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## Philippians 1:9-11

### Intro

When I was a teenager, and I began to take my faith seriously, the Lord began to give me a desire for evangelism, to “share the gospel” with others. I began to grow very interested in missions and being a missionary. I began to understand why it is so important that we pray and labor and give so that the gospel is taken to those who haven’t heard all around the world!

But as a teenager, I had a mistaken view of missions: I thought it was *only about evangelism*: sharing the gospel with unbelievers. Now hear me rightly: this is **definitely and necessarily essential to missions!** We must share the gospel! We must be about evangelism! But what I missed is that evangelism is only the beginning: the hope is that evangelism leads to **discipleship**. After all, this is the mission Christ gave us, isn’t it? When I was a young teenager, I had this developing zeal to carry out the Great Commission, but if you asked me what it was, I probably would’ve said that it was something along the lines of: “*Go therefore and evangelize*” or “*share the gospel with all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*” But if we look at the Great Commission in Matt. 28:18-20, that’s not exactly what it says, is it? Jesus tells us to “**make disciples of all nations.**” Yes, this necessarily includes evangelism! We are commanded to go forth in all the world, proclaiming the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone! We pray and plead that others would hear, repent, and believe! But that is also just the beginning of carrying out the mission Christ gives us. The hope and goal of our evangelism is **discipleship**. We make disciples by “**baptizing**” those who believe, and then, as Jesus says in Matt. 28:19, “**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**”

We’re supposed to share the gospel, absolutely! And then we’re supposed to teach those who believe more about the gospel, God, the Bible, and the Christian faith, so that they can follow Christ all their days, continuing to believe and obey until God calls them home! This is discipleship! And where does such teaching, such discipleship take place? **The local church**. As the early Christians carried out this mission in the book of Acts, it became clear that this was to

take place in every local church: the gospel goes forth in new areas, people believe by God's grace, are baptized, and then join the local church, gathering together around God's Word, worship, and prayer for the purpose of seeing each other **discipled**, *to be taught and grow in following Jesus*. Or to put it differently: to help each other be **sanctified**, to continue to grow in holiness by God's grace. The mission given to us in Great Commission is to see everyone become a believer and to *grow* as a believer, to be discipled! **And the primary discipleship plan for each believer is the local church.** One of our main goals as a local church must be to see each member, and therefore each potential member, to *become* a disciple, a follower of Christ, and then continue to **grow in their discipleship**: to be grow in Christ; to continue on in sanctification; to become more and more spiritually mature.

### **Phil. 1:9-11**

In this passage, Paul tells us his prayer for each member of the Phillippian church. Last week, we looked at verses 3-8: we saw Paul's joyful, affectionate love for each and every believer in Philippi. He spoke of praying regularly for them, and everytime he did, he *gave thanks* for God's work of grace in their lives. Now, in verses 9-11, Paul tells us that he also **prays for God's continued grace in their lives.**

Paul's prayer in vv.9-11 is one long, complex sentence. What is the gist of his prayer? I think we can summarize it this way: ***he prays for each believer to continue to grow spiritually mature in Christ, by God's grace.*** Paul just got finished proclaiming his joyful, affectionate love for these believers, and now, he explains that the overflow of his love for them is his desire to see each of them continue to grow in Christ; to continue to grow as disciples, as followers of Jesus. This is his earnest desire and prayer for each of them! This is God's will for each of us! And therefore, this should also be our desire and prayer for each other, for each believer, each church member, each visitor, even every non-believer. So throughout this prayer, Paul tells us ***what spiritual maturity looks like, why we should desire spiritual maturity, and how we become spiritually mature.*** So our three points today will look at the **what**, the **why**, and the **how** of ***spiritual maturity in Christ.***

[Transition]: **So first: What is spiritual maturity?**

## I. What is Spiritual Maturity? - Loving God and Others by Knowing and Applying Biblical Truth (vv. 9, 10a, 11a)

### A. The “what”

Paul is praying that their *love* would grow - that it would “**abound more and more**” - by flowing out of their *abounding knowledge and discernment*, or *wisdom*. Growing spiritually mature in Christ means continually growing in our *love*. And I think we should understand “love” here as generally referring to *God and other people*. Our **love for God** and our **love for our neighbor**, for other people, is to “*abound more and more*”; after all, these are the greatest commandments!: **to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves** (cf. Matt. 22:36-40; Mk. 12:28-34). The core of living godly lives is bound up in **rightly loving God**, in all that we do, and **rightly loving other people**.

But how do we rightly love God and others? By firmly *rooting our love* in **biblical knowledge** and living it out with **wise discernment**. Our love has to be rooted in right, biblical *knowledge*. We must grow in our knowledge of God, the gospel, the Bible, and theology. We must know God personally, learning more about Him, His ways, and His will for our lives. And we increase our knowledge of God and His ways *by reading and knowing His Word*, the Bible. But it’s not enough to only have the right knowledge; we must also know how to *apply* what we see in the Bible to our lives in order to rightly love God and others. In other words, we need **discernment**, the *wisdom to know how to best love God and other people in every real-life circumstance*.

Paul further explains what this looks like in verse 10: this is “***so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.***” To “*approve what is excellent*,” means to know God’s will, to know what is morally right and wrong, in different circumstances of life. The word “**Pure**” refers to having pure motives, a clean heart with pure, loving intentions towards others. The word “**blameless**” refers to “causing no one offense” in our outward actions towards others. In other words, mature Christian love flows out of *right biblical knowledge* and *wise discernment* of how to *apply* that knowledge to specific instances of loving God and other people. And love is not abstract or impersonal; it leads us to action, to changed

lives and behavior. This is summed up in verse 11: we are to be *“filled with the fruit of righteousness.”* I think this can be best understood as a reference to the **“fruit of the Spirit”** (cf. Gal. 5:22-24).<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Paul is praying for their **spiritual maturity in Christ**. We are to *progressively grow* in Christ by **knowing** the Lord and His Word more and **applying** God’s Word more accurately, **so that we increasingly love God and others** more and more, with **wisdom, pure intentions, and blameless behavior**. This describes *sanctification*, the slow but steady, progressive growth of holiness throughout the Christian life, in which we become more like Christ. And be sure, this is only because we are filled with the Spirit of God. And therefore, we demonstrate the “fruit of the Spirit” as evidence of God’s grace in our lives.

### B. Ill/App

Love and truth go hand and hand; love is not blind. To love someone means to put them before yourself; to put their interests and their best good over your own. It requires sincerity of the heart, right and pure intention. But it also requires right *action*. AND it requires for us to know what is actually in the best interests of others. Or in other words, it requires *knowledge and discernment*. Knowing biblical truth and wisely letting it shape the *way* we love. We soak up as much knowledge of the Bible as we can, that seek to apply it in love, letting it show us how to wisely love God in all things, and to rightly love others in every circumstance.

We’re probably all familiar with unfortunate episodes of “knowledge” divorced from “love:” where someone claims to uphold knowledge and truth, maybe even upholding right Christian doctrines, and yet uses them in unloving, ungodly ways. Instead of using biblical knowledge to build up, it is used to tear down. Think, for example, of the many ways professing Christians have responded to homosexual sin in very unloving, ungodly, even hateful ways. It is not loving nor biblical to hatefully shame, humiliate or abuse people. So what should we do instead? Some would say that we love people who cling to sexually immoral lifestyles by simply ignoring the sin; or worse, that it is impossible to actually love them without fully embracing

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Phillippians*, NICNT, pg. 104. Fee: “Paul’s emphasis... is on ‘the fruit, consisting of righteousness,’ which comes to them through their relationship to Christ.”

their sexual identity, requiring us to no longer call it sin, but encourage and endorse such lifestyles. But again, we know that that is not an option to us as Christians. The Bible makes very clear that homosexuality, and every other form of sexuality outside of a married man and wife, is sin. Loving, biblically based discernment shows us that to not treat people as if their identity is based on their sexual preferences; or as if their greatest good can be found in changing their gender and going against God's good design for human beings. We cannot rightly love people by encouraging them to walk in sin, away from the Lord.

So we *rightly love* our neighbors by treating them with kindness, gentleness and patience, truly seeking a relationship with them in which we seek their best interest and good. And their greatest good can only be found in knowing the Lord. And so we lovingly explain that such sexual practices are in fact sin; that this "sexual identity" doesn't have to be their true identity, but their true identity is to be found as beloved, righteous children of God in Christ.

And this is just one example of what this looks like. We could apply this to be a godly, loving husband and wife, mother and father, child, student, or employee. In all these, we seek to love God by glorifying Him and obeying Him in each circumstance, according to His Word. In all these, we seek to love the other person - our wife, our husband, our children, our parents, our coworkers, clients, employees, boss, etc. - by asking how the truths of the gospel, the truths of the Bible, apply to our relationships and circumstances. As we grow in Christ, our love grows. And our love grows as our *knowledge of Christ, the gospel, and the Bible grows*. As we grow spiritually, we not only *desire* to love rightly with a pur heart, but are also able to *discern*, with all wisdom, how to love GOD and others "blamelessly," in a biblical way in all that we do. God continues to shape us, by His Spirit, to lovingly apply the truth so that we "*may approve what is excellent*" in all things.

So let us prioritize spiritual maturity. Let us prioritize and strive after greater and greater ***love, biblical knowledge, and wise discernment.***

[Transition]: But why is it so important that we continue to grow in Christ?

## II. Why Desire Spiritual Maturity? - God's Glory, Our Good, and the Good of Others (vv. 10b, 11c)

### A. The Why

Paul gives two main reasons for why he prays for each believer to be spiritually mature, to abound in love rooted in knowledge and discernment. The first: because it is good for each individual to continually grow more mature in Christ. It is good because it means we are truly believers and are on our way to be with the Lord in eternity. In verse 10 he explains that he prays this for them so that they may be ***“pure and blameless for the day of Christ.”*** We've already touched on what 'pure' and 'blameless' mean here. The "day of Christ" refers to Christ's return, the end and consummation of all things. Therefore, we are to continue to grow spiritually mature, to grow in our sanctification, so that we will be presented as mature, pure and blameless, before the Lord on that glorious day. Paul is **not** saying that we save ourselves by our actions in becoming more mature and loving; no, we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. But what Paul **is** saying is that such grace through faith in Christ never is alone. As we talked about last week, one who truly believes continues on in Christ by God's grace. Our salvation is God's "good work" that he begins in us, continues in us, and brings to completion at "the day of Jesus Christ," as Paul says in verse 6. This is the same idea here: just as Paul is grateful for evidences of grace in their lives, he prays they would continue! He prays God would continue to grow them in Christ, that their sanctification would continue, so that they would persevere, as mature believers, until Christ's return. We are saved, being forgiven and declared righteous, the first day we repent and believe in Jesus. And God continues this work of salvation in us, every day after that first until the last, through our **sanctification**: growing us spiritually, making us more and more like Christ, by His grace. And this continues until "the day of Christ;" when Christ returns, or when He calls us home before then. And on that day, when we see Christ and are raised with him, our sanctification, our spiritual growth, is **completed**: we enter into eternal life ***sinless and perfected***. That is the beautiful goal we are looking forward to! And so we live lives *now* that look more and more like that day, that like our old days as unbelieving sinners.

So the first reason is for the good of the believer; it is a regular part of the Christian life to grow in Christ more and more. But there is a second, even **greater** reason why we should pursue

spiritual maturity: “*for the glory and praise of God*” (v. 11c). All of this is not for *our* glory, but for God’s glory! Again, God alone saves, and he gets all the credit. And God alone produces spiritual growth. And so, it rightly leads to *His glory and praise*, not our own.

### **B. Mature faith desires grater spiritual growth, both for self and others**

The more spiritually mature we become, the more we love God and others rightly. If we love God, then we want to glorify His name above all things, which we do by loving, trusting, and obeying Him in all things. If we rightly love others, then we desire their greatest good, which is found ultimately in knowing, loving, trusting, and obeying the Lord. Therefore, if *we* have mature Christian love, then we will necessarily desire to see *other people* grow in Christ, becoming spiritually mature in Him. The more we grow in godly knowledge, wisdom, and love, the more we desire for others to do the same. Why? **Because we are driven by love for God and love for others; we long to see each other grow spiritually mature in Christ, more and more each day, because we long for *each others’ good* and, above all, *God’s glory and praise*.**

### **C. This should be our desire for each person/member (Culture of Discipleship)**

*Therefore, we too should diligently pray for God to do this work of grace, both in our lives and in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ.* Paul’s prayer here should be our own purpose and desire, both for *our own lives* **and** *for each others’ lives*. If we truly love each other, just as much as Paul loved the church, with the love and affection of Christ, then our desire and prayer for each other must include that we see each other continue to grow in Christ, by God’s grace; that we see each other grow in Christ-like **love, knowledge, and discernment**, growing more like Christ in all we do.

In other words, Paul’s goal, and our goal, for each believer, is **true Christian discipleship**. We must be about *discipling one another, especially as fellow church members!* We must desire, pray for, and strive towards seeing each fellow church member grow spiritually mature in Christ! That’s the goal!

We should constantly strive to have a church culture that more and more reflects a **culture of mutual discipleship**; our drive, as a church, should be to disciple one another, to help each other grow in Christ. In our preaching, teaching, fellowship, personal relationships with each other... all of it should have the purpose of discipleship in mind! Every time we go to

each others' homes, go out to eat, call and chat, or go on walk, or visit each other in the hospital... We should view all of these as opportunities for the *ministry of discipleship*! Does this mean we must turn every interaction into a Bible study? No. But it does mean that we should constantly strive to let the gospel season everything we do. We should seek to encourage and build one another in Christ in all of our interactions, lovingly helping one another along as we all seek to be more like Jesus!

So let us make this our goal, to see each other grow as mature disciples in Christ! After all, this is part of the mission that Christ has given us.

[Transition]: So then, how does such spiritual growth and maturity come about?

### **III. How do we Become Spiritually Mature? - By Grace through the Gospel of Christ**

#### **A. The How**

In verse 11, Paul tells us that this vision of Christian maturity he prays for only comes ***“through Jesus Christ.”*** We grow spiritually **through the Grace of God shown to us in Christ.** Paul refers to this spiritually mature state as being ***“filled with the fruit of righteousness” (11a).*** I think the best way to understand this is seeing it as a reference to the “fruit of the Spirit” (cf. Gal. 5). **After all, the first “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal. 5:22 is “love.”** Every believer receives the Holy Spirit upon conversion. The Holy Spirit changes and grows us, producing “fruits of righteousness” in our lives; such fruit as, for example, rightly loving God and others, exercising it with knowledge and all discernment. This is another way of speaking of growing up in Christ more and more, of becoming spiritually mature. And so it **emphasizes** for us that such spiritual growth is *God’s work of grace*; it is the work of the Spirit of God, not us, brings about such change and gets the credit. Yes, we strive and labor to grow, to know, to love, to discern, more and more each day. And yet we also know that this is only possible by God’s grace through Christ.

So then, how do we strive to grow spiritually mature in Christ, by God’s grace?

#### **B. Application**

##### **1. Pray!**

First, we pray! Sanctification only comes by God's grace; therefore, **must start with prayer**. Let us earnestly pray for this, just like Paul does! Let us pray this prayer for *ourselves*. Earnestly pray that the Lord would allow your *love, knowledge, and discernment* to abound more and more each day; pray for God's continued grace in your life, that you may be more like Christ, glorifying God by being filled with the fruit of righteousness.

And let us **diligently** pray this for each other. In order to have a true, genuine culture of discipleship, we must all be praying such prayers for each other: earnestly and regularly praying that each member, each believer here, and each non-believer, would continue to grow in Christ; to have a more robust saving faith in Christ, leading to greater love and holiness. And as we pray, not only will God shape our hearts to have such desires for each other, but He will also bring about such growth in our church!

## 2. Preach the Gospel

**Secondly**, we preach the gospel and teach one another the Bible! We never graduate from the gospel; the same gospel that saves also sanctifies. The same gospel that **saves** us is the same gospel that **sanctifies** us. We do not need Christ *plus something else* to grow as mature Christians. What we need is to constantly *remember the gospel of Christ*: that God pours His grace and love upon us, not because we deserve it, not for anything we do for Him in exchange, but purely out of the abundance of His wonderful mercy. We grow by His grace. And so let us fix our eyes on the grace of Christ, learning more and more about Jesus, the gospel, and the Word of God. And let Christ's love for you give you increase your love for Him.

So look to the grace of God in Christ Jesus: He showed His love for us while we were sinners, by sending the Son, Jesus Christ, to live, die, and be raised in our place. We are saved wholly by His grace!

### Call to Unbelievers

So if you are not a believer this morning, your path of growth starts with this: **turn away from all of your efforts to fix up your life and save yourself**. You cannot produce fruits of righteousness or holiness on your own. You cannot clean up your act or make yourself

better. ***But God can. And He will.*** So turn to the Lord! Repent and believe; trust in the glorious grace of Christ!