

Philippians 1 pt. 3 v.8-11

V.8 - We return to Paul's affection for the saints in Philippi.

His love for them was evidenced by his deep desire to be with them. His affection for the Philippians, we see, is as "the affection of Jesus Christ."

The love of Jesus Christ is that intimate, connected, sacrificial love, extending to us based solely on His prerogative and initiative.

This is not superficial love, seasonal love, or romantic love but profound care that is felt and carried deep in the gut, the pit of the stomach, or, as the original language indicates to us - the bowels (σπλάγχνοις).

This is how Paul classified his love for the Philippians! What an encouragement! The Philippians are more than just some church to Paul. AND, they are more than just some church to Jesus. They are deeply loved and cared for.

We are too, church!

What's more - this is an affection that is observable by God. He is the one who sees our fellowship, our affection for Him and for one another.

God is the eyewitness of our love. I find this to be especially pertinent in our documentarian culture where exhibitionist outreach is not only the norm but encouraged both in our society and in the church at large.

V.9-11 Here is Paul's continued prayers for the Philippians - that their own holy expressions of love would find root in their lives and grow!

He prays, "...that your love may abound still more and more..." Paul desired that the saints at Philippi would continue maturing as believers.

Even so, we are to be growing as believers.

None of us are called to devolve into stagnant, cold, curmudgeonly, wretched believers. We are not called to

theoretically love one another but to really, truly, practically love one another. To be warm and gracious like Jesus.

Likewise, there is no indication that we are called to adopt the disposition of room temperature hot dog water in our love, knowledge, and discernment.

Rather we are to grow! How much? More and more!

You may know that the Bible is filled with agricultural metaphors - which preaches quite well in the South!

As we go through the Bible we are constantly presented with holy truth through the example of fruit, harvests, seeds, birds, plows, sowers, soil, rocks, trees, rain, vines, gardeners, etc.

That's on purpose! God is communicating to us in terms that we can observe and understand.

One such place is found in Psalm 1:

[Psa 1:1-3 NKJV] 1 Blessed [is] the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits

in the seat of the scornful; 2 But his delight [is] in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. 3 He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper.

Grow, loved one! Come to life! Grow as you consider God's word and respond to it.

As we sit with God's word, meditate on it, respond to it, we find that it is not in our own strength or by our own devices that we are growing but it is by God's Spirit.

In what areas are we to grow?

First and foremost our love is to multiply, to become abundant, to overflow - bigger, warmer, more frequent, more often toward those who don't deserve it. In short, love like Jesus!

That's how the world will know that we are Christ's disciples.

AND that love is to grow IN knowledge AND all discernment.

There are many poignant layers to this request for love to abound and to grow in knowledge and judgment including the relationship that exists BETWEEN love, knowledge, and judgment; and how these three are practically carried out both individually and jointly with or without the other named characteristics.

For example: it's possible to love with or without judgment; it's possible to execute judgment with or without love. Same goes for knowledge.

One text remarks on this portion of scripture saying: "The words "knowledge and depth of insight [discernment]" provide the twofold environment in which love may grow. They are, in fact, the most basic elements which foster love....these two terms provide a collective environment which fosters growth. If either is lacking, love will not grow."¹

Unfortunately, I have observed a nasty, lazy streak found throughout the kingdom among those believers who are drawn to the lukewarm, neither loving, nor learning. This is marked by a sort of arrogant piety devoid of knowledge that is both opposed to study and cannot be moved to caring for others.

¹ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 65.

This is the movement that says in the middle of the most trying human experiences, where love is the most needed, “you just gotta have faith...” or some other bland lifeless spiritual sounding cliché; all delivered in the most dismissive terms, unwilling to press into that moment lovingly.

And, in regards to knowledge and judgment, they continue to avoid committing to true teachable discipleship by saying, “I don’t need anybody to teach me anything, I’ve got the Spirit and my Bible,” in the most presumptuous way.

We have described the unloving and unlearned -- marks of which we have all carried, marks of which dot churches across the land. Unfortunately we know all too well what this looks like. Forgive us Lord.

“C. H. Spurgeon...countered such pretension with some advice to budding preachers... ‘It seems odd, that certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others.’¹⁵”²

² William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 206–207. ¹⁵ C. H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1876), 11.

A working love is a love that grows in knowledge and judgment.

Upon this point one might reply, well...doesn't the Bible also say, "knowledge puffs up, but love edifies..." Or, "knowledge makes us arrogant, but love builds us." (1 Cor 8:1)

The attempt is to paint the two - knowledge and love - as incompatible. Even as we find that Paul succinctly pairs the two together here in our text.

We must do our best to let the scriptures stand as they are presented.

We have this insatiable desire to harmonize things within God's word that are not presented to us in a harmonized form.

We believe we see contradictions where none exist.

Is it possible to study God's word, to grow in knowledge that will allow us to have a more scriptural discernment and judgment and remain loving? Yes.

Is it possible that along the way we will become arrogant and prideful in those things we learn? Also, yes.

Haven't we seen both of these things in our own experience - yes!

Nevertheless, are we called to obedience? Or, are we so afraid that we are going to stumble into arrogance that we don't do anything at all?

This is like the argument by those who have been wounded by somebody within the church so they throw out the baby with the bathwater when there is no scriptural allowance to do so.

In regards to this feigned pursuit of humility and aversion to study because of the risk of becoming arrogant - I also propose that before Christ we weren't all too humble to begin with!

It is not by growing in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we become more arrogant, more prideful. He is the cure to our intrinsic human sickness -- self-importance.

And to His praise, He is holding on to us in the midst of our arrogance. What we are certain of is that as we grow into His likeness we will leave those ugly characteristics behind.

On the topic of growing in knowledge Peter writes:

“[2Pe 1:5 NIV] 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge...”

We are to grow in knowledge, that much is clear.

AND - we must consider that as these join: love, knowledge, and discernment - this is how God's love came to us. It is not a blind love that extends to us but a perfectly informed love that extends to us.

From a human perspective when we love people blindly we aren't truly loving them as God does. Unconditional love and blind love are not the same.

Matthew Henry writes about this:

“It is not a blind love that will recommend us to God, but a love grounded upon knowledge and judgment. We must love God because of his infinite excellence and loveliness, and love our brethren because of what we see of the image of God upon them. Strong passions, without knowledge and a settled judgment, will not make us complete in the will of God, and sometimes do more hurt than good.” (Matthew Henry, Phil. 1:9)

We also find the WHY of Paul’s desire that the Philippians would grow in love, knowledge, and discernment... “That you may approve the things that are excellent...”

When we come to Christ we are learning to see with new eyes, we are learning to think with new minds - the mind of Christ.

We are learning that how we once viewed things may be skewed by sin and a fallen creation. But, He is teaching us to make a distinction between that which is common and that which is excellent in a spiritual sense.

It’s amazing to watch the worldview of believers change because of Jesus. We shudder to think of those things we once believed as good and right, knowing now how fraught with sin they were.

Additionally, we see that part of our growth results in sincerity of belief.

As we grow and learn and understand we come to find that the faith we profess is not as fragile as some propose.

These are not just fairy tales but battle tested truths that have been scrutinized, maligned, and twisted over the millennia and yet they remain because they are true!

Take courage, love one - this faith is true and not just because of a feeling, a hunch, or because somebody else said so but because what we hold to be true actually occurred and is occurring in the present.

Those things that lay the foundation of our faith: the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were witnessed and recorded for us.

[1Jo 1:1-4 NLT] 1 We proclaim to you the one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen. We saw him with our own eyes and touched him with our own hands. He is the

Word of life. 2 This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim to you that he is the one who is eternal life. He was with the Father, and then he was revealed to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we ourselves have actually seen and heard so that you may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We are writing these things so that you may fully share our joy.

It is the truth of the gospel, God's reconciliation of man, the reality of His word that stirs within us both sincerity and keeps us from offense. Not that we shall never fail - but that you are secured by God's grace and He shall keep us til the end.

Keep in mind - it is not sincerity alone that wins the day! There are many sincere people who have offended God, who are yet to be reconciled to Him.

[Rom 10:1-2 NKJV] 1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. 2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge.

This lends urgency to disciple making! That our love might grow in knowledge and discernment that we might grow into Him in sincerity and without offense.

FOR HOW LONG? How long are we to be growing and maturing? When do we get to retire from discipleship? Until the day of Christ (Ref. v.6) -- when we shall finally be made complete and His kingdom shall continue in perfection forevermore.

Until that day the result of growing, and the gift of God by the Spirit is that we are filled, inculcated, engrained with the fruit of righteousness.

This reminds of the “fruit of the Spirit,” found in Gal 5:22 -- without taking a detour to examine that at length we do recognize that the Scriptures teach us that the life of the one following Jesus is changed and is recognizable by the fruit born therein.

Where does that fruit come from? Where do good works, re-formed character, holiness come from?

Some propose that it is cultivated by our own choices or perhaps by our own moral agency. Some propose that we can try hard

enough to be good people and in doing so we may represent Jesus Christ adequately.

Unfortunately many have found out the hard way that such a life is often found to be fruitless in the most practical sense; the spiritual cupboards run out of stock quickly.

That well intentioned, yet hungry, saint is found scraping the bottom of the barrel to present themselves as a fully blossomed fruit tree while in reality they are surrounded by a pile of dead leaves and dry branches.

Jesus taught the disciples how to bear fruit:

[Jhn 15:4-5 NLT] 4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. 5 "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.

So then, the source of this fruit in our lives is Jesus Christ.

“These are the natural consequences of being restored to a right relationship with God. Paul is careful to add that this quality is not something that a man can acquire for himself; it is something which *only Jesus Christ can produce*.”³

To what end? The glory and praise of God.

So then we finally come face to face with the chief purpose of our growth in love, knowledge, and discernment.

In that growth we find sincerity, we find a life free of offense but ultimately we are carefully cultivated trees, bearing fruit that is brought forth by the master gardener of human souls - God Himself.

The good work he is working within us, that good fruit He is growing in us, that good work He is bringing out of us is a testament to His perfection and glory.

The idea is that when others look upon the saints they see the wondrous works of God and glorify Him for what HE has done and is doing.

³ I-Jin Loh and Eugene Albert Nida, *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 18.

This nicely ties up our discussion on growing in knowledge -- the question one might ask themselves is “why do I desire to grow in knowledge?” Is it for the glory of God or ourselves? Is it out of obedience or ambition?

It is certainly possible for people to hold mixed motives but every indication here is that we are supposed to be growing up.

Or, as we read in Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians: [Eph 4:14-15 NKJV] 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ--

The end result of our growth, the fruit of righteousness, growing in love and knowledge is ultimately for the glory and praise of God.

Let Him be high and lifted up in our every endeavor.

Let His name be praised for His faithfulness, His holiness, His glory.

And, rejoice that we get to be a part of that! That He has not left us as some brain dead amoeba to sleep through eternity but that He has called us to grow, to adopt His nature and character, to bear fruit and to have the mind of Christ. Amen.