

Smart Love

Joy by Example Part 03
Philippians 1:9-11 1-24-2016

Summary: We must prepare ourselves for the Day of Christ as our central concern, because it will be a day of evaluation. Being ready means being pure and blameless, full of righteous fruit produced by Jesus, and that happens when we keep growing in smart love. Love grows in the soil of knowledge and discernment, and that combination enables you to consistently make the best decisions, resulting in being pure, blameless, and righteous.

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Philippians 1:9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

The Goal: Readiness for that Day

Imagine yourself getting ready for some really important person to come to your house. They're coming in the morning, so you make sure to set your alarm because you don't want them to ring the doorbell and you're just waking up and you drag out of bed and answer the door in your pajamas. So you make sure you get up, get dressed, brush your hair, and get ready. Or imagine a girl who has a huge crush on a guy who is on his way over to her house to pick her up for a first date. And she is getting herself ready. Or to use a biblical example, imagine a bride getting herself ready for the wedding. That is the analogy that Scripture uses to describe us getting ready for Jesus' return. We are like a bride getting herself ready, and she wants her dress to be perfect and her hair to be perfect and her makeup to be perfect – everything she could possibly do to make herself as beautiful as possible in the eyes of the groom. The Bible says that is what we are doing right now. If you are working on an anger problem in your life, that's not just so that you can have a little more peace in your household. Atheists work on their anger for that reason. The reason you are working on your anger problem, or your lust problem, or selfishness problem, or laziness problem, or greed problem, or whatever problems you are working on, is because you are a bride getting herself ready for the bridegroom.

2 Corinthians 11:2 I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him.

Everything we do in the church and in our Christian lives is because we are getting ready for something.

We are studying through the book of Philippians, and we come this morning to Paul's prayer for the Philippians in 1:9-11. And the crux of that prayer is that last phrase in verse 10. In verse 9 Paul says what he is praying for, and then halfway through verse 10 he gives the reason why he is praying for that. What's the reason?

Philippians 1:10 ...so that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ¹

The NIV says **until the day of Christ**, ESV says **for** and I think that's a little clearer because the point has to do with preparation.² The idea is we must become pure and blameless now so that we will be ready when he returns

Paul's Focus on the Day of Christ

This is already the second time in the book that Paul has mentioned the Day of Christ. Remember in verse 6 he was confident that God would carry on the fruitfulness of the Philippians' gospel partnership all the way until the day of Christ. And you will see that come up again and again throughout this book just like it does in all of Paul's writings and the rest of the New Testament. The writers of the New Testament saw everything through the lens of the last Day.

But if that is the dominant focus of the whole New Testament, and we are a people of the Book, why don't we think about it and talk about it more than we do? We come here on Sunday mornings and talk about spiritual things the whole time we're here. And yet, how many references do you think there are to the Day of Christ in the several hundred conversations that take place on a given Sunday morning? In the prayer groups we ask, "How can we pray for you?" How often does the prayer request have anything to do with getting ready for the second coming? I can't speak for all of you, but I'm ashamed to confess that it doesn't find its way into my conversations or prayer requests very often. And I don't hear it much from others either. Why is that?

Part of it is just the obvious fact that it's always going to be hard for us to keep something in focus that is outside of our daily experience. Out of sight, out of mind. But I think there is another reason that has made the problem even worse in our particular culture. In most Bible teaching, the second coming of Christ is seen as the time when everything finally gets better. That's when your struggle ends. But we have lost sight of the preparation aspect.

It's true that when Jesus comes back all your troubles will be over. But that's not the whole story. It is also true that when Jesus comes back, he is going to evaluate your life.

Romans 14:10 ... we will all stand before God's judgment seat. ... 12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.

2 Corinthians 5:9 So we make it our goal to please him... 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul talked about how ministries will be evaluated on that day. Some ministries will be found to be like gold, silver and precious stones; other ministries will be exposed as wood, hay, and stubble, and will be burned up in the fires of judgment. He goes on to say those people will still be

¹ The NIV makes it sound like all of v.10 is the reason, but the "pure and blameless" clause begins with the word *hina*, which means "in order that." The NIV simply translates it "and," but it is probably too strong a word to be translated that way here. More likely it appears in its normal sense of "in order that," introducing what is known as a *hina* purpose clause. That sets the second half of v.10 apart from v.9 and 10a.

² G. Stahlin, *TDNT* 6, 757, and Obrien, *NIGTC*, 79.

saved, barely, but their life's work will go up in smoke. Some Christians will, on that Day, suffer loss (1 Cor.3:15). They will have cause to be ashamed when they have to give an account. They will find out that all their work on earth was for nothing. And Paul was acutely aware of that, and he was very concerned that that not happen to him.

Philippians 2:14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure ... 6 in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.

That was a concern that *drove* Paul in ministry. He did not want to show up on judgment day with a pile of wood, hay and stubble. Nor did he want to show up with deficient character.

1 Corinthians 9:27 I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be rejected.

So much preaching today gives the impression that once you are genuinely converted, everything else is basically just a formality. You get the idea from modern preaching that the moment you are born-again, everything of any consequence is already set in stone. It's a done deal. That is not how Paul thought about it.

Philippians 3:10 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Notice the word **somehow**. The literal translation is **if somehow**, and that's a phrase that introduces an element of difficulty, if not doubt.³ What was Paul's situation going to be on that Day of evaluation? That was still a question mark. It was undetermined at this point, and so Paul kept straining and pressing on and laboring and praying, and having others pray for him. It wasn't just Paul helping the Philippians prepare for that Day; the Philippians were also helping Paul by praying for his perseverance.

Philippians 1:19 I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance.

What kind of deliverance?

20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage...

He is expecting that he won't be ashamed on the Day of Christ because through the Philippians' prayers, he will have sufficient courage to remain faithful. You see, everything had to do with the Day of Christ. Even his happiness over their financial gifts. He explains that in chapter 4.

4:17 Not that I am looking for a gift, but I am looking for what may be credited to your account.

I just want you to have lots of rewards and a really good situation on the Day when Jesus comes and makes his evaluations of each one of us. And all that is just from the book of Philippians. We could go all over the New Testament and I could show you how verse after verse after verse that point to that last Day.⁴ I think if you came up to Paul with a new ministry idea, his very first question would be, "How will

³ The same phrase is used in **Acts 27:12 Since the harbor was unsuitable to winter in, the majority decided that we should sail on, if somehow possible to reach Phoenix and winter there.**

⁴ Paul was doing his work in Corinth in order to present them to the Bridegroom as a pure virgin (2 Cor.11:2). And he wanted to be able to boast about them on the Day of the Lord Jesus (2 Cor.1:14). Or how he was concerned that all his work with the Galatians was going to prove to be a wasted effort (Gal.4:11). Early in his ministry Paul went to check in with the other Apostles about his direction in ministry because he was afraid that he was running or had run his race in vain (Gal.2:2). In 2 Tim.1:18 he prays that his friend Onesiphorus would be granted mercy from God on the Day of Christ. In 2 Tim.4:8 he talked about the rewards that will be given on that Day to everyone who simply longs for that Day! God will reward you on the Day of Christ just for caring about the Day of Christ. In 1 Cor.5:5 we see that the purpose of excommunication in the church discipline process is so that the person's spirit will be saved on the Day of the Lord.

this help prepare people for the Day of Christ?” And if you couldn’t answer that question, he would say, “Then why do it? It’s pointless.”

Pure and Blameless

Everything we do is for the purpose of getting ready for that Day. But what does “ready” look like? What exactly is readiness? He tells us in verse 10. The goal is that you **may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ**. That is what it means to be ready. You don’t have to have your hair brushed; you don’t have to have your living room picked up or a meal ready; being ready for his return means being **pure and blameless**. That’s ready. The word **pure** means unmixed, or undiluted, or uncontaminated. It can also be translated *sincere* – the same on the inside as you are on the outside. No phoniness. No pretense. You don’t have to fake it or pretend, you don’t have to cover up what’s really in your heart, because what’s really in your heart is good and beautiful.

The word **blameless** is a similar idea. That word is used in Acts 24:16.

Acts 24:16 So I strive always to keep my conscience blameless before God and man.

The idea is that there is no sin in his life that is going un-dealt with. He is not perfect. He still sins every day, but when he stumbles into sin, he confesses it and repents. There is no lingering, ongoing, unrepentant sin that his heart is clinging to and saying, “I’m not ready to give this up.”

You don’t want to be found toying with some sin when Jesus comes back. You don’t want to be found rationalizing some morally questionable thing when Jesus comes back. You don’t want to be caught on the Day of Christ clinging to some bad attitude toward someone he loves. Or involved in some fight that isn’t pleasing to him. You don’t want him to come back and find you off in the weeds messing around with something that deep down, you know is not pleasing to him.

Fruit of Righteousness

That is what you don’t want to happen. What you do want to happen is in verse 11.

11 filled with the fruit of righteousness

That is the positive side. **Righteousness** is simply doing what is right in God’s eyes – in your thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, desires, words, and behavior. And Paul refers to that here as **fruit**.⁵ The point of that is it is the result of something. Righteous behavior, righteous attitudes and thoughts – that doesn’t just happen by itself. It is fruit being produced by something. By what? What is the source?

11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ

It comes through Jesus. He works in you to will and to act, you cooperate with that, and you end up willing and acting in righteous ways.

So all of that is the goal. Paul is saying, “I’m praying for some things for you, and the reason I’m praying for them is because if you have them, you will be ready. Instead of him coming back and being displeased because he finds you with impurity and sin in your life that’s not dealt with, I want him to come back and be delighted because he finds you filled with all kinds of righteous fruit that came from him.”

All of that is the outcome of what Paul asks for in verse 9 and the first part of verse 10.

⁵ There is some debate over whether the word righteousness here is being used as a subjective genitive (the fruit that righteousness produces) or an objective genitive (the fruit that is righteousness) or an attributive genitive (righteous fruit). But whichever one we accept, the reference is to righteous living. I lean toward taking it as an objective genitive. What fruit would righteousness produce other than righteousness?

Paul's Pastoral Heart

But before we start in on verse 9, I just want to take a moment to point out the shepherd's heart that Paul has for the Philippians. Before looking at *what* he prays, it is worth noting *that* he prays. If you are in a position of spiritual leadership, prayer for the people you minister to is so critically important. Remember in Acts 6, the most important thing was that the Apostle never neglect two things: prayer and the ministry of the Word. Pray for the people you minister to. Before you ever preach a sermon or teach a Bible study, pray it. Prayer puts the preacher's heart into the sermon, and the sermon into the preacher's heart.

Paul was not just sitting around crafting impressive sermons. He cared deeply about the people's progress. I think that is such an important lesson for us today. Imagine a woman who has a baby, then just leaves it on a doorstep somewhere. Then she has another baby, and she drops him off at an orphanage. Then another one, and she puts it in a garbage dumpster. Then another and another and another, and every one she just abandons because she doesn't want to raise any of them. A woman like that would be considered a problem by our society. But I would suggest to you that in the spiritual realm, there are some churches that are like that. They are constantly having babies, but they are never willing to bring them to maturity. They are all about evangelism, and getting mass numbers of new converts, and they will feed them some milk here and there, but once the people grow beyond infancy and start needing some solid food, the church essentially abandons them.

"You're on your own – our mission is to reach the lost."

They don't concern themselves with your growth or health or maturity – they are just on to the next convert.

Paul wasn't like that. No one had more of a heart for the lost than Paul. He was the greatest missionary ever, and yet a huge amount of his time and energy and prayers went into helping the people he led to the Lord grow to maturity. He wanted them to keep growing, keep progressing, keep maturing.

That is the model Scripture gives us for ministry. Keep working with the person until the job is done. And when is that? When Jesus comes back. Until then, you still have work to do. That was the attitude that Paul had about everyone who came to faith in Christ through his ministry. He didn't bring them to faith in Christ and then leave them in a dumpster somewhere. He didn't drop them off in an orphanage. Twelve years after starting that church he is still discipling them, still teaching them, and still praying for them regularly.

Abounding Love

Okay, so let's look at how he disciplines them. What is it, exactly, that will bring these people (and us) to the point of being pure and blameless and full of righteousness so we are ready for Jesus' return? It starts with love.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more

Character Trait

Abounding love. Love for whom? He doesn't specify any particular object because his focus here is not on the object, but on love as a character trait. He is talking about the virtue of love in general. He wants them to increase in their love for everyone and everything that ought to be loved. Scripture calls us

to love God,⁶ to love your neighbor,⁷ love your enemies,⁸ love one another,⁹ love your spouse,¹⁰ love strangers, and just in general, to be lovers of good.¹¹ And Paul wants all of that to **abound**.

More and More

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound yet more and more

Abound means a whole lot, the word **more** means even more than a whole lot, and the second **more** means even more than more than a whole lot. So even if you have more than abounding love, Paul would say, “That’s great, but that’s still not enough. I’m praying for even more love than that.”

That rules out mediocrity, doesn’t it? Sometimes we can kind of settle in to a comfortable Christian rut that is just enough to keep conscience at bay (“I’m not a bad Christian – I’m doing this and that...”), but it remains at a nice, comfortable, manageable level that isn’t too demanding. Paul says, “No, it’s more like an Olympic foot race where only one person gets the prize and you have to run like you want to be that one person” (1 Cor 9:24).

So no matter where you are in your level of love, keep striving with everything you’ve got to grow and progress more and more in love. The church in Philippi was a loving church. That was obvious from their gifts to Paul, and their care for him – as well as to their generosity to their needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem. But that wasn’t enough. Paul wanted to see more growth, because anytime love isn’t growing, it’s dying.

And even though the Philippians were extraordinarily loving, they did have some weaknesses. They were having some unity problems in their church. They were great at loving people far away, but loving each other was little different story. Love is always tested most by those people you’re living with. They are the ones that threaten your comfort and ease more than anyone. They are the ones who step on your toes more often than anyone else. They are the ones who inconvenience you most often, and they are the ones whose sins you see most clearly and suffer from most often. And they are the ones who are around you when you’re at your worst. So ironically, it’s the ones we love the most that we struggle to love the most. So Paul prays for this loving church to keep abounding in love, yet more and more.

Smart Love

So, we need to make sure our love is growing. How is that done? Where is the garden where this growth can take place?¹²

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and depth of insight

That is the garden. Love grows in the soil of **knowledge and depth of insight**. One of the most dangerous things in the world is ignorant love. So Paul says, “I’m praying for you guys to have smart love.” That is so important, because dumb love will ruin your life, and here’s why: All love, whether it’s smart or dumb, is powerful. It motivates you. It propels you in the direction of its object. So if you love the wrong things, your life is going to be propelled in the wrong direction. And you don’t have to look very far in our society to see examples of that. People in our culture are all about love, but as soon as you start talking about truth they think you are being arrogant and they shut you down. They are like the airline pilot who came on the PA and said, “I have good news and bad news. The bad news is we have

⁶ Mt 22:37.

⁷ Mt 22:39.

⁸ Mt 5:44.

⁹ 1 Pe 1:22.

¹⁰ Tit 2:4, Eph 5:25.

¹¹ Tit 1:8 (the word “hospitable” literally means “stranger lover”).

¹² Meleck argues that where a locative idea works for *en*, that should be the first choice. So this love is to abound and increase in the realm of knowledge and insight.

lost all our instrumentation, and so we have no idea where we are or where we are going. The good news is we have a tailwind and we're making great time." That's most people. Their love gives them a strong tailwind, and they are making great time, but there is no navigational system to point them in the right direction. That was Israel's problem.

Romans 10:2 I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge.

And as a result of that, they were not even saved (Ro.10:1). As soon as love goes outside the boundaries of knowledge, it becomes evil. Dumb love will get you running after the wrong things - like this world.

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

If our love isn't properly educated and informed by Scripture, it will be duped into thinking that happiness can be found by running after this world and the things in this world. The only way to know which things ought to be loved and which things ought not to be loved, is through knowledge of God and his will, as expressed in Scripture.

Spiritual Knowledge

You have to know what pleases God and what displeases God, so that you love what he loves and you hate what he hates. You also have to know how God operates. You need grace, and so you have to *know* what the Bible says about how to get grace from God and how to fight against sin effectively. And you need knowledge to know how to recover from the effects of sin. Every time I sin it has a darkening effect on my heart so that my perception of reality is distorted. And that distortion is what causes me to have less love for good things and more love for bad things. And the only way to reverse that is by learning truth from God's Word.

That's why we are constantly studying the Bible around here. If you want to be a more loving person, it's not going to happen if your Bible sits on your shelf.

Think!

There are some corners of Christianity that seem to be against knowledge. They think that too much knowledge will make you a Pharisee, and so they focus on just trying to be loving without getting into too much theology. And this idea that having profound experiences of God's presence is somehow antithetical to thinking and understanding has created a situation where instead of pursuing knowledge and insight and understanding, many Christians are content to just operate on their feelings without rational thought.

A study was done to discover how many people are careful thinkers. All the subjects in the study were told some new idea that challenged something they already believed. So if they accepted this new concept that they had never heard of before, they would have to let go of what they previously believed. Fifty percent believed it immediately, without thinking it over. Thirty percent rejected it immediately, without thinking it over. Fifteen percent wanted some time to make up their mind, but they didn't ask for any additional information. They just gave it some time and then made a decision. Five percent of the people analyzed the details and formed a conclusion based on that. So what that study showed was this: Only 5% of people think. Fifteen percent think they think. And 80% of people would rather die than think.

Discernment

So the soil where this love can grow is knowledge. Actually, that is part of the soil. There is another part: not only knowledge, but also discernment. (The NIV says **insight**, but **discernment** is probably a little better translation.)

Now, before I give you a definition of discernment, let me say something about what it is not. Discernment is not the ability to “read” people’s hearts. Scripture forbids us from making judgments about what we think is in someone else’s heart.

1 Corinthians 4:5 judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts.

There are Christians walking around totally disregarding that verse, and they think it’s okay in their case because they have the gift of discernment.

“I have a feeling that guy is lying.”

“I’m pretty sure she has ulterior motives.”

“I’m a good judge of people, and I can tell you that guy isn’t genuine.”

None of that is discernment. It is just sinful judging, and is forbidden in 1 Corinthians 4:5.

So discernment is not the ability to read people’s hearts. So what is it? The Greek word here literally means “perception” – the ability to see things. It is the ability to see, not in the physical realm, but in the moral realm. Discernment can see moral distinctions that are hard to spot. Some people have an eye for beauty - discernment is when you have an eye for morality. There might be some new situation that hasn’t come up before, and most people don’t see any problem, but someone with insight, or discernment, can spot a moral pitfall that no one else picked up on. “I think that would be morally wrong because of this factor,” and as soon as he points that out, everyone else can see it.

“Oh, yeah, you’re right. I didn’t think of that.”

And it works the same way on the positive side. Some situation comes up, and everyone else in your family thinks it’s just a regular situation – they don’t see anything special, but you are able to spot a great opportunity to show love. (Remember, all of this is in the context of love.) The objective is for love to abound more and more, but without this kind of discernment, love gets stuck. You can show love in the ordinary, obvious ways, but that’s about it. But when you have discernment you can get into a situation where nobody else sees any special opportunity for love.

We need discernment to be able to spot subtle sins.

We need it to spot spiritual opportunities.

We need it to figure out priorities.

We need it to avoid being tricked by false teaching or the rationalizations of our own flesh.

We need it to avoid becoming legalistic.

We need it to know when to speak up and when to keep our mouth shut.

We need it to know the right way to approach delicate situations.

We need it to make most of our decisions throughout the day.

Ninety-nine percent of the decisions we have to make in a given day are not directly addressed by any particular verse in the Bible. What time should you get out of bed? That’s a judgment call. How much leisure time should you have and how should you spend it? What kind of diet should you have? What kind of car should you drive? What areas of your life are out of balance, or reflecting wrong priorities? Should you discipline your child right now, or let this one slide? What’s the best way to reply to that email you just got? Most of the decisions we make throughout the day we don’t have time to stop and pray about it. Many decisions we make, we only have a second or two to make them. Discernment is a virtue that will point you in the right moral direction time after time even in those quick, spur of the moment decisions.

That will happen if your love is abounding more and more. Without love, all the knowledge and discernment in the world will be useless, because you will know all the right things but you won’t have the motivation to do them. You’ll have motivation to go other directions. If your heart doesn’t love the

right things, you will always make bad decisions. Maybe you're trying to decide which car to buy, or where to invest your money, or whether or not to allow your kids to do this thing they are asking to do, or how to handle a really sticky situation at work. And you're racking your brain, trying to use wisdom, trying to discern God's will and find His guidance. You want to make the best possible decision. And you have lots of knowledge – you have studied the Bible for years. And yet you are still at a loss as to what to do. You still find yourself making decisions that, when you look back on them, turned out not to be the wisest option. And in many cases it's because of a lack of love. When you don't have enough love, then the needs of the people around you don't weigh heavily enough in your decision-making process. So if option A really benefits someone a lot, but option B has a lot better financial outcome, you will tend to not put enough weight on the pros of option A.

But on the other hand, if you have a lot of love but not much knowledge or discernment, you will be willing to choose what helps people the most, but you won't have enough knowledge to know which option is more beneficial to people. And you won't have the discernment to see those times when saying no, and making someone upset, is actually better for them in the long run than giving them what they want.

But if you have love, and that love is growing the soil of both knowledge and discernment, then you'll be able to make and follow through on not only good decisions, but the best decisions.

Choosing What Is Best

The Best

You need knowledge and discernment **so that you may be able to discern** (your Bible might say **approve**) **what is best**. That word **discern** or **approve** means to test something in order to prove its value. Like when you put gold into fire to prove that it's pure gold. All kinds of circumstances come your way, and you put them through a test to expose which one is **best**. It is not talking about deciding between good and bad; it is talking about deciding between good and best. Sometimes you'll have several options, and they are all good. But it's tough to see which one you should choose. The only way to know is to have the skill of being able to spot subtle differences in the options, and the ability to weigh the relative moral value of those differences. And that is what this word means.

“Wow, I'd like to have that ability.”

The only way to get so you can do that is to have smart love. You have to love what is good, and that love has to be governed by knowledge of the truth of God's word and the skill of moral discernment. And only then will you be able to consistently choose what is best in the myriad of options.

Then you will be able to move through life with ideal priorities and the proper balance. That is so hard. Sometimes I feel like the only time I ever get it right is in those split seconds at the bottom of a pendulum swing. I am totally overboard on studying and learning and sharpening my axe, and God says, “What about loving people?” And I say, “Yeah, I need to focus on that!” so off I go meeting with people and spending time with folks and writing letters, and all the rest, but then my studies are being neglected, so I swing back. And the only time I have any balance is that one quick moment in the middle between pendulum swings. Smart love enables you to get to where you can consistently say no to good things in favor of best things.

The Glory of God

And when you do that, the result will be that one of these days the eastern sky will crack open and the Son of Man will appear in power and great glory with countless millions of angels, and the trumpet will sound, and we will finally meet him face to face. And he will look at some and be displeased with what condition they were in when he returned. But he will look at you and he will say, “Here is one that is pure and blameless and filled with righteous fruit that came from me! Well done, good and faithful servant!” And the reason he will be so pleased is because it will all be to his Father's glory.

10 ...in order that you may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

The Father is glorified because this purity and blamelessness and righteousness all came through his Son.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

“If the righteous fruit comes from Jesus, what is our role?”

Some people teach that since it all comes from Jesus, you don’t even have a role. Just sit back and let him work. Let go and let God. Stop striving and working, and let God do it. That is not what the Bible teaches. Yes, Jesus is the source, but that doesn’t mean you play no role. He is the source of the fruit, but you are the branch that actually bears the fruit.

Philippians 2:13 it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

God is the ultimate source that makes it happen, but when it happens, it happens through your willing and your acting.

You can’t make yourself righteous apart from Christ.

But consider this question: True or false – we cannot become righteous through our own efforts. False! We cannot make ourselves righteous apart from Christ – that statement is true. But it is false to say, “Therefore, we cannot become righteous through our own efforts.” Our righteousness does come from Jesus Christ, but it doesn’t come from him automatically. He chooses to give it to us as a result of our efforts to remain in him. And being in Christ means having an especially close relationship with him on the basis of faith – trusting him enough to follow him. When you trust Jesus Christ more than you trust yourself, so that you want to follow his way even more than your own way, then you are in Christ, and that’s when he will produce fruit in your life.

So what’s the bottom line of this sermon? Pursue greater love, and do it by devoting yourself to following the Lord Jesus Christ. Pursue greater knowledge, and do that by trusting in Jesus’ words. Pursue greater discernment by trusting Jesus Christ and drawing near to him. Whenever you make decisions, choose whichever option will prepare you best to be ready when Jesus returns to evaluate your life. Do that, and Jesus Christ will produce righteous fruit in your life. And all of it will be for the praise and glory of God the Father.

Benediction: 2 Peter 1:5 make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. ... For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Name a couple of things in your life that are righteous fruit, produced by Jesus, that he would be pleased with if he came back today.
- 2) When it comes to love and knowledge/discernment, most people find themselves naturally stronger in one and weaker in the other. Which one comes more easily to you, and which one is more elusive?
- 3) Is there an area in your life where you feel an especially urgent need to make some changes before Jesus comes back?