

Growing In Love

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[0 : 00] Together, verses 9 to 11, Philippians 1 at verse 9, three verses down to verse 11. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so 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.

Okay, the main features of these verses, there's much in these three verses, so we're not going to cover absolutely every point, but looking at the main features of it as these verses are very closely tied together in the Apostle's writing.

It's always, when we're young in the faith, a great privilege for us to listen to older Christians praying. It's something that we may find intimidating in a sense, especially if we be called to public prayer ourselves in due course, but it also humbles us, and it humbles us to realize that these are people, male or female, who have in fact been walking with the Lord many years, who obviously show by their prayers that they have come to grow in their knowledge of the Lord, who have a familiarity with God, not a careless or that kind of familiarity that you would associate with carelessness, but familiarity of intimacy and of a knowledge of God on a personal level that has grown in their experience.

And it's really a great privilege to have that experience of listening to mature Christians as they come to pray to the Lord.

And I would like to say to those who are maybe young in the faith at this point, and maybe feel that their prayers are so poor compared to more mature Christians, that those who are mature in the faith and come to listen to new Christians, if you like, are themselves truly grateful for that experience.

[2 : 09] There's something very fresh, very new about a Christian that's not long been following the Lord, and yet comes to be heard in prayer, comes to express themselves in direct conversation with God in prayer.

And those of us who are mature in prayer, I can assure you, if you're young in the faith and feel a bit intimidated, the prospect of that, that there's a great blessing for the older ones too in listening to younger ones in prayer.

And if you can call it in the proper way, simple faith and trust in the Lord, that comes across in such prayers of those young in the faith, even if they be up in years.

But here we have the great privilege of access to Paul in prayer. As you go through the letters of Paul, you'll find him referring a number of times to what he himself is praying for, as far as these churches that he's writing to are concerned.

You have a similar passage to this one in the next letter in Colossians, chapter 1, verses 9 to 11, again as it happens, where he asks for very similar things. We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God and so on.

[3 : 36] He goes on to add a few more things there. But you can see that as you're given access to the apostle at prayer or in prayer, what a window of blessing that is for us.

Because not only do you see the stature and the caliber of this man in prayer before God, but he gives us also in these prayers that are recorded for us of his, he gives us items that we ourselves can take in prayer to God.

He's praying here that, as we'll see, that the love of the Philippians will increase, will indeed abound more and more increasingly, that they will know of a growth in their love.

Now there's something just to take with you and build into our own prayers as well, so that we come before the Lord and ask him, as his word here encourages us to do so, that like Paul, we too will pray that as a congregation, our love may abound more and more.

We see something of what that means just this evening as we go through these items. So there are two things that we want to take from these verses briefly tonight.

[4 : 47] First of all, there's an emphasis on how growing in love is an essential growth. How growing in love is an essential growth.

Secondly, we'll look at how growing in love is what we'll call a multi-purpose growth. Because he mentions a number of things tied to that growth, the purpose for which this growth, this increase in love is mentioned by Paul.

And he has three things especially to say, in terms of the purpose for which he is setting this out. That they might grow in love so as to approve what is excellent, so as to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

And thirdly, so as to be to the glory and praise of God. So these are the two items we're looking at this evening. First of all, how growing in love is an essential truth.

Now you see that immediately as you come to these verses. This he says, I'm praying for this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and all discernment.

[5 : 56] In other words, growing for the apostle in love, just as growing in many other features of the Christian life, is to be regarded as a norm. It's something that's to be regarded as belonging to a certain standard of life that the Christian has to follow and is privileged to know in Jesus Christ.

It's not something in any way that he presents as optional. It's not something that he would set out as an extra to be added to more important features of a Christian life.

It's not something at all of that nature. It's something that far from being optional or an extra is an essential part of living as a Christian or being together as a Christian congregation.

Because, of course, what he's saying here, I'm praying that your love may increase and may abound more and more. That your, of course, is plural. I'm praying for you as a spiritual group, as a church, as a gathering of God's people, that your love may abound more and more.

And here is what is so important for ourselves, that because this for the apostle and for ourselves is essential, it's not something extra, it's something that has got to be at the real heart and at the foundation of our development as Christians.

[7 : 19] Here is the apostle saying it has both a collective emphasis, we are to do this together, and obviously that's something that takes in the whole congregation, but then it carries with it every individual who belongs to that congregation.

Because he doesn't leave the Philippians in any doubt, that it's their personal responsibility, their individual responsibility, as they belong to the church in Philippi, to actually apply themselves individually to this growth in love, so that thereby, if they all do that as individuals, the whole church, the whole congregation, will be what he prays for, increasing and abounding in love.

It's something often essential. And you notice there's no object specified when he says, I pray that your love may abound more and more. He doesn't say, I'm praying that your love for God may abound more and more.

Not is he saying, I'm praying that your love for one another may abound more and more. Not is he saying, I'm praying that your love for lost sinners may abound more and more.

He's leaving the thing as open as to include everything that is to be brought and everyone that is to be brought into prayer, whether it's for themselves as a congregation, as individuals and their needs, or the world outside that they need to reach out with the gospel to, or God himself, that is to be loved first and foremost, the apostle is simply saying, in principle I pray that your love, your love for whoever that love is going to be, God or human beings, that it may abound more and more.

[9 : 04] So you see, we're not left in the dark as to our love being anything other than a growing, developing thing, or that we ourselves, put another way, we ourselves must grow in the exercise of our love.

It's something that we must grow in regard to exercising the activity of our love, and love of course is only meaningful as you love someone or some people or God himself.

So here is the first challenge really, and the first privilege in these verses, that love is unessential, the growing in love is unessential rather, and there's no object specified.

So that's the first point you take from this. The apostle is saying, this is what I'm praying for, therefore this is what we have to pray for ourselves as a congregation too, that our love may abound more and more.

That it will be true of us as a people together, whatever people say of us, whatever caricatures they may have of us, the one thing we trust that they would never be able to say of us is that our love is not growing, that we're not giving evidence that we are increasing in love.

[10 : 24] That's very difficult, that's a very challenging thing, but it's essential, and it's something that Paul is praying for, that we must pray for too. But then you see he goes on, and he's now beginning to dissect this growth in love a bit more than just speaking about it generally.

He's not content with simply saying, I pray that your love may abound more and more, and then moving on to something else. He continues to speak about love, but he's taking us inside the workings, or the components, or the elements of it you like.

And he's saying, I pray that your love may abound more and more with knowledge, or in knowledge and all discernment. Or you could put it, in all knowledge and discernment. These are two important elements in terms of our growth in love.

Let's take them in turn. I pray that your love may abound more and more with knowledge, with all knowledge. This is a word in the New Testament that is always used with regard to the things of God.

Things to do with God, with God's cause, with God's people. There's always something that includes God. It's always, it also has a theological emphasis, and is to do with our relationship with God, our relationship with other people for God's sake.

[11 : 44] And of course, it reminds us of something very important that you find specified elsewhere more fully. And that is that our growth in love will only be in proportion to how well we know God.

Our growth in love is to be a growth, as we'll see, that is related to growing in our knowledge of God and knowledge of God's truth.

The two things go together as you look at the Bible and as you rightly see that as God revealed truth to you and to us as a people together, so you come to know God through that, as we saw this emphasis on Jesus this morning in John 5.

His complaint was that these religious leaders of the time, they knew the scriptures, they were searching the scriptures, but you will not come to me that you might have life.

We come to the Bible so as to come to know God. And as we come to know God, we come to know God's love. And as we come to know God's love, we come to love Him in return and we come to love one another.

[12 : 49] We come to realize that love is something that must grow and must increase and that it must increase in relation to knowledge. You see, love has what you might call a backbone.

Love is not something frothy, not something that's like a mallow, something that just moves with the times. It's not something that doesn't have a relationship with foundational things like the truth of God itself, especially.

Love has truth as its basis. In other words, when something that's called love has departed from the truth of God as its basis, it ceases to be love, at least in God's definition of it, in the Bible's definition of it.

That's why you're saying, I pray that your love may abound more and more in knowledge. Cut off the exercise of love from the knowledge of truth. We've seen recently how truth is such an important element in society, for society, as well as for ourselves as a church.

In Isaiah's great words, the truth had fallen in the streets, truth had stumbled in his day, such were the, was the departure from God's truth of his day. We saw something of how that characterizes our own day as well, by so many people departing from the truth.

[14 : 11] Truth is just like a figure that's collapsed in the street, as it were, in the public places. Here is a reminder to us here that our love is very, very closely connected with God's truth.

And that it's as you come to know God's truth and appreciate God's truth and love God's truth and come increasingly to understand God's truth and know God's truth, well, that feeds into your exercise of love.

And as your love, as your knowledge grows, so your love correspondingly and proportionally will actually accompany that and keep up with that in the idea that Paul is presenting for us here.

In other words, you counter the idea that you come across today so much in our world, where people choose relationships that they think best for themselves, where they define love in terms of what seems best to them, where they take love and detach it completely from the truth of God as you have it in the Bible, and you end up with this situation where the idea of love is what I choose to make it.

The idea of love is how I define it, how it seems right to me. This individualistic attitude, this individualistic mindset which displaces the Bible as no longer relevant.

[15 : 40] Truth is how I see it. Truth is how I define it. How it works for me. How I choose to live my life. Well, this is a counter to that idea that this is really how you see love.

That it's just open-ended. It's something that you can change from one day to the next in terms of who you love and how you love. And you have this meaningless phrase bandied about so much, love is love.

What does that mean? Love is love. There's no meaning to that because there's no structure to that. When you come to have the structure of God's truth and then you base love on top of that, then you've got a structure to love.

You give it a backbone. You give it something that is going to stand the test of time and the challenges of time. That's why he's saying, I am praying that your love may abound more and more and actually may do so in knowledge.

And when he's saying abounding here, it's important you notice that word. It's a favorite word of Paul. It doesn't just mean grow and increase and growing and abound.

[16 : 54] The word abound, of course, means multiplying, just going on, growing increasingly. But it's a word that Paul uses as, you might say, representative of the gospel age.

The gospel age that began with Jesus Christ that then comes into the apostolic period where the apostles wrote their letters and there we find God's, the Bible, God's revealed truth closed with the way that the apostles reached the end of that time in the church.

Well, here is a reminder to us that abounding, increasing in that voluminous sense, if you like, is a characteristic of the gospel age.

We live in an age of abounding. We should see that because we live in the age when the Spirit of God that was promised in the Old Testament and known in a lesser sense than in the New after the day of Pentecost, we live in this abounding age, abounding blessings.

Blessings that exceed those of the Old Testament. Here is Paul reminding us that that is something that you apply to love, this whole wonderful privilege and idea of the abounding that belongs to the gospel age, the plenteousness of blessing, the way in which God is revealed as being abounding in His grace and love toward us.

[18 : 22] As Romans 5 reminds us that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. You see, God is the God of abounding.

Isn't that a wonderful truth tonight to appreciate, to study more and more that when God abounds toward us in His mercy, it's an abounding mercy, it's an abounding grace, it's an abounding love.

God abounds in the privileges of the blessings that He gives to us in Christ. And in Jesus Christ you see God's abounding more than anywhere else.

Well, that's just a bit of a tangent that we were taking off, but taken on to. But this is the idea that Paul has, that your love may abound more and more as you actually know the truth and knowledge.

knowledge. And so you take that into your personal life, you take it into relationships, you take it into what unites us together as a congregation of people who worship the Lord, our relation to God Himself.

[19 : 30] What he's saying is that this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more, that it may go on increasing, and that it may do so in knowledge.

And then he's also got discernment, and more and more in knowledge, or with knowledge and all discernment. Now if knowledge is a word used for God and for things to do with God and for theological aspects of that, discernment really has to do with the way that God gives us the ability of seeing the relevance of His truth and then applying it to everyday life.

Seeing the relevance of His truth and how it applies to ourselves and how we then apply it to everyday life. In other words, as your mind takes in the truth of God, as there is a growing in your understanding, this knowledge that He's speaking of here, that follows through here logically into the way you apply it in your life.

In other words, mind growth, if we can put it that way, must lead to conduct growth. Paul never actually detaches what you believe and know from how you behave and how you live.

The two are so intimately tied together, which is why he can say that he's praying that their love will abound more and more, but it's with knowledge and all discernment.

[21 : 00] You know, when we come to meet problems in life as we do, we have to then apply our minds to that. We come to the Bible as much as possible to receive light and instruction.

We take advice from other Christians. How do we deal with these problems? Problems of relationship, problems of how we are in regard to the way the world sees us, how we are together as a congregation, as a fellowship.

Unless you face the problems, you have to make choices. You have to make choices as to how you're going to respond, what you're going to make of this? Are you going to react or not react?

And one of the great things about making choices in that respect in this way is that making choices by the light of God's truth actually brings about a forming of your attitude and a forming of your character.

Because you can't form or come more and more to take on a certain character, a character as a Christian, I mean, you can't do that without knowledge of the truth of God.

[22 : 14] And making choices for God, choices that will say, well, I can't do that, I can't involve myself in that, that would be sinful. That's something that immediately forms part of your attitude, adds to the attitude you already have, and that itself leads to formation of character.

You can't form your character without God's truth, and making choices, and applying your mind to decisions, and reaching conclusions. And Paul is saying that's actually part of the workings of love as well, because the increase in love that he's thinking of is love, knowledge, and discernment, or with knowledge, and all discernment, all ability to apply God's truth as you come to know it increasingly.

So growing in love is an essential growth. It's an essential growth, it's a norm, it's not an extra, it's not something to be added to more important things, and it's growing with knowledge and discernment, so that our love will have a structure to it, so that it will be different and distinguished from the world's idea of love, and that we will appreciate what it is all the more to increase in love, love for God and love for one another especially.

Secondly, we can say that this passage teaches us that growing in love is a multi-purpose growth, you see what he's saying, so that you may approve what is excellent, that's the first purpose.

Secondly, so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. Thirdly, to the praise, to the glory and praise of God.

[24 : 06] Now, just briefly going through these three points, where you find growing in love to be a multi-purpose growth. This is not something theoretical, it's not something Paul is saying to the Philippians, this is just like a philosophical argument, you follow it out logically, just apply your brain to it, and once you've got it into your brain, you've made it, that's it.

It's not like that, Christian life's not like that. Yes, of course, you need to inform your mind, as we've been saying, the truth of God underlies all our Christian growth. But what he's saying is, that has then to be applied in the practice of your life.

He's saying, so that you may approve what is excellent. Now, what does he mean by what is excellent? Well, it has a number of different ways of taking it, two ways you could take it.

It can mean that which is superior, or it can mean that which is also different. In fact, there's not much difference, not much to distinguish between those two meanings.

What he's really saying is, the Christian lifestyle, the lifestyle of which growing in love is an essential part, he says, I'm praying that you may increase and abound more and more in love, so that you may come to approve, to recognize the worth of that Christian lifestyle, of that Christian life that God has given you the ability to live out by his spirit and through Jesus Christ.

[25 : 37] You see, again, Paul is always conscious of what's going on around the people he's writing to. Philippi was not an easy place to live a Christian life.

It's a center of paganism, one of the chief cities of the Roman Empire, much to do with pagan worship, much in opposition to the gospel, and yet God planted a church there through Paul.

And you can see in Acts chapter 16, the three people especially that were used by God through the apostles' ministry to establish, to be founded members of that church, and they're very different to the kind of people you and I would choose if God gave us the choice.

Who were they? Well, if you read Acts chapter 16, you'll see that the three were in fact the Philippian jailer, the young slave girl, and a very rich woman called Lydia.

Very, very different backgrounds, very different personalities, very different character, but that's how God works. God doesn't say to Paul, I want you to go to Philippi, and in Philippi, look out certain people that are exactly the same, these are the ones I want to be the foundational members of my church.

[26 : 54] That's not what God is about. This place tonight is full of different people, of different backgrounds, different characters, different personalities, different ways of life through which you've come to know the Lord, different things in life that you do with terms of your career, your work, your families, all sorts of differences.

But God, by His grace, puts us together to be a people, to be a church, to be a congregation, and charges us through the gospel to abound more and more in love.

And so that you may approve what is excellent. I think he's using this word here really to emphasize so that you can approve, that you can actually recognize the worth of the distinctive Christian life that is different to and at odds with the world outside.

That follows, in other words, the teaching of Scripture, the terms of Christ Himself, for example, in the Sermon on the Mount, which is really a counter-cultural sermon.

You go through the Sermon on the Mount and you'll find that's really exactly what Jesus is about. He opened His mouth and taught His disciples and He taught them about how to live in the world of their day.

[28 : 18] And how to be distinct and how to be different. And how to stand out for Him. Which is really exactly the principle that Paul is saying here applies to our growth and love so that you may approve what is excellent.

You may approve what is superior. And of course, it sounds rather arrogant, doesn't it, in today's world to say that the Christian life is a superior type of life, if we can use that word of it.

But it is superior. Superior not in the sense that you look down on people. Superior not in the sense that you go and say to people, look, I'm better than you are. Chapter 2 of Philippians makes that very clear.

That's not what it's about. That's not what Jesus did. But superior in the sense that it's a life that's filled with the Spirit of God with the life that God gives to his people and therefore in that sense God has placed it above, if you like, ordinary human life.

And he's saying if you abound more and more in love, you will come to approve, to consider the excellence of this Christian lifestyle and how different it is and how distinctive it is and how much it contrasts with what surrounds it in the lifestyle of the world.

[29 : 41] Secondly, to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Now I said we weren't going to deal with all the various words and phrases but he's saying here that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Paul loves to speak about the day of Christ. It doesn't mean the day that Christ came into the world. It means the day that Christ returns. The day of judgment.

The day of the Lord's return to this world. What he's saying is I'm praying that your love may increase and abound more and more so that you may be ready when he comes and so that you may be ready that you may be pure and blameless for that day of Christ.

That's what you have to keep in mind as a Christian too that this is the objective that this is the reason or one of the purposes why we have to grow in love so that when Jesus comes he may find us pure and blameless and that's in the sense of being ready to meet with him.

None of us is entirely 100% pure and blameless right now. We have to of course confess that but what he's saying is this is the objective that when Christ comes this will be true of us and in order that this will be true of us he's given us the privilege now of increasing of abounding in love and knowledge and all discernment to be holy to increase in holiness and blameless there means not just blameless in the sense that other people see us as holy blameless there means giving no cause of stumbling to others and that's a big challenge for me and for you that nobody would say of us well I fell off from following Christ because of what I saw in them because they were inconsistent because they didn't live their life in a way of abounding in love they showed the opposite spirit or something like that what he's saying here is that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ and he's saying filled with the fruit of righteousness that's just holiness this practical life this life that through

[32 : 02] Jesus Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness Paul loves again to use this language of fruit and of bearing fruit which of course itself lends to the idea of increase or of abounding you look at the stuff growing in your gardens just now and it's the time of year when you see it coming to increasing in growth and when you come to see fruit or vegetables or flowers and they're really now beginning to some have reached maturity already but it's a time of growth it's a time when you can associate this language with spiritual things too filled with the fruit of righteousness because God is working in them God he says in the early part of the chapter where he's saying that he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ tying together what you have there in verse 10 as well that you may be pure and blameless for the day of

Christ there's a mystery of course to that mystery in the sense that we can't you can't really understand you can't put your finger on spiritual growth and how it comes about can you remember how Jesus himself in the gospel of Mark and chapter 4 talks there about the growth of plants whether it's wheat or whatever and Mark chapter 4 and verse 26 this is how he put it he said the kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground he sleeps and rises night and day and the seed sprouts and grows he knows not how the earth produces by itself first the blade then the ear then the full grain in the ear when the grain is ripe at once he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come but it's these words he knows not how the person who does have a lot of care on it he fertilizes it to make sure the ground is right chooses the right seed and then nurtures it waters it everything else but ultimately he's not responsible for its growth though he has to attend to it that's how it is with the

Christian life as well you have to attend to certain things that are necessary you have to give your mind to believing things you have to give commands and injunctions and promises you grow by the use of God's word and by compliance with these things and in your relationship to Christ but the essence of the growth is in God's hands thankfully it's not depending on how good we are at praying or whatever other aspects of our Christian life or even our love but he is saying that you may be filled with the fruit of righteousness and to be filled with the fruit of righteousness I'm praying he says that your love will abound more and more so it's for the day of Christ and finally it's to the glory and praise of

God you could treat these words this passage verses 9 to 11 as a kind of literary symphony if you like symphony is a piece of music performed by an orchestra where you have all the different musical instruments where they all have their own part in the music and the musical score has been written by the composer so that each of these musical instruments contributes at different parts at different times different ways to the overall effect of that piece of music but if you think of one of those pieces of music performed as a symphony that has either as an ending or somewhere along the line a crescendo where you find it coming to a real height and usually certain of the instruments then really are given an emphasis more than others so that this crescendo this wonderful great emphasis comes across in the volume of the music and makes the point that the composer wants to put across that's what

Paul is doing each of these parts of the passage if you like to think of it as a literary symphony they actually give their own contribution to the overall effect but there's this crescendo because this is the apex this is above all what our growth in love is to be about it is to be to the glory and praise of God every part contributes towards it but this is the great objective and that's how it has to be for us as a congregation as individuals together that our love may abound more and more that it will be with knowledge and all discernment that it will be so that we together may approve what is superior what is different what distinguish it from all counterfeits this

[37 : 27] Christian lifestyle this grace of God in the gospel so that we will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ but we'll not think of that as something so far distant from us that we can just relax we can relax in the sense of enjoying the gospel enjoying our relationship with God but you always have on the horizon never out of your view if possible if you're like me sometimes you confess you let it out of your sight that is the return of Christ the day of Christ so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ and so that we will be to the glory and praise of God now and then when you go to the Lord's prayer prayer where Jesus taught the disciples to pray you recall as we were learning it with for the children's sake particularly our own sake too in the course of our morning services our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name in other words

Jesus is saying that's first and foremost everything else comes within the glorifying of God everything in terms of our relationships our personal development hallowed be thy name let thy name be glorified may God bless his word to us this evening let's conclude now by singing from psalm 65 psalm 65 in the Scottish Psalter page 297 the tune is free church singing verses 4 and 5 blessed is the man whom thou dost choose and make approach to thee that he within thy courts O Lord may still a dweller be these four stanzas verses 4 and 5 to tune free church to God's praise blessed is the man whom thou dost choose and mixed up road to thee that he within thy courts soul

Lord may still adweller be we surely shall be satisfied with thy abundant grace and with the goodness of thy house even of thy holy place O God of salvation thou in thy righteousness by fearful work unto our prayers thine answer her done horsepower that be upon the sea their confidence

O Lord will praise in thee I'll go to the door to my left this evening.

Now may grace and mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit be your portion now and evermore. Amen. Amen.