

THE JOY OF GOSPEL GROWTH (PHILIPPIANS 1:8-11)

--If you've got a Bible
 --Welcome To Our Family In Ventura!
 --I'll pray before we begin

--Read Text

*For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. **Philippians 1:8-11***

INTRO:

Big Idea: Gospel maturity is measured by a life of fruitful loving and living.

- 1) One of my main concerns is that I'm telling you how the gospel can change you, and how you are to grow, but it's not happening in here [my heart].
 - a) A question that I've been wrestling with is both personal and communal.
 - i) Personally, how should I measure maturity in the gospel, in my relationship with Jesus.
 - ii) And then communally as a local expression of the Church, how can we measure whether we are just growing in numbers or whether we are growing in the gospel as believers and members of one another?

Big Question: What is the mark of maturing/Growth in the gospel

- 2) As Paul [the author of this letter] prays for his gospel partners, this community of believers in the Roman city of Philippi he gives us a metaphor for what growth should look like, and how we can measure our maturity. He says that **gospel growth is similar to botanical**.
 - a) Christian Maturity is similar to plant life. Are there any botanists in here? You'll find out real quick my botanical limitations.
 - b) Paul says that Gospel Maturity is like a plant or a tree that bears fruit **(1:11)**.
 - c) Paul, like Jesus presents gospel growth as being likened to botanical growth.
 - i) Notice in v.10 he prays for them to **be filled with the fruits of righteousness**.
 - ii) It corresponds to Gal 5 where he calls the evidence of growth fruit of the Spirit. So what is the mark of maturity/ growth in the gospel?

I. FRUITFUL LOVING (1:9)

A) WHY DOES PAUL PRAY FOR LOVE TO ABOUND?

1. Abounding love is a **process** of the Spirit of God in our lives.

2. Abounding Love reveals the redeeming ***purpose*** of the spirit of God.

a. Metanarrative

1) We were created in the image of God.

- a) And this God, who is the very definition of love, who existed before time as a community of loving relationship (Father, Son, Spirit) created man in his image.
- b) As image bearers of God, our first parents Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect, unbroken, untainted love, both w/ God and with each other.
 - i) Through the tempting of the serpent, the Devil, Adam and Eve chose self love over God's love, thereby breaking the natural order, and reducing love to a self-focused love. Subsequently our love is tainted.
- c) Enslavement to love:
 - i) Our songs, our movies, marketing all revolves around this self love, propagated during the enlightenment era.
 - ii) Although we often exchange the love for lesser things. As image bearers of God We are on a search for love constantly,

Ernest Becker, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his book *The Denial of Death*, explained the various ways secular people have dealt with the loss of belief in God. Now that we believe we are here by accident and not made for any purpose, how do we instill in our lives a sense of significance? One of the main ways, Becker believed, is what he called "apocalyptic romance." We look to sex and romance to give us the transcendence and sense of meaning we used to get from faith in God. Talking about the modern secular person, he wrote:

He still needed to feel heroic, to know that his life mattered in the scheme of things...He still had to merge himself with some higher, self-absorbing meaning, in trust and gratitude...If he no longer had God, how was he to do this? One of the first ways that occurred to him, as [Otto] Rank saw, was the "romantic solution"... The self-glorification that he needed in his innermost nature he now looked for in the love partner. The love partner becomes the divine ideal within which to fulfill one's life. All spiritual and moral needs now become focused in one individual....In one word, the love object is God....Man reached for a 'thou' when the world-view of the great religious community overseen by God died....ⁱ After all, what is it that we want when we elevate the love partner to the position of God? We want redemption —nothing less.

Some might say that Becker's cultural analysis is dated.

- We now live in "the hook-up culture," in which young people have turned sex into something ordinary, casual, and free from commitment.
- Fewer men and women actually date or have boyfriends and girlfriends.
- In the interest of gender equality, women have begun to say: "We deserve to have as much fun with our sexuality as guys do."

- There is growing peer pressure to engage in sex and not get too emotionally involved.ⁱⁱ Surely, then, our culture is moving away from any hopes in “apocalyptic romance.” Once we get over our lingering Puritanism, the argument goes, sex will be no big deal.
- b. Self-Love
- c. Enslavement

3. Abounding love is the **proof** of the spirit of God in our lives.

- a. In Galatians 5 Paul describes the ‘fruit’ of the Holy Spirit as ‘Love,’ which then produces joy, peace, etc. Paul prays that this fruit would abound in their life.
- b. Why doesn’t he pray for holiness to abound, or Purity to abound? Love, Paul says in Gal 5, is the fulfillment of the law.

a) Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

b) He also said, Gospel Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

c) Why? Why would it be a sign to all of lordship of Jesus? Love is counter-cultural.

B) HOW DOES PAUL PRAY FOR LOVE TO ABOUND

1) THROUGH KNOWLEDGE (Not Sentimentalism)

a) Notice it doesn’t begin with me and what I must feel, but with God, and what I must know to be true about Him.

b) We live in what’s called a **postmodern era**. Premodern epistemology or belief is a loose catchall category for what is common in Judeo-Christian epistemology before the Enlightenment period (prior to 18th Century).

i) For pre-moderns knowledge doesn’t begin with self, with me: It begins with God.

ii) There were however several atrocities to this era. It wasn’t as faithful an approach to God as some might think (Servetus the Atheist burned at the stake during Calvin’s Geneva).

iii) Premodern epistemology was usually tied to a fairly “open” universe: the connection between the universe and what God does is so “open that a firm, evidence-based, coherent, and predictive science of the physical world remains largely alien.

c) Enter modernism and Rene Descartes (17th Century), whose famous cogito ergo sum, “I think, therefore I am begins a new wave of epistemology that no longer begins with God, but with I.

i) Along came the rising epistemology of naturalism, the view that matter, energy, time, & space are all that is.

d) Enter Postmodernism: The idea that all foundational truth is neither desirable nor attainable. The knowledge that is spoken here is a knowledge of God.

- e) Jesus said, “sanctify them by Your truth, your word is truth (John 17:17). We grow in love through the renewing of our minds.
- f) This type of knowledge happens as you get to know someone intimately. Their love language. It doesn’t happen in a vacuum of knowledge. In other words growing in love is not simply a matter of sentimentalism.
- g) THE DANGER: Neither is this knowledge to be some weird religious knowledge that you get in Bible college.
 - i) It’s possible to have all knowledge, and all bible verses memorized, says Paul in 2 Cor 14, but if I’m not loving people, I’m like a loud annoying noise.
- h) Good will hunting

2) THROUGH DISCERNEMENT (DOING SOMETHING)

- a) Notice: love doesn’t just grow through **sentimentalism**, nor does it grow through **Cerebral-ism**. You’ve got to grow in discernment. You’ve got to know how to put the love of God into practice.
- b) Also, biblical love is bound up with *discernment*. This Greek noun occurs only here in the New Testament, but a related verb occurs in Hebrews: “But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” Hebrews 5:14
 - i) By putting love into practice we learn how we are to love practically. This happens often times through trial and error, failure and repentance.

b) A few of the ways that growing love is evidenced then is in

- i) How we Obey it

John 14:15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

John 14:21-23: Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” **23:** “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.

- ii) How We Say It: Paul verbalizes his love.
 - (1) Paul speaks his love
- iii) How We Show It: Paul shows it by praying and writing a letter.
 - (1) Dads, Husbands, wives, children, co-workers
- iv) How We Sacrifice:

(1) Although the Christians in Philippi were known for their generosity and love, some in the church failed to love because they did not want to sacrifice their position of respect, identity.

- c) Conservatives tend towards cerebral-ism, while liberals tend towards sentimentalism. The Gospel joins both. It is the news that Jesus has died on our behalf so that we can love others with the love he has shown to us.

C) LIFE GROUPS

- 1) All of this is why we feel so strongly about doing life together in our LifeGroups.
 - a) Love cannot flourish void of community. You should know that love does not grow in isolation from people.
 - i) The Enlightenment caused us to look inward and to create a sense of isolationism, and individualism.
 - ii) Because we were created in the image of God, we are to love one another in community.

II. FRUITFUL LIVING (1:10-11)

Because there will be a day of Harvest, When Jesus will separate the wheat from the chaff.

If God were not angry at injustice and deception and did not make a final end to violence—that God would not be worthy of worship.... The only means of prohibiting all recourse to violence by ourselves is to insist that violence is legitimate only if it comes from God... My thesis that the practice of non-violence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many... in the West.... [But] it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human non-violence [results from the belief in] God's refusal to judge. In a sun-scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die... [with] other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind.ⁱⁱⁱ

-Miroslav Volf

A) FRUITFUL LIVING COMES AS WE ARE TESTED

- 1) Paul prays that these believers would be able to “**approve the things that are excellent.**”
 - a) It is very often that we make good things in our lives, excellent things.
- 2) It is God's will to make us fruitful, like His Son to make us, notice the word, 'Pure,' or Sincere. The word literally means **sun tested**.
 - a) God desires to free us from replacing Him as the Excellent One, and thus turning good things [i.e., relationships, spouse, jobs, health, career, goals, friends, image] into excellent things.

Thus, the SON will test us, but we must count it worthy to suffer for His sake.

Think of Job

- We tend to set our lives up in ridiculously safe and comfortable ways. D.A Carson said, the last taboo subject is death.

3) He calls us to walk in the light with him, and with others as He is in the light.

B) FRUITFUL LIVING COMES AS WE LIVE FOR SOMETHING GREATER THAN OURSELVES

- 1) The Glory of God (v.11)
- 2) The Kingdom of God (v.10)
- 3) The Mission of God (v.5)
 - a) Yesterday I was talking to a guy [Kevin Kewley] that really doesn't want to be working where he's at but doesn't feel that Jesus has given him release from his Job
 - b) Billy's sees his neighborhood as a mission field, soccer team.
 - c) In what places or ways do you have opportunities to be a missionary?

III. FRUIT FROM ABIDING (1:11,8, 6)

A) YOU MUST REMEMBER TWO THINGS

1) What Jesus has done for you

Philippians 1:11: filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

It's because we've held on to position that Jesus left his glorious throne in heaven to humble himself for us proud sinners.

John 12:24-26: Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Because we eaten of the fruit of sin, Jesus came to live a fruitful life of perfect love so that we could turn to him to experience freedom from abandonment, fear.

He was abandoned on the cross in your place, so that you would never have to face abandonment.

It was Jesus who perfectly evidenced love: showing it, saying it, and sacrificing himself for you.

As a result we have been declared innocent. The Father now sees us as fruit bearers. We have what Theologians call:

- a) Imputation (Imputed Righteousness)
 - i) How can I as unrighteous sinner stand and be righteous in the eyes of a Holy God? The answer is here the righteousness that comes through Jesus. You are given a

new legal standing before God. We call this the doctrine of justification (Gift righteousness). Martin Luther called this the great exchange. 2 Cor 5:21 says...

a) Imparted (Imparted Righteousness)

- i) "The fruit of righteousness" You receive a new heart, new nature, new motivation. You have new nature, that's why we use words like born-again. Your new nature, new heart has new desires. You have a new power through the holy spirit. New community- you don't have to do it alone. You are now guided by truth (new instruction).

Philippians 1:6: And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

2) How He feels about you

For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. (1:8)

- a) Some of you have been abandoned by others, and you find it so difficult to love. Jesus knows loneliness and what it is to love others that are difficult to love.
- b) Do we dare say that God Almighty, the Holy One, is excited about the Philippians—problems and all? And can we apply that to you and me and say that God's face is aglow with affection toward us this morning, even though we too have varying remnants of selfishness and grumbling in our hearts? Doesn't the fact that we are still unholy demand God's countenance to be a stern one with a frown instead of a smile? O how many of you out there are laboring under a frowning God. You can't look into his face because he makes you think of your angry father or teacher or boss who is demanding perfection of you NOW! And you can't give it so he frowns and you are defeated and depressed.

1 John 3:16-18: By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

1 John 4:7-12-Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

B) YOU MUST REPENT OF TWO THINGS

- 1) The good things that you have made into excellent things, making you an idolator. (self-love)
- 2) The good deeds that you have done to make you excellent apart from grace, making you religious.

Abide In Christ: Live in relationship with Him & you will bear lasting fruit.

ⁱ Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: Free Press, 1973), 160.

ⁱⁱ There has been a wave of articles and books on this minor cultural shift. See the article by Barbara F. Meltz “Hooking Up is the rage, but is it healthy?” in *Boston Globe*, February 13, 2007. Also see Laura Sessions Stepp, *Unhooked: How Young Women Pursue Sex, Delay Love, and Lose at Both* (Riverhead, 2007.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Abingdon, 1996), pp. 303-04.