

**PHILIPPIANS 1:3-11**  
**JOY IN FELLOWSHIP!**

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 1 as we continue our in-depth study of Paul's letter to the church in Philippi.

Keep in mind that Paul is in prison in Rome. And yes, he was under house arrest and able to see people from time to time who came to visit him, but he was chained to a soldier twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week! He had no time to himself, and he didn't know if he would be put to death for the charges that were against him or let go.

And yet, as he writes this letter it is filled with joy!

How can that be?

I mean, for me, someone in front of me driving down the road and they are going slower than the speed limit, I am not filled with joy!

How can that be?

Because Paul did not let the outward circumstances of life, which were bad for him, cause him to take his eyes off the Lord and thus, his joy was from the Lord!

When I was driving and that guy was going so slow, my focus was on myself and the situation I was in and there was no joy there. I needed to turn my attention back to the Lord and realize that getting to where I was going 20 seconds later than I wanted was not such a big deal. But it can be if we let it!

Let me share this with you and you will see what I mean about what we are focused on can change our attitude. It can fill us with joy or rob us of joy!

We are told,

When theologian Broughton Knox was serving as a young chaplain in the British navy on a ship preparing for D-day and the invasion of Normandy, he noted that the minds of all hands on board, regardless of rank were focused on the invasion's success.

No one thought of his own interests, but only on how he could help his shipmates in their commonly shared task. He says, "I remember noting in my mind how I had never been happier."

After the invasion and the return to England, everyone noticed a difference in the atmosphere on ship. It was still friendly because it was a well-run ship.

But several of the sailors, sensing the difference, asked the young chaplain why things had changed.

Knox reflects, "The answer was quite simple. During those months that preceded and followed D-day, our thoughts had a minimum of self-centeredness in them. We gave ourselves to our shared activity and objective. . . . Once the undertaking was over we reverted to our own purposes, as we do normally."

Broughton Knox was, of course, reflecting on his ship's experience of the fellowship that people experience in pursuing a common goal. Human friendship is a wonderful thing, but fellowship goes beyond friendship. Fellowship occurs among friends committed to a common cause or goal and flourishes through their common pursuit of it.

. . . here in Philippians our text has at its heart a depth of fellowship that exceeds any earthly fellowship – "your partnership [fellowship] in the gospel" (v. 5) – which is rooted in God and is a quest that can only be described as eternal.

- R. Keny Hughes, *Philippians – The Fellowship of the Gospel*, pp.23-24

Why are so many Christians struggling so much today?

Maybe because they are not focused on the Lord, and they don't see the battle for the faith that they are in with their brothers and sisters in the Lord!

What happens many times, as we isolate ourselves, is we become focused on self, and we have lost that joy.

Think about this for a minute. Listen to what Ray Stedman had to say about Christians living in isolation.

He wrote,

This is the recognition that no Christian lives his life alone. He can't. We can't live as Christian hermits. We are members of a family, and we need each other very, very much.

There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, one who has no relationship with anyone else. I know occasionally you meet people who because of difficulties they experience in Christian relationships want to go live their lives by themselves. They never want to come to church or have anything to do with other Christians.

When I hear that I am immediately suspicious as to whether they are really Christians, because one of the first signs the scriptures tell us of new life in Christ is that we love the brethren.

John says this is an unmistakable sign that we are born again, that we love the brethren, and if we choose to live apart from them something's wrong.

- <https://bit.ly/49VUA04>

For Paul, he did not want to be isolated, but he was in prison and had no choice in the matter. For most people today, they have a choice and to isolate yourself from the brethren is wrong.

I know, not easy but here in the verses we will be looking at this morning our focus is going to be – ***JOY IN FELLOWSHIP!***

And in these verses Paul is going to lay out four main points about this joy he had with the people back in Philippi, the believers there.

And please understand that they were not perfect. Like any church they had their problems with relationships, and we will deal with that as we read on here in Philippians.

But there was no major false teaching or false teachers that are mentioned. Heresy was not a problem there in Philippi!

Here is what we will be focusing on this morning.

***LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN – PHILIPPIANS 1:3-4***

***LOVE FOR THE WORK THEY ARE DOING – PHILIPPIANS 1:5-6***

***LOVE TO SEE THEM – PHILIPPIANS 1:7-8***

***LOVE TO SEE THEM GROW – PHILIPPIANS 9-11***

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in Philippians chapter 1, beginning in verse 3 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic – ***JOY IN FELLOWSHIP!***

**PHILIPPIANS 3****VERSES 3-4**

Remember that Paul is in prison and yet, his focus is not on himself, but on others as he thanks the Philippian Christians for their love, their generosity towards him!

We see this in Acts chapter 16 where we are told that after Lydia was lead to the Lord, **“And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.’ So she persuaded us.”**

Acts 16:15.

She opened up her home to Paul.

When Paul was in the Philippian jail, and he shared the Gospel with the guard and he and his family got saved. It is then that we see this love for the brethren in this new believer as we are told in Acts 16:32-34, **“Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were baptized. Now when he had brought them into his house, he set food before them; and he rejoiced, having believed in God with all his household.”**

Think about that one. It was the jailer who gave Paul and Silas those stripes and now he was cleaning their wounds!

And just one more. In II Corinthians 8:1-4 we are told of how generous the church there in Philippi was, **“Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality. For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing, imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.”**

The Northern part of Greece was known as Macedonia and that is where the cities of Philippi – (Acts 16:12-40), Thessalonica – (Acts 17:1-9), and Berea – (Acts 17:10-15) were located.

Here Paul is using the churches in Macedonia, including Philippi, as an example to the Corinthians on how they gave, even in their poverty, their great affliction, they gave **“according to their ability”** and even **“beyond their ability.”**

That is the idea behind – ***FELLOWSHIP!***

The Greek word is ***KOINONIA***, and it is hard to translate into an English word but the basic idea here is ***“having things in common.”***

The main thing is that we have a unity in the faith or our beliefs in the Lord Jesus Christ and His atoning work for our sins we are in agreement with. You can't be in unity with someone who is not a Christian, not a unity in the faith, even though many are trying to do that but then they must compromise what they believe!

And that is then manifested in how we treat the brethren, our love for them, our dependance upon each other.

Granted, we are not going to agree on everything, but there is that unity in Christ and that is manifested in our love for the brethren and that is what we see here with Paul!

And notice, as Paul prayed for these believers it filled his heart with joy as they were working together to bring the Gospel message to the lost.

Now some of you may be thinking,

I don't need fellowship!

I am strong all alone like the giant redwood tree!

I am sorry to tell you, you are sadly mistaken!

Let me explain.

Again, this Greek word for “**fellowship**” is *KOINONIA*, (koy-nohn-ee'-ah) speaks of communion, fellowship, and participation; it means to *share* in something.

And keep in mind that they continued steadfastly in this fellowship! This was not just when they felt like it, it was the pattern of their new life in Christ!

And what we see here is that the early church shared their love for the Lord and their love for each other. They did not isolate themselves like many do today!

Again, I do realize that there are those that don't see the need for fellowship, the need to share their lives with their brothers and sisters in the Lord.

And what happens many times as they isolate themselves from others is that when the storms of life come blowing upon them, and they will, they fall over just like a tree that has shallow roots.

Okay, let me tell you about these giant Redwood trees because this example will stick in your mind and show you the need for fellowship.

And, as you will see, we do need to be kind of entwined together you might say with other Christians.

I am sure many if not all of you have seen a Redwood tree either in pictures or you have seen them in person. They are impressive to say the least.

It is the tallest tree on earth. It can grow to some 350 feet tall or as high as a 35-story building.

To give you a perspective on that, the Statue of Liberty only stands at 151 feet tall!

These majestic trees have an average lifespan of some 400 to 600 years, and some are as old as 2,000 to 3,500 years old!

Interestingly enough, the only place in the United States where these trees can be found is in California!

Their average base circumference is between 18 to 24 feet, with the largest being 57 feet in circumference!

I know that is hard to picture in our mind, so let me give you an idea of how large that is. This is amazing. It would take 12 people holding hands to circle the base of the tree!

What keeps this tree standing?

How come it does not topple over or on those windy days they just blow over?

Keep in mind that many trees have a tap root that is about as deep under the ground as the trunk is above the ground and this helps keep the tree upright as well as providing it with nourishment.

Interestingly enough these giant Redwood trees don't have a tap root!

Then how does it stand?



The root system of the Redwood tree has thousands of smaller roots that spread out in a circle of some 250 feet.

Now these are not deep roots that hold the tree upright, they are only some 6 to 12 feet deep! Not much help when the tree can be 100 feet, 200 feet or 300 feet or more tall!

Then again, how do they remain upright, what keeps them from falling over?

This is amazing to me.

These roots that are woven just under the surface of the ground do not survive alone.

These roots intertwine with the other Redwood trees and that causes them to be held upright, to be strong, able to stand the strongest of winds without falling over!

I think you see where this is going and you may not like it, but it is true. And it is what we see here Philippians!

These giant Redwood trees, the tallest trees in the world will fall down if they don't hold hands, in a sense, underground!

In other words, applying this to our Christian lives, if we want to be able to stand strong, we need each other, we, in a sense, need to hold hands!

Think of it like this. The Redwood reaches up into the heavens just as we reach up to God through Jesus Christ.

But the Redwood also reaches down to the other Redwoods for stability as the winds of life blow upon them just as we reach out to other believers to help us stand strong as the winds of life blow upon us!

Do we need this fellowship?

You bet we do! You see, union with the Lord means union with each other, at least it should!

Paul, in Hebrews 10:24-25 speaks of this fellowship we are to have as he wrote, “**And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**”

Think about this for a minute. How many of you are involved in a ministry because someone came up to you and asked you? I am sure all those who are involved in ministry have been asked, it was not just dropped in their lap. You see, someone stirred you up you might say to get involved, to use the gifts, the talents that God has given to you. But if you don't come to church, if you don't have fellowship with believers, how are you going to stir anyone up? You are not going to be able to nor will you be stirred!

And if you are still struggling with this fellowship issue, look at how this changed the heart of Paul. He was not down in the dumps but overflowing with joy for the brethren there in Philippi.

It is as Morgan wrote, “*It is a glorious revelation of how life in fellowship with Christ triumphs over all adverse circumstances. The triumph, moreover, is not that of stoical indifference. It is rather the recognition of the fact that all apparently adverse conditions are made allies of the soul and ministers of victory, under the dominion of the Lord.*”

Remember what the Psalmist said in Psalm 133:1, “**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity!**”

There it is. We see the unity we have in Christ and the joy of coming together as brothers and sisters in the Lord!

But Paul was not in Philippi, he was in Rome, in prison!

Yes, but he remembered, like I have said, the times he spent there. Seeing Lydia coming to the faith.

Seeing the Roman jailer and his family come to the faith.

Seeing that young demon-possessed slave girl who came to the faith.

Was it always easy for Paul there in Philippi?

Absolutely not. In fact, he was placed in prison there because of his faith in Christ.

But he does not remember the difficult times, but the joyous ones as people were getting saved and the church had begun in this area of the world!

Yes, Paul's joy came from the Lord, but that joy was also the result of the loving recollections of believers who, like those in Philippi, were consistently faithful to the Lord, to their fellow believers, and to him.

Now let me add this little note because as we read this, we think that Philippi must have been that perfect church. Everyone got along, they never had any problems.

First of all, there is no such thing as a perfect church. Do you know why?

Because there are people in the church and where there are people there can be conflict, disagreements, trouble.

We are not perfect people, and we are growing in the Lord and thus, we deal with those issues of selfishness, bickering, gossip and so on!

We see this in Philippians 1:15-17 where Paul tells us, **“Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.”**

Also, in Philippians 4:2-3 we are told, **“I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life.”**

Make no mistake about it, problems and conflicts are bound to happen from time to time.

So what are we to do about it?

We are to be patient, we are to be loving, we are to be forgiving, and when needed, to correct in love, to help people out.

But please remember that there is not the ministry of condemnation, but of reconciliation!

Now for those of you who are looking for a problem-free church, I do have a solution.

Do you know what that solution is?

Get rid of all the people!

And that is what some do, they are on their own but if that is what you are doing, understand that you are not going to be able to get much work done for the Kingdom of God because you are part of the body of Christ. Think about it. Just one part of a body does not function better than a whole body!

Remember what Proverbs 14:4 says, **“Where no oxen are, the trough is clean; But much increase comes by the strength of an ox.”**

The Living Bible puts it like this. **“An empty stable stays clean-but there is no income from an empty stable.”**

This is funny to me, but true.

If there are no oxen in the barn, then things are going to be clean.

But if there are oxen in the barn, well, you will have a mess in there that will need to be cleaned up.

And if you want to have an income you need those animals in the barn, even though it may be messy. You don't say, "***Man, these cows are a mess. They act more like pigs than cows. Look at all this stuff I am going to have to clean up. I am just going to get rid of them and have a clean barn!***"

And yet, we see that so often in churches today.

***"That person said something I don't like, I am leaving!"***

And we can have all kinds of reasons and make them really sound good and justify why we are leaving, but that is wrong. Sorry if you don't like that, don't leave! Just kidding.

But so often we let things that come our way destroy our fellowship and we just want to bail, we just want to leave, we are ready to take off!

Instead of doing that, deal with it. Church is messy because, and I am not saying we are barn animals, but we are messy and thus, deal with it biblically, humbly and in the love of Christ!

And the reality is, you can't run away from your problems or from people. You see, wherever you go, if you don't deal with these issues in your life, you will take them with you and before long, you will be on the run again to another church and another church because someone said something you did not like!

Listen to this perspective from James Montgomery Boice. He wrote,

Fellowship with God and true fellowship with others go together.

That is why John said, in 1John 1:3: (1) we want you to have "***fellowship with us***" and (2) "***our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.***"

Some people have said, ***“The stronger your vertical fellowship is, the stronger your horizontal fellowship will be.”***

If you find yourself out of fellowship with God, you will begin to find yourself out of fellowship with other Christians (especially with your spouse).

If you say, ***“I don’t really like to be with other Christians very much. They all seem to be hypocrites.”*** You will begin to drift off.

But if you come close to God, you will inevitably find yourself being drawn close to other Christians.

And it works the other way, too. If you spend time with other Christians, if you share a great deal with them, that fellowship will help to draw you closer to the Father.”

- James Montgomery Boice

How true that is.

We see here Paul’s – ***LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN!***

As we read on, this love that Paul had for the brethren was also seen in his – ***LOVE FOR WHAT THEY ARE DOING!***

Let’s read on and see what Paul has to say.

#### VERSES 5-6

Here we see Paul being filled with joy because the work that Paul was doing, spreading the Gospel, they were doing as well.

They not only were united in Christ, but they were united in serving Christ.

I have experienced this with my trips to Russia. I don't speak Russian, not even close. I can say, and not well – *PRIVYET*, which means *HELLO!*

And yet, we enjoyed such koinonia because of our relationship, our unity that we had in Christ. And as we went out sharing God's Word it was such a joy.

I see that here as well. Yes, going out to eat together is a blessing but doing Vacation Bible School, men's study for the men and women's study for the ladies there is that oneness, that joy, that koinonia because we are sharing Christ with each, we are growing in the Lord.

And Paul wanted them and us to know these encouraging words, because sometimes we can become so down, so discouraged, we can lose our joy.

And thus, Paul said, **“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.”** Philippians 1:6.

We should treasure these words.

Why?

First, let me start by saying this. How many of us have started a project and not finished it?

I'm sure we all have experienced that in our lives.

And that can be a problem. You see, when it comes to our Christian life, we tend to lose hope as we fall short of our goals with the Lord.

But Paul has total confidence that the work that God started in the Philippians, their salvation, He will bring to completion, their glorification.

And what Paul says of the Philippian believers he is also saying to us.

Paul, in Colossians 3:4 tells us, **“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”**

Folks, when God saves us, He does so completely and eternally, and you can take that to the bank!

Paul didn't say that we "*might*" appear with Him but that we will!

This is so important. Imagine Paul writing, "*When Christ who is our life appears, then you also might appear with Him in glory if you hang in there, if you don't blow it, if you are good enough!*"

Praise God that is not what he said!

So if God started the work and He is completing the work, do you think He will finish the work?

Of course He will!

Do you doubt that?

Do you think it is too hard for God and He might not complete the work?

Do you think if you don't live up to a certain standard you will be cast out, the work won't be completed?

Listen to what Jesus said in John 6:37, 39, "**All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out . . . This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.**"

Also, in John 10:27-28 Jesus said, "**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.**"



And Paul tells us in Romans 8:37-39, **“Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

And lastly, listen to what Paul said in Romans 8:30, **“Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”**

I want to focus on this glorification here because it is the final step of the sanctification process, and it will occur when we go to be with the Lord.

What is interesting here is that Paul states this work, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is in the past tense.

Why does Paul speak of something that has not happened as if it already did?

Because that is how sure it is, God will complete the work He started because He foreknew us!

If you are His, He will not lose you – it is a promise – you are already seen as glorified in the Father’s eyes – that is how certain it is, that is how secure we are in our eternal redemption!

Think of it like this, as the nineteenth-century commentator, F. B. Meyer put it, *“We go into the artist’s studio and find there unfinished pictures covering large canvases, and suggesting great designs, but which have been left, either because the genius was not competent to complete the work, or because paralysis laid the hand low in death; but as we go into God’s great workshop we find nothing that bears the mark of haste or insufficiency of power to finish, and we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete.”*

The work of sanctification is a work of God the Holy Spirit, He has begun it, and He will see it through to completion.

Don’t disbelieve but believe! God will finish what He has started!

The problem is that many try to make it their own work and then, if they fail, they will then forfeit heaven.

It is not a work that we started, God did.

And it is not a work that we finish, God does!

Praise God we can rest in the security of our salvation that is based in Christ!

One writer put it like this. He wrote,

As I reflect on my fifty plus years in Christ it is indeed God who has kept me. It is not my grip on God that has made the difference, but his grip on me. I am not confident in my goodness. I am not confident in my character. I am not confident in my history. I am not confident in my “reverend” persona. I am not confident in my perseverance.

But I am confident in God.

- R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians – The Fellowship of the Gospel*, p. 28

Amen to that!

I am not confident in myself, but I am confident in the Lord and the work He began in my life, He will finish, He will bring me home to glory! And the same for you!

And that is what we bring to people. Not for them to live up to a certain standard, but to repent of their sins, to ask Jesus to be Lord and Savior of their lives and He will work in them. Not only that but the work that He is doing on the inside will manifest itself in the things we do and say, we will see it outwardly.

It truly is not just good news but great news that Paul shared, the Philippians were sharing, and it is what we share as well!

We see that Paul had this – ***LOVE FOR THE WORK THEY ARE DOING!***

But for Paul, he was in prison, not able to see these brethren and thus, the next point is that Paul would – ***LOVE TO SEE THEM!***

### VERSES 7-8

As you read these verses you see the heart of Paul for the believers in Philippi.

You see, Paul lived what he believed, and his love was not just empty words, these believers were in his thoughts and in his heart!

I don't think we realize that all that Paul was going through there in Rome, in prison. And yes, like I have said, he was under house arrest, but don't think this was something that was great for Paul.

And yet, Paul does not focus on himself, but his focus was on the brethren and his love for them. How he longed to be with them.

I feel that way about the brethren in Russia. I love them and I know that they love me. And I long to be with them, fellowship with them, share with them, just to love them with the love of Christ.

But let me also say this. I love the brethren here at Calvary Chapel of Manitowoc with all my heart. I would do anything to help you grow in the Lord. I love to be with you. I love to share with you. I love to fellowship with you.

And I pray that you know that. And the brethren in Philippi also knew that Paul loved them, and they loved him.

It is as John said in I 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.”**

That is kind of a funny way to put it. That the manifestation or what is seen in our life after we have passed from death into the new life in Christ is love for the brethren. Yes, it is that new life we have in Christ that gives us the ability to love the brethren!

Look at this world today and look how the love for people is growing cold. Men have become lovers of themselves, and that selfishness has hurt many people.

And this is important. Paul did not see himself as being better than they were, they all received the same grace and as he defended the Gospel so too the brethren in Philippi were!

I like the way that Adam Clarke paraphrased Paul’s words here, it does drive home the point.

He wrote, ***“I call God to witness that I have the strongest affection for you, and that I love you with that same kind of tender concern with which Christ loved the world when he gave himself for it.”***

May we have that kind of genuine love for the brethren!

Let me share this with you to show you how simple it can be to care for people, to love them and that love, that *AGAPE* love, unconditional love. And keep in mind that this is an action word, love in action as we see in this story.

We are told,

In the fall of the year, Linda, a young woman, was traveling alone up the rutted and rugged highway from Alberta to the Yukon. Linda didn't know you don't travel to Whitehorse alone in a rundown Honda Civic, so she set off where only four-wheel drives normally venture.

The first evening she found a room in the mountains near a summit and asked for a 5 A.M. wakeup call so she could get an early start.

She couldn't understand why the clerk looked surprised at that request, but as she awoke to early - morning fog shrouding the mountain tops, she understood.

Not wanting to look foolish, she got up and went to breakfast.

Two truckers invited Linda to join them, and since the place was so small, she felt obliged.

*"Where are you headed?"* one of the truckers asked.

*"Whitehorse."*

*"In that little Civic? No way! This pass is dangerous in weather like this."*

*"Well, I'm determined to try,"* was Linda's gutsy, if not very informed, response.

*"Then I guess we're just going to have to hug you,"* the trucker suggested.

Linda drew back. *"There's no way I'm going to let you touch me!"*

*"Not like THAT!"* the truckers chuckled. *"We'll put one truck in front of you and one in the rear. In that way, we'll get you through the mountains."*

All that foggy morning Linda followed the two red dots in front of her and had the reassurance of a big escort behind her as they made their way safely through the mountains.

Caught in the fog in our dangerous passage through life, we need to be *“hugged.”*

With fellow Christians who know the way and can lead safely ahead of us, and with others behind, gently encouraging us along, we, too, can pass safely.

- Don Graham

Paul poured his life into people because he loved them and cared for them and wanted the best for them.

These truckers did not know this woman, but they cared enough to reach out to her to protect her and guide her.

May we do no less for the brethren.

May we take the time to see them, be with them, and fellowship with them.

That is what we see here. Paul’s – ***LOVE TO SEE THEM*** but not just that, we will also see of Paul’s – ***LOVE TO SEE THEM GROW IN THE LORD!***

#### VERSES 9-11

Keep in mind that Paul is some 800 miles away from them.

Not only that but it has been some 10 years or so since his first visit and yet his love for them is still rich, it is still deep as when he was first there with them and established the church.

Now, why did Paul pray for their love to grow?

Because *AGAPE* love, unconditional love will never fully be attained in this life. It doesn't matter how much love you have, when compared to Jesus and what He manifested in His earthly ministry, we need much more in our lives than what we have!

And Paul wants their love to grow, to super abound or excel in "knowledge" or maturity and "discernment" or being able to judge things correctly.

When Paul speaks of "knowledge" he is not just speaking of head knowledge but a knowledge that comes from God's Word and applying that to our lives, living what God desires of us.

It's one thing to understand the doctrines of the Christian faith but without living them out it's of no practical value.

And then Paul speaks of "discernment", and I think we have all seen how this is lacking in the church today.

This word carries with it the idea of being able to discern right from wrong, not because of some standards that we have set, but because that is what God has shown us in His Word.

I don't know if you have encountered this issue over the years, but I have. You expose a false teaching to someone, you tell someone about a false teacher and what they are teaching, and they are mad at you!

***"That is so unloving, you need to repent! They are brothers or sisters in the Lord, and you should not say things like that about them!"***

No, exposing false teachers and false doctrine is not unloving, but not doing that just shows you don't love the person enough to confront their sin. And, tragically today, their false teaching is embraced many times!

Let me show you what I mean by giving you an example of sloppy agape. Yes, I said it, sloppy agape and the example is given to us in I Corinthians 5:1-7 where we are told, **“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles - that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”**

Obviously, that was wrong. But they thought they were showing love by accepting this sin, something that the Romans didn’t even accept, and Paul called them on this, and they were to remove him from the church until he repented and got right.

As much as some would not agree with that, it shows that true love will do what is necessary to see a person get right with God and not to continue on in their sin.

Sin, false teachers, false doctrine needs to be dealt with, we need to have the knowledge of God’s Word and discern between what is right and what is wrong!



And here's the thing. The way to grow in love and to grow in the Lord is by being in His Word, for Paul told Timothy, "**All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**" II Timothy 3:16-17.

Here in Philippians 1:10 we see that Paul wants them to be "**sincere**" or *EILIKRINES*, (i-lik-ree-nace') in the Greek and it speaks of being "***judged by sunlight, tested as genuine.***"

When our actions are held up to the light of the Son of God, to His Word, will there be cracks in it?

Paul tells us in Hebrews 4:12, "**For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**"

Expose your life to the Word of God because if you don't, if you try to cover your faults, when tough times come, the cracks will show and not only will you see them, but also those around you!

It is so important we continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, without a doubt, to know Him more is to love Him more!

Now, how do we bear fruit in our lives as Christians?

By abiding in the giver and sustainer of life, Jesus Christ and fruit will then naturally be produced in your life, it will be real.

Jesus said in John 15:4-6, **“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.”**

And we do this all **“... to the glory and praise of God.”** Philippians 1:11.

That is my passion for all of you, as well as me. That I love to see you grow in the Lord and when someone drifts away into false teaching, embracing false doctrine, they get involved in sin that they refuse to come out of, it breaks my heart!

That was Paul as well. He loved them so much and we see that as we read through this letter.

Paul had a – ***LOVE FOR THE BRETHREN!***

Not only that, but Paul had a – ***LOVE FOR THE WORK THEY WERE DOING!***

Also, he missed them and thus, he had a – ***LOVE TO SEE THEM!***

And finally, Paul had a – ***LOVE TO SEE THEM GROW IN THE LORD!***

Let me close with this story. It will show you what true love can do in a person’s life, the importance of spurring people on.

We are told,

Ted Stallard undoubtedly qualifies as the one of “the least.” Turned off by school. Very sloppy in appearance. Expressionless. Unattractive. Even his teacher, Miss Thompson, enjoyed bearing down her red pen - as she placed Xs beside his many wrong answers.

If only she had studied his records more carefully. They read:

1st grade: Ted shows promise with his work and attitude, but (has) poor home situation.

2nd grade: Ted could do better. Mother seriously ill. Receives little help from home.

3rd grade: Ted is good boy but too serious. He is a slow learner. His mother died this year.

4th grade: Ted is very slow, but well-behaved. His father shows no interest whatsoever.

Christmas arrived. The children piled elaborately wrapped gifts on their teacher's desk.

Ted brought one too. It was wrapped in brown paper and held together with Scotch Tape.

Miss Thompson opened each gift, as the children crowded around to watch. Out of Ted's package fell a gaudy rhinestone bracelet, with half of the stones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume.

The children began to snicker. But she silenced them by splashing some of the perfume on her wrist and letting them smell it. She put the bracelet on too.

At day's end, after the other children had left, Ted came by the teacher's desk and said, ***"Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mother. And the bracelet looks real pretty on you. I'm glad you like my presents."***

He left.

Miss Thompson got down on her knees and asked God to forgive her and to change her attitude.

The next day, the children were greeted by a reformed teacher - one committed to loving each of them. Especially the slow ones. Especially Ted.

Surprisingly - or maybe, not surprisingly, Ted began to show great improvement. He actually caught up with most of the students and even passed a few.

Time came and went. Miss Thompson heard nothing from Ted for a long time. Then, one day, she received this note:

Dear Miss Thompson:

I wanted you to be the first to know. I will be graduating second in my class.

Love, Ted

Four years later, another note arrived:

Dear Miss Thompson:

They just told me I will be graduating first in my class. I wanted you to be first to know. The university has not been easy, but I liked it.

Love, Ted

And four years later:

Dear Miss Thompson:

As of today, I am Theodore Stallard, M.D. How about that? I wanted you to be the first to know. I am getting married next month, the 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mother would sit if she were alive. You are the only family I have now; Dad died last year. Miss Thompson attended that wedding and sat where Ted's mother would have sat. The compassion she had shown that young man entitled her to that privilege.

Let's have some real courage, and start giving to "*one of the least.*" He may become a Ted Stallard. Even if that doesn't happen, we will have been faithful to the One who has always treated us - as unworthy as we are - like very special people.

- Jon Johnston, *Courage - You Can Stand Strong in the Face of Fear*, pp. 111-113

What impact can we make in each other's lives as we love people, love the brethren with the love of Christ, as we reach out to them.

I know we don't think we will ever be that good but let me leave you with these words from Paul to encourage you to go forward.

Paul wrote, "**Being confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.**" Philippians 1:6.

May we never forget that, and may we be watching to see how we can bless the brethren and it all begins with love. Love for God and then love for the brethren!