

TOTAL COMMITMENT MONTH
THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

"Abounding Love"
Philippians 1:8, 9

Introduction

1. Frequently the Word of God records the personal prayers of Paul for the believers with whom he was associated. That is the case in this passage (vv. 9-11).

2. The intensity of Paul's prayer life is patent. It is demonstrated here in three ways:

a. The witness called. The solemn appeal in prayer is supported by his own assurance that it is expressed in the presence of God. It is an affirmation he offers as testimony to his ardent heart which was often tried by suspicion. Elsewhere the expression is used (Rom. 1:9; 1 Thess. 2:5, 10).

b. The longing involved. The Greek verb used here shows that Paul had a deep family affection for the Philippian believers. It is a homesick yearning. Eleven times this verb is used in the New Testament (Rom. 1:11; 15:23; 2 Cor. 5:2; 7:7, 11; 9:14; Phil. 2:26; 4:1; here; 1 Thess. 3:6; 2 Tim. 1:4). It is no mean term for a deep outpouring of one's heart.

c. The affection recorded. While the KJV follows the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX), the word used here actually means the intestines (Acts 1:18). But anatomy is not the point. The Greeks traced strong passions to this area while the Jews considered it a place of tender affection. The word itself is translated in a variety of ways in the New Testament (2 Cor. 6:12; 7:15; Col. 3:12; 1 John 3:17). Being linked with the Person of our Lord, it is evident that there are no yearnings of this quality without the pulse-beat of His heart. Here is a joint heart-throb with Christ.

3. So, what does Paul pray for? The text gives a clear statement. The three verses (vv. 9-11) are linked in a grammatical construction (Note: "that" in vv. 9, 10 occurs three times with two different Greek constructions). The first of these "thats" avers purpose and involves three cogent concerns which Paul desired for the believers at Philippi. They are worthy objects for us today:

1. ABOUNDING LOVE

a. The noun. Here is the word "love." Although much abused by modern society and unthinking people, it has a sincere significance in the Bible. It means an intelligent, directed, and controlled uncompromising qualitative giving of oneself for another. The word is probably to be under-

stood in its widest sense: love for God, Paul, others, gospel, church, etc. It is not sensual, but divine in its origin (Rom. 5:5 where the perfect passive verb is used concerning its presence within the believing heart).

b. The verb. Here is the present active subjunctive form which seems more appropriate and supported than the aorist. It is a favorite word with Paul (v. 26; 4:12, 18; 1 Thess. 4:1, 10). The present tense conveys the idea of perpetuity, hence "keep on overflowing" is correct.

c. The modifiers. The use of the double "more and more" shows that Paul focused on the idea of spiritual growth and overflow. The fire in Paul's breast for love could never say "enough." The figure of John 7:38 is an apt illustration. Love never fails in its supply, for its Source is God.

2. FULL KNOWLEDGE

The noun used here relates to acquired or experimental knowledge. But it considers knowledge in its fullest orb. This compound word will not permit a false or low position. This prayed-for knowledge, then, is of the deepest, highest, widest, and longest quality. Its use in other passages of the Word accent its firm commitment to the standard (Rom. 1:28; 3:20; 10:2; Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Col. 2:2; 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25, 26; 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:2, 3, 8; 2:20).

3. POWERFUL DISCERNMENT

Paul employs a word which only occurs once in the New Testament. In the LXX (Proverbs) it translates the Hebrew noun for "knowledge." It does not mean, however, intellectual acuteness, but moral sensitiveness (Luke 9:45; Heb. 5:14). It is a delicate perceptiveness which is in view. The singular "all" connotes every kind of discernment. It also denotes that there are manifold demands for its exercise. When one considers the pagan communities of Paul's day and the innumerable spiritual problems associated with the impregnation of the gospel in Macedonia, the demand for discernment in that day was enormous. The complexities of modern society and the attendant challenges to the Christian faith make the need for discernment today as great, if not greater, than in Paul's day. Think of ecumenism, doctrinal debates, neo-evangelicalism, inclusivism, not to mention music, worldliness, and the unending challenges to Christian interpersonal relationships. God send us the discernment Paul prayed for!

Conclusion As we gather to the Person and Name of our adorable Lord, the impact of this prayer of Paul bears upon our own relationship with Him and others. Like the Philippians, may we abound in love, experience full knowledge, and exercise ourselves in powerful discernment.