

Love Abounding

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[0 : 00] We're going to read a few verses now, and this time it's in the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians. Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 1.

And after we've read that, we'll turn back to Philippians and pick up our studies there in chapter 1 of Philippians. So it's Colossians, chapter 1 and verses 1 to 14. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.

Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world, it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

[1 : 43] May you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

May God bless to us that reading of his own precious word. We'll turn now to Philippians, a previous letter, and chapter 1, and reading tonight from verse 9.

Philippians 1 at verse 9, 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.

And as we come to this verse, or these verses, we're really, as it were, coming close to the room in which the Apostle Paul is praying.

[3 : 05] Just imagine that you're drawing near to the door in which the Apostle, beyond which the Apostle is praying. And as we're coming to this text, another text like it, like we read, for example, in Colossians, we're just really creeping close to the door, and we're just listening out for Paul at prayer, because that's exactly what you have in this verse.

He's telling the Philippians what it is he's praying for them, what sort of things he's setting before God, so that God will answer his prayer and giving that to them.

What he's praying for here is that their love will increase more and more, that it will actually abound more and more. And that reminds us itself that because that's what he's praying for, and because he is praying for it, that our increase in love for one another, for God, in every way in which our Christian love must grow, it's something to pray for.

It's something that we need to set before God as a specific request in prayer. When did we last do that? When did I last come and pray to God that as a congregation, our love would abound more and more?

But that's what it is. That's what Paul is actually setting out here. This is my prayer. This is what I am praying for. This is the burden of my petition, that your love will increase, will grow more and

more.

[4 : 38] And it reminds us that love is not something that's self-produced on our part, though it is we who must exercise love. Love is a gift of God to us before it is something exercised by us.

And it is always the case, and that's why we need to remember that whenever we're praying for love, remember it's God who is the source of that love, even our Christian love, not just his love to us, but our love as we exercise it for one another as well.

It's something to pray for. It comes from God. It's nourished by God through his truth, as we'll see. And this is what Paul is actually praying for. Now, these verses, verses 9 to 11, are, you might say, a pretty packed spiritual suitcase.

And so we're going to take some time going through it in two studies, rather than just cramming it all into one. We're going to try and take out of this wonderful spiritual verbal suitcase that Paul is putting out for us here, things just one by one and see how they're related together, and just take them and look at them as we go through them.

Look at them as closely as we can. Because, you know, when you're looking at a packed suitcase, it doesn't really do you much good when you're looking for something in it, just to keep it packed and just try and work your way through the clothes that are packed into it.

[6 : 05] You might be doing that on holiday. You know how frustrating it gets when you're not able to actually do anything other than just live out of a suitcase. And you might find it difficult just getting the bits and pieces that you need to wear.

Well, in this spiritual suitcase, this suitcase that Paul is setting out, this suitcase of teaching, if you like, let's just look at what he's setting out here for us and take it under two headings, the first of them tonight, and God willing, the next of them next time.

He talks firstly about growing in love. This is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and with all discernment.

That's what he's saying growing in love is about. And secondly, in the remainder of the passage, from verses 10 to 11, we can take that under the heading of gaining from love.

Because as we grow in love, and this is the apostles' intention for them, that as they grow in love with knowledge and discernment, so they will approve the things which are excellent.

[7 : 12] So they will be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. So they'll be filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. So they will be able to attain to their chief end in creation, to the praise and glory of God.

So the two things are growing in love and gaining from love. And let's turn to look at the first of these in some detail tonight. This is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more.

And you're immediately aware of one of Paul's favorite words, abound, or elsewhere, abounding. It's a word that he uses in different epistles, and he uses it in relation to different topics, different things.

He talks about, in Romans, for example, the grace of God abounding toward us. Where sin abounded, he says, grace did even more abound.

Grace outabounded sin and gave the victory over sin. He talks at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 15 there, that wonderful, long, extended treatment of the resurrection of Christ and of His people.

[8 : 26] Therefore, my beloved brothers, he says, be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. You see, for this man, it's such a wonderful thing to notice as you go through the letters that he wrote.

He's so hesitant about putting limits on things, even like love. He doesn't want to confine us tonight to thinking about love in restricted terms.

Or in 1 Corinthians 15, the work of the Lord in restricted terms. He's not going to put a limit on it at all. He's just saying, abound in it. And so he is here saying, this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more.

Of course, it's plural. It's to the congregation. It's to the church in Philippi that he's addressing this. He's not just talking here to a few individuals. He's not talking here or addressing those who are in leadership in the church in Philippi.

He's not leaving them out, but he's not confining to that. He is saying, you all in Philippi, this is my prayer for you, that you all may abound in love, that your love may increase.

[9 : 35] You see, this Bible, this passage of the Bible tonight is speaking to all of us here. And when it says, I'm praying that your love may abound more and more, it's not just addressing that to

me or to the elders or the deacons or to those who are older in the faith.

It's addressing this to all of us as a congregation because this is God's will and this is what God will have us to be and to do, to be abounding in love, to not put limits on our growth in love, but to see as Paul is here addressing the Philippians, this is our privilege as well as our responsibility, to attend to it individually, but so that the whole congregation grows in love, that your love, plural, may abound more and more.

What does that look like? What does abounding love look like? What does love, Christian love in itself look like? Well, in order to try and get a definition or an answer to that, you've got to first of all go back to love as you find it in God.

You find its definition in God Himself, in the love of God. And you remember John 3.16, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

You go forward to John's first epistle, chapter 4. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

[11:15] You see John saying, what is this love? How do you define love? Where do you begin to actually assess what love is and see what it looks like? You begin with God. You begin with the love of God.

And when you begin with the love of God, you're immediately aware of the fact that love is more a giving than it is a receiving. Love is more a giving of yourself and a giving from yourself than it is a receiving from others to yourself.

Because that's how God's love is defined. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten. This is love. Not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation. The death of the cross is what He sent Him to. It reminds us, doesn't it, that love at times has to experience pain in order for it to be exercised.

That it suffers a degree of loss on our part because when you give something away, sometimes you don't get anything back for it and you don't give it away just so that you will get something back.

[12:27] You give it away because it's an aspect of your love. 1 John 3, verses 16 to 18 says, By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

And you might think, well, that's really going quite far, isn't it? You have to actually be prepared to give your very life for your fellow Christians. Well, at times that has been necessary.

It was necessary in the days of the apostles. It's necessary tonight in parts of the world where God's people are persecuted to death. And where faithfulness means you protect your brothers, you protect your sisters, you don't actually capitulate to the enemy, otherwise you're being untrue to Christ.

And it's so difficult because sometimes that means giving your life. But it's not just about those hugely demanding things.

It goes on there to say, By this we know love, if anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

[13:40] Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. So you see, there's the great emphasis. This I am praying that your love may abound more and more.

And when your love abounds more and more as a people, when you as an individual and I as an individual want to contribute our contribution of love to that overall growth in love that must be part of congregational life, well, Paul is saying and John is saying and the Bible is saying that's going to involve giving.

Giving of your time, giving of your talents, giving of the gifts God has given you, whether you think of them as small or great, giving of yourself just being prepared to be put out, giving of your patience, giving of everything that really is part of being a servant of Jesus.

You see, the great deception, isn't it, that comes from listening to the world is that love is really all about self-fulfillment. That love, as you love and as you love other people, that really you're loving so that you will actually get satisfaction from it.

So that you will feed yourself emotionally or spiritually, whatever. that's very much the worldly idea of love. You just love for so much that you can get back out of it.

[15:11] And it really is satisfying and it really does touch you emotionally. You get so much back from it. No, the Bible is saying love is primarily the giving of yourself, giving out from yourself as

God did in His love toward us.

And the context really here makes it clear that it's the love of within the church that's mentioned. Of course, he doesn't put any limits on that either.

That your love may abound more and more. He doesn't say that your love for God may abound more and more. That your love for each other may abound more and more. That your love for the world and your evangelistic concerns for the unsaved will abound more and more.

He doesn't mention anything like that. They're all included. He just leaves it open. But nevertheless, it's really pretty much, it's especially and particular about love within the church.

Now, I want you to notice verse 8 here because there's something here that's very close to what he's saying here about abounding love. He says here, God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

[16:23] And it is my praise. You see, verse 8 really runs, as it were, into verse 9 naturally on the flow of thought. This he says, God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Now, that word affection in the language of the New Testament is a word that literally, and it's translated this way, you remember, in the old authorized version.

It's the word bowels. That's maybe not a word that we would tend to use now in translation. But nevertheless, it really conveys something very important to us.

How I yearn for you all in the bowels of Christ Jesus and in the deep affection of Christ Jesus. In other words, what Paul is saying as he says, I have you in my heart, I hold you in my heart, I yearn towards you in the bowels of Christ Jesus.

He's saying, my love for you is of the kind that really has a knot in my stomach over it. It's something that I really feel in my inmost parts.

[17:28] It's corresponding to the love of Jesus himself that is so much set out before us in the Bible as a giving love, but a love in which he yearned, in which there was, as it were, deep within himself and outflowing of that love.

I remember it in terms of compassion, the feeding of the 5,000 as the gospel writers speak about it, Mark especially, when he saw the crowds there, he was moved with compassion.

It's a word that means he was stirred inwardly. And there's a challenge there tonight for me and for you as Christians. There's a challenge there in regard to my love.

What kind of love is it? How much am I aware of this love? Is the love that I want to have as a Christian for God, for my fellow Christians, is it really, if you like, a love that hits me in the pit of my stomach and my soul?

You know what it's like when we use the phrase having a gut feeling about something. You have a movement within you.

[18:36] You know what it's like, for example, when a beloved child that you've brought up and raised and all of a sudden it comes to the point where they have to leave home and they have to go to study on the mainland or they have to go to work where they're removed from home and they go and live somewhere else.

You know what it's like. It gets you in the pit of your stomach. It moves you inwardly. There's a knot there. There's something there that you feel and that you can say you just have that gut feeling. It's something really there that's tense.

God is saying that's a property of love. It should be something we actually have within us that we feel a movement of.

Something deep within our soul. Something in the bowels of our soul, you might say. What a challenge that is. Is my love tonight for you as a congregation a love that really grips me in the depths of my soul?

Is it a gut moving, bowel feeling, love and affection? Is our love tonight for one another as a congregation something that really gets us in the pit of our souls?

[19:55] Or are we just happy to have a much less intense love than that? Is it just a mild feeling?

Or is it just an aspiration? Surely not. When we love each other, when we want to love each other increasingly, when we want to have this prayer of Paul for ourselves and for our fellow Christians, for fellow people in the congregation, whatever their status is, whatever their background is, whatever their personalities are like, whether they're confessing Christians or not, they're part of the congregation.

This is what we're praying, isn't it? That our love, our individual love, but it flows into the corporate love of the body, the congregation, that it will actually abound more and more.

And as it abounds, that I will feel it in my inmost soul. That I will be moved inwardly as I think of what it means to love and to love in a way of self-giving for my fellow Christians.

This is, I'm praying, he says, this is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. Well, what a great challenge that is.

[21 : 16] And yet, what a great privilege it is, too, to have that kind of definition of love.

challenging? Yes, it might be so challenging, in fact, that we might feel, well, that's way beyond us.

Well, that's why Paul is praying about it. Because the more you see it beyond yourself and your own capacity and your own ability, the more you pray for God to bring it about. The more you pray that God will give the increase of your love, that you will more and more know it as something that moves you inwardly rather than something much less than that.

So here is growing in love, in abounding love. But you notice he goes on with knowledge and all discernment. That word knowledge usually in the Bible means spiritual knowledge or theological knowledge, knowledge of God, knowledge about God, knowledge of His truth.

So you see he's saying that this love as it abounds more and more if our love is going to grow, it is going to grow in direct connection with our knowledge, our knowledge of God's truth.

It will not grow except as it is with knowledge and with discernment. We grow in proportion to how we know and appreciate the truth of God. And it's important that it's the truth of God that we have in mind in that, in all knowledge, knowledge of God's truth.

[22 : 45] Why is that important? Well, it's God-defined truth that's important to us, not what human beings might define truth to be. Remember in 1 Corinthians 13 that David took us through while he was here with us so beneficially for ourselves as he expounded 1 Corinthians 13 to us.

In 1 Corinthians 13 and verse 6 there, you say, love does not rejoice with evil but rejoices with the truth. Love rejoices with the truth, the truth of God, the truth in which God has revealed himself.

And why is that important that it's God-defined, the truth that we find in the Bible, not any kind of ideas that are current in the world that what is truth and what is not truth? Well, because, for one thing, and it's very much a feature not just of the world but of some so-called Christian thinking as well, that, you know, in order to love one another, we have to be entirely non-judgmental about things.

You can't actually stand in criticism over certain lifestyles. You just add the word Christian to them. You see us, you see them as Christian activity. Let's just label them Christians is the idea and let's label the thing Christian love.

And let's not be judgmental about this even if they're very different in their way of applying the idea of love to things that even are condemned by the Bible.

[24 : 25] Well, we mustn't be judgmental about that, we're told. It's not something in which we have a right to actually look upon other people and critique their way of life. Well, as somebody put it, true love loves truth.

True love loves truth. And true love, love for God, true love for God's people, true love for God's church, loves truth.

You love in truth. You love in a way that you actually have, as he puts it here, you love and grow in love with knowledge.

With knowledge of God's truth and from God's truth. You remember Jesus in John chapter 8 how he spoke to those that were then listening to him, his disciples particularly, some of those who had followed him, others that were gathered round.

And remember how he said in John chapter 8 and verses 31 and 32, if you abide in my word, see what he's saying? If you abide in my word, if you are true to my word, then you shall know the truth.

[25 : 42] You shall be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. What an important combination of elements.

If you abide in my word, then you shall be my disciples indeed in truth. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.

The world out there is obsessed with freedom as defined by the world, freedom from the truth of God, freedom from the restrictions of God's truth, freedom from the requirements of God's truth, freedom from everything that God's truth sets before us as to control and to guide and to shape our lives.

The world out there is obsessed with getting rid of that. Freedom defined as freedom from truth. You, on the other hand, as a Christian, we as Christian people, as a Christian congregation, should be dominated by the idea not of freedom from the truth but by freedom through the truth, by the truth.

Set free from unrighteousness, from sin, from things which are displeasing to God. How are you set free from it? By the grace of God that has abounded to us.

[27 : 03] And through faith in Christ you come to know what true liberty is, to reach and to, by God's grace, attain to the life we were created for, what we ought to be and not what we want to be as sinful human beings.

So it's a knowledge or by knowledge that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and also with all discernment. With all discernment.

Very close to the word knowledge and it follows on from what said there we've said what we said about knowledge because this word really discernment relates to things like taking decisions especially in terms of ethics or moral issues.

Discernment. You see, when you know the truth of God and you appreciate the truth of God and when you come to realize that this word of God, this Bible as God's revealed truth is what must determine human decisions and human opinions and certainly sets that for Christians, then you have discernment.

You're able to actually make choices on the basis of what this word sets out for you. Whatever people think of it, whatever others might take, whatever views they might take of what truth is and what love is.

[28 : 28] You know, one of the big words at the moment as you know is the word inclusive. You have to be, we're told, we have to be inclusive.

We have to be inclusive of all sorts of views and of all sorts of opinions and all sorts of lifestyles. We have to be inclusive. We mustn't leave any out. We mustn't condemn any.

We mustn't actually come in any way to criticize any of those. They're all equally valid. We must all put them together. They're just human behavior. And unfortunately that too has crept into and is found in the confessing church of God.

That same idea that you don't actually in any way sit in a way that critiques other ways of life, other lifestyles, other relationships other than those that are commended in the Bible, lifestyles and relationships such as marriage or even singleness itself in a way that's honoring to God.

Oh, you have to be inclusive. You have to go beyond these, we're told. And we have to, in other words, make sure that we're not leaving anything out in our acceptance of what passes for human relationships and behavior.

[29 : 49] And you find the same thing, really, what you might say that comes from is an idea that somehow or other when you focus on Bible doctrine, Bible teaching, that you're immediately causing divisions.

And then instead of actually focusing on doctrines and on confessions of faiths where doctrines are set out, instead of focusing on that, we should really just be together with people who differ from us, whose idea of being Christians is very different from us, or even other faiths as well, perhaps.

And we emphasize love and we emphasize serving together and we emphasize showing unity and all of these things. That's the way to progress. That's the way to progress humanity, is it?

Well, it's not for Paul. It's not for this God. It's not in terms of this Bible. Because what that does is really sever the ligament, if you like, the spiritual ligament, between love and truth.

And when you sever that ligament between love and God's truth, when you say that love is love and it's not related to the Bible's teaching at all necessarily, you're severing that ligament between truth and love.

[31 : 10] And what you end up with is a spiritual cripple. And that's not what we have to be. You know, the book of Revelation gives us an account of churches that were written to under God's direction.

The apostle John was given these letters to the seven churches. And in chapter two, you have two churches, Ephesus and Thyatira. And the church of Ephesus is commended for it being doctrinally sound.

It's an orthodox church. It's very much sound in terms of its doctrine. But there's one big criticism. It has ceased to love. You have fallen from, you have fallen away from your first love.

And they have to repent, and they have to restore that. And then you go on to Thyatira, chapter two again, verse 18 following. They are actually commended for charitable works, for works of love. But then there's a criticism of them for tolerating falsehood, false teaching, sexual immorality, because all of these usually go together.

[32 : 25] See, you can be doctrinally sound and have little love and exercise. And you can have much of what passes for into human love and just have false teaching and debauchery and a life that God disapproves of.

What we have to be, friends, is abounding in love in terms of God's definition of it. Love that is attached closely to His truth.

Love that does not tolerate false teaching and sin, because that is displeasing to God. Love that truly sets out to grow in our love for God and for each other.

Love that is fed by the truth of God so that through the Spirit of God blessing that to us. We will love more and more one another and God and lost sinners around us.

This I pray. Let's just say it to each other, really. This I pray that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment.

[33 : 40] May God answer that prayer as we pray it to Him. And may we, and there's undoubtedly no shortage of love already within this congregation.

But you see, we mustn't leave it at that, because God is saying, go on increasing in it. Let your love abound more and more, but do so in faithfulness to the truth, in knowledge, and in all discernment. And then, as Jesus said, you will be my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free. And may God follow with His blessing, our thoughts there on His word.

Now we're going to conclude this evening singing our final psalm of praise in Psalm 143, this time in the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 143, and the second version of it from verse 6.

Lo, I do stretch my hands, to Thee my help alone, for Thou well understands all my complaint and moan. My thirsting soul desires and longeth after Thee, as thirsty ground requires with rain refreshed to be.

[34 : 53] Verses 6-8, that's on page 439 of the books, if you're using them. Lo, I do stretch my hands to Thee. Lo, I do stretch my hand to Thee, my help alone, for Thou well understand all my complaint and moan.

My thirsting soul desires and longeth after Thee, as thirst even required with rain with rain refreshed to Thee.

Lord, let my prayer prevail to answer it may speak.

For though my spirit not fail, I do not like haste in me, lest I be like to those that do in darkness sit, or in blood downward goes into into the dreadful pit.

Because I trust in Thee, O Lord, cause me to hear Thy loving kindness free, when morning doth appear, cause me to know the way when my path should be, or why my soul on high, I do lift up to Thee.

[37 : 37] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and evermore. Amen.