippians 4:8, *"Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure,*

*whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—reflect on these things."*

The means of acquiring this biblical knowledge and discernment is the study of the Scriptures. In Romans 2:18, Paul reminds the Jews that they are able to *"discern the things that are worthy"* because they *"are instructed by the Law"* of God, in this case referring to the entire Old Testament: *"[you] know his will, and discern the things that are worthy, because you are instructed by the Law."*

Pray that your love for Christ would increase in knowledge and insight, and be sure to follow up your prayers with the work the Lord requires. Approach the Word of God in personal study and at public preaching and teaching as a disciple who wants to learn how better to serve and please the Lord and Savior whom he loves.

### **III. Pray that Your Love for Christ will Increase in Fruitfulness (vs.11)**

The objective of the apostle's prayer, first stated in negative terms, is that you may be *"pure and blameless for the day of Christ."* To be *"pure"* is to be unmixed (devoid of any alloys, purged of all foreign elements) and undiluted (not "watered down" with sub-Christian thought or practice, but found to be at full potency in Christ-like life.) To be *"blameless"* is to be unchargeable; not subject to the words, "I have this against you." On the contrary, it is to be worthy to hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." The way to be blameless—the way to stay clear of great transgressions, the way to stay on course spiritually—is to always consciously live in the presence of God, to "walk before God." Note Genesis 17:1, where the LORD says to Abram, *"I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless."*

We are to be pure and blameless *"for* (or, *"with regard to,"* the Greek preposition, εἰς in the accusative) *the day of Christ;"* i.e., in anticipation of and in preparation for the day of Christ's return in glory. We are to live our present lives in the light of that great future day when we shall give an account before the judgment throne of Christ:

*... we make it our goal, whether at home [in the body] or absent [from the body], to be well-pleasing to [Christ]; <sup>10</sup>because all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ; so that each one may receive the just reward for the deeds done [while living] in [this earthly] body. [Each one will be repaid] for what he has done, according to whether it was good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:9-10)*

We are to prepare in this present life for that great future day, as the Apostle John exhorts us:

*Beloved, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see*

*him as he is. <sup>3</sup>Everyone who has this hope set on him purifies himself, just as he is pure. (1 Jn. 3:2-3)*

The objective of the apostle's prayer stated in positive terms is that you may be *"filled with the fruit of righteousness."* *"The fruit of righteousness"* is the fruit that results from coming into living contact and union with the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be said to be the radical alternative to what the Apostle Paul warns against in 1 Corinthians 15:33, *"Bad companions corrupt good morals."*

The fruit of righteousness is the fruit that consists of those qualities God defines as righteous and pleasing in His sight, those attributes that are a reflection of His own moral character and being and that are produced in the Christian by the Holy Spirit: *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, integrity, <sup>23</sup>meekness, self-control"* (Gal. 5:22-23.) The fruit of righteousness is *"through Jesus Christ."* It is not something that is self-produced; on the contrary, as indicated above, it is produced by the Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Spirit as the Christian yields his will to the Lord and dwells in the life of Christ his Savior. Jesus declares, *"I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him, he is the one who bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing"* (Jn. 15:5.)

The fruit of righteousness is *"to the glory and praise of God."* God is glorified as His righteous character is reflected and radiates from the lives of His redeemed children in Christ. God is praised as His character is reproduced in former rebels who were at enmity against God and against His righteous loving character.

Pray that your love for Christ will increase in fruitfulness, bearing in mind and taking to heart the words of Jesus: *"If you love me you will keep my commandments"* (Jn. 14:15.) Again, in John 15:10-11a, the Lord Jesus declares, *"If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you."* We, as Christians, in our obedience to Christ our Savior, become a source of joy to our Savior, we bring joy to Him, such is the meaning of our Lord's words, *"so that my joy may be in you."*

## **Conclusion**

"More love to Thee, O Christ, more love to Thee!" A love that grows in fervency, and in knowledge and insight, and in fruitfulness; this is a worthy prayer. This is the apostle's divinely inspired prayer for the church of Christ, and may it be our heartfelt prayer, too.