

Learning to Love More and More

Introduction:

This morning we are considering a new paragraph in Paul's first letter epistle to the Thessalonians. It is contained in chapter 4, verses 9 through 12. Here is the English Standard Version (ESV) rendering of these verses:

⁹Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Paul's subject in this paragraph is "brotherly love", that is, the love that characterizes the Christian that he has and shows for other Christians. This, of course, is a major biblical theme, particularly in the New Testament. It is one which not only the Apostle Paul, but other writers of Scripture addressed. It is a major subject in the Johanne writings. In 1 John it is recorded that to love one another was a message heard and reinforced from the early days of the Christian era. 1 John 3:11 reads, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." The writer to the Hebrews gave an exhortation, "Let brotherly love continue" (Heb. 13:1). And the Apostle Peter wrote, "And above all things have fervent love for one another, for 'love will cover a multitude of sins'" (1 Pet. 4:8). Many other examples could be cited of the New Testament emphasis on Christians loving other Christians, "love for one another."

It has been argued rightly, I believe, that love is the major identifying mark of a true Christian. **Francis Schaffer**, who was a Christian intellectual and apologist of the middle 20th century, wrote a rather short book entitled, *The Mark of the Christian*. He wrote of love as the mark of true believers, expounding on it as the major way in which the world may recognize that we are of God. He based his book on the words of our Lord:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:33f).

Schaffer wrote,

Love--and the unity it attests to--is the mark Christ gave Christians to *wear* before the world. Only with this mark may the world know that Christians are indeed Christians and that Jesus was sent by the Father.¹

He also gave this exhortation:

I want to say with all my heart that as we struggle with the proper preaching of the gospel in the midst of the 20th century, the importance of observable love must come into our message. We must not forget the final apologetic. The world has a right to look upon us as we, as true Christians, come to

¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian* (Intervarsity Press, 1970). P. 35.

practical differences and it should be able to observe that we do love one each other. Our love must have a form that the world may observe; it must be seeable.²

Paul addressed the matter here in 1 Thessalonians 4:9ff. It is not wholly unattached with what went before. In verses 1 through 8 he wrote about the believer's sanctification, with particular emphasis on sexual purity and integrity. In those verses he instructed the church at Thessalonica in what not to do with regard to their sanctification. Christians are not to live in and for sin, but rather unto holiness. And then here, in verses 9 through 12, he wrote of the forward direction of sanctification, to be more and more devoted to love the brethren.

I. Christians' love for one another (4:9-10a)

⁹Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

1. He wrote of their competency in this matter: "concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you..."

Now Paul would instruct these Christians to grow and develop in love, but he would do so only after commending them for the love that they had already exhibited to one another and to all the Christians in that region of Macedonia. He began his exhortation by essentially saying they were not in need of his instruction. He wrote, "Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you." Nevertheless, of course, he did write to them regarding this matter. He first complimented them, then he exhorted them further. This would be a good practice for each of us to adopt in our dealings with others. "A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down."

2. He gave the reason for their competency of this matter: "for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another."

Paul used a word that is only found here in the New Testament. It is the word, **θεοδίδακτοί** (*theodidaktōi*), which may be translated, "ones taught by God."³ God Himself had "taught" them.

We might ask, however, in what way did God teach them? Certainly we could say that God taught them (and us) by His example in His dealings with them. In many ways God "loves" us in demonstrable ways. Our Lord Jesus taught this when He said to His disciples:

"But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:35f)

Was He not saying that God taught them to love by example?

God teaches us by His example to love by the manner that He is so gracious to us. He bestows His great blessing upon us in providing for us. Surely we could say to God as Nehemiah said of His people, "Here we are, servants today! And the land that You gave to our fathers, to eat its fruit and its bounty, here we are, servants in it!" (Neh. 9:36). He loves us by faithfully bestowing His mercies upon us, even His

² Ibid, p. 34.

³ This word is actually an adjective, describing the one who is taught by God. One can discern in this compound word, the first few letters as "God" (*theo*), followed by the letters that speak of being taught or teacher (*didakt*), from which we get the word, didactic. The *oi* at the end of the word is the third person plural pronoun, "they" or "the ones." They were "ones who were 'God taught.'"

“abundant mercies.” We read, “Through the LORD’S mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam 3:22f).

But the apostle is not speaking of our God teaching His people by His example, by the manner in which He displays His goodness to them. Paul was saying that God personally, individually, and directly teaches every Christian “to love one another.” When God brings sinners to salvation, they come because they are taught by God to do so. Our Lord Jesus taught this truth. He said to His disciples, “It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me” (John 6:45).

This matter of being “taught by God” takes place in regeneration, or more specifically, in God’s effectual calling of His elect unto their salvation. The Westminster Shorter Catechism suggests this:

Question 31. What is effectual calling?

Answer. Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

When it says that God “convincing us” and “enlightening our minds”, it means that God teaches us these truths to which we respond in faith and compliance, by His grace working in us. In a similar way God has taught every true Christian to love the brethren. This is so much the case that Paul could write to this church, “for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.”

The fact that God teaches every (true) Christian to love other Christians makes love for the brethren evidence of true salvation. We have stated this numerous times for it is set forth numerous times in the Scriptures. We might consider several verses that speak to this idea:

1 John 3:14. “***We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.*** He who does not love his brother abides in death.”

1 John 4:7, 8. “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; ***and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*** He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

Consider also Paul’s words regarding “love for the saints” as evidence of salvation:

Ephesians 1:15. ¹⁵“Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and ***your love for all the saints,*** ¹⁶do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.”

Colossians 1:3f. ³“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of ***your love for all the saints.***”

2 Thessalonians 1:3. “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and ***the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.***”

The Christians in the church at Thessalonica were taught by God to love one another.

The Lord foretold through His prophets that He would teach His people in these essential matters of the faith. We read in **Jeremiah 31:33-34** God’s words,

“But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ³⁴No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”

Micah foretold the coming Kingdom of God, which was established through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus. We enjoy the present reality of this kingdom, even as we anticipate the full realization of His kingdom at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In the Kingdom of God the Lord teaches us that we live in peace with the people of His kingdom.

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days
That the mountain of the LORD's house
Shall be established on the top of the mountains,
And shall be exalted above the hills;
And peoples shall flow to it.
²Many nations shall come and say,
"Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
***He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.***"
***For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.***
³He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;
They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
And their spears into pruning hooks;
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
Neither shall they learn war anymore.

3. Their love for the brethren encompassed all Christian brethren. Verse 10 reads, "for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia." Their love was for the people of God throughout their region. It is not stated how they manifested their love to these brethren in that region, but it had been manifest, even to the degree that the apostle Paul had knowledge of it. We are to have love for all the Christian brethren, wherever they are. We have much in common with them. As Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus:

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, ***bearing with one another in love,*** ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ***⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*** (Eph 4:1-6)

II. But Christians are to love one another more and more (4:10b)

Even though God Himself had taught these Christians to love one another, they were in need of increasing their love for one another more and more. **Verses 10b** reads, "***But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.***" They were in need of growth in this grace of love for one another. This instruction falls under the heading of sanctification that Paul had addressed directly in the first few verses of this chapter. Sanctification involves maturing in our love for the brethren.

In what ways may we "do more and more" in this matter of loving the brethren? Let us suggest some ways from the Scriptures.

1. We should grow more and more in our love of all the brethren. As we grow in this grace of love, we are to increasingly love all brethren alike, not showing partiality. We are to love the brethren for they are brethren in the Lord. James wrote of this:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, *with partiality*. ²For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, ³and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, “You sit here in a good place,” and say to the poor man, “You stand there,” or, “Sit here at my footstool,” ⁴have you not shown *partiality* among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵Listen, *my beloved brethren*: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? ⁶But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? ⁷Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? ⁸*If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you do well; ⁹but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.* (James 2:1-9)

The natural tendency we have is to love those with whom we can relate based upon less than spiritual ideals. But the supernatural love that the Lord would have us possess and exhibit would be for His people (and others) with whom we have little in common, with whom we might even have conflict. Our Lord spoke to His disciples, “What more do you than others?” Jesus said,

“But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. ³¹And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.

³²“But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. ³⁵But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. ³⁶Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. (Luke 6:132-36)

When the Lord teaches us to love the brethren, He means more than just those “brethren” you tend to “like”, but you are to love “all” the brethren, even those for whom you might otherwise have little natural affection.

2. We should grow more and more in wisdom so that we may know better how to manifest our love for others.

We read of this in the first chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Philippians. Let us consider its message, **Philippians 1:3-11.**

³I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ.

⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In **verse 3** we read of Paul's prayer on behalf of these Christians at Philippi. We read first that **Paul thanked God for these Christians**, and we are told why it was that he did so. Paul knew assuredly that they were Christians as a result of God's powerful grace working in their lives. God was the source and cause of their salvation, so Paul would thank God for them. We, too, should thank God for each other. We are the products of God's work of grace. He alone receives the glory for what He has done.

We also see that Paul thanked God for these Christians **with joy (1:4)**. Every prayer of Paul for these Christians was with "thanksgiving" and every prayer for them was with "joy." That was not the case with every church that he prayed for, but this church at Philippi was a glorious church of believers who were always responsive to his leadership and his instruction, and they were consistently faithful to their Lord. He prayed for these Christians with joy. May others, when they pray for us, do so with joy, not with grief because they are burdened and distressed for us.

We also read that Paul thanked God for them with joy, **because of their share with him in his ministry**. **Verse 5** reads,

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you with all joy, **for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now**.

Because of their faithful partnership with him in the gospel ministry, Paul was convinced that God would be gracious to them and Paul assured them that God would continue in them the good work that He had already done in them. Paul believed and taught *the perseverance of the saints*. This is what we see in **verse 6**, in which Paul wrote: **"being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."** Paul described the manner in which he prayed for these Christians. He prayed with assurance regarding their continuance in faith and obedience to their God. God had begun this work of grace in them; God would continue to work His grace in them until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

We read in **verses 7 and 8** Paul expressed **his great affection for the brethren**. He would shortly begin to write to them respecting their love, but he would first express his love for them. We read,

... just as it is right for me to think this of you all (that God would preserve them), because **I have you in my heart**, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. For **God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ**.

There is a comradeship, a fellowship, in the gospel. We are able to have a friendship with one another in the gospel ministry, even a kinship with one another, that we can only desire that our family according to the flesh could experience.

Paul knew that their heart was with him in all that he experienced. So, too, we know that we are not alone in our trials. Our brothers and sisters in Christ stand with us. **"There are friends who pretend to be friends, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother"** (Prov. 18:24). For the Christian, that will probably be found in his church or with that brother or sister in Christ with whom he is closely connected in the gospel ministry. We have common longings and goals. We seek to help one another in achieving those spiritual aims. This is what it is to be a true friend. We partner together in bringing glory to our God. We desire the cause of Jesus Christ be furthered in the world. We desire to be used of Him to help and strengthen His people to walk with Him. This knits our hearts together.

Notice that Paul had affection for them all. "Just as it is right for me to think this of you **all**, because I have you (all) in my heart." When God brings a person to know Him in salvation, God does a work of grace in his/her soul. The Holy Spirit implants a principle of love to the believer. **Romans 5:5, "The love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us."**

This capacity for love is directed towards God and towards His people. First, certainly it is true that everyone who has become a true Christian loves God and His Son. 1 John 4:19 reads, "We love him, because he first loved us." It is the natural, fitting thing that one loves God because He has done so much for him. But God teaches His people not only to love Him, but to love one another also. This is a great evidence

of the new birth. 1 John 3:14, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” Paul had these people on his heart; he loved them. God had put love in his heart for these believers.

We read in **verses 9ff** of Paul’s desire for them to increase true love.

⁹And this I pray, *that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment*,
¹⁰that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, ¹¹being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

In verses 3-8 Paul revealed *that* he had prayed for them and *why* he had prayed for them. Beginning with verse 9 Paul tells them *what* it was that he was petitioning God on their behalf. He was praying constantly for them that *their love would increase in intensity and sincerity, and in purity and veracity*.

Love is the great need of every believer, of every church. Much is said about love in Christian circles. Everyone recognizes the importance of love for a Christian understanding about God and how He relates to the world; after all, love is an attribute of God. We read in the Scriptures, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). Every Christian knows, too, that love must be central to his/her own experience. Love must characterize the Christian’s relationships with God and other Christians, as well as with non-Christians. And every Christian also knows that a local church is to be characterized by love if that church hopes to be true to God and blessed by Him.

Of course our Lord emphasized the greatest importance of love in that it is that which comprehends *the whole duty of man before God*. We read in **Mark 12:28-34**, that Jesus had been engaged refuting the errant teaching of the leaders of Israel. One of the Jewish scribes was impressed with our Lord’s answers. He approached the Lord Jesus with what seems to have been a sincere question designed either to discover the truth of a question that he himself had, or perhaps to try and determine if Jesus was truly of God. At any rate, here we see what appears to be one of the few truthful and honest discussions that our Lord was able to have with a leader of Judaism.

The man asked Jesus, “Which is the first commandment of all?” In essence he was asking, “Jesus, of all the commandments that God has given us, of all the commandments in the books of the Law and the Prophets, which is the greatest commandment? What is the sum and substance of what God expects and desires of His people?” We then read that Jesus answered him,

The first of all the commandments is, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And *you shall love the Lord* your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this, ‘*You shall love your neighbour as yourself.*’ There is no other commandment greater than these.

The scribe, himself knowing the Scriptures, recognized the truth of this statement. He responded to the Lord with these words,

Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

The scribe was very impressed by the words of our Lord. Jesus had answered him in a manner “deserving praise.” Then we read, “Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said unto him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” He thereby confirmed as valid the assessment of the scribe.

The Lord Jesus had affirmed that we are to love God fully. We are to love God. We are to love God’s people. He essentially said,

a. “If you are to be My disciple, *you are to love Me with all your heart.*” We are to be *fully devoted* to Him. Our hearts are to be fixed on loving Him supremely. We are not to hold any other thing or person in

higher esteem than we do God. Our Lord applied this commandment requiring full devotion to Him. He told his disciples on one occasion,

b. “If you are to be My disciple, *you are to love Me with all your soul.*” This speaks of fullness of your loyalty and commitment to the Lord. Our allegiances are not to be divided. God is to be loved foremost. His interests are to be primary to us.

c. “If you are to be My disciple, *you are to love Me with all your mind.*” Love to God is to be informed by truth. The mind is involved. The kind of love for God that is in accordance with this greatest of commandments is not an ignorant love, but it stems from an informed mind. We are to love God with our entire mind.

d. “If you are to be My disciple, *you are to love Me with all your strength.*” This speaks of the fullness of your effort. Love is not a feeling as much as an activity that is rendered unto God. We are to show forth our love in action, not just in word. It is to be done with great effort and energy.

Now, every true Christian has love for God and for his Christian brethren. God has implanted this into our soul. But not all Christians have love *to the degree* that they should have or could have, nor do they show forth their love to others in a biblical manner. This is true of us. This was true of the Christians in Philippi. This was also true of the Christians in the church at Thessalonica. This is why Paul prayed for these Philippians that their love might increase through its development in two ways—knowledge and discernment. Paul wrote,

(1) “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in *knowledge.*”

True love is shaped by *knowledge*. Love needs to be informed by the Word of God. There are some things that we are to love. But there are many things that we are not to love. These need to be taught to us from the Word of God. This will only occur if blessed of God. This is why Paul continuously prayed for these Christians, that “*love may abound still more and more in knowledge*” (1:9).

The Greek word used for our English word, “knowledge” is the word “*gnosis*.” In this day in which Paul ministered, there were many heretics running about deceiving Christians claiming that they possessed true “*gnosis*” or knowledge. Later they would develop their views into the religion of “Gnosticism.” But Paul does not claim the need to develop love in the realm of that Greek word, “*gnosis*”; rather, he used the heightened, emphasized form, “*epignosis*”, or “full knowledge,” or we might even say, “true knowledge.” Love must be defined and fully informed by God if it is to be true love.

There are many today who claim to have love, but it is not informed or shaped by God’s Word. The “love” of the sixties was of this variety. It was a “love” void of commitment, self-control, or sacrifice. It was a “love” of indulgence, no restraint, no standards.

I fear that much “love” that is claimed by people today is rather uninformed as well. How many times have younger (and older) couples entered into marriage believing and claiming to be greatly in love. But it is apparent from the vantage point of some experience, that it is a very naive, infant love, if love at all. It is often a selfish “love” that only lasts as long as one or both of them feel that he or she is receiving what is expected from the relationship.

And what of the “love” of many who claim to be Christian who are accepting and supportive of ungodly and unrighteous relationships in our society? They believe they are truly loving by welcoming and accepting these things. They regard us as unloving who reject and repudiate such things. We would argue that their love is null and void for it is not informed and shaped by the Word of God. Nowhere are we told in the Word of God that love is a toleration and acceptance of sinful behavior and relationships that God has forbidden to His creatures. Rather, true love is to make known to others that behavior and those institutions are wrong that endorse and promote such things. Love must be informed by the Word of God. Paul wrote, “*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge.*”

But Paul also said that he prayed for them to increase in love in another manner. He wrote,

(2) “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in *discernment*.” This is similar to what we just covered, but is more specific regarding the application or demonstration of love. We must have wisdom on how to demonstrate love. Sometimes it is more loving not to give, but to withhold. Even the world recognizes this problem in a measure. It speaks of the danger of being an “enabler.” There is much love so-called that is manifested by parents and other societal institutions that is void of discernment. They make matters worse by their charity, rather than better.

Churches always have to deal with this problem. There are people who make the rounds to churches not “to pray” in them but “to prey” upon them. We will tend to err on the side of charity, but we do try and be discerning in the degree and manner in which we render assistance. It is my opinion that our government is woefully weak in this matter on all levels.

Now notice in **verse 10a** why it was that Paul viewed an increase in love in knowledge and discernment was so needful. Paul desired for them to increase in true love for three specific purposes (1:9ff).

⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, ¹¹being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

What are these three reasons that they were in need of an informed love, discerning in its administration? So that **(1)** they would be able to determine and affirm that which is most excellent, **(2)** they would be able to stand before Jesus Christ as good stewards on the day of their accounting, **(3)** that they may be able to glorify God and His Son because they are truly serving Him and being used by Him.

We need to abound in love still more and more in knowledge and discernment in order that,

(1) We “may approve of the things that are excellent.” This is what it is to be discerning. Discernment is the ability and practice of distinguishing what things are excellent from what things are not. We have said it in other ways at many other times. Discernment is distinguishing between truth and error, good and evil, and right and wrong. That is what is being said here. Love must abound in knowledge and discernment so that which is excellent may be identified and supported.

There are many good causes to which we may give ourselves and give of ourselves. There are far fewer “excellent” things. *Let us do and give to what is most excellent. We have limited time and limited resources. Let us get the most, achieve the most, with what we have to give and what time and effort we have to give.* Now by way of application we might say this: There are many good Christian causes, such as missionary works, that vie for our attention and financial support. But our resources are limited, therefore, as a church we will seek to give to that which is most excellent. We rejoice with any and all who preach Christ sincerely and truthfully, but we are only able to render support for that which we can determine to be “most excellent.” Unless our love abounds still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, we will be unable to determine and approve the things that are excellent. Let us pray that we would do so.

We need to abound in love still more and more in knowledge and discernment in order that,

(2) We “may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”

One day the Lord will return and each of us will render an account of our stewardship. Paul wrote of this elsewhere. **1 Corinthians 4:1-5** read,

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²*Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.* ³But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. ⁴For I know nothing against

myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. ⁵Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts; and then each one's praise will come from God.

Some of you have investments which you have entrusted to a fund or finance manager to invest on your behalf. You probably meet with him or her from time to time to see what is being done with your investments that you have entrusted to him or her. We are stewards of what God has entrusted to us. He has invested with you time, talent, treasure, that are His not your own. One day He will call you to give an accounting to determine whether or not you have done well with his investment that he has entrusted to you. How will you do? Have you used that which he has given to you to serve only yourself? Have you embezzled that which is in reality His to squander upon yourself? The way that we can assess and determine whether or not we are doing all that we should do and can do, is if we abound in love still more and more in knowledge and discernment in order that we ***“may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”***

When Paul wrote that we might be ***“sincere”*** until the day of Jesus Christ, he used a word that was commonly employed in describing a pure unmixed, perhaps refined metal. This would be in contrast to an alloy, a mixture of metals. We should be pure and sincere, fully devoted to Christ. Our eyes should be fully focused on the cause of Jesus Christ in all aspects of our life. To have one eye on the world and one eye on Christ is to be spiritually cross-eyed. We are to be as Paul:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:9f)

When Paul wrote that we are to be ***“without offence”*** until the day of Jesus Christ, one of two points may have been intended. First, He may be saying that if we live in this way we will not become a stumbling block to others, hurting or hindering their relationship with God by our foolish and ignorant behavior. Or, second, that we ourselves will not have stumbled in our walk, for this way of life has preserved us from faltering and falling. Both are true to Christian experience and Scripture.

The point is this: we have the task in this life to purify ourselves of all uncleanness of thought and heart, to purge ourselves of all iniquity as well as worthless pursuits, and to pursue that which is holy. We are to desire holy allegiances, as well as holy character. In short, ***we are to put on Christ***, becoming conformed to His image. This will occur to the degree that we pray and that God answers our prayer that we abound in love still more and more in knowledge and discernment. If He hears us and blesses us to this end, we will “be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”

What kind of life is this? It is a life in which...

(3) We are “filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

The Lord has said to His people through His Word, “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor. 6:20). In order to know how to glorify God in our lives, we are in need of our love to abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, and by so doing, we will be filled “with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Paul had said something similar to the church at Colossae. **Colossians 1:9-10** read,

⁹For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that you may have a

walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Do you desire to walk “walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work”? Then let us pray and work toward this end.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. (2 Cor. 13:14)
