

## “Love Abounding in the Church”

June 30, 2013

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

Scripture Text: Philippians 1:1-11, ESV

### Greeting

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

### Thanksgiving and Prayer

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, <sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, <sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

God’s design for the family is perfect: one man committing himself in covenant to one woman for a lifetime and, through God’s blessing, bearing children as the fruit of their love and raising children for His glory. What a wonderful gift God has given to us to be enjoyed. God created the family to be a source of pure love and lasting affection in this world, even this broken, sinful world. That is why the church takes an interest in the institution of the family and of marriage itself. We see the family and marriage as God’s means to bring joy to our hearts, stability to society, and worship to God. What joy and power there is in just the simplicity of the family expressing itself according to God’s design.

This last week I had the opportunity to see two instances of the sweetness of family love demonstrated before me through the actions of children. On Tuesday I stopped by Pastor Fred’s office to greet him. His daughter, Julie, and his two grandchildren were there. I engaged little Rosie in conversation. She had such a winning smile as she approached me and smiled up at me. I asked her, “What fun things are you doing this summer?” She surprised me by saying, “We are taking walks.” I said, “O, great. Is there anything else fun you are doing this summer?” She told me they liked to go swimming. I asked, “Do you put your face in the water?” At that she looked at me as though I had just arrived from the moon and she shook her head, “No,” and said she did not understand why anyone would put their face in the water.

As we were having this conversation, her little sister came walking up, all smiles. Rosie looked at her sister, reached over and she kissed her on the cheek. What a beautiful demonstration of love that was. I asked, “Do you always show such love to your sister?” I looked at her mom and her mom was indicating maybe that is not always the case, but Rosie was affirming her absolute love for her sister.

The next day I was talking to a mom in our church who was attending the home-school conference. She had her little daughter perched in her left arm as we talked. Suddenly, the older son came running up to her and he just buried his face in his mom’s hip. You could tell he was really hurting. Something happened in the gym and he had hurt his head. He was doing all he could to keep the tears from running down from his eyes. His mom asked what happened and he said he got hit in the head. The little sister, from the arms of mom, reached way over and gently patted him on the head. She wanted to nurse him back to comfort and free him from his pain.

These were two precious, sweet demonstrations of love in the family – one by a sister who, for no apparent reason, wanted to let her sister know she loved her. Another was by a sister who recognized a brother in pain and wanted her love to bring him comfort.

Another interesting part of that story is Rosie said to me, “I had a dream I kissed my sister on the cheek.” Is that not a great dream?

We consider out text, the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi. Right away we observe God’s design for the church is very similar to His design for the family. Namely, the church is, also, to be a source of pure love and lasting affection in this broken world. Scripture calls the church, “God’s household,” and “God’s family.” It uses family terms to describe our family relationships, that we all call God, “Our Father,” and we call each other “brothers and sisters.” This family idea is presented in Scripture so we would view relational love as central to our identity within the church.

Love within the church is bound together by something much stronger than blood and the physical family. This love is bound together by Christ Himself. Our mutual union with Jesus glues us together as a spiritual family in Him so every believer is a part of a three-strand bond of love. One strand is ourselves. One strand is others in the body. One strand is Christ Himself. Bound together we form this bond of love that is oh so precious and oh so powerful. We are bound together in love for the glory of God the Father.

Nothing truly good can happen in the church when relational loves wanes. In preparing the apostles to begin the church, Jesus says to them, in John 13,

*<sup>34</sup> “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”*

Without love the church’s ability to worship God and proclaim His Truth to our world is negated. We become nothing more than noisy gongs and clanging symbols.<sup>1</sup> We become irrelevant and unnecessary.

Someone may say, “I am not much of a people person. I intentionally lay low in building relationships within the church because I am an introvert by nature.” I understand. I consider myself an introvert by nature. Left on my own this is exactly how I would think and act, but my union with Jesus challenges me outside of the natural boundaries my selfish self would lay upon me to make relational love within this body a priority. Jesus urges me out of my comfort and into the lives of others.

In John 13, Jesus continues,

*<sup>35</sup> “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

This is in the context of this family: one-another love. It is not love, necessarily, for those outside of the family, though that is, also, to be an attribute of the church, but most central to us is that we love one another. The Apostle John continues on this vein as he was one in that Upper Room when Jesus shared these truths with him. In his epistle, he writes this,

<sup>1</sup> John 4:21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

This is what it means to be born again. This is the change that happens. Everyone who is born of God loves their brother. Relational love is not an item on a menu we can order if it suits our taste. Relational love within the church is like blood in our veins: it carries life for it. Without it we die. For this reason, every member of the family of God rightly asks, “How might love abound in me so that love would abound in Jesus’ church?”

I ask, would you be brave enough to ask that question? I believe this takes bravery, because if you ask it sincerely, I believe the Holy Spirit will answer it. If He answers it, the application is going to challenge us. It will disrupt our routine, our schedule, and our natural desires.

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1

In our text we discover the Apostle Paul provides, first, a great example of love for us, as well as some precepts and instructions as to how we might have love abound in our midst. We will consider four specific means for love to abound within the church. Paul is going to write this letter out of deep affection for the church,

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart...<sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more...

Verse 9 is central to tying the first eleven verses together. Paul has been deeply loved by this church in Philippi. They have given sacrificially to him so God would supply all of his needs through their sweet love to him, and Paul recognizes that. And, he has loved them. He has loved them from the beginning when he first arrived in Philippi, in Acts 16, and shared the Gospel with Lydia, set the slave girl free from demonic possession, sang hymns in a Philippian prison, and shared the Gospel with that Philippian jailer and all his family. He loved them and he has loved them these twelve years. There has been great, deep bonds which have been formed and fashioned as a result of the love of Christ.

This provides for us an example of what church can be, what it should be, what it ought to be, and what it was designed to be. I trust, as we consider these four means for love to abound within the church, God will encourage our hearts so love might, first, abound in our individual soul and then abound within this church more and more and more.

The first couple of verses give an introduction,

<sup>1</sup> Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Christ...<sup>2</sup>

Paul recognizes he is not his own. He has been bought with a price and he is not to think his own thoughts or to act according to his own agenda. It is all about Christ and whatever message gives to him, that is the message he is to present. Whatever attitude Christ calls him to, that is the attitude he is going to have. Whatever actions and agenda Christ tells him to accomplish, that is what he is going to do with his life. And, he does so with great joy because he recognizes that mastery to Christ is the only way to true freedom, that he was born in slavery to sin and every form of mastery sin has over us is a mastery that is cruel, punishing, robbing, and emptying.

Now, Christ has liberated him so he can claim he is a bondservant of Christ and for him to live is Christ<sup>3</sup> and there is no greater joy. How is it being a slave can create so much joy? It is because of who our Master is. He is not a task master who reigns and rules over us cruelly, but He is the Master who loves us and who gave Himself up for us. He is not ashamed to call us “brothers”. Is that not amazing?

He cause us to enter into His very own inheritance, an inheritance which is His by right of nature but which is ours by grace provided in Him and through Him. Paul exults he is a bondservant of Jesus Christ. Are you a slave of Christ? Do you submit to His will and not to your own? That is what a Christian is and that is what it means to be a follower of Christ. When we are bondservants of Christ, we are free.

When Paul says, “to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus,” he is not speaking to some of the saints or some of the saints he particularly likes, but he is speaking to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus. It is Christ who forms the center of our relationship. We are in Christ together and that is what binds us together as a church. Our commonality is Christ.

Think of the variations of people who comprised the church at Philippi. There is a business woman by the name of Lydia. There is a Roman jailer and his household. I believe there is the slave girl who has been liberated from demonic possession. And, there are others who have come to know Christ. None of these people have anything in common with one another, yet in Christ they have everything in common. There is a fellowship and in writing to the church, he says, “with the overseers and deacons”. Paul wants the spiritual leaders to know they have a sacred responsibility.

---

<sup>2</sup> New King James Version (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> Philippians 1:21

Everyone has a responsibility, but in particular there were spiritual leaders who have been established in the church and who possessed identified and qualified leadership. There was structure and organization with that early church. Overseers and elders were the same office. Deacons were those who ministered mercy within the congregation. Together, they were to read this letter with particular attention, knowing their impact upon the church was great and they needed to live it out and teach it. Then Paul says,

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This order of greeting is important. Grace always precedes peace. If a man or woman does not possess the grace of God, if they have not received God's grace by faith, they cannot possess peace of any kind. There is not peace with God so that they have a right relationship with Him. There is not a peace of God so that their heart is still in the midst of a world in chaos. Do you have the peace God offers in Christ? Do you have peace with Him so you know you are right with God and your life is right with God? Do you know that because you have Christ?

Do you have the peace of God so that in the midst of all this crazy chaos in this world, in all the conflict, in all the difficulty, in all the temptations, and in all of your own failings there is a peace that rests upon you and overpowers every anxiety, every fear, every concern and every dark thought? That is available for those who are in Christ – grace and peace.

**There are four means for love to abound within the church. First, we thank God for one another.** How important it is for us to take time and thank God for one another. What a power it is to bring love to abound in our hearts and in our church if we simply practice what Paul does,

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, <sup>4</sup> always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, <sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

There are two enemies of love within the church and giving thanks is the medicine for both of them. The first enemy of love within the church is bitterness. Someone hurts us and our heart closes toward them. Someone wrongs us and we begin to back away. A heart once opened to that individual says, "I am not going to be as opened because if I remain open I will be hurt again and I do not want that. Furthermore, I resent what they have already done. It is no longer my natural joy to enter into this love relationship with them. I am going to begin closing my heart." Bitterness is the death of love within the church and bitterness cannot grow in the soil of gratitude and thanksgiving Paul is cultivating.

The second enemy of love within the church is neglect. Neglect simply means we do that which comes natural to us. We look after our own interests. We see only what is in front of us and the things that affect our own lives and the lives of our children. We fail to see the needs others have or consider them because we are so busy with our own life. Our own stuff is consumed in our time and attention and we simply do not have time to love anymore.

Neglect is the death of love within the church. It is much more subtle because we can usually tell when bitterness or resentment enters in because we can feel it. Neglect is something that does not have a feeling; it just is. We are carried along by the currents of life.

The Apostle Paul takes time to stop and write, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you." He is letting the church at Philippi know he thinks of them and he remembers them, and as he remembers them he takes time to thank God for them. He is forever grateful to this Philippian church and the individuals in it for their friendship and partnership in the Gospel. Before he intercedes for their needs, he thanks God for them as people.

Do you do this when you pray? I acknowledge I am challenged by this. I ask myself, "Do I stop and thank God for specific people in the church and spend time thanking God for them before I mention the prayer requests given to me of their physical needs, emotional needs, or relational hurts? Before I begin to intercede in that way do I simply take time and say, 'God, thank you. Let me tell you why I am thankful for this person.'" I believe if we took the time, love would grow and it would abound more and more.

When we pray, we often launch into prayer requests do we not? I know this is my natural habit. Perhaps we have learned some principles about prayer and we make a habit of giving praise to God and exulting in Him for His

attributes and His gracious works on our behalf. Paul challenges us, in this text, to take some time to simply thank God for the people He has placed in our church.

I believe our heart toward others in our church would change if we simply did this. Paul thankful remembrance does not reflect the passing moment of interest where he would say, “I am kind of casually thinking about you,” but it reflects a practice discipline of love that was a part of his life. Paul spent some time just remembering and he is remembering to thank God for them. That does not mean every memory was a sweet and wonderful memory, but he took time, even with the difficult people, to thank God for them.

Notice the words “all”, “always”, and “every” in the text: Verse 1 – “To all the saints who are in Christ Jesus...”; Verse 3 – “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...”; Verse 4 – “Always in every prayer of mine for you all making prayer with joy...”; Verse 7 – “It is right for me to feel this way about you all...”; Verse 8 – “For God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.” Paul is not giving thanks to God for just some of the people, but he is giving thanks for all of the people and it is very deliberate. That is why the words are the way they are. He is very deliberate in letting them know not one person is outside of his sphere of joyful thanksgiving to God.

This is important because some people are easier to give thanks to God over than others, but that does not negate the need for us to give thanks to God for them.

Why would Paul give thanks to God for every person God would set into a church family?

<sup>5</sup> because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.

Some translations use the word “fellowship”. Both of these words come from the word *koinonia*, a Greek word meaning fellowship. Paul thanks God for them because God had made them partners through His Gospel work in their lives. God joined them together in the same family and there is a common bond being enjoyed.

These believers in Philippi are partners in the same two ways we are partners in the Gospel. Regardless of the differences in the background we have in this church we are partners. First, it is by means of relationship and, second, by means of mission. Both of these ideas are in view.

First, a partnership in the Gospel means we have a new relationship with God as our Father and thus we have a new relationship with one another. We are His children through faith according to His grace that was given to us in Christ Jesus. God’s Gospel brings new relationship and our fellowship with Christ, this new relationship, glues us together as a family.

All of us are invited to sit down at God’s table and feast on the gracious table He has set before us. Being adopted into His family we are all invited. What joy it is we experience together in Christ because of Christ. The Apostle Paul remembers the first day this happened. He remembers walking in the streets of Philippi and there was not one believer anywhere in the city. Paul remembers how God opened Lydia’s heart and she became a sister, along with her whole household. Paul remembers how he was invited into her home, a Jew who was raised a Pharisee, and with this Gentile business woman it was as though there was a bond they shared from the first day.

The same was true of the demonic slave girl when she was liberated and the Philippian jailer who was Roman and the Romans resented the Jews. Yet, when he and his household came to Christ, all were one in Christ.

It was not only the relationship Paul was thankful for, but it was also the mission they shared. He recognized when they have Christ everything about their purpose changes and they realize it is all about Christ. It is all about proclaiming Christ Jesus as Lord and the mission is shared necessarily because the mission cannot be accomplished apart from one another. There is a fellowship and a partnership.

J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a famous book entitled The Fellowship of the Ring.<sup>4</sup> As we remember the story, the fellowship is made up of a number of different kinds of persons, four hobbits and two men. There was one wizard, one elf, and a

---

<sup>4</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Ballantine Books, New York, 1954.

dwarf. These people would never get together except for the fellowship, a partnership and a mission. Darkness and evil was threatening to destroy the world and this fellowship was brought together to do something about that. I believe J.R.R. Tolkien was referencing the church. One would never have a dwarf and an elf in the same room and have peace, yet here they were. The mission ultimately caused them, first, to join together and then to actually love one another.

In the church is it our mission, it is our partnership in the Gospel, it is Christ in us, and it is the call of God to do something about the dark evil taking over this world and do something together that feeds our love for one another. One principle I encourage you with, regarding the obstacle of bitterness, when fellow-Christian offences consume our thoughts about them we loose sight of the wonder of God's grace in our life and the wonder of His grace in theirs. And, we loose sight of the mission God has given to us to share. What a horrible lose that is for each and every one of us.

The Apostle Paul feeds his love for the Philippian church members by remembering them in thankful prayer.

The past several weeks have been rather busy for us in the Boerckel home. We had a little flood in the basement and we are preparing for our son's wedding in a couple of weeks. We have several boxes of pictures, which are not organized, and we have been taking them out and looking at them. One of the really great aspects of this whole endeavor is we found many pictures of many of you from ten to fifteen years ago. You have not changed but your children have. We looked at some of the picture cards sent to us and they cause us to remember and as we remember my heart begins to think of that relationship way back then and continuing on to the present. I began to give thanks for you and as I gave thanks for you I began to have a greater love for you. It is remembering that helps to feed love. How good it is to take time to remember.

**The second means for love to abound in the church is: we rejoice in God's sovereign work in our lives,**

<sup>6</sup> 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.

What an awesome verse that is! This is a great verse regarding the Doctrine of Perseverance. I could preach an entire series of sermons on this one verse. The good work mentioned here, begun and finished by God, is the work of bringing a person who was dead in their trespasses of sin, making them alive, and ultimately fashioning and forming them in the conformity of Jesus Christ. It is a work of salvation.

Remembering back to the study of Acts 16, we remember dear Lydia, the praying, religious woman Paul met by the river, and how the Lord needed to open her heart.<sup>5</sup> God did this work in her she could have never done for herself. She would have never opened her heart to God had not God opened her heart to the Gospel and to Jesus Christ so she would receive Him.

This is certainly true of the Philippian jailer. How would you get a toughened, hardened Roman jailer to hear the message the first day and on that first day give his life to Christ and commit himself wholly to Christ. God was supernaturally opening his heart so he would receive the message of the Gospel, receive Christ Himself, and find new life in Him.

Paul's reference, "he who began a good work in you," refers to God who began the good work and the good work is our salvation. What will God continue to do? He will bring it to completion and that is an absolute promise. If we did not understand the absoluteness of the absolute promise, Paul tacks on the beginning, "I am sure of this, I am absolutely confident of this. I know I am about ready to make a statement that is hard to believe, but here it is: who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. What God begins, God finishes."

The principle we learn is: it is not our grip on God that gives us confidence in our future, it is God's grip upon us. God never leaves a construction project unfinished. Indeed, some may show slow progress, but rest assured, if God has truly begun a good work of salvation in our life, He will finish it on the day Jesus Christ manifests Himself in power

---

<sup>5</sup> Acts 16:6-15, "God Opens Doors," August 28, 2005

and in glory and we stand before Him. Beloved, do not let Satan discourage us in our failings. God will continue His work and He will not give up on us.

To be sure, we are not passive puppets in all of this work, but God is the One who is effectively working. We will discuss this further as we work our way through this letter. We are holding onto Him in faith and we are following His instructions in faith as He does the work.

How does this confidence that the work God began in us will be carried on to completion? How does it motivate love for other people in the body? That is a great question and I am glad you asked it. Because we know God is going to complete the work it is exciting to be a part of it. God uses our love, our encouragement, our instructions, our correction to complete the work He is doing in each person.

Imagine we could take a trip back in time some forty years ago and you are teaching third or fourth grade. In your classroom is little Billy Gates. You have an opportunity to teach him and to influence his life, only you have seen the future and you know what Billy Gates is going to do. Would you be motivated to spend some time with little Billy? Or, would you say, "I do not want to be any part of that." No, you would say, "Look at what he accomplished and it would be awesome to be a part of someone like that early on because this is what it will be like in the end. I already know that so let me invest now."

What about little Billy Graham. To have little Billy Graham in your Sunday school class we might need to go back eighty years ago. Would you want to be a part of that? Absolutely, you would. You know how it ends. This is the discouragement about love: if I love this person I do not know if it is going to make a hill of difference and have any effect at all. I may invest and invest and invest and nothing may happen. That is truly discouraging.

The Apostle Paul says, "This is what we are confident about when we work in the church with each other. We are confident the One who began a good work in every one of us will bring it to completion and we will be able to stand on that day and say, 'Wow! Look at what happened. Look at what God did by using little me in having a little part in this.'" Is that exciting and does that motivate our love? We rejoice in God's sovereign work in our lives.

**The third means for love to abound within the church is: we communicate our desire to deepen our relationships with one another,**

<sup>7</sup> It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Paul speaks of the imprisonment in Philippi and the imprisonment in Rome twelve years later and he reminds them they are on this mission together. The point to see is Paul did not keep his love for the Philippian believers quiet. He set his love to words and what an example this is we find here.

Why do you believe Paul told the Philippian believers, "I hold you in my heart." He recognized the need to use loving words to communicate love so love would have its right and powerful affect within the church. If that were not enough to say, as a manly man to other men in the church, as well as women and children, I hold you in my heart. Paul doubles down on his loving words,

<sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

The word "affection" is a strong, visceral word and it is very graphic. He felt this love in his gut and he could feel the affection for the church. Paul desires so much for the Philippians to know he loves them that he even calls God as his witness. Is that necessary? Could he not have simply said, "I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." No, he wanted them to know he was so serious about this. It was not to be a superficial hug and an, "I love you, man." Paul is telling them he is calling God as his witness as to how sincere, how deep, and how meaningful the words are he is about to speak. He yearned for them in his heart. He loved them with the affection of Jesus Christ.

Paul will continue to use these loving words throughout the letter,

<sup>2:12</sup> Therefore, my beloved...

<sup>4:1</sup>Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown...my beloved.

Are loving words necessary to communicate love? I believe the answer to that question is, "Yes!" Actions are necessary, also, but just as words without actions lose their power, so actions without words lose their power. Words are not superfluous; they are not extraneous. Too many people remain silent regarding their love for one another and I speak especially to we men. Speaking words of love often seem awkward and uncomfortable, perhaps even embarrassing, but Paul shows us a better way.

Paul is moving toward them in love. He enjoys these saints. He learns from them. He is opening his life to them. He is wanting to receive them in. He is communicating that with words. Words are God's powerful tools to open hearts and grow love in His church.

There are many words people have spoken to men which have been powerfully influential. Let me share one man's words. As I was reading this, I particularly gave praise to God because I had not spent a lot of time with this individual, but he will send me e-mails and an occasional card. He will write such loving words about how much he cares about me and appreciates me. Every time I read them I am humbled.

When I read those words, from a person I have not spent a lot of time with and someone I have not given much to in terms of individual attention, do you know what those words motivate me to do? They motivate me, first, to be a better friend and to live up to them, but they also motivate me to love him in return. They motivate me toward a deeper love. That is why speaking words within the context of the church to others in the church is so powerful. It is not only an expression that glorifies God Himself, but it is a fuel that set a fire within the church which God intends to release so God's love will dominate and abound more and more and more.

I urge you to begin to use words to express love to other brothers and sisters in this church, whether it is through e-mail, text messaging, face-to-face communication, or a phone call. Some of you may be thinking, as you consider this application, "Awkward! This is not me!" The only way to overcome the feelings of awkwardness is to do the very thing that seems awkward. There are no other means I know of to overcome the feelings of awkwardness than to do the very thing that seems awkward and to do it over a long period of time.

My dad grew up in a home where his dad, nor his mom, ever hugged him. He was loved, but they never showed physical affection or these words of love. Growing up my dad was transformed by the power of Christ just before he married my mom and began a family. His parents were not born again as he was growing up. I remember, as a little kid, my mom's soft, comfortable hugs and her words, "I love you." My dad was committed to loving me and to demonstrating that. He would hug me, but I would feel a stiffness that was different. He would tell me he loved me, but it seemed as though he was getting the words out. I knew he meant them when he said them, but it seemed as though he was in an awkward place.

He did that over the course of my life so that, by the last ten years or so of my life, when I hugged my dad it seemed so natural. His words just seemed to flow because he said awkwardness was not going to keep him from expressing words and actions which communicate love. I thank God for that because then I did not have to deal with some of the things he had to deal with in that regard.

**The fourth means for love to abound within the church is: we pray for one another's love to abound,**

<sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment...

I believe this forms the center of this whole section of this text. This is what Paul is driving at and this is what is on his heart. Why did Paul pray, "that you love may abound more and more"?

Paul understood without love the church cannot be the church. Without love the church cannot bring glory to God. Without love the church cannot be light in a dark world. He is praying with God's priorities in view, "This is God's heart and I am praying God's heart for you."



Paul knows God alone can give this love. This love is not manufactured by people who say they will be the most loving church in the town. That is not how love abounds and that is why he prays, “God, do something here. We are not passive in it, but we are also not in control of it.”

Love is the fruit of God’s Spirit at work in His people. It is not the result of our efforts to be as loving as we possibly can. Often times that is where we get off track and we believe we can change our heart and our culture by doing things to change that, but it must be God’s Spirit so that is why Paul prays for other’s love to abound more and more and more.

This is a church that already loves well, but it is a church that could continue to experience more of God’s love and to demonstrate more of God’s love in their assembly.

We will discover there is some friction that exists that threatens the very love found in this church at Philippi. Paul prays passionately to God, “Here is what God would do – that He would love and He would send His love and the churches love would abound more and more.”

Perhaps you have come to a point where you have met a danger in your life and you think to yourself, “I believe I love enough. Love has been costly to me and it is costing me much now. I do not have more love to give. My love plate is full. I cannot be more ‘others’ oriented.” I know our natural hearts want to close so we are free from the pursuit of loving more and more, but Scripture does not allow it and Paul’s prayer does not allow it. Wherever we are in love we cannot say, “My love plate is full.”

Paul says, “I pray that your love might abound.” The truth Paul understand is the more we love is not the less we have, but the more we love the more we have and the more joy we have that is true and sure. I know, and Paul knows, love is costly and it is not convenient. It disrupts our peace and our schedule. It demands financial resources and it invites a world of frustrations and disappointments. Paul knows all of that, but he also knows if we abound more and more in love we will abound more and more in God’s Spirit, more and more in joy, and more and more in Christ and Christ is life.

Many hear the Bible upside down. Some will hear this message and think, “Yeah, why isn’t the church more loving? The church has not been as loving to me as it should be. It needs to be more loving. I hope everybody is listening.”

First, I say to you, if that is a thought rolling through your head, I apologize and I am truly sorry and I pray God will change this so you and others like you will experience love the way Christ intends.

Secondly, I must encourage you, if you are believer in Christ, the way of love is outward, it is not inward. I do not contribute to love by asking to be loved. A number of reasons might be hindering you from this outward perspective regarding love. First, you may not have received God’s love, yet, through the Gospel so you are empty and there is a big reason why you can have that perspective because God is not shining His love abroad in your heart. I want you to know God invites you into His love and receive it so your love will be made full and all those needs for love are meant in Him and you can be an instrument of shining love outward.

Are you in Christ? Have you believed in Him and committed your way to Him so you receive His life inside of you? Has His love made you complete?

If you are a believer, you may have sin and selfishness controlling your heart. God says in great tenderness to us, when He corrects us He does so in love so the sin and selfishness can be removed so we might experience what He intends and the church might be the church,

<sup>3</sup> I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...<sup>9</sup> And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,<sup>10</sup> so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,<sup>11</sup> filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.