

READING

Philippians 1: 1-11

SERMON

**Together in Prayer** (Philippians 1:9-11)

**I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy** (Philippians 1:3-4 NIV)

Isn't it great when someone comes up to you and says that they are praying for you? Because there are times when we really need to be prayed for.

It is fine for someone to say they are praying for you and Paul in writing to the church of God at Philippi says

**I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy** (Philippians 1:3-4 NIV)

Isn't it great when someone prays for you and tells you so? Well, not always. I did have one person ring me up and ask if it was right for a member of my church to say they were praying for someone else who did not go to church. I replied that I am thrilled if someone says they are praying for me. The person on the other end of the phone was not so thrilled at being prayed for, but it transpired that it was other things that the churchgoer was saying that were giving offence and that prayer was just the thing that had been latched onto to begin the conversation with me.

But at times you wonder what people are praying for you. Are they being very general in their prayers? Is it the Christopher Robin type prayer – 'God bless mummy, God bless daddy, etc' with no real substance in it. Paul tells the people that he is praying for them and then he says what his prayer is, what it is that he is praying about. Philippians 1:9

**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 until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.**  
(Philippians 1:9-11 NIV)

Paul prays for love. Does this mean that the Philippian Christians did not love one another? Was it another church like the church of God at Corinth who has so much, but lacked love for one another? These are the sort of questions that theologians ask themselves as they read through the letters in the Bible because they are trying to see why Paul is writing the letter in the first place. What problems is he addressing? But as we shall see this morning love is a process, not an end point; love is always growing, never being satisfied.

Love can be typified as a plant in these verses and of course plants are growing things and plants usually begin as a seed and often need to be held up with stakes. It is so with love which is growing. Verse 9

**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight** (Philippians 1:9 NIV)

We see here twin stakes, those of knowledge and depth of insight, otherwise called discernment. But why chose these twin stakes, why do I need my love to be held up by knowledge and depth insight.

## Knowledge

With only love and no knowledge, strange things can happen. A baby gosling will follow the first living thing it sees and love it as its mother. That is imprinting. The gosling has no knowledge of what its real mother looks like so it attaches itself to the first living thing it sees, which most of time is its mother, but occasionally things can go wrong.

With only love and no knowledge dreadful things can happen. In one film I saw about Frankenstein's monster, the monster goes for walkabouts and comes across a little girl throwing flowers one by one into the river and watching them float away on the current. She asks the monster if he would like to do the same, not seeing the monster in him and him really just being like a small child in his emotional and development life. So she gives him some flowers and they both throw a flower into the river and both gain joy at seeing the flowers float away on the flow of the river. Then the monster runs out of flowers and he is perplexed as to what to do next. So, because he knows no better, he picks up the nearest object to him, the girl, and throws her in and of course she drowns and the monster is blamed, but he had a child's mind in the body of a very strong man and he had no knowledge.

Knowledge lets us see the difference between good and bad, between what is right and what is wrong. When we look at the life of Jesus, a life of love for fellow human beings we see that Jesus loved, but he also knew the difference between good and bad. At one time a woman is brought to him by the Pharisees and teachers of the law and they say to Jesus

**"Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"** (John 8:4 NIV)

We are then told that

**They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground. At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?" "No-one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you,"** (John 8:3-11 NIV)

So Jesus in his love allows the woman to go. No one has condemned her so neither will he. But then he adds

**"Go now and leave your life of sin."** (John 8:11 NIV)

Jesus knew the truth and was not condoning the lifestyle of the woman. Our love needs to have the stake of knowledge by it, so that it does not turn into something weak and floppy, allowing anything to happen and having no knowledge of whether something is right or wrong, good or bad. We need to be people, like Jesus who love sinners but hate sin, who love those under the influence of Satan, but to hate what they are doing. At times I think the hardest thing we have to explain to people is that it is possible to love someone and hate what they are doing, although many people who say that it is impossible to do that, manage to do it, manage when they are parents – especially of teenagers!

Insight

But then we have the other stake – the stake of depth of insight. Love and knowledge go together very well but there will be situations when love or knowledge will let one down and even working together they will not be sufficient.

In time management there is the difference between the important and the urgent. One is suppose to do the important and so that way the urgent never needs to be done as a priority. However talking to most people it seems that we go from one urgent to another hoping that the important gets done on the way.

In love we have to discern what is important and what is unimportant. What is it that really matters and what is a bolt on extra if you like. In the gospel stories there are several things which are left out which could be a great help to us. Firstly you never hear of Jesus or the disciples ever going to the toilet. You read of such things in the Old Testament, because one day we read that

**King Saul came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave.** (1 Samuel 24:3 NIV)

Some other versions put it

**...to attend to his needs.** (1 Samuel 24:3 NKJV)

But we never hear of the disciples relieving themselves. We also never read of the disciples using bad language and of course we know that Jesus said

**But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.** (Matthew 5:34-37 NIV)

But what if someone had of come to Jesus using bad and foul language asking for forgiveness, what would he have done? Would he have told the person about their bad language or told them about salvation? At times we need to be discerning about what is important and what is unimportant, we need to discern what and when we need to say something and perhaps put up with something because of the importance of the issues.

However this is not a reason to have carte blanche to do anything which we know is wrong because we think it is unimportant. Remember Paul's answer to the question

**What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.** (Romans 6:1-4 NIV)

We must always strive to live lives as Paul says in verse 11

**...to the glory and praise of God.** (Philippians 1:11 NIV)

Goal

That is the goal of our love, the aim of our love. Surprisingly Paul does not say that it is to make the fellowship better, or stronger or more. Our love is to abound more and more so we are

**...to the glory and praise of God.** (Philippians 1:11 NIV)

We are **...to the glory and praise of God.** (Philippians 1:11 NIV). Is that the goal of your life? Of course we all say, but does the outworking of our life show that? Our goal controls our purpose.

Purpose

So what is the purpose? Verse 9

**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 until the day of Christ** (Philippians 1:9-10 NIV)

Our love is to grow with the twin stakes of knowledge and insight so that we discern what is best for us, so that we may be pure and blameless.

Being pure is to do with our attitudes. As Paul says in Romans

**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.** (Romans 12:2 NIV)

There should be no flaw in our attitudes, our thinking, and then this leads to our behaviour being blameless. What attitudes do you have towards other people? Are your attitudes the same as God's? Do you know what attitudes God wants you to have? That is where we need the knowledge, we need the knowledge of God and of his word.

And then with the right attitudes, being pure, our behaviour becomes blameless. Of Daniel we read that

**...the administrators and the satraps tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of government affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption in him, because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent.** (Daniel 6:4 NIV)

Daniel's behaviour was so blameless that they then had to invent a law to trap him, but that's another story. Do people know you follow God because of your behaviour? Do your actions confirm your words?

So the prayer of Paul is that

**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 until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.** (Philippians 1:9-11 NIV)

But he prayed also for their responsibly in their growth. He says

**...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** (Philippians 1:9-10)

We too are partners with God in this growth. We need to play our part, to gain knowledge, to develop insight so that our love will grow and grow. Love is one of those things that never reaches an end point, never finishes developing, but needs to go on and on and so Paul was right to say

**And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more**  
(Philippians 1:9 NIV)

And this should be our prayer for each other, for I do hope we pray for each other, that our love may abound more and more.

PRAYER