

Gaining From Love

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[0 : 00] Let's read God's Word now in 1 Thessalonians, the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonians and chapter 5. When we've read chapter 5, we'll turn back again to Philippians, to chapter 1.

So 1 Thessalonians and chapter 5, we'll read from the beginning through to the end of the chapter. Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying there is peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day.

We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.

[1 : 16] But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we might live with him.

Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing. We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast what is good, abstain from every form of evil. Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 48] He who calls you is faithful, he will surely do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be with you. Amen. We pray again that God will bless us and bless that portion of his word to us.

Now if we turn as we wait on the Lord further to Philippians chapter 1, and reading once again at verse 9. Philippians 1 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.

Now we looked at verse 9 last time under the heading of, or the title of, Growing in Love, because that is what the apostle here is revealing to the Philippians, that he is praying for this, that their love may grow, indeed that it may abound more and more, not just grow, but grow abundantly.

He doesn't specify love for God, or love for their fellow Christians, or love for those in the world that are without Christ. He simply leaves it open, so that all of these would come into their thinking, as they read this and would have this read, This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.

[4 : 27] And tonight we're looking at the rest of that passage, down to verse 11, under the title of, Gaining from Love. Because the growing in love that we saw last time in verse 9, is with a view to what he's saying here in verses 10 and 11, these specific gains that they will have from love, as love increases in their experience and in their practice.

Paul wants them to grow in love, and he's praying that they'll grow in love, so that, and then he mentions certain things. First of all, so that you may approve what is excellent.

That's the first thing. Secondly, so that you be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ.

And thirdly, he wants them to grow in love, to the glory and praise of God, although you could take the whole thing into the final phrase there, to the glory and praise of God.

So it's really growing in love, firstly, to approve what is excellent. Secondly, to be holy for the day of Christ. And thirdly, because that is to the glory and praise of God, as we grow in love.

[5 : 46] Now, the first one there, that you may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent. And when he's saying here, approving what is excellent, the word approve really means literally to have something examined and tested, and come to a conclusion about it.

It's something that Paul is aware of in terms of the teaching that he's given to the Philippians, and to other churches as well, that is something that he has no embarrassment whatsoever in putting above every other form of teaching.

And in Paul's day and in our day, there are a whole series of competing philosophies or teachings for your attention. It was there in Paul's day, going back to the Romans and to their idolatry, to the Greeks and their idolatry and their paganism.

All of that was still current and in vogue at the time that Paul wrote this. And you remember how he actually, to the Romans, how he, at the beginning of his letter to the Romans, put it in such ways that, in verse 16, he says, For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

And when he says that, I'm not ashamed of the gospel, he's very conscious that there are rivals to the gospel, very conscious that there are other forms of belief or systems of belief that are actually offered and being promoted amongst human beings that are clamoring for their attention.

[7 : 17] And it's the same in our day. You're very much aware tonight of all of these different forms of belief and systems of belief and creeds and religions that are clamoring for your attention that people will say to you, make far more sense than Christianity does.

And here is Paul saying to the Romans, I'm not embarrassed about my own faith in Christ. I'm not embarrassed about the gospel of Christ. I'm not in any way hesitant, he's saying, to put it above all the competitors because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes.

And here he's saying to the Philippians, amongst all the competing products, if you like, that are placed before you, I want and I'm praying that your love may actually abound more and more with knowledge and discernment so that you may approve what is excellent, so that you may actually come by testing the products, if you like, and by your knowledge of the truth.

That's why the knowledge and discernment is important, as we saw last time, to be able to actually see into things and measure them up appropriately so that you may come again and again to approve what is excellent.

When you come to purchase something, you bring discernment to the activity of buying whatever it is you're buying. And there'll be different types, perhaps of the same type of product, set before you.

[8 : 45] All you've got to do is go to a supermarket and we have the blessing, the privilege of having so much available to us in God's goodness.

And you'll have all these different types of whether it's washing powder, whatever it is that's placed there, all of these different brand products. And you'll be looking at them, unless certain people I know are looking at them and measuring up what it says about them.

And it's very important when it comes to foodstuffs. Because people now that have a need for the likes of a gluten-free or a dairy-free diet, if something is bought that contains elements or contains ingredients that would harm their health, well, they have to actually make sure that all the listed products there are acceptable, that they can take them.

And so you have to have discernment. You have to have some knowledge of yourself, of your needs. And you need the discernment then to just sift out that which is not going to be, as Paul puts it here, the things which are excellent.

You have to approve them in such a way that this will be for you what exactly is meeting your need. And of course, Paul especially has the gospel in mind.

[9 : 57] He's really talking about making informed choices. And in life, you have to make choices. You have to make informed choices. All you young folks have to make choices regarding your career.

You have to make choices regarding what you study in school or at university or college or what you're going to do if you're going into a different type of career to that. But you need to make the choices.

And in making the choices, you use the knowledge you have. You use discernment. You have insight to see into what's on offer and what best suits you in your own life and lifestyle.

It's the same with moral and spiritual choices. That's really exactly what Paul here is focusing on especially. It's the moral and spiritual choice that needs to be made of what is excellent, what is superior.

And the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gospel of God, the salvation, amongst everything else that's on offer, he's saying, I want you to grow more and more in love with knowledge and discernment so that you may approve what is excellent, that you may go on being convinced that this is the best for you, that this is the best product God could have produced.

[11 : 13] And that's what we have in the gospel. That's what we have in Jesus Christ and the salvation that is in him. It is God's very best.

And you cannot improve on that. And you cannot match up anything else with that. It is just simply the best. It's superior. And all of us here tonight know that that is the case.

It's something that the gospel itself and the preaching of the gospel promotes. It doesn't just say, here is a product for you. Just look at it in terms of measuring it up against others and then choose which is best.

It says, this is the best. Spurgeon at one time, I think, said something like this to his audience. You will find many instances of a better preacher, but you will never find a better gospel.

And so it is in Stornoway Free Church. You will find many instances of better preaching, absolutely. But you will not find a better gospel.

[12 : 22] And the more we grow in love and appreciate in love all our needs, as we said this morning, as we put them together and as we seek to actually examine them here in terms of Philipians, we come to the conclusion, well, we have the best.

We have that which is above every other offering that human beings can offer, God's own offering, God's gospel for us. And in the choices we have, that's the context in which we bring it, which we make our choices, so that you may approve what is excellent.

But secondly, we need to grow in love with knowledge and all discernment so that we may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Now, when he says what's excellent here, it doesn't just mean what is above every other type of teaching, as we've said.

It's not just rejecting counterfeits or opponents or rivals to the gospel. It also means within our own context of being a church and within the context of scripture itself and of the gospel itself, we need to actually know not just good from bad in terms of the gospel versus all rivals, we need to have good in compared with what is best, what is superior.

In other words, we need to discern the difference between what is of primary importance in the teaching of the gospel and what is secondary. And it's very often been the case that a failure to actually recognize that has led to difficulties and even divisions for the church.

[14 : 09] We have to actually look at scripture itself and say, what does it make to be fundamental, primary importance in terms of doctrine? And if you go to the likes of the apostle Paul, Paul would never in any way compromise in terms of justification.

What is it that, how is it that we come to be set right with God, which includes the forgiveness of our sins. And Paul would say, it's by faith in Christ. You don't add to Christ.

You don't take anything away from Christ. By believing in Christ, by trusting in Christ, by taking the Christ that's offered in the gospel, that is how we come to be made right with God. We justify our sins forgiven.

Paul would never bargain over that. Paul would never compromise over that. It's a primary doctrine. It's fundamentally important. It's foundational. But he would never put alongside that in terms of level of importance what clothes people wear going to church or any issues like that that are of secondary importance.

Sadly, sometimes the church has put the secondary really up there with the primary or with the most important. And so discernment and knowledge and growing in love is to approve what is excellent and then move on from that to being holy for the day of Christ so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

[15 : 31] Now, that word pure, first of all, if we can take it and try and just draw out a wee bit of what it means essentially, it has actually in its idea, it has in its meaning the idea of taking a garment or taking a white garment that you've washed and just holding it up to the sunlight.

And when you see a garment that you have washed even with the best intentions, when you hold it up to sunlight, if there's any stain at all there, then the sunlight shining through it will actually bring it up and it'll show something that you perhaps wouldn't see anywhere else without that sunlight.

And that idea is behind this word pure so that we will be ourselves pure as we are held up to the light that is God himself, the light of God's inspection, the light of God's truth in what it tells us we ought to be and need to be.

The word always points inwardly what we are especially in our minds and our souls because as we'll see the word blameless takes in the other side of things, the outwards, that which we are in public.

But here is Paul saying this is how you must be pure and blameless, pure for the day of Christ. And as we grow in love with knowledge and discernment, not only does that mean we come to understand more about what is excellent and approve the things which are excellent, he's also saying so that you may be pure for the day of Christ.

[17 : 08] You remember how important it is in Paul's teaching when he speaks about the mind. The mind being very much part of our inward spiritual being.

And what the mind is focused on or what you feed into your mind by and large determines what you're going to be in the other side of things outwardly in your conduct.

For example, in Romans, remember in Romans chapter 8 that Paul wrote there in terms of one mind against another kind of mind. The old translation had the carnal mind, the fleshly mind against the spiritual mind.

But listen to what he says, chapter 8, verse 5 of Romans. He says, For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh.

But those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death. But to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

[18 : 11] For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit. There's the differentiation between what he calls the fleshly mind, the mind that is still dominated by and led by sin and by the power of sin against the spiritual mind which is led by the Spirit of God and focuses on the truth of God.

What is, what our mind is focused on is very important for what our life will consist of, what our behavior or conduct will actually consist of.

And I don't need to, you don't need me to tell you that as you live in the world in which we live there are not only a whole lot of things competing for your religious affections, for your spiritual affection but also a whole lot of things competing for your interest in terms of your moral uprightness or otherwise.

You live in a world that is sadly so used to and so filled with pornography, with violence that comes through in all sorts of different ways into our homes, into our sitting rooms, into what we read, what we watch.

[19 : 34] So much of that kind of stuff is what people sadly fill their minds with. Things which really gratify the flesh. Things which the mind of the flesh loves.

Things which the mind of the flesh wants to follow out more and add to. And here is Paul telling us and reminding us be careful what you feed your mind on.

Be careful what you let into your mind. He's talking here about a mind that is set really on things which are excellent, things which are of good report as he says in chapter 4 there.

We'll see it in a minute. But he's saying here be pure for the day of Christ. Don't let your mind be filled with that which will pollute your lifestyle.

Which will bring you into disrepute before God. There's plenty of that stuff available. It's not for you as a Christian or for me as a Christian. It's something you say no to.

[20 : 39] It's something you just refuse. It's part of modern lifestyle. It's part of what's promoted by way of a secular society. Just be yourself. Just live the way you want to.

Have your own mind as far as what your philosophy of life is. No says Paul this is it. It's set by God. It's the best. It's the best for you.

And so with knowledge and discernment so that you be pure for the day of Christ. And he calls here blameless as well. Pure and blameless. Now of course as we said we mentioned chapter 4 in terms of the mind.

Chapter 4 verse 8 there has finally brothers whatever is true whatever is honorable whatever is just whatever is pure whatever is lovely whatever is commendable if there is any excellence if there is anything worthy of praise think about or think upon those things.

It's the alternative to the mind of the flesh the offerings that the world gives you to actually feed the mind of the flesh. Whatsoever things Paul says are true honorable just pure lovely commendable think upon these things in other words he's saying set your mind upon these things be holy for the day of Christ be pure for the day of Christ be pure for him now but be pure with respect to your anticipation of his coming.

[22 : 09] And then the word blameless as we said really we don't need to spend much time on that it's just the other side of the public side of it if you like to the purity that's within the blamelessness outside it includes being in a situation where you you don't fall into the pits of sin or at least don't make a habit of walking in those ways because the purity of mind leads to the blamelessness of lifestyle to the purity of lifestyle the two things in the Bible very clearly are always joined together if the mind is the mind of the flesh the outward conduct is the conduct of the flesh the fleshly life if the mind is the mind of the spirit the mind of truth then the corresponding lifestyle will be such and what Paul is talking about in chapter 4 there and also in terms of the opposite the mind of the flesh it's really what is habitual for us and we all have lapses we all from time to time find ourselves doing things thinking things even saying things that we know

I shouldn't have done that I shouldn't have said that as a Christian you go to God you repent of it but Paul is thinking more of making a habit of things and when you make a habit of the fleshly mind when you make a habit of ungodliness when you make a habit of things opposite to what is pure and just and good then your lifestyle habitually follows when you make a habit of keeping your mind pure then habitually you live a pure life a blameless life a holy life and that's what God made us for that's why Jesus died for us Jesus didn't die so that we would still welcome sin in all its forms it was sin that caused his death under the overarching sovereignty and provision of God but he says be pure and blameless for the day of Christ now he mentioned in verse six as we saw going through it

I'm sure of this he who began the good work and you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ you know there's a direct line between these moments that we're actually in church here or you're watching online there's a direct line between that and the return of Christ a direct line between here and now and the judgment of Jesus the judgment seat of Christ and what is really challenging in all of that is that we keep in mind that you and I together and as individuals will have to come on the day of Christ to appear before him to be as 2nd Corinthians 5 puts it set before him as the judge who's on the judgment seat that we may receive the things done in this body whether good or evil and the temptation always is that we kind of minimize these emphases in preaching the gospel or in our understanding of the gospel or of the truth of

God we can't do that if we're faithful to God we cannot do that we can't miss out the call of God to be holy the call of God to kill sin in my own life and in yours we can't miss out the emphasis that there is a coming judgment that there is a judgment seat of Christ that you and I must appear before we cannot miss out the emphasis that there's a direct relation between that judgment seat and what happens on that day and what you are and I am now and will be to the end of our course in this world Jesus is going to measure us Jesus is going to put us in his balances and if we have him and if he's ours now and is ours then then everything is well all is well with us body and soul but if we're not in him if he's not ours if I've not received him if I've not accepted the offer of the gospel of a savior who has come to die on the cross so that

I would be saved from my sins if I've not come to accept that in the way the bible encourages me how am I going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ what will I bring before him that will argue for my entry into glory with him I can't bring my own righteousness I don't have it I can't bring before him what my parents were to me that's not going to be of any use to me on that day I can't bring before him anything that I can produce or create myself thinking that somehow that will provide safe ground for me as I come to appear before the judgment seat of Christ I can't actually bring before him the fact that he was preached in my hearing that I was part of Stornoway Free Church or wherever I belong to that I listened to the gospel week in week out all I can bring before him is himself in all his fullness in all his sufficiency and when I have himself

[27 : 23] I have everything I need to stand before the judgment seat of Christ be pure and blameless for the day of Christ the Bible makes it clear to us that that day is going to be the great days the day of the completion of God's people's salvation as we find there the work in verse 6 he's going to bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ and all of you today who are in Christ are looking forward to that day as you lament your own limitations now and the sin that you still find in your own life as I do myself you long for that day when that will be gone when will it be gone when Jesus returns when we will appear perfectly holy in his presence but you see that doesn't mean that now I can relax and not really bother about thinking about that coming day of Christ or what I need to be now in relation to him no he says be holy and blameless and in order to be holy and blameless this is what

Paul is praying for that these Philippians to be holy and blameless for the day of Christ that their love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment friends tonight we are the most fortunate people in the world we are the most fortunate people in the world we have the gospel we have the gospel preached and understood by us we have each other we have the church and the benefits of belonging to the church we have the freedom to meet together as we do now free from persecution free from being somewhere like Afghanistan or parts of Africa or wherever that's in the world Christianity is persecuted I mean whatever difficulties we face living as Christians they pale into insignificance compared to our brothers and sisters in these places we have such an abundance of advantages and tonight

I say to myself and God is saying through me to you please please don't minimize these make every effort to benefit from them have Christ in your life make him foundational in your life approve what is excellent what is superior and be pure and blameless for the day of Christ because that is being filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ well it's all about Jesus Christ isn't it here's Paul using the imagery of fruit fruit like say John 15 the vine and the branches how are we made holy how do we come to continue to be holy in our way of life well it's through our union with Christ we draw our strength from him our spiritual sap from him that's why it's important as we saw this morning to not neglect the gathering of ourselves together as the habit of some is because the sap of the gospel the sap of Christ the spirit the spiritual life that comes from

Christ himself comes through the gospel as we gather together in worship that's one of the primary means of grace as it used to be called and still called so that the Lord will actually fill our lives with his life with a life through the gospel he's pleased to give to his people and that sanctifying process being filled with the fruit of righteousness this righteousness that especially here is holy living it's not a judicial side it's more the practical side the righteous life another word just to describe holiness so that's what his mind is on as he prays for these Philippians finishing with saying to the glory and praise of God you can see how these verses we've spent some time going through them and I don't want you to think that we're going to spend an inordinate amount of time going through

Philippians but at the same time we'll just take it as God will lead us we trust so that we want to open up as many of these great points as possible though some of the passages we can go through more quickly or take more of them together but this is really what he's saying to the glory and praise of God why did God create you in the beginning why did God actually bring us into eternal life in Christ through faith in him why did God forgive you your sins why does God sanctify you through the work of his spirit why does God place you amongst other Christians in the fellowship of believers to advance in love and to abound in love as Paul is praying for for his glory and his praise God is just like these verses you can almost say they're like a wonderful musical symphony one that ends on a crescendo a great climax and here is the climax this is my prayer that you love may abound more and more knowledge and all discernment that you may approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of

[33 : 16] Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God that's what it's all about for him rightly to have all the credit all the praise all the glory because he rightly deserves it may bless his word to us we're going to conclude singing once again this time we're singing from Psalm 36 on page 44 Psalm 36 on page 44 and singing verses 5 to 9 June this time is London New your steadfast love is great oh Lord it reaches heaven high your faithfulness is wonderful extending to the sky your righteousness is very great like mountains high and steep your justice is like ocean depths both man and beast you keep so on to verse 9 we'll stand to sing your steadfast love is great oh Lord your steadfast love your steadfast love is great oh Lord it reaches heaven high your faithfulness is wonderful wonderful extending to the sky your righteousness is very great like mountains high and steep your justice is like ocean depths both man and beast you keep how precious is your steadfast love what

God forgets it brings both high and low find shelter in the shadow of your wings they feast with you your arms and drink from streams of your delight for with you is the source of life in your life we see light 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 ever more Amen