

Please turn with me in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 1. We are continuing our look at this letter of Paul, building upon what we just saw previously in the opening verses of this chapter. Remember that Paul is writing this letter as an encouragement to those believers who are at Philippi, and last week we saw that he urged the Philippian believers to persevere to the end as those who are in Christ, and he gave them encouragements in their perseverance. Here in our text this morning, in verses 9 through 11, Paul continues this theme by praying for these saints and the fruit of their perseverance. So hear now the Word of our Lord from Philippians chapter 1 beginning at verse 9.

Read Philippians 1:9-11

Pray

Most of you here have met my two daughters, Esther and Lois. One thing that has amazed me over the last four years of being a father is how much and how quickly they have grown. My grandmother used to say to me and my brothers when we were kids that we were growing like weeds. If you know anything about yard care or gardening then you know that weeds can sprout up and grow in an incredibly short period of time. And if you have kids yourself then you know that this saying is true of children. They grow up incredibly fast. They soak up so much information that they grow and mature at a great speed. Lois right now is learning new words, and it seems like a day doesn't go by in which she has learned something new. Esther right now is learning how to add numbers. It's cute to see how much she loved sitting at her table and working in this simple addition workbook that she calls her homework. While it is cute to see this take place, we all understand that it is necessary to the human life. Growing and learning and maturing are necessary in becoming who you are as a person, and anyone will tell you that it never ends. From the day you are born until the day you die you will always be growing and learning and maturing. And just as that is true of all of us in regards to our physical selves, it is equally true of all of us spiritually. Growing and

learning and maturing are essential elements of the Christian life. From the day you were united to Christ until the day you pass on into glory you ought to always be advancing. Here in our text we see that this is the prayer of the apostle Paul in regards to these saints in Philippi; it is with this in mind that “always and in every prayer” Paul makes his request with joy. And it is after this pray of the apostle that we must model our prayers for ourselves and for one another. So, dear believer, the exhortation to you this morning is to pray for growth in your Christian life. We will consider this exhortation in the areas in which you ought to pray for growth: first, pray for growth in love; next, pray for growth in knowledge; and finally, pray for growth in righteousness.

First, pray for growth in love. The apostle writes, “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more.” Love is absolutely essential to a Christian: without that, whatever else we may possess, we are only as sounding brass or crashing cymbals. There is no mention here of what the object of the love that the Philippian believers are to grow in is, but we can use the rest of Scripture to see what Paul is speaking of. Because he is writing in regards to growing in the Christian life, it is the basic principles of Christianity that he must have in mind; namely, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Matthew 22:37-39) The love that is mentioned is their love to God, and one another, and all men. Love is the fulfilling both of the law and the Gospel. We must love God because of His infinite excellence and loveliness, and love our brothers because of what we see of the image of God upon them. Friends you must grow in your love for God. You must meditate upon the things which He has done for you. Take time over this next week and simply meditate upon the wonderful work of the Lord. Oftentimes we become so busy with the things of this world, with the matters of life, that we fail to sit back and recognize that the God of this universe has created all things, sustains all things, works all things according to His divine purpose,

and has granted you salvation through the blood of His own Son. When was the last time you were able to truly proclaim with the expression of the heart what the psalmist saying in Psalm 8, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? ... O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” Friends, if you are not growing in love for God then there is cause to question your standing before Him. Jehovah is a jealous God and He will not give His glory to another. If you have time and desire to grow in love for the Cubs or the Bears or, preaching to my own heart, the Crimson Tide, how much more ought you have the time and desire to grow in love for the one who purchased your redemption with His own life. Do not become content with your love for God, but instead be earnestly praying that it would abound yet more and more.

And growing in love for God must necessarily lead to growing in love for one another. I’m convinced by my own personal experience that loving other people is one of the hardest things we have to do in this life. People are messy. They have baggage which makes things difficult. It sometimes makes building and maintaining relationships seem more like a chore than a joy. Combine that with the fact that we are all sinful creatures who sin against one another and you have the making for an incredibly difficult task. But as difficult as it may be, loving one another is not simply something that we should do, it is something that we are commanded to do. The Christian life is a life of being involved in the mess of people’s lives and caring for them in that. It is a life of forgiving one another just as God in Christ Jesus has forgiven you. It is a life of living with one another, caring for one another, fellowshiping with one another, praying for one another, discipling one another, and loving one another. Love is not an option for a Christian; love is not to be held hostage by our changing emotions. Love is an attitude that we cultivate and a pattern of behavior that we embrace. This isn’t the fleeting love that we experience in a worldly emotional sense, but is a true and genuine abiding love that is rooted in something that is

everlasting. It is rooted in our union with Christ. And just as our union with Christ cannot be broken, cannot be shaken, cannot be moved, so must it be with our love for one another. Nothing can be done which breaks the bond of love that we have for one another. Our love for God therefore, and to His people, should be daily nurtured and strengthened by an increasing acquaintance with them. How can you say you have love for one another if you are not taking the time to be involved in each other's lives? If I never spent any time with my wife, if I never spoke to her other than in passing, would you believe me when if I said I love her? Of course not. Love necessitates a relationship. If we are to grow in love for one another then we must pursue that love, that relationship which is essential. And just as Paul recognized in the saints in Philippi, we must recognize within this body that that love is there. Yet we must pray that it would abound more and more. Friends, pray for growth in love.

That love for God and for one another must be based upon something true, something solid, something unshakable. Yes, it is rooted in your union with Christ, but you have an intellectual starting point upon which for love to abound more and more. We cannot simply have zeal, but we must have knowledge as well as the Proverbs tell us. So that leads to the second area of the Christian life in which you must pray for growth: pray for growth in knowledge. Look with me back at our text, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ." Much of modern Christianity has become anti-intellectual; it shuns deep intimate study of matters of doctrine and theology. But that ought not be us, because we are a doctrinal people; Christianity is a doctrinal religion, and it is one in which knowledge is essential. So we must take great care that the knowledge we are pursuing is knowledge of the Lord which is found only in His Word. We should not be satisfied with that speculative knowledge which may be gained from men and books; but we should seek that spiritual discernment, which nothing but the

operation of the Spirit of God upon the soul can produce. Friends, you must be in the Word, studying it, meditating upon it, gleaning from it the wisdom which is contained therein. “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” Be that blessed man that we just sang of in Psalm 1 who, through being united with Christ, does love the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night. Dig in to the deep things of Scripture, the things that cause you to stop and ponder, the things which take time to digest and discern, the “things that are excellent” as Paul calls it.

Do not be satisfied with a diet of milk only, but consume the meat of the Word and fatness thereof. It is there that you will grow in knowledge and all judgement. How can you possibly discern truth from error if you have not sought to obtain knowledge of those things which are true? How many stumbling blocks Satan from time to time throws in our way, with the view of either stopping our course altogether, or impeding it, every one of us knows from his own experience. Brothers and sisters, the milk of the Word is sufficient to bring you to a recognition of your sinfulness and need for a savior, but you must press on from the elementary things. This world is full of those who are of antichrist who seek to deceive the saints of God. I have friends, dear friends who I believe are true saints, who are being deceived by the subtleties of false teachers. It is easy to discern the truth from error when it comes to the overt ways in which Satan seeks to deceive. It is much more difficult when it comes to the subtle ways, especially when those subtle ways are clouded in orthodox Reformed language. That is what makes doctrines like Federal Vision so dangerous. That is what makes ideas like the New Perspective on Paul so deadly. Men like Doug Wilson, Peter Leithart, and NT Wright use flowery language and scholarly phrases, they redefine standard Christian terms, and they are deceiving those within Christ’s Church. You may be sitting there thinking to yourself that you will never be one of those who are

deceived by these things, but how can you be sure if you do not have knowledge and judgement to combat these false teachings? If you do not know what the Scriptures teach concerning the doctrine of justification by faith alone or what the Scriptures teach concerning the nature of the covenants or what the Scriptures teach concerning union with Christ then you are in danger of falling prey to the enticing words of man. I have know people who once appeared to be true believers in Christ who were deceived by these false teachings and ultimately wedded themselves to the Antichrist by joining the Roman Church. Friends, you must grow in knowledge of the things of God lest you too be blown about by every wind of doctrine.

But there is another warning which must be heeded as well. In your pursuit of knowledge you must not forget what comes first, love. It is by love that our knowledge and judgement abounds more and more. John Calvin once said, “Doctrine without zeal is either like a sword in the hand of a madman, or else it lieth still as cold and without use, or else it serveth for vain and wicked boasting.” Do not become a cold-hearted intellectual, because you will tear people down and bring shame upon the name of Jesus Christ as you wield the sword of the Spirit in an unruly manner. Instead let it be your love for God and for one another that pushes you forward to a greater knowledge of those excellent things. Let it be for the glory of God and the edification of the Church that you pursue such knowledge. Friends, do not be content with milk, but instead feast upon the meat which Jehovah in His bounty has graciously given to you. Pray for growth in knowledge.

This growing in love, this growing in knowledge, must impact the way you live your life. So this leads us now to consider the final area in which you must pray for growth in your Christian life: pray for growth in righteousness. Look with me at verse 11, “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” This love for God and one another, this growth in the knowledge of the things of the Lord, is made manifest by obedience to His law. Consider the law of the Lord given at

Mount Sinai from Exodus 20. This is the law which you are to keep. This law was not given simply to the Israelites in the wilderness; this law was given to you, Christian, as a rule for your life. There's no salvation that's found in keeping the law, but it's an expression of the salvation that you already have. That's made clear in Exodus 20 when the Lord gives the law. He says, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage...", and then He gives the law. It's out of redemption that the law comes. So we must remember this: if we are to grow in our Christian lives, we have to obey His law. And not out of a sense of working towards gaining merit, but out of a sense of gratitude for what He has done in our lives already. And it's not just simply obeying; it's meditating on; it's living. It should shape every aspect of your life. Consider once again the words of Psalm 1, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

The only way you can walk in the way in which He walked is if you know the way in which He walked. You have to be in the Word. Study the life of Christ, because it's the example by which you are to live as well. And know that it's not on your own that you're able to do these things, but it's through the power of the Spirit working in you. You can't do these things on your own. No, you need the Spirit to empower you to fulfill this command. This is how you can grow in righteousness, by depending upon the Spirit to work obedience and righteousness within you. The fruits of righteousness, brought forth for the glory of God and edification of his church, should really fill us, and wholly take us up. Do not fear being emptied by bringing forth the fruits of righteousness, for you will be filled with them. These fruits are by Jesus Christ, by his strength and grace, for without him we can do nothing. Charles Simeon writes, "If we increase in a spiritual perception of the excellency and importance of the Gospel, we cannot fail of being stirred up to activity and diligence in the ways of God: we shall not be satisfied with bringing

forth thirty or sixty-fold, but shall labour to bring forth fruit an hundred-fold, and to be 'filled with' it in all seasons, and under all circumstances."

Friends, examine your life. Do you love the law of the Lord? Do you meditate on it day and night? Do you walk and talk and act like this world which is lost and dead in sin, or do you walk and talk and act like Christ who you claim to be united to? Scripture says you will know a tree by the fruit that it bears. What kind of fruit are you bearing? Is it the fruit of righteousness that Paul sees within the saints at Philippi, or is it the rotten fruit of worldliness that does nothing but poison the soul? Paul tells us in Hebrews 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." Growing in righteousness is simply that sanctification without which there will be no glorification. What does Paul say in Galatians 5, "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." If we are marked by these things; if we are habitually practicing and living in sin; there will be no glorification; we will not see the Lord. This does not mean that if we struggle with sin and temptation that we should doubt our salvation. This passage and others like it speak of the unrepentant habitual sinner. However, if there is not at least a yearning in our hearts to be holy as God is holy, then we ought to wonder if we are saved. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Sooner could a fish live in a tree than the wicked in paradise." God in His perfect holiness calls us to be holy, because unholiness can not dwell in the presence of holiness. We are called to be transformed into His likeness through the power of the Spirit dwelling in us.

And this obedience, this growth in righteousness is not for our own vainglory, but is for the glory of God alone. "Being filled with

the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” This ought to be the end result of everything that we do. Just as our love for God and one another ought to bring us to rejoicing, just as our pursuit of knowledge ought to cause us to praise, our growth in righteousness ought to bring a psalm to our lips magnifying the work of the Spirit within us. This is the purpose for it all, to praise and glorify the Lord of glory in all that we do. And it is by your union with Christ that this will be accomplished. But do not lose heart, dear saints, when the progress is not as fast as you would like it to be. This is a work which takes time, but Paul gives us the assurance of the Lord that He will do this “till the day of Christ.” We must continue to the end blameless, that we may be presented so at the day of Christ. He will present the church without spot or wrinkle as Ephesians 5:27 tells us, and present believers faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, Jude 24.

Brothers and sisters, let the prayer of Paul for the saints in Philippi be the model for your prayers here. Cry out to the Lord of the harvest to bring forth the increase. Continue to abound more and more in love for God and for one another. Christ says, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Continue to seek out wisdom and knowledge which is found perfectly and infallibly in the Word of God. Meditate on the Word day and night. Seek out the wisdom of your brothers and sisters in how to rightly discern between deception and truth. Do not be deceived by those who are of antichrist, but lean on Christ and His people. Continue to walk in His ways by the power of the Spirit. Seek to obey the law of the Lord with your whole being, knowing that He will present you blameless in that last great day. And do not only pray this for yourself, but pray it for those around you. Let your brothers and sisters know that they are remembered always and in every prayer of yours. It is an encouragement to us to know that we are prayed for by our friends, who, we have reason to think, have an interest at the throne of grace. So be encouraged, dear saints, and pray for growth in your Christian life.