

And This I Pray

Philippians

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I take my title this morning Philippians 1:9, the first four verses or four words, rather, of that verse, "And this I pray." For a few years now I've been trying to at the beginning of the year in January, to bring a message on prayer for which we will do this morning as we take a break from 2 Corinthians. We'll look at Paul's opening prayer for the church at Philippi. Paul says, "this I pray," and then the main petition of his prayer is, "that your love may abound yet more and more." Abounding love is love that is in abundance. The imagery of the word is something or someone that is so richly furnished that it overflows into the lives of other people. Now this is not unusual for Paul; throughout the New Testament he would use this word when he would exhort churches in his writings. You remember just last Sunday, he told the church at Corinth he wanted them to abound in this grace also, the grace of giving; he wanted to see that overflow in the life of the church at Corinth. Thessalonica, he wanted to see love abound. He wanted to see brotherly love increase more and more. Now he had said to them, "Your love is made manifest. I don't even need to write unto you to love because you're taught of God to love yet to see it increase more and more." In Colossians, he told the church to abound in thanksgiving. And the church of Corinth, in the 15th chapter, in the first letter, he said that their work, he wanted to see the work of the Lord abounding as they were steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. The only reason that love can abound is because Paul, as he said in Romans 5:20, the law entered that the sin might abound but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. So it's only by grace that love can be increasing, love can be overflowing and love can abound.

So with this main petition that Paul prays for the church at Philippi, which is a prayer for us in 2023, we see the mechanics of this petition in four different ways. One is how does this prayer show itself in the life of the church in knowledge and in all judgment. Then there are two subordinate clauses to show what it starts to look like, "that you may approve things that are excellent, that you might be sincere and without offense." And then the last part of the workings of this prayer, sort of envelops the whole prayer itself, "being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." That's like the capstone of the prayer. That's where this is going. The end goal is that God would be glorified, he would be praised through your abounding love.

So first we consider that your love may abound in knowledge. Now this was a church where love was abounding, but Paul, as an apostle, wanted to see it increase and overflow more and more. Now how does it overflow in knowledge? Paul doesn't give a list of items. He doesn't do maybe perhaps as some of you wives did to your husbands at beginning of this year when you may have said to them you'd like to see love abound more in your life here at home, for which then you thanked God for her and said, "That's the way and the reason I married you because you are keenly aware of ways that I need to grow in love and you are for the good of my own sanctification," because that's what you said, right? Then you sat down with a piece of paper and you said, "Honey, I am keenly interested and want to be alerted to the fact of how I can love better as it relates to you and my children and my family and church, whatever you see. So I want to write it down." She says, "No need. I've already written it for you," and she puts a piece of paper in front of you and says, "Here are some ways you need to increase in love." And then you would once again say, "God, thank you for this woman. I knew this is the reason I married her."

Now you're laughing and I'm kind of chuckling but in reality you should be thanking her, right? I mean really. We should thank God for one another when God uses people to show us areas we need to increase in love. But the interesting thing here is that Paul doesn't give one single thing to do. So for you practicalists out there that want to hear what to do all the time, "Just show me something to do, how to love," Paul doesn't do it because you cannot love until you first know something in a certain way. You cannot begin to love until you have a certain kind of knowledge and you know that truth in a certain way and Paul is very clear in this letter in two ways that you need to know something and, of course, what he means is to know God. To know God is an intimate word, it means to know him in a certain way, not just to know facts about God, not just to know he exists, all men know that in their own conscience, but it's to know something about the truth of God in a certain way which Paul calls two words "gain and joy. Gain in Philippians 3:7, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." What was gain for Paul? It's kind of odd to us that this would be gain but it was his gain, he was a Jew. He was of the tribe of Benjamin. He was "an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain," or profit, "to me, those became rubbish, loss, damaged goods, for Christ." Now notice what Paul does, he will use the word "gain" to tell us he means knowledge. "Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung," the second time he uses the word "gain," "that I may win," or gain, the Greek word there, "Christ."

So what Paul means by "gain," what Paul means for love to abound in practical deeds is that you must first know Jesus as gain, as profit, as superior, as supreme, as excellent, and that's the word that Paul uses. Paul says he has put everything in the category of damaged goods and only when we do that are we really ready to love and even ready to suffer for the cause of Christ. I have a refrigerator in my home. It's damaged as far as I'm concerned. I don't really like it. It does the job, keeps everything cold and the freezer everything is frozen, but some things that don't work right, and in my mind it's just

damaged so when the day comes when it's ready to get rid of that refrigerator, I'm okay with it. It's gone. Fine. Good. Paul sees everything that he owns as damaged goods. That doesn't mean he doesn't value them. That doesn't mean it's not good. It doesn't mean that your refrigerator is not appreciated and it does work. It just means if love calls him to let it go, he's already made the preparation. If love calls him to suffer, he's already made the preparation.

Beloved, the way we prepare to suffer is not talk about suffering and what may happen in America, we count everything loss. It's damaged goods. We appreciate it. It's good. It has value. But the only way you can count it loss is by knowing Jesus in a certain way, and when you start knowing him that way increasingly what happens? Love begins to rise up in the cup and overflow because the grip on damaged goods is lessened by a grip on superior good which is knowing Jesus, knowing him, and that means knowing him spiritually, spiritually.

Now if love is the main thesis of this prayer, and really the thesis of the book to the Philippians, meaning Paul is going to start right at the beginning with this prayer and say, "This is my prayer. This is the thesis of what I want to talk about in this epistle, that your love would overflow," you would expect him, then, to take that thesis statement and then unpack it in the rest of the research paper but he only mentions love three more times. But guess what? He mentions joy 16 times. Now why is that? What's the relationship of love and joy? And of course, when you see something as gain you enjoy it. So there's another connection. Now when we go back to last week where we talked in that message about the churches of Macedonia, which is where we are now in Philippi which is also Thessalonica and Berea, and show you that we've already seen what Paul means from last Sunday and the Sunday before, because you remember in 2 Corinthians 8:7, Paul said to the church concerning their love, "I speak not by commandment, but by the forwardness of others to prove the sincerity of your love. I want to test if you're really loving in this account by your liberal gift. And so what I'm doing, I'm not going to commend you. It's free. I want you to do it willingly, but what I'm going to do, I'm going to bring the churches of Macedonia as an example of forwardness or their love and you can kind of see how it works." And so what did Paul say about these churches right here in Philippi? 2 Corinthians 8:2. One he said, "I want you to know the grace of God given to the churches of Macedonia, how that in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their love and deep poverty abounded to the riches of their liberality." But that's not what it says because you heard me use the word love instead of joy. You caught that, didn't you? The abundance of their joy, not their love, but isn't that what love is because Paul is saying here's an example of love of a church that gave abundantly, their love overflowed in a rich gift for the church of Jerusalem out of what? Overflowing love or joy, rather.

So if we look at that again and say what was the source of their joy? Well, it wasn't in their money and it wasn't in their goods. They couldn't really buy anything. They were deeply poor. That takes that off the table. No joy there. It wasn't what was happening to them. It wasn't their experience at the moment because nothing good was happening. When you're in deep trial and great affliction, that's when we say nothing good as humanly speaking, is happening in terms of the way we see it, right? This pain is not

good and this money is getting me nowhere because I don't have any of it. So their joy cannot be money. It cannot be circumstances. It can only be in one place, the grace of God in verse 1. So abounding love is the overflow of joy in knowing God that spills over in loving deeds towards people around you. So knowing Jesus, then, is a prerequisite for genuine love. That's why Paul's not going to say do anything first. You first need to know the supremacy, the superiority, the excellence, the love, the greatness, the forgiveness, the salvation, the rescue, the deliverance, and all that we know about Jesus in the Bible is so that we may know him in such a way that joy in knowing God or the gain of knowing God, is then overflowing in what Paul calls abounding love. That's what he means.

Now what's the first application here, then? When you read the Bible to know Jesus, we pray that God would show us Jesus in a way that we see his gain and we experience joy spiritually by seeing him in scripture. We're not looking for laws. We're not looking for rules. We're looking for the person for which the whole book is about for then when we find him, the commandment keeping follows and the love overflows. So we pray when we discuss the Bible and we disciple, we're praying that our eyes will be opened. When we have fellowship groups, we're going to pray that what we talk about and what we learn from scripture and as we encourage one another, that it is gain, it is profit, it is producing spiritual joy because the root of overflowing love is, what? In knowledge in who Jesus is, in his love for you, knowing his love more supremely that produces joy that overflows by counting everything loss. Why? Because of the joy and the profit and the gain of Christ that love increases and it keeps going.

So we pray with David in Psalm 119 when he said, "Open now mine eyes and behold wondrous things out of your law which I know not." You see, we must have prayer because without it we won't get there. David said also in Psalm 119:36, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness." So to be inclined to covetousness is to be inclined to gain. So what does David pray to incline his heart away from covetousness but to incline it to the gain of the testimony of who Jesus is? The word of God which is a revelation of God's love. Its revelation in the gospel of Jesus Christ of the supremacy of King Jesus who loved you and he gave himself for you. Do you not want to know the man that would come down from glory to take upon human flesh for the sole purpose of rescuing you from yourself and the wrath of God, from our self-loving ways that we may see and behold the glory of God and enjoy him forever.

That's the only way love is going to increase and there will be genuine love that pleases God by faith when we know Jesus. Now the good thing is we've got prayer as the weapon to get there, right? If it was dependent on us just to get there with this book, it wouldn't happen, would it? But God is willing to answer this prayer because it's inspired, which means he wants it in his book, it also means he aims to answer that prayer because that's why he gave it to Paul to tell you Paul's prayer and how we should be praying as a church, so that should encourage us that if we're going to overflow in 2023, just increasing in love because there is love here, I've seen it, but to increase more and more we need to have more joy, see more of the gain of Jesus through the knowledge of the truth of the word of God. In other words, we need to experience the knowledge of God in a certain way that empowers us to actually let the goods go or to count them in loss in

such a way that hard, yes, not the refrigerator, that that'll be easy, but a new one would be hard, what's the power to let it go and you get the illustration in life is the power of gain. So we need to be praying this year, "Lord, show us more of the gain of Christ. Fill us with the joy of Christ like the church at Philippi so that the overflow of joy in knowing the grace of God would then redound and overflow in love to one another." And what happens? God is glorified and God is praised through your gain and through your joy.

All right, now look at the two subordinate clauses. So abounding love happens in knowledge and in all judgment, we're going to use the word "judgment" for the next cause, so that you would approve things that are excellent. Now, the word "judgment" is the only time it's used in the New Testament here. It's not the courtroom word judicial judgment, it is the word that means discernment or perception. So when your love is abounding in knowledge in the supremacy of Christ and you're growing in that, then it's leading you to perception or discernment which then is going to enable you to fulfill the first clause, approve things that are excellent. So when you perceive something with the five senses, you see it, you taste it, you smell it, you touch it, you hear it, but here this is spiritual and so when love is overflowing, it's going to empower us to perceive, to see, to be aware, to have insight into approving things that are excellent. So let's look at verse 10 in relation to all judgment, which I think the word "all" just means in every way, in every area of your life you're having, you're growing in this discernment.

So let's look at the two words "approve" and "excellent." The word "approve" is the word we've seen before dokimazo, "to test." We used it last Sunday and I'm just going to stay with the review with the same illustration. You remember dokimazo can be the person in the ancient days that puts the gold coin in the mouth and bites it and then looks at it and examines it. So dokimazo has both of those nuances, first, the test itself, bite the coin, that's dokimazo, that's what the word can mean here, the test, the examination. How are you going to do that? You bite the coin and you put the ore into the fire. Just putting it into the fire, that's testing it. But the other nuance of dokimazo is when you pull the gold out of the fire, or when you hold the coin up to the light and you see the indentions, you either say approved, genuine, rejected, false. Now there are two levels in which I think Paul is saying we can have this discernment. The first one is we can approve or recognize after the test is done and we can know the difference, incidentally, the word "excellent" means "to differ," we can know the difference in good and bad, right and wrong, righteousness and unrighteousness, and that's a basic level of discernment which we need to have. But when your love is abounding, you don't just say, "Well, I know that's right, dad. I get it, that's wrong. That was bad. This is good." Love means you look at the good and you say, "Oh, how I love the good." Romans 12:19, "Abhor evil, cleave to good." That's different than saying, "That's evil. That's good. That's gold. That's not." Hate the evil. Cleave like glue to the good because you treasure it. Why would you treasure just good? Because you treasure the God who is good, the God who's told you what is good and he's told you what is evil. So when love is overflowing, it's enabling you by love to see the good and treasure it but that's basic love. Even the unbeliever can say, "That's wrong. That's right." They get that distorted sometimes, it's getting distorted now, but they can't treasure what's good without knowing Jesus and abounding in love.

So this discernment, this judgment in all of your life is going to help you to approve things that differ at that basic level but there's another level here because the word "excellent" implies we're approving and making a distinction with things on the same side of the ledger, right? It's not good and bad. It's good, better best is what Paul is calling for here because when something's excellent or more excellent, if we can put it that way, you go from something good to something better to something excellent. That's a different level of discernment that love empowers us to do.

Now you do it all the time when you search the Internet, don't you? You find a good deal. Well, then you search some more and you just found a better deal. And then you just kept searching and searching and you found an excellent deal. You just approved things that differ but that's on a secular level. That's good. That's okay. But this is spiritual. So what does Paul mean and how would that work out for us? I think he's going to use his self as an example, which he often does beginning in verse 12. "But I would ye should understand, brothers, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out," have turned out, "rather unto the," advancement or, "furtherance of the gospel; so that by my bonds," he's in chains, he's under house arrest, this is one of the four prison epistles. He's not yet in the prison of 2 Timothy. He's in bonds, he's incarcerated. He's linked up with a Roman soldier by chain, "in Christ are manifest in all the palace," in all other places. So Paul has to move from good, that's a piece of gold, to excellent, bags of gold.

Now two things in this verse, verse 12 in particular. First, Paul has to be aware that the things which are happening to him have a purpose if he's going to love in a way to prove things are excellent. He can't just see things on the human level or his love will not produce this. And what happened? The gospel was advanced because Paul was approving things that were excellent. For example, in Acts 21, Paul makes his way to Jerusalem. He's probably talking about the things that started in Acts 21. For a three- or four-year period, a lot of things happened to Paul which were not good. Acts 21 he comes into Jerusalem and he's bringing the gift. He wants to go there. He's warned not to go there. The Holy Spirit has even told him bonds and affliction abide him there. He gets there, the Jews which are believing, they're zealous of the law, and they've heard some things about Paul that the apostles are concerned about so they tell Paul, "Look, take this vow, the Nazirite, and you'll show the people that you're not teaching against certain things and customs in the law." He agrees to do it but then some Jews of Asia see Paul in the temple, and they assume that this man who's a Gentile which was with him in the city that they saw him earlier with, Paul had taken him into the temple and they cry out, "Men and brethren, help, this is the man who's speaking against this place, the temple, and against the law and against Moses." And they rushed upon him and grabbed him, took him out of the temple and they went about to kill him. Word got back to the chief captain. He sends the army in and rescues Paul and it says "they left off beating Paul," and what that means is this: they were beating him to kill him and when somebody wants to kill someone and they start beating someone, how hard do you think they're striking? They were pummeling him with the point to take his life. Blows in the head. Blows in the body. I don't know how long they started beating, obviously not long enough to kill him. They rush in and grab Paul, put him in chains, inquire what's going on, the noise, the tumult of the crowd, they couldn't discern it. Then they had to take Paul back to the castle. As

they're going up the stairs, it says "they bore Paul," they had to carry him over their shoulders because of the violence of the mob.

At this point that was gold, wasn't it? God came in, as he so often does, and rescues Paul right the last moment. Gold. Paul could just be rejoicing, "Thank you, God. You rescued me." But Paul is discerning bags of gold. So on the stairs all of a sudden he speaks to the captain and said, "I beseech you, let me talk to the people." And he turns and he preaches to the crowd. He gives a testimony of his own conversion. I don't know about you, I'd just been, I'd been looking at that gold coin, "Thank you, Lord. Get me out of here! Get me up the steps into the prison and don't let me out until these people leave." But not Paul because he is approving things that differ. Not just good/bad. That was good. I was rescued. That would have been bad to be killed in human terms. But Paul turns and then sees, he has perception, he has discernment, and in a time of pain and time of fear, he's enabled because love is overflowing in his life because he knows Jesus so supremely as gain and joy that he sees bags of gold as he looks over the crowd that hates him. And we see this happening throughout the chapters until Paul makes his way to Rome and he wants his church to know because he's concerned they may bolt, or they may crumble because they don't understand what's happening to Paul. He says, "I want you to understand, brothers, the things which happened to me turned out for the advancement of the gospel." And when the gospel advances God's love is advancing, isn't it?

Now how does this work out for us? You say, Okay, I get it. If I'm ever beaten to death almost then I'd turn and maybe look for an opportunity." Well, that's probably not going to happen, is it? No, when love is overflowing in knowledge and then in all judgment, love is enabling us not only to see the gold of God's love for us but the gold of God's love going through us and God's love working around us. Wherever you are just in the small mundaneness of your life and mine, God is working gold. He's working in people's lives. And to have the discernment to see it and then to act on it so that it's not my time or my resources or me, when it's about God's love but God's love through me into others. So what would that mean to me personally? When I go to Publix on the corner from now and I'll walk in and say, "There is love going on in this building. There's something going on here just with this small group of people. God is at work and I want God to be worked through me, so I want to see what God is doing. I just don't want to see where the eggs are and the milk is. I want to be aware. I want to have discernment." And so does that mean that, you know, spectacular things happen all the time? In Acts 21 it doesn't show that anybody was converted. In fact, they got even more upset when Paul mentioned the Gentiles that he was sent to. But Paul was aware that through God's providence, God's love to Paul through the things that happened to him was an opportunity for love to flow out of Paul unless he becomes self-focused or even looks at the gold of God's deliverance, which is gold, and stops there rather than looking at how that gold can be seen or viewed and working out in the lives of other people, even the people that hated Paul.

So what's the application here? We pray, "Lord, help us to treasure the gold of your love in the knowledge of Christ in such a way that then we want to be aware of your work in the things that happen to us, the things that happen around us, so that we may be ready to

speaking, ready to just love others so that you would be glorified and praised in all that we do." And then the second subordinate clause here is so that, verse 10, "ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." Now these two words are sort of two words on one coin when one's happening, then the other is happening. The word "sincere" is a compound word that literally can mean "to be seen as pure when examined in sunlight," and we all know that experience, don't we? When you get dressed in fluorescent light or maybe in your closet in the morning because you don't want to turn the light on and maybe there's somebody else sleeping in the room, you get dressed and you look in the mirror and you do what you can to get out in sunlight and everything gets unfolded and maybe somebody tells you, you look in the mirror and say, "Boy that is not what I saw." So the sun reveals reality or sincerity or genuineness or authentic. You can take a garment out in the sun when it's kind of dark and vague, and you see the real color, the authentic color. That's the word here.

So Paul says when love is abounding in knowing Christ and you're approving things that are excellent, your love is seen to be real and without offense. What does that mean? It's not the kind of way we use it today as offending people, I don't want to offend people, it means without stumbling, without falling. Ultimately, it means without apostasy. When love is flowing, you're shown to be real and you won't apostatize. Now what does that mean? Well, I want to make you aware of two words that are gaining steam in culture of Christianity today. You may have already heard of them. One is deconstructionism and the other one usually follows, deconversion. Deconversion means just what it sounds like. Deconstruction is the idea that you're going to examine your faith, look at the principles of Christianity, and then make changes. Make changes. Now in one sense that can be a good thing. In fact, probably my whole ministry has been a deconstruction ministry not because we're challenging what the Bible says, but we're challenging our own ideas about what the Bible says, traditions, and we are making changes to our faith, to the faith once delivered to the saints, not by changing the faith but what we think about it. Now that's just good and right. We've done some of this at Heritage. We've made some changes. We've deconstructed.

Now you need to know I hate the word. I don't think it's a good word because it has a negative implication, but what it means in Christianity today is really demolition. We're going to deconstruct the faith and tear it down and change well-founded beliefs that are not culturally popular. That's what it means. And so what are churches doing? They're deconstructing and they're changing their articles, they're changing what they've held to as longstanding tried and true beliefs. That's bad, that's wrong.

Now what deconstructionism leads to is deconversion. Deconversion what is that? That's when a person questions their own faith because of doubts, maybe science inconsistencies they think they see in the Bible, they ultimately deconvert, which is apostasy. They don't go from one church to another, they leave Christianity. 2015 a Pew Research report stated that one out of every four, three out of four rather, only one would stay, three out of four would depart from the faith who grew up professing to be a Christian. And the statistics in another poll suggested based on the way things are

looking, over one million people in the next few years will depart from the faith as they started professing Christianity and depart from it. Deconversion.

Now what I want you to understand so that when you're talking to maybe a young person who uses intellectual reasons for departing, you can see right through that. I do not belittle doubts, perceived inconsistencies, scientific discovery, which we're living in a culture that's moving way past science. Science is of no consequence anymore, but still some people say the science doesn't fit to try to answer those questions, is there's many answers, but what you need to know ultimately, the reason for deconversion is one word, it's love. And you can see right through it. It is not an intellectual problem, it's a love problem. And so people try to say it's just intellectually incompatible. No, it's incompatible about what your affections are, and I want to show you that, and then we're going to make application here. And this is the condemnation: that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. What's the condemnation? They don't get it intellectually? No. It's what they love. Men love darkness and they deconvert because they love darkness. 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas hath forsaken me," because he could not get his answers from Paul. Paul could not satisfy his doubts and the inconsistencies of what he was saying, so he left. No. He loved the world. It's not intellectual, beloved. Don't buy it because if you do, it will lead you astray. It is never intellectual although the world tries to make it that way.

Jude 1, Jude writes, "earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints because there have been men that are crept in unaware." They're creeping in as false teachers. How do you counter the intellectualism of false teachers? You keep yourselves in the love of God, verse 21. Isn't that amazing? Just stay in love with God and you're safe. Don't bind to the intellectual arguments. So deal with them and stay in love. If you just deal with them, you'll bolt because the problem is not intellectual, it's what we love. It's always the problem. I'm not saying there's no intellectual issues to deal with because we love Jesus with, what? Our minds. But the ultimate reason for deconversion that often comes out of deconstruction faith is love. 2 Peter 2:22. Peter says, "For after they have come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ," there's the word "knowledge" again, "and they're entangled and overcome again and go back," they deconvert, "the latter end is worse than the beginning." It would have been better had they not ever known any truth about Christ than to come and then deconvert. Now that's pretty chilling. That's one of the most chilling things in the Bible and Peter knows that so he wants to help us out and say, "Wait a minute, it happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog has turned to his vomit again and the sow that was washed to wallowing in the mire." What's Peter saying? The reason they deconverted is because they didn't have a changed nature, which means it's a love problem. Why on earth does a dog after eating too fast, regurgitate and eat it again? Because it's just food that he likes. Why does a pig go back into the mud when you wash him up? Because he loves mud. So Peter wants to calm the saints and say, Look, the problem is love."

1 John 2:19, "They continued not with us because they were not of us. If they had been with us, they no doubt would have stayed and continued with us but they didn't continue with us to make manifest they were never with us at all." So John, again, is trying to calm

the saints. Why did these teachers leave? Why did they deconvert? Because of verse 15, "Love not the world."

So how does John want to help them answer the intellectual questions that come up from false teachers of the world and people that are deconstructing and reconverting? Well, he says in 1 John 1:4, "These things have I written unto you that your joy might be full." What is love? It's knowing God so supremely that the overflow of that joy goes out in love to others. John says let's deal with the intellectual problems, but not without joy and not without love because people deconvert because of love. It's a love issue, beloved. So don't be duped by people deconstructing and deconverting as if they've got some real good intellectual problem. It's not, it's love, and the Bible bears it out. Why did Israel deconvert from God again and again and again? Because they didn't love the fountain of living waters. Period. That's it. And it's true today.

Now how do we apply what was just said in this verse because Paul says when love is abounding in gain and joy, what happens? You don't deconvert. You are real and you are without apostasy till Jesus comes back. And that's the point of verse 6, isn't it? "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you shall perform it," when? "Till the day of Jesus Christ." What work? The work of love. The work of salvation is the joy of salvation. It's a spiritual joy. How does God keep this work going in you? He works in you to will, and to do of his good pleasure and the fruit of that work is love. You love him. Can you say that? You can't say I'm not a sinner and I don't struggle with loving other things, can you? Can you say, "I genuinely, I really love Jesus"? Yes, so the fruit of that when love is increasing through the knowledge of Jesus and through spiritual joy, you're real and you won't deconvert.

So don't get lost in intellectual arguments even though we can address those arguments. There's all kinds of answers that are valid and they will counter what the world is saying about the Bible and about Christianity, but it won't satisfy the problem, and that's what they love. And if you don't know that you're going to be duped. So let them belittle us and think we're, you know, simple and all the things they say, but we love Jesus and when that's real, God uses that. He uses means in part to keep you going on the pathway all the way to glory because he's going to keep you there. You say, "I thought we were kept by the power of God through faith?" Well, you are. "Well, you're telling me you're kept by the power of God through love?" You are. Did you put that equation together because faith produces love. How do you know you have faith? Because I love, I love Jesus and if you have any love for others.

So Paul can use them interchangeably. He can also throw joy in there, right, the joy of faith. Why? Because when you love, if your love for your wife has no experience of joy, do you love her? Biblically, yes, you can love without joy in a relationship, but just humanly speaking, love has enjoyment. When you love something, you enjoy it. When you love God, he's honored when he's enjoyed because he's perfect. He's better. He's superior than anything you could love. Yes, he's better than your wife or your husband, your child or anything because he's holy, he's pure and he's a God of, what? Love. He is love. So young people in particular, don't get lost in the intellectual arguments. We can

address them but stay in love with Jesus. How are you going to do that and? "And this I pray. Lord, keep me in love with you." If God doesn't keep you in love, guess what? You will not stay in love. But the good news of verse 6 is he is going to keep doing the good work of salvation, the work of love in you. So hang on to Jesus. Hang onto him with all of your spiritual might because he is hanging onto you and that is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

And lastly, lastly verse 11, "being filled," that's a participle, "being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." The word "being" is interesting, a perfect passive participle. Perfect means it's a completed work already done never to be completed again. But there's ongoing results of that completed work. What's the completed work? You have already been filled. You already have the fruits of righteousness. It's already done because you are attached to Jesus Christ. Every piece of fruit you will ever bear in your life is already done. You're already attached to the vine. It flows from him. That's the perfect tense. Your union with Christ is never repeated. It will never happen again because it will never be severed. God's love for you is so rock solid because of who Jesus is. Nothing, no one, not a devil from hell, not Lucifer, not Satan can sever you because he loves you. Done.

Now the ongoing is we need to start seeing the fruit hanging on the branches, right? That's the ongoing fruit of union with Christ. Romans 6:22, "You have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life." You already have it. 2 Peter 1:3, "According as his divine power hath given us all things pertaining unto life and godliness," and is, "through," what? "Knowledge." You have it. You are lacking nothing in the ascended Christ who gave himself for you. Now to get the fruit on the branches is the ongoing result of a completed action. You are completely supplied. His love is so completely supplying you, we just need to tap into it. What would you think of a person who was malnourished but you knew in their home their refrigerator and their pantry is just overflow with food? You'd say, "What is going on with that?" Or the person who is homeless and holding up a sign and they need transportation, and you found out they've got a bank account full of money, tons of money? Or the Christian or the church who has a Savior that they have been united to, who in him is all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you're complete in him, and there's no fruit on the branches? You'd say something is wrong, right? How do we get into the bank account of faith, have access into the grace of God by faith? What is part of the access? I think Paul's telling us it's a, you know into this bank account of grace, that there's a four-letter access code password and you can't get in it without it. It's p-r-a-y. You need to pray that the reality of what you have in Christ that can never be increased or never be decreased, would start to so impact us that fruit starts popping on the trees in your marriage, in your family and your relationships instead of the conflict and the anger and all that so easily is representing our relationships. Then we start seeing fruit, abounding fruit, because we're tapping in to the one that's already been tapped into us because he lives inside of us. It's Jesus, the Son of God who loves you and he gave himself for you.

So being filled with the fruits of righteousness is already done but now we want to see the fruit on the branches which are by Jesus Christ, so prayer unlocks the key and then we

start moving. We pray and then we act. We pray and then we act. And then what's the ultimate aim? Unto the glory and praise of God. Your abounding love, which for which Jesus is source, he's the vine, you're the branch, Jesus himself said, "Herein is my Father glorified." If you want to know how God is glorified in your life, it's when we bear much fruit. So what are we praying in 2023 in all the other prayers we need to be praying? We're praying that our love may abound. We're praying that it would be in knowledge and in discernment that we would see and approve things that differ, that we would be sincere or real and without offense to the day of Christ. And then we would see fruit start abounding on the tree because the fruit's already there. It's already there in Christ. And that God would be glorified and praised and honored through the life of the church, through abundant joy because Christ is gain, more and more and more until Christ returns. "And this we will pray."

So let's pray now.

Father, we thank you for your glorious word and all the ways in which you are for us, you are with us, you are our helper, our Redeemer, our strength. In all the ways that we know you and want to know you more, may that knowledge be the source of great joy and strength and peace for us in this new year so that it overflows in more love, that we would truly count all things loss, as Paul did, because he was not giving an apostolic creed for himself but simply Christianity 101, counting all things loss so in such a way that the love would be discerning love, that we could see your work around us, that we would be real, show ourselves to be real through love, and you would keep us through love as we keep ourselves, as Jude said, and, Lord, that the fruit of the Spirit would be seen not for our sakes but for your sake, in the sense that you're glorified, you're praised, and you're honored and you are seen to be the glorious God that you are. So we pray, hallowed be thy name, your kingdom come, your will be done. In Jesus' name. Amen.