

Strengthening Your Core

Grownup Love—Philippians 1:9

When you become capable of extending mature love, two things will be crystal clear to those you love.

1. They will know they have been touched by a caring person that deals truthfully.
 - a. Mature love seeks a deep understanding of the truth with respect to human behavior.
 - b. Mature love asks questions about another's life history.
 - c. Mature love asks questions about current information and facts.
 - d. Mature loves seeks to advance the truth in the lives of others.

2. They will know they have been touched by a caring person who knows who they really are. Mature love has identified the hidden forces that shape the loved one's visible behavior.
 - a. Mature love sees strengths overdone.
 - b. Mature love seeks to bring healing to a loved one's hurts.
 - c. Mature love seeks to bring relief to a loved one's fears.
 - d. Mature love seeks to minister recovery to a loved one's guilt.

Summary: Mature love names things as they are and how they need to be. It does so in a manner that moves an open hearted person to change.

Pastor Bob Fox's Personal Notes on Philippians

1:9—"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment."

What does one pray for such a people who are doing so much so well? When you pray for those you love the deepest, how can your prayer serve and equip them for an even fuller, more blessed walk with Christ? Paul's prayer is very instructive in so many ways, which is likely why the Spirit led him to record it for posterity.

Our prayer for people should always look toward what they are becoming, the progress they are making in their journey toward Christ-likeness. It should not deal just with present spiritual, emotional, or physical needs, though the need to pray for these should not be minimized in any way. The urgency of these can so occupy us that we forget to pray for the most important day in the lives of those we love. That day is the day when they stand before Christ to receive from Him a reward for their faithfulness to Him. On that day what we have become will be the critical thing, when to have crucified the flesh with its self-centered agenda will be commended. On that day it will not be a type of action or series of tasks that draws praise. It will be a pattern of thought that is rewarded, one that continually elevated the things of God and allowed Him in His grace and by His Spirit to prune the things of self.

To that end Paul prays for the Philippians, looking to the strengthening of their character and the continued invasion of their inner thought by the truth and grace of God. He is thinking of their immediate future, something he'd like to see develop in them. He is concerned with their more long-term future, the fruits that passing years would yield. He is also concerned with "the day," their ultimate destiny to give account for how they have lived this life. His prayer encompasses all these and it is a great prayer for all who desire to prepare and train for their future.

Our impression of the Philippians from what Paul writes in this letter is that of a warm, affectionate, and relational people. Much of what Paul says to them, including this prayer, seems aimed at strengthening further this which is already strong in them. We always need to sharpen our strengths. In the end this is usually how God uses us. Our weaknesses we can strengthen, but our real contribution will usually be made in the area of our strength. And so Paul will speak to how a loving, relational people can become more effective in their love for others. The truth is that our strength can become a source of weakness and blindness if it is not developed within the boundaries of truth.

The subject of Paul's concern for the Philippians is the quality of their love. Ultimately, love is the business God is in. It is His love that has shaped the mission He entrusts to us. The Philippian's love, like that of every local church, was likely to be challenged in two areas. There is the danger of becoming just an affectionate, supportive, and accepting people that stand for nothing. If we become that, we do not accurately depict the love of God. There is also the danger of having all the mannerisms of love, but underneath this veneer to have a number of factions within the church based on fleshly distinctions. That

too is not a complete depiction of the love of God. Both these dangers are addressed by Paul's prayer.

Paul had come to understand that the complete love that is God and is His business lifts us to something beyond warm feeling for each other. His love is developmental, deliberately orchestrating in our lives that which will lift us to a higher plane of living. It shows itself through teaching, reproof, correction, training, and the like (2 Timothy 3:16-17). God is willing to conduct the unpleasant conversation with us. His love leads Him to execute judgment in the cases where wrong has been done. His love leads Him to discipline us for our benefit and that of His Church. So if we are to be instruments of God's love we must be capable of loving as He does, engaging ourselves in this developmental work he is carrying on in us through each other. He is a person of warmth and affection and comfort. He is also a person of confrontation, who makes us face the truth about ourselves and our actions. If we wish to do what He does, we must receive and do both things and we must know the exact mixture the moment in front of us requires.

To this end of the Philippians imitating God, Paul prays that their love would "super-abound" in two things. Before speaking of the two things we should linger on this idea of "super-abounding," which is the idea behind the wording of the original language. This is a way of saying that he wishes for two things to be noticeably present in abundance as the Philippian's expressed love to each other. A more colloquial way of saying this is that Paul wanted their love to be always saturated and dripping with two things. Before moving on to a deeper understanding of Paul's statement, we can already say that our way of showing love will noticeably change over time if the Spirit is truly allowed to shape our thinking and behavior. This great Christian virtue of love will be expressed by us differently than the way it is expressed by those devoid of God's Spirit. The more basic manifestation of it, warmth and acceptance, does not disappear or wane. But God's Spirit begins to intertwine two things with it that complete it. And when something is completed by God, it means He has lifted it from being a kind of resemblance of Him to being the exact replica of that which is His. What follows then is a challenge to develop a love that is more God-like. Love is more God-like when its actions are shaped and governed by two things.

The two things that Paul prays will come to characterize our love are "real knowledge" and all discernment." Acts of love that are dictated and shaped by real knowledge and all discernment are exact expressions of the mind and heart of God. Aside from the influence of these, our expressions of love might only be a human touch. This is not to say such are not useful. They are just incomplete. They have not come to be as effective and as efficient in achieving His will as they might.

The first of these, knowledge, reminds us that Christian love is unconditional, but it is not blind. It is Christ's love and so its expression is governed by what He knows to be true. Our acts of love should be shaped by what we know to be true about God, specific persons and situations, human nature, pragmatic facts, and so on. The more we know, the more precise becomes our expression of love.

The knowledge Paul speaks of he calls “real knowledge.” That is the English rendering of the one word used here for knowledge, *ἐπιγνώσις*. This is the term used to distinguish actual knowledge from supposed knowledge, the true from that which only has the appearance of knowledge. There is much that passes for knowledge and there is a way of behaving that gives the impression that one has knowledge. This term refers to genuine truth sourced in the One who knows all that is, God. Truth becomes known to us through the Spirit as we spend years interacting with the plain written truth in Scripture, with people, with truth naturally revealed, and with God Himself. We must be careful because what we think we know beyond a shadow of a doubt can give way later to a more informed knowledge. At the same time we must not be hesitant with regard to what can be reasonably stated as true.

To be complete, our love must also be shaped by “all discernment.” The word Paul uses here is *αἰσθησις*. It is the only time it is used in the New Testament, and Paul chooses this word over more common expressions for discernment. In Greek literature it refers to that which is accomplished by the senses, namely the proper perception of the nature of something based on past knowledge gained. So to discern a matter is to select, classify and apply what is furnished by knowledge. The verb form of this word occurs in Luke 9:45. There it refers to the ability, or inability, to perceive the profound nature and truth of a statement made by Jesus. Those present were unable to sort out His meaning due to their inattentiveness to Scripture. In calling for discernment Paul’s aim is that we reach God honoring conclusions based on passing through the grid of truth what our various senses take in.

Paul calls for us to have “all” discernment. Nearly everyone has a natural acumen of some type, some for people problems, some for material things, some for academia. Paul prays that we might be people of breadth and depth. Our discernment should be multi-dimensional so that we see with precision. It involves a working understanding of the things of the Spirit, along with life lessons and people lessons. It involves having a “grid,” a mental understanding of Scripture so that things can be sorted out as to their essential nature as of the flesh or of the Spirit. This discernment is more than life experience, though that is helpful. Ultimately, Paul is talking about skill in discerning the voice of the Spirit.

It is easy to see that in general, as our knowledge and discernment increase, we will be more longsuffering in our love for others.