

# Abounding Love of Paul for the Saints

by David Smithers

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*David Smithers emphasizes the importance of love in the Christian life as revealed through Paul's prayers and teachings.*

**Duration:** 52:17

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 4:9

**Topics:** "Christian Love", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having priorities and landmarks in our Christian lives. He encourages the audience to recognize and be thankful for the work of grace in others, and to demonstrate love in practical ways. The speaker also highlights the significance of growing in love for God and for others, and emphasizes that grace is the means by which we can achieve this growth. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of prayer and the role it plays in our spiritual development.

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## Transcript

You know, I really encourage us all just to, you know, in a way it's a shame to have to stop, isn't it? I'm really of about half the mind not to stop worshipping. Praise God for the Word. But, you know, when you connect with Jesus in a time of worship, it doesn't get a whole lot better than that, does it? And one thing I really desire for each and every one of you is, and I'm not convinced we all here share this experience, but is that we all know and learn how to enter into the presence of God and really release ourself in that place.

You know, there's very few places where you can, or niches, or spaces in your heart, or moments in time where you really can be free and released with very few limitations or boundaries. Amen? I mean, there's just naturally all kinds of restrictions around us and limitations and boundaries for all different reasons. But in the place of worship, there's very few boundaries.

And it's just awesome. I mean, it's one of the most free moments that I enjoy on a regular basis. How about you? Amen? But I really do desire, and I think one thing that the Lord wants for us this weekend, is that we all know how to abandon ourselves to the Lord and be totally Christ conscious.

Not others conscious, not self conscious. Because as long as we're thinking in the back of our head, what is the people doing behind me? Or what do they think about when I'm raising my hands like this? We're not there yet. Amen? When it really clicks and connects, you forgot about everybody.

All you can see is Jesus. Amen? All that's you just aware of His presence. And if you don't know that experience, you need to pursue the Lord for it.

It doesn't get any better this side of heaven than that. Amen? And so I challenge you, out of all the things that we've addressed this weekend, I challenge you strong on that to figure that out. Ask the Lord to get past yourself so we can just really see Him and love Him.

Amen? It's awesome, the love of God that flows into your heart in those moments, the nearness, the intimacy that you enjoy with Christ is phenomenal. And I'm not trying to separate or make any division between those who do it this way versus those who do it that way. I'm not talking about an outward expression.

Okay. Is that your response? Okay. I'm not talking about a mode of worship.

I'm just talking about our heart. Amen? So. Okay.

The message is being left. Okay. Do you guys understand what I'm talking about? Do you relate what I'm talking about a little bit? I really encourage you just to... What's so awesome is when you can really give yourself to worship, it doesn't depend on if the overhead's working or the music's just perfect or everybody's singing real pretty.

It has nothing to do with all those things. You can enjoy it in your private devotions to the Lord. Amen? Okay.

You guys are looking at me funny now, so I guess we better move on. Let's pray and ask the Lord just to bless the simple stuff I'm going to share with you guys. Lord, I just ask you to help me.

Be with my mouth. Help me to communicate clearly, God. I pray you'd be with my lips, my tongue, my heart, my mind.

God, I pray that I would just share, pull these things together that we've been talking about, God, that we would have priorities like Paul had, that we would have landmarks in our life that keep us balanced and well-orbed in the Spirit, Lord, looking like you and not some caricature of you, God. God, help us, Jesus. Help us to be balanced people in these days in which we live.

Father, that we would confirm the reality of the Scripture through our lives, God, through our lives, through our love and through our relationships with other people. That, God, the way that we live would convince people that you're real and your Scriptures are true. God, we ask that you would make that a reality among us in Jesus' mighty name, that you would bring liberty here to worship you in Spirit and truth.

God, that we would learn how to love you in more free ways than we've ever, liberating ways than we've ever known before, Lord, in the mighty name of the Lord Jesus Christ. We just praise you. We worship you.

We honor you. We thank you for the wonderful, precious privilege it is to draw near to you and stand before you, God, to stand in your presence, to share the same space with you and to just hold our heads high in your presence, God, because you've made us right with you, because the work of the cross is perfect, God, and we rejoice in that, Jesus. God, I thank you that you're making us men and women who can walk upright and hold our heads high, God, by your grace.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, that we would operate in liberty and a spirit of freedom and boldness and humility and love and all those pieces work together so it looks right, God. So it looks right.

Father, we just pray. We want to look right. We want it to all come out right.

When we communicate and how we walk with other people, God, we ask that by your mercy and grace, you would help us to do that in the mighty name of Jesus. Thank you, God. Amen.

Okay, we've been talking about the prayer life of Paul and Paul's greetings, Paul's prayers that lay a groundwork for all of his instruction throughout his epistles. As we've already seen, Paul firmly establishes a foundation of gratefulness and thanksgiving for the saints of God, a prayer life that is unceasing, that is sacrificial, that is faithful, that is considerate of other people, that opens the doors of these people's hearts so he can share some very challenging truths. Amen.

We've already seen that these foundations of recognizing the grace of God in other people and being quick to affirm that and be thankful for that and this lifestyle of fervent prayer, that that continues, gives Paul an open door of access to challenge people to go deeper. Amen. We've already seen that one thing that Paul's prayers that reveal so clearly his priorities, you know, your prayer life reveals what's important to you.

Amen. And your prayer life reveals what's going on inside you, what you value, what you emphasize. And as we're examining Paul's prayer life, we see what he values and what he's emphasizing.

Amen. And what he's trying to get at is that they grow, they go deeper, they mature, they become more like Jesus. All the epistles are about us becoming more like Jesus.

Amen. If you study the epistles of Paul and don't come away with a strong conviction that the author, the one who penned that book, is all about trying to get you to mature and go deeper, you didn't read the book right. Amen.

Anybody that tries to tell you that they've used the epistles of Paul to say, it's alright, be at ease, take it easy, don't worry, just settle down and enjoy what's going on with you right now, you didn't read the books right. Okay. They may pull some stuff out of context, they may pull out a verse here and there and get to that point, but that's not the emphasis.

Anybody that uses the epistles of Paul to preach a particular brand of doctrine or theology, maybe they're big into grace, maybe they're big into some teaching about the sovereignty of God, whatever you may be into, you know what I mean? If that's how you exclusively, get me, if that's how you exclusively use the writings of Paul, you're misusing them. Because what Paul is concerned about, first and foremost, in his writings, when you really break it down and look at it over and over and over about, is about that you go on with Jesus. Amen.

The very thing that he desires for himself, to know more of Christ and to become more intimately connected with Him, to go deeper, to become more like Christ is what he desires for all the churches that he writes to. Amen. So you know what, you guys, we can become specialists in theology and doctrine and park and camp out around certain little truths and have even a handle on certain truths, the little details, and miss the big picture.

Amen. It's very, very easy to do. I know people that know how to quote this book inside and out, but have missed the big picture of what the plan of redemption is about from Genesis to Revelations.

We've got to be careful not to avoid doing that. And what I love about Paul's prayer in the beginning is he reminds us what he's after. Amen.

So we've seen that he opens this door of access by being thankful about the people he's writing to, affirming the good things that are going on in their life. We see that he then moves on to reminding them of his sacrifice in prayer, that he's always praying about them. Translated means he's always thinking about them.

And not just passive thoughts, but taking initiative to see that God does something in their lives. Amen. He's concerned about them.

He loves them. We moved on from there to see that part of the emphasis of Paul's prayer life is their growth, their change, that they would abound over and over. That's communicated.

But what is that growth? What is the end of that growth when you sum everything up? Anybody got any ideas? When you look at the prayer life of Paul, he's talking about being thankful. He's talking about unceasing prayer. He's talking about that they abound more and more, but he always gets back to one particular topic in his prayers, and that is that they abound in love.

Amen. Again, we're looking at his prayers. His prayer life revealed that this was a primary major theme of all of his instruction.

What is the end of instruction? What is the end of this thing that we're going for when we get into this book and really study it? It's that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and we love our brother as ourself. Amen. And if you don't come away with that, you missed it.

I don't care how many verses you can quote and how much theology you know. Amen. And this is where it comes down to the nitty-gritty of our life.

This is what Jesus is wanting us to grow in. This is where we need to go deeper. Amen.

We can talk a big talk, but unless we know how to love people, we're not going any deeper. Amen. You guys are getting quiet on me.

The apostolic priority of love. Let's look at some more of Paul's prayers, OK? In case you're not convinced. Ephesians 3, 13 and 19, Therefore, I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulation for you, which is your glory.

For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family of heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, Paul's about, he's praying now, OK? For this reason, he bows his knee and he prays, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man. Not just an outward work. He's wanting something to happen that starts from the inside and works itself out.

Verse 17, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and the length and the depth and the height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. Which passes knowledge. We're not going to

get here academically.

We're not going to get here intellectually. We're not checking our brain at the door. We've got to hang on to that thing, amen? We want to use that.

God wants us to be rational, you know, functional beings in our pursuit of Him. But we're not going to get there just intellectually. It passes knowledge, this thing that Paul wants you to understand, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This is what Paul is praying for, that you will be rooted and grounded in love. Amen? Is that a priority of your prayer life? Is that a priority of your Christianity? Or do you find yourself reacting, overreacting, having a knee-jerk reaction to all the groups that that's all they ever talk about? Amen? What we're going for here, what I love about Paul's prayers in the beginning of all of his epistles, is how well balanced they are. Amen? He's charging you to go deeper.

He's compelling you to go deeper, to abound in godliness and sanctification and righteousness and good works. He never lets you off the hook when it comes to those issues. But he wants this righteousness to be revealed through a spirit of love.

It's got to be coupled with love and grace and mercy. Amen? I don't know how we've come to do this in the church of Jesus Christ, but it's happened. And that is, there are people who are known for their holiness message and their message of righteousness, who have the most terrible reputation for being unkind and unloving.

I don't know how it happens, but it does. And if we'll be honest, any one of us at any one time who was at one time or another really pursued a deeper work of righteousness in our life, sometimes it has led to a very unrighteous attitude towards other people. If we'll really be honest, I'm telling you, this is what's happened.

We have got to guard against this. We've got to be wise. I want to be a holy man, but I want to be a loving man.

And those two things are supposed to coexist in the same space. Amen? And so Paul, that's why he's praying this way. First and foremost, he's praying by demonstrating what love looks like, by recognizing the good in the people that he's addressing.

He's affirming them. He's encouraging them. He's being thankful for them.

He demonstrates love by getting on his knees and praying in an unceasing day and night way. Amen? Then he charges them to grow, and the end of all their growth is supposed to be love. Love for God with a passion and love for other people.

Amen? And this sums it up. Amen? Doesn't it? In a minute, we'll talk about how you get there. That's by grace.

Paul always talks about grace. This is where we're going. These are five marks of Paul's apostolic prayers and greetings in the beginning of how he introduces his books.

This is how he opens the door to start instructing people. He always touches these topics. And you guys, if we're ignoring these five topics, I believe we're missing something.

Are you getting this yet? Am I making sense after the last few messages? Maybe a little bit. Well, let's look at another. Philippians 1, 9 through 11.

And this I pray. Here he goes, praying again. That your love may abound still more and more.

And you might add more and more and more and more. Amen? I want you to abound. I don't want you to play the inchworm game.

You remember that little thing? God didn't want you to grow a little bit. A year later, I'm an inch bigger in my love for Jesus and for other people. He wants you to abound in your love.

Amen? Some of us are just squeaking it out, barely. You know what I mean? I'm telling you, it's pretty sad when you look at your life sometimes going, Well, I think I've shrank. I haven't grown.

You know, God have mercy, help me. Amen? No, he wants you to abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ. Paul doesn't want you to be an offense to God, and he doesn't want you to unnecessarily be an offense to anybody else.

He wants you to abound in love until the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. Paul's back to this same theme. He's praying without ceasing.

He wants you to grow, but how is this growth supposed to be produced and revealed in your life? When you boil it down, it looks like love. Laying down your life so God can be glorified and other people can be benefited. Amen? In regards to spiritual matters and the needs of their life.

Colossians 1, 3 and 6 We give thanks to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints. Paul's excited. He's putting on praise.

He's giving thanksgiving for the church because they're loving one another. Amen? Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel which has come to you as it has also in all the world and is bringing forth fruit as it is also among you since the day you heard it and knew of the grace of God in truth. Paul's always concerned about fruit.

He's always concerned about growth. He's always concerned about righteousness. But it's worked out in love.

Amen? How are we doing loving one another? How are we doing walking with one another? You know, the litmus test, if you will, of loving one another is how well do you forgive one another when you offend one another. Amen? How long does it take you to get over it? How long does it take you to stop talking about it? How long does it take for you to stop thinking about it? Amen? Can you forgive one another easily and freely? Can you put stuff behind you and just say, hey, it's a new day, a new situation, and there's new grace to hear to help me, to empower me to do this thing. Amen? You know, we can talk the talk, we can talk it up hard and fast, but if we can't love one another and forgive each other and love one another and try again with each other, then it's all talk.

Amen? You know, sometimes it's just about trying again, isn't it? It's a little bumpy with this person or that individual or in this situation. This person bugs you and kind of rubs you the wrong way. And you go, oh my goodness, this is tough.

And Jesus says, get up and do it again. Get up and love them again. Get over there and greet them again.

Get over there and talk to them again. Open up your heart once again. Give them another chance.

Amen? It's grace. Amen? We need a lot of grace. We need another chance every day, several times a day.

Amen? And we need to give others another chance. We're talking about basic stuff. I know this isn't any great revelation, but what I love about it is that, Paul, these elements are all found in these prayers over and over again.

First Peter 4, 7 and 8. We're not talking about one of Paul's letters here, but it's an apostolic exhortation nonetheless. But the end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be serious and watchful in your prayers.

And above all things, have fervent love for one another. For love will cover a multitude of sins. Love will cover a multitude of sins.

Sometimes when you're really concerned about growing in righteousness, growing in godly character and good works, which is a holy, beautiful ambition, but sometimes when you try to do that, you're not busy about covering sin. Sometimes you're busy uncovering it. Amen? That's okay if that's in your own life, but you guys, a heart of love shouldn't want to unnecessarily expose people's junk for everybody to know about.

Amen? I mean, Jesus came and died on the cross not to uncover your sin, but to cover it. Am I talking about compromising or cutting quarters or hiding things that need to be exposed? Not at all. But you guys, we talk too much sometimes.

And we need to cover more. Amen? A man who does not cover sin does not know himself. If you unnecessarily expose other people's sins, you don't even know who you are or what you are.

Because each and every one of us are capable to do anything a moment apart from the grace of God. Amen? We are all hunks of flesh prone to sin, prone to love sin left apart from the grace of God. Don't you forget it.

But you know, it's a funny thing. You hang around the church long enough and you talk a good talk long enough and you start believing your hype and you forget what you are. And then you find yourself talking too much about somebody when it could be you.

Amen? 1 Thessalonians 4, 9 and 10 But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. This is kind of a cool verse, isn't it? You know what? If you're not getting this message that you're supposed to love one another, you're not being taught of God.

You're not listening to the Spirit of God within you. Amen? I know that there are places that use the message of the love and grace of God at the expense of teaching a message of holiness and being upright and going all the way with Jesus. That's what Paul calls using the grace of God as a license.

Isn't that right? There are lots of places out there doing that, but that does not excuse us who want to be sincere seekers of God to have a knee-jerk reaction to what others are doing badly and in turn do something badly ourselves. Amen? Amen? You guys, we've got to have all this stuff coming out of our mouth. But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, and indeed you so do towards all the brethren who are in Macedonia.

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more. That you abound in love more and more. Paul wants you to grow.

Paul wants you to change. He wants you to mature. He wants you to become conformed to the image of Christ.

And what is that? That's love. When you boil it all down, it's about love. Amen? Loving God with all our heart and loving one another as ourself.

And I'm not just talking about the intent of our heart and the motives of our heart. Sometimes we try to give ourselves a little bit of room. Well, I meant well.

My motive's pure. I do want the best thing for this and those people over there. But I just kind of said it in a crabby way.

My spirit was a little bit sour. You know what I'm saying? You're responsible for all of it. Amen? Your motive and the method.

We've got to get this thing right. Amen? I'm preaching to myself because I blow it and the method a lot of times over and over again. I need grace.

We all need grace, don't we? But you guys, as long as we're making excuses while we don't have to do this, we're on dangerous ground because then we're on a place where we do not allow ourselves to be accountable to one another. We've got to firmly establish what the ground rules are, what we're going for. Amen? Creating a foundation that we can appeal and influence one another.

Understanding that we're after Christian maturity, spiritual growth, and that the end of that spiritual growth is love. We've got to nail this down and say this is what we're going for and I'm going to allow you to hold me accountable to that standard. Amen? When my spirit is bad, when I'm grumpy, when I'm impatient, when I don't want to take time, when I'm just rude, somebody yank my chain and tell me.

Amen? We want to point out all the stuff somebody may not do. I don't know if you should be listening to that music. Really, so-and-so dresses us in such a way and this person has that kind of hairdo.

And you know what? I heard that so-and-so had a tattoo. Am I advocating any of those things? No. I don't even know what I'm talking about.

I really don't. I'm just hypothetical. We talk so much about this stuff, you guys.

We need to give a little bit more. Go for the heart. Go for the juggler.

You know what I'm saying? Go for someone's heart. Say, hey, you get godly in here and trust the Lord a little bit to work some of the other stuff out. You know? Man, one thing I've seen over the years is there's some people that seem like, man, they're all way out there in the bushes in some weird place about all

kinds of external stuff, but they really are pursuing Jesus in spite of some of the external trappings or things that maybe you don't understand or wouldn't do it exactly that way.

But they're really seeking the Lord. Then one day, they pop up and pass you. And all of a sudden, everything comes together and it starts clicking for them.

We've got to be careful, alright? Don't focus and major on the externals. Focus on the heart, alright? Am I saying that with good holiness preaching and good preaching that doesn't come, some standards of morality? I'm not saying that at all. There's places where we speak in wisdom and love to one another that, hey, you know, this may be making things a little more difficult for you or may not be representing Christ exactly right.

But then there's a lot of... As an old saint of God told me years ago, there's some stuff that just let Jesus take care of. You know, when you're trying to minister and encourage somebody to grow in their discipleship with Christ, you can only talk about so many things at one time. Amen? And sometimes we gravitate towards the little stuff and we miss the big stuff.

Focus on the major stuff and see that if the Holy Spirit doesn't... He does a whole lot better job, effective job speaking than we do a lot of times. Amen? You know, I could tell you some stories, I really could, about some of this stuff. Because I came from kind of a strange place myself as far as some of my habits and dress code and some of my vocabulary and conduct.

I hung around with a lot of strange people that did a lot of things, and a bunch of us came to Jesus around the same time. You know? And we came through it together. On the other side, the Lord got it all straightened out.

Amen? Be careful that your natural inclinations and prejudices that you already have aren't masquerading as a standard of godliness and creating an opportunity for criticism. Amen? Because some of you guys just might be... I don't know if I need to go here exactly or not where I'm going. I'm camping here a little bit.

I'll spit it out and we'll move on. Some of you guys might be kind of... We are talking about the Midwest here, right? Some guys don't cater towards earrings and long hair and tattoos. Not because they're godly people, but because they're just a good old cowboy.

You know what I'm saying? So make sure it's Jesus the reason why that thing bugs you and you want to talk to Him. Not just your old stuff. You know what I'm saying? The camp I came from, you know, jocks kind of really freaked me out.

You know, I was real suspicious of them. You know, I thought, oh man, those egomaniacs. You know, they're all under their body.

I had all kinds of biases and prejudices. And you know what? I still surprise myself those little things pop up within me still to this day. There's all kinds of little cliques and groups.

Aren't there on campus? And we've got these little biases and prejudices and a lot of times they try to masquerade as some godly standard. Well, that's not what it's about at all. You just came from a different place and you never used to like doing things that way anyway.

Amen? Okay. Let's talk about another thing about how Paul introduces his instruction. It was really striking to me.

Now again, I don't believe that Paul is giving any exhortation during his letters that are just kind of niceties, just kind of casual blessings. You know like some of us write letters, don't we? We do it with an apostolic flavor. Greetings in the name of Jesus.

And then we sign with some of those too, don't we? You can't even get away with signing an email without saying blessings in the name of Jesus Christ. You know what I mean? Like apostles in training or something. I don't know what's going on.

You know, that kind of wigs me out because you catch yourself trying to type one of those things. What am I doing, man? I'm just going through the motions just saying this is how I start and end a letter. God help me.

Give me something, you know? But I do not think that's what Paul was doing. And one common phrase that is always found in the introduction after Paul reminds the church who he's addressing about his apostleship and how it came from God, he moves on from there to pray for them and be thankful, he always says, grace to you. Grace to you.

And I've been meditating on this. And what I realized is what I believe the Lord was ministering to me is I don't believe that we have any business trying to instruct anybody about anything pertaining to spiritual matters without first starting on the foundation of grace. Amen? And yet, we get caught up in conversation and dialogue with one another and we start talking about spiritual things and things we read here and there and this theology and everything.

And, you know, we talk about all kinds of disciplines. Yeah, we want to go for it. We want to pray.

All these godly things that we want to do that are legitimate that we should want to do and yet we never talked about the power or the means by which we get there and are enabled to do it. This we must be very, very careful. I'll tell you right now, within the church of Jesus Christ, there is not an appetite for teaching about godliness if you haven't figured that out.

People squirm and are very, very uncomfortable when you start talking about that, yes, you must be a holy man or a holy woman of God. That the grace of God is not given just to offer you forgiveness, just to wipe away the penalty of your sin, but yet to even more empower you to overcome sin. Amen? That message is not popular in the church of Jesus Christ.

And yet, many of us in this room have found that that teaching is a reality. It is a precious truth that we have been partakers of that has transformed places in our lives. It is a new freedom that we're excited about that we want to share with other people.

And in our enthusiasm so often, we share with one another the disciplines that got us to some of these breakthroughs and in the process, we forget to tell people the means by which we got there, which is the grace of God. And I'll tell you what, so many churches are already recoiling from the message of holiness, and if we're not careful to emphasize and reemphasize and say it again and again that it's all by God's grace, they think they've found a little loophole and they excuse themselves from receiving our testimony and our teaching because we did not mention grace. I'm not saying they're justified in doing that, but I am saying that if we're careless not to put grace in our message, we're always going to have trouble when it

comes to talking and sharing with people about this message of being a godly man or a woman.

Amen? And we've got to remind ourselves, I can't do this apart from the grace of God. We can't say that enough. Amen? I have found that in every one of the pastoral epistles, not pastoral epistles, every Pauline epistle with the exception of his two epistles to Timothy and Titus, he starts with grace to you.

Grace to you. And still, we can say within the pastoral epistles, he lays the foundation about grace very clearly. But you know what I think? As Paul understands when he's talking to his fellow ministers, to Timothy and Titus, they are a little bit deeper in the Lord than the general churches that he's been addressing.

They understand the mechanics of his theology a little bit better. And I don't think Paul has to be quite as careful to always introduce everything with grace with these men. But when he's going to give general instruction to the church of Jesus Christ, to people who he's trying to urge them to grow and to end up looking more loving like Christ, he reminds them first and foremost, grace to you.

He gives them a blessing. Grace. May the grace of God be upon you to enable you to do what I am now charging you to do, is what he's saying.

Amen? We have no business teaching anybody anything about matters of the Spirit without emphasizing the grace of God. This is something, you know, the Lord started revealing this to me a few years ago. And when I found that when I started to define grace more biblically for people and went out of my way to really lay a foundation of grace when I started preaching about holiness or encouraging them to a holy life, I got a lot less flack.

I got a lot less argument. When I emphasize over and over, it is all by your grace, Lord, and I believe that with all my heart. When we emphasize that, it puts certain people at ease.

It allows them to open their heart and open their mind to receive our instruction and encouragement. Amen? Because there are groups out there that will urge you to try to live a godly life in your own strength. They are.

I've been in some of those groups before. And it's not a good place. I remember so clearly a man of God, a real, genuine man of God that had a radical transformation stand up and give his testimony about how God had broke through and changed his life and delivered him from homosexuality and all kinds of drug addiction.

You know how he told me this wonderful work of God happened in his life? He was submitted to his authorities. He read his Bible. He prayed.

And he was a regular member of the church of Jesus Christ. And I was going, oh my goodness, he just gave them the law. You know what I'm saying? He never mentioned faith in Christ and he never mentioned the grace of God.

Now, I knew that this brother had a genuine work of grace in his life that had been appropriated and applied through faith in Christ. He had a great heart experience, but he didn't have his theology down, understanding about how to communicate it, and he gave a message that created a lot of confusion. Does that make sense to you guys? Am I saying that Bible study, submission to godly leadership, and prayer are not important? No, I'm not saying that at all.

But you guys reading a book as good a book as this is, inerrant and perfect in all its content, memorizing the Scripture, doing knee drills, and submitting to a leader at a church is not going to give you a breakthrough. It's a work of Christ. Amen? It's the body of Christ.

It's the Word of Christ. It's praying in the closet with Christ. It's just a means to facilitating what He did on the cross.

All our boasting, all our bragging, all our glorying is in the cross of Christ. He is our sufficiency. We cannot say that enough.

And so, Paul always starts when he gives instruction to somebody that says, grace to you. There is a spiritual principle being laid out here about how to instruct people. I hope that's what you've been gathering from these last few messages.

First and foremost, you must be a people who readily recognize the good work of grace in the people that you're addressing. Be thankful for them. Amen? Then demonstrate love in a practical, tangible way.

Paul did it by praying. He went on from there to urge them to grow, not just to grow, but to grow in love, and he always reminds them, grace to you. Grace is the means by which you get there.

We must have these five keys, these five landmarks, if you will, in our Christianity, in our exhortation, if we're going to have real influence with people. Does this make sense to you guys? I hope it does. I'm excited about it.

It's great stuff. Aside from the talk about haircuts and earrings. I'm excited about this stuff.

1 Corinthians 2.3 To the church of God which is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 1.7 To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 1.1-2 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are in Achaia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1.1-3 Paul, an apostle, not from men through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead and all the brethren who are with me to the church of Galatia, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1.1-2 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus, grace to you. Philippians 1.1-2 Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ to all the saints of Christ Jesus who are in Philippi with the bishops and the deacons, grace to you.

Colossians 1.2 To the saints and the faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossia, grace to you. 1 Thessalonians 1.1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, grace to you. 2 Thessalonians 1.2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

And then Philemon 1.3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you! Amen? It's by grace that we do this thing. There's something to be learned here by the prayers of Paul, by the greetings of Paul.

He starts out with a firm foundation. We've got to talk about grace. But just as we've heard the message of love abused in some fellowships, we've heard the message of grace being abused.

Grace this, grace that. Oh, the grace of God I cover you here. There, you don't worry about that.

God's not caring about that. We've seen it used over and over again as a license to sin. So we have a knee-jerk reaction and what we find ourselves doing is being way too quiet about the grace of God.

We need to define grace correctly. Amen? Titus 2.11 says, The grace of God has appeared to all men, teaching them to deny ungodliness. Amen? That's what the grace of God... When I saw that verse, that got my attention.

I said, I need some of that in my life. I need to be taught how to deny ungodliness. I need how to be conformed to be a man who is zealous for the things of God.

Let's get on with this thing. Then I figured out God gives more grace. And He gives more grace to the humble.

I said, I can't get low enough. God, get into my life. You know what I mean? Let me learn humility, because I want more grace.

Guys, we need not avoid the message of grace, but rather, as the old Methodists used to preach, preach about the possibilities of grace. Amen? That grace can transform your life. That grace can break you out and change you into somebody that you never dreamed you'd be.

Amen? That the grace of God can set you free from besetting sins. That the grace of God is the power to overcome ungodliness. That's exciting stuff.

You know, when people come up to you and they start telling you, yeah, the unmerited favor of God. Translated means that when you really mess up bad, God looks over your sin and He gives you another chance. Say, praise God.

That's exactly right. It's the unmerited favor. But more than that, it's the unmerited power.

Not only does God's grace forgive you of your sins, but He'll help you overcome your sins. Amen? Don't get wigged out when they just kind of share about half of what grace does. Just add the other piece.

You know, so often though, we draw battle lines and we get in a defensive posture. Oh, now, brother, remember. You know what I mean? And we've gotten our boxing gloves on.

And we say, oh, that's not all. You know, we get real antagonistic. Say, praise God.

You're right. You know what else? Hey, there's some other awesome things about grace we ought to look at. Amen? If we do not major on the grace of God, we will always get this, and it must always be misunderstood in the church of Jesus Christ.

Is this good stuff, you guys? I'm telling you what, this is an apostolic pattern and principle for giving instruction on spiritual matters. And if we are wise, we will receive it. And I'm putting a little bit of emphasis on this.

If you don't go out of your way to put an emphasis on grace when you start sharing spiritual things, you're being a knucklehead. You're making it harder than it needs to be. Do not do that.

I exhort you, my brethren. I'll use apostolic language here. I exhort you, my kind brethren, who are abounding more and more in the love of God, please, emphasize the grace of God.

I'm kidding with you, but I'm kind of not kidding with you. I'm putting some authority behind that. It will be helpful to your soul if you'll learn how to do it.

Don't take for granted they know this. Man, given to our natural inclinations, the flesh always tries to fix the flesh with the flesh. Isn't that right? Even when we have the greatest motives.

You know how many times, I'm going to do it all by God. We're praying, we're praying, we're reading the Scriptures, then we catch ourselves a few months later striving in our own strength. Miserable, tired, grumpy, not a very happy Christian, joyless.

What's going on? Oh, I'm trying to fulfill a spiritual command in my own strength. I need God's grace. You get on your knees, I'm sorry Lord, I can't do this.

I need your help. Making sense yet, you guys? Did you get anything out of these things today? Is this helpful? Don't get wigged out. If you got bugged by the earring hair talk, just scrap that.

We'll talk later if you want. Just don't be preaching the law with a good old boy mentality though, okay? That's all I'm exhorting you. We are in Texas, isn't that right? Okay.

You guys, we need the grace of God in our life. Is it safe to talk that way to Aggies? Is that alright? About good old boys? Okay. We want to go deeper.

We want to be people that help other people go deeper. That's what I've really tried to do, lay out in these last three messages, is that there is some wisdom found in Paul's prayers that opens doors to people's hearts to help the message go in a little bit easier. We, unashamedly, have a message, I believe, collectively, I know many of us know each other very well, collectively we have a message that has some teeth, has a message that has an edge, that has a message that's compelling and seeks to be uncompromising.

I'm not apologizing for that. That message transformed my life. I've seen it transform a lot of other people's lives.

But you guys, we've got to be careful not to make this message harder than it needs to be. We need to learn grace. I'm just talking about being gracious in our communication style.

We need to learn tact. We need to flat just grow up in some areas in how we interact with people. Amen? There are ways to approach people and to reach out to people and love people that just make this whole ministry thing a lot easier.

Okay? We need not make excuses for people rejecting the Gospel by blaming always on them. That's not where the fault lies, I think. We can have much more effective ministries if we will simply, first and foremost, admit we need help in this area.

And then our ears will be much more open to, as I said today, those little inward promptings of the Spirit that says, ah, you're doing it again. Stop that. Or reach out, touch, share, love.

Amen? If this has been convicting at all and you said, yeah, that's me, ouch, and you want more grace in your life, I exhort you to humble yourself. And right now, let's just pray for one another. Can we do this? But if you want, stand and come forward and we can pray about these things.

Let's see a difference, okay? Let's see a difference. You know what I'm tired of, you guys? I'm tired of us blowing it in the same areas and then we're giving each other the pep talks to say, yeah, I know I should have been nicer. I know I should have said it different.

Yeah, I know. And then we go right back out there and do it again the same way. We need change and repentance in this area.

Amen? I'm being direct, aren't I? That's good. That's good. I need change and ongoing repentance in this area.

Because as I said this morning, I think I've blown it more than all of you guys. I've had just more years to do it. I don't want you guys to be as hard for you as it has for me in some situations.

Okay? Well, if that's you, you want to pray, stand, kneel, make some gestures, say, yeah, that's me, I'm humbling myself before God and my brethren. I need help right now in Jesus' name. Can you guys come up here and lead us in a song of worship? And then let's just worship the Lord.

Let me just pray for you and for myself. God, I ask you to help us. Father, help us to have a teachable spirit.

A teachable spirit today, God. God, that we would receive the message of grace and we would understand the necessity of emphasizing grace. That it's only by your might, only by your power, only by your Spirit, not by our strength, not by our intellect, not by our good works that we accomplish anything.

We recognize that. God, we've got all of our good works, all of our good efforts are as filthy rags. They stink, God.

Left to themselves. God, we pray that you would help us, Jesus. God, I pray, please, please, teach us how to do it.

Equip us. Empower us to love one another, God. To be gracious to one another.

God, to pray for one another, Lord. Just to be thankful for one another. And God, to point people clearly to you.

Not to a list of disciplines, as helpful as they may be, as practical as they may be. Sometimes God, let that not be our final word, but the final word be your name, Jesus. The final word be your cross, Lord, where all the sufficiency is found.

I just pray that you would help us in Jesus' mighty name. In Jesus' mighty name. You guys, let's just worship the Lord and just say, God, help me.

Give me freedom. Give me liberty. Liberty to love you.

Liberty to love my brothers and sisters. And you guys, when you get... You know, I'm exhorting you guys to open up and share with one another earlier in the message. And I found myself around the lunch table talking to somebody and all of a sudden I started to freeze up inside.

I started trying to withdraw. I was having difficulty being genuinely interested in an individual. And I'm going, help! Help! Spirit of God, help me.

Help me. What do I say next? What do I do now? How do I do this? We must have the Spirit of God helping us from the inside out if we're going to do this thing. Amen? Call upon the Lord as you're trying to walk this thing out.

Let's just do that as we worship the Lord.

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