



Abounding in Love

Growing in discernment is growing in the love of Christ

Note: Bible verses used in this study are taken from the New King James Version.

Philippians 1:9-10 - And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,

What did Paul pray for the church at Philippi?

That they would grow in love, knowledge, discernment, approving the things that are excellent, and be without offence until the day of Christ.

What kind of love is Paul talking about?

The love of God, the agape, sacrificial, not-expecting-anything-in-return kind of love that Jesus showed us by dying in our place so that our sins may be forgiven.

Where does this kind of love come from?

It only comes from God. It is a byproduct of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit and is also known as the fruit of the Spirit...

Gal 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

How do we come to be indwelt by the Holy Spirit?

If you are saved, God, in the person of the Holy Spirit, indwells those who believe that Jesus Christ paid the penalty for their sin...

1 Corinthians 3:16 - Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?

The presence of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of our salvation...

Ephesians 1:13-14 - In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

If you are saved, you have the Holy Spirit within you...

1 John 4:13-15 - By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Can people tell those who have the Holy Spirit resident within?

Yes, there will be something about them that they know they need. It is unusual and so it stands out in this world. The witness of the fruit of the Spirit is best expressed by a verse addressing another of the fruits of the Spirit, peace:

Philippians 4:7 - the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding

For Christians who keep their focus on Christ, things can be falling apart around them yet have a peace that the unsaved can not understand. Likewise, Christians can demonstrate a Love that surpasses all understanding completely contrary to their circumstance.

Do all saved people always demonstrate the agape love of God all the time? Why?

No, we still have an old sin nature that struggles with our new born-again nature and we must choose to follow the way of God.

Eph 4:22-24 - put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

So if we're going to have the love of God, what must we do?

Deliberately choose to love people sacrificially, without expecting anything in return.

How is the love of God distinguished from mankind's concept of love?

The world's concept of love is that it is a feeling, an emotion that you get. It is also motivated by being loved in return. God's agape love is an act of the will, it is loving the unlovable as He loved us before we repented of our sins in response to His provision for us.

Romans 5:8 - God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

What did Paul pray would become of the love of those at Philippi?

That it would grow.

How did Paul want this love to manifest itself?

What did it mean for their love to grow?

That they would grow in knowledge and discernment, approving that which is excellent, being sincere and without offense.

What should we be growing in knowing in knowledge of?

If we are to demonstrate the love of God, we should be growing in our knowledge of the Lord. We can not be like Him if we do not know what He is like.

What should we be growing in discernment of ?

A concordance search of passages in the Bible using the root word “discern” turns up passages in the Old Testament talking about discerning between good and evil.

How do we grow in discernment?

By exercising it. This is a great principle in the Bible, if you don't use it, you'll lose it...

Heb 5:12-14 - For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Growing in discernment is an act of the will that comes from deliberately preparing to know the difference between good and evil by studying God's Word and applying this knowledge to real-life situations.

What is the distinction between milk and solid food that is made in Hebrews 5:12-14?

- Milk represents basic truths... as newborn babies need for nourishment, so too babes in Christ need to know the fundamental truths of the faith.
- Solid food are deeper truths about God and His plan. These are things that one must be more mature to consume. As solid food requires sufficient maturity to chew it, so too the deeper truths require are greater amount of study and meditation to grasp.

What are some examples of distinctions between milk and solid food?

Milk is knowing certain truth, solid food is being able to teach these truths. Being able to show other why you believe what you believe...

1 Pet 3:15 - But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

- Milk is knowing that Scripture is inspired by God, solid food is being able to prove it.
- Milk is knowing we are saved by God's grace through faith, solid food is being able to explain this to others and show them why you believe it.
- Milk is knowing that Jesus is God, solid food is being able to help others understand why our Almighty

Creator Himself came in the form of one of His creations.

- Milk is knowing that the death of Jesus paid the penalty for our sin, solid food is being able to show people why we know this is true.
- Milk is having hope in the Lord's resurrection, solid food is being able to expose the flaws in the arguments of those who deny that Jesus rose from the grave.
- Milk is knowing Jesus is going to return, solid food is knowing the order of certain key events such as the rapture and tribulation and being able to explain why you believe it.

In the New Testament, there is an additional application:

Matt 16:1-4

- 1 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven.
- 2 He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red';
- 3 "and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.
- 4 "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

It appears as though forecasting the weather was even popular in the First Century. The weather forecast is often the most popular portion of the TV news. Why are we so interested in the weather forecast?

- People want to know the future, even if it is whether or not it will rain tomorrow.
- There is a fascination with the weather because it is clearly beyond human control yet can have a great impact on our plans.

What did Jesus rebuke the Jewish religious leaders about in Matthew 16:3?

Jesus rebuked the religious leaders who could forecast the weather by the color of the sky but failed to “*discern the signs of the times*” which revealed Him as their Messiah.

What kinds of signs should the Jewish religious leaders have recognized?

Prophecies fulfilled... not only the miracles that He performed but even they type of them were Messianic in nature. The time that had elapsed since the command to restore Jerusalem per Daniel 9:25 revealed the time-frame of the coming of the Messiah. Even the Magi realized this, being learned men from Persia they would have had access to the writings of the prophet Daniel.

How is the rebuke of Jesus applicable today?

That like the weather forecast, there is a coming event also beyond human control that will have an even greater impact on the plans of men: the return of Jesus Christ. The Bible says that while we can not know the “*day and hour*,” Jesus can return at any time (Matthew 24:36).

What are the signs of the times Jesus referred to?

As there were signs which pointed to His first advent, Jesus told us what would indicate the season of His return. It was prophesied that Israel would cease to function as a nation but will be resurrected in the last days. For example:

Jer 23:3 - But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.

Ezek 37:21 - "Then say to them, `Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land;

The parable of the fig tree tells us that the generation seeing Israel return to the promised land will see the return of Jesus (Matthew 24:32-36, the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel, see Hosea 9:10 and the book of Joel.)

We are that generation!

What other signs did Jesus give us so that we may know we are in the season of His return?

Jesus also said that preceding His return, there would be an increase in frequency and intensity of wars, racial strife, hunger, disease, earthquakes and yes, bad weather...

Matt 24:6-8 - And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Luke 21:9-11 – “But when you hear of wars and commotions, do not be terrified; for these things must come to pass first, but the end will not come immediately.” Then He said to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes in various places, and famines and pestilences; and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.”

Luke 21:25-27 – “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the

Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

There are other Bible prophecies addressing the state of world politics, technology, society, and institutional Christendom prior to the Lord's return.

What is the danger in dismissing all the signs of the Lord's soon return by thinking that “it has been 2,000 years since He was here, who is to say it may be another 2,000 years before He returns?”

Before you dismiss the idea that the coming of Jesus is near, it would be to your advantage to recognize that this prevailing view is in itself a sign that we're “*in the last days*” .

2 Pet 3:3-4 - knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Why did Jesus come to earth the first time?

Jesus came the first time to provide a way for people to have eternal life.

Luke 19:10 – “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

John 10:10 - I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Why do people need to be saved?

People need salvation because “*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*” (Romans 3:23) and “*the wages of sin is death.*” (Romans 6:23)

What did Jesus do to save us?

He paid our sin debt by dying in the place of those who trust in Him. The good news is: “*that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again*” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) thus authenticating the truth about who He is and that what He said when He was Here is true.

Why is Jesus coming back?

To fulfill promises to the nation Israel and to restore order to His creation. He is coming back “*to execute judgment on all*” (Jude 1:15).

Why is God going to fulfill promises to Israel?

- God chose Israel as His vessel to reveal Himself to mankind through... all the writers of the Bible were Jews, Jesus himself was a Jew.
- It is God's character to be true to His Word...
2 Tim 2:13 - If we are faithless, he remains faithful; he cannot deny Himself.

How can you be free from having to worry about what the world will bring?

By having an eternal relationship with the Creator.

How do you enter into an eternal relationship with the Creator?

Just pray right now, where ever you're at for Jesus to save you. *"For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Romans 10:13).

How is discerning the times that we live in connected to showing the love of Christ?

We will realize that the time we have to make an impact in the world for eternity is short. Jesus articulated the correct attitude when he said:

John 9:4 – "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work."

How may we make an impact on the world for eternity?

Working to bring the good news about Jesus Christ to people so that they will have an opportunity to receive Him into their lives and be saved.

What are things that are excellent?

Things that are excellent are not of the world, they are the truths that come from God...

Prov 8:6-7 - Listen, for I will speak of excellent things, and from the opening of my lips will come right things; For my mouth will speak truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

Prov 22:20-21 - Have I not written to you excellent things of counsels and knowledge, That I may make you know the certainty of the words of truth, that you may answer words of truth to those who send to you?

They are things we should meditate upon, like the character and attributes of God...

Phil 4:8 - Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy-- meditate on these things.

What does it mean to be sincere?

1. Not feigned or affected; genuine: sincere indignation.
2. Being without hypocrisy or pretense; true: a sincere friend.
3. Archaic: pure; unadulterated.

Why is being sincere important?

- Being sincere means that our attitude is right. We can change our attitude, it is an act of the will. Anything

less than having your attitude aligned with your words and actions is hypocrisy. God know the thoughts and motivations of our heart.

- As dogs can sense when people are afraid of them, people can sense insincerity. Being insincere can damage our witness.

What does it mean to be without offense?

Without sin.

Why is being without offense important?

This is proof that God is doing a work within is. It is part of our witness.

How long should we seek to have our love grow?

We should seek for our love to grow until the day of Christ.

What is the day of Christ?

It that time when the Lord will return to establish a literal kingdom on earth...

Jer 46:10 - For this is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; it shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; for the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates.

Acts 2:20 - The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

1Thes 5:2-5 - For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

II Th 2:1-4 - Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

2 Pet 3:10 - But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat;

both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Why do we not need to seek for our love to grow after the day if Christ?

Because when we have our glorified bodies, we will be perfected, not needing any growth of our love.

Phil 3:12 - Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

It is important for us to grow in our love in these mortal bodies because it has eternal ramifications. This is a great principle in Scripture:

Matt 25:29 - For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.