

ABOUNDING LOVE Philippians 1:9

Philippians 1:9-11 contains a wonderful prayer Paul offers for the brothers and sisters in Philippi. In the first two or three Bible Studies in "Grace to You" we will look at the amazing grace found in this prayer.

"This I pray, that your love may abound still more and more..."

Paul prays that you have a continuous overflowing of love toward other people.

Great idea, Paul; but how can I get there? These verses give us some answers.

"In real knowledge..." Knowledge is the way in which love comes to "abound." Not just any kind of knowledge, but "real knowledge." The word "real" is the translator's attempt to communicate the intensity of this word in the Greek language, which indicates the need of a firm awareness of spiritual truths. Now follow this: the greatest truth in the Bible is this, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The greatest spiritual truth you can grasp is God's overwhelming and unconditional love for you. Understand, there is no greater truth! God loves you, right now, just like you are; and always will love you in all of the "right nows" throughout your life, just like you are and will be. Friend, grasp this "knowledge;" let it grasp you.

"...and all discernment" (NIV: "depth of insight") This term indicates practical insight into your own heart and life. *The Message* renders it: "You need to use your head and test your feelings so that your love is sincere and intelligent." *"Use your head...test your feelings."* The best place to begin doing this is with your own life: *your head, your feelings; insight into your own mind and heart.* Probing into our own mind and heart can often be a journey of most unpleasant discoveries. What we often find—if we are honest—is not flattering. In fact, if we don't have "real knowledge," it can be condemning. In fact, it probably is.

C. S. Lewis distinguished between the "animalistic sins" and the "diabolical sins." The animalistic sins are the familiar sins of the flesh: adultery, fornication, homosexuality, etc. The diabolical sins are the subtle sins of the mind and heart: desire for power, wanting someone to fail or suffer, covetous of another's success, envious, jealous; the sins we can hide behind a pleasant façade, a smile and even pleasant words. Of the two Lewis said that the diabolical sins were far worse.

When you look honestly into your heart do you find the diabolical sins? Wanting someone to get what's coming to them? Hoping a rival colleague will botch an assignment, miss a deadline, lose a bonus? Do you have the desire to "put someone in their place;" find yourself mulling over "what you should have said" in order to have the last word; wanting to get even for some offence? If you find these or similar things in your heart, GREAT! You are being honest, using "depth of insight" to probe your own heart. Leo Tolstoy said,

"The test of observance of Christ's teachings is our consciousness of our failure to attain an ideal perfection. The degree to which we draw near this perfection cannot be seen; all we can see is the extent of our deviation."

Acknowledging that you have such a heart just might drive you to the Cross for the mercy and grace we all need; drive you there, and keep you there.

It is at this juncture that the "real knowledge" must be coupled with your honest evaluation of your heart. The "real knowledge" which you must have at this point is that even though you may have "diabolical sins" hidden away in your heart, though you may have blown it terribly, that your heart is still after all these years quite corrupt, *God still loves you with a perfect love!* No matter what is in your heart, God's love for you is unaffected, unaltered, never diminished; His love for you is unconditional! The greatest knowledge on the face of this earth is that God loves you just like you are...regardless of what you do, say, or think.

Let the gaze of God's love sear your heart like a laser with the unshakable knowledge that God loves you, period; no "ifs...ands...or buts." When you have a "real knowledge" that God loves you unconditionally, such knowledge will set your heart so free that your love will indeed "abound more and more" toward your enemies and even toward some of your friends.

How can you be sure that God loves you so much? The cross is the historical testimony to the eternal truth of God's love for you.

Grace to you.