



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Philippians 1: 3-11

2013

"God's Masterpiece"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Mike, and good morning. We have started a series of studies in the Book of Philippians. We looked at the introduction, the first two verses, last week and this morning we're going to look at verse 3 through 11 of Philippians, chapter 1,

³ I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, ⁵ in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ *For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷ For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. ⁸ For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. ⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Philippians 1: 3-11

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word and our time of study and worship together. Let's pray.

Father, we do pray Your blessings upon our time this hour. We pray that You would guide us and direct us as we consider this great passage of Scripture. A passage that certainly exalts Your power, Your love, the initiative of Your love, the completeness and unconditional nature of Your love, Your sovereignty—and also brings to mind our responsibilities as Your people.

Certainly, LORD, it would be Paul's purpose for us to understand that Your sovereignty is incentive to live a life of obedience; and to be specific, one of love for one another. It certainly is that and I pray that that will be the lesson that we draw from this great passage of Scripture: For it gives us the assurance of our salvation, the certainty of the salvation of every believer in Jesus Christ, but also our responsibilities as believers to love one another—to really be Christ to one another. So LORD, teach us these things and build us up in the faith; give us great encouragement from the things that we read and incentive to live lives that honor You and exhibit Your love, not only to one another here in the church but before the world at large.

Bless our time now as we study this great passage together, as we worship together. And then bless our time of fellowship afterwards. We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(Message) One of the most famous lines in poetry, or so it's been called, is the first one of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Kahn*. What's interesting about it is, it all came to him in a dream. He'd been taking laudanum, (which was an elixir kind of medicine that contained opium), and he fell asleep under its influence.

And while he slept, a poem came to him. And when he woke up he began writing it down:

In Xanadu did Kubla Kahn

A stately pleasure dome decree...

But while he was scribbling the lines, a visitor came to the door. He left his desk and he answered the call. But when he finally got back to his poem...it was gone. He was never able to finish it.

I memorized some poetry when I was in the eighth grade and that was one of the poems I memorized. I liked it because it was interesting—and it was short. *[Laughter]* He didn't finish it. Well, the story is a bit unusual, but the end of the story isn't. Many have started projects that they didn't finish; poems, paintings, books, buildings, symphonies. There was an interruption and the work was never completed.

That doesn't happen to God, He always finishes what He begins. And that's good news for us because He is doing a work with each one of us, every believer in Jesus Christ. And He will finish it, He will finish it well, He will finish it with perfection. We are His 'masterpiece', His "workmanship", as Paul told the Ephesians, (2:10), and He promises to complete us. Paul told the Philippians that here in Philippians chapter 1 in verse 6—it is a promise of success.

Now what does that do to you? What does that do to your thinking when you hear that, when you hear that God's going to complete the work that He begin in you—that you are going to be a success?

Does that make you feel a bit presumptuous in your faith? Does that give you a sense of impunity in regard to sin—that you can sin and it doesn't matter? 'I'm saved and I'm always saved. I can't lose my salvation, so it doesn't matter what I do. I can live my life any way I want. I can even be idle and somewhat of a deadbeat. Why work? God's doing it.'

No, it doesn't produce that in you, not if you really understand what Paul is saying. Just the opposite. The undeserved goodness of God in our lives, with the ultimate victory that He promises to give us, doesn't make us lazy—it energizes us. It makes us grateful and gives us a desire to live for Him.

Paul teaches that as well. He prayed that for the Philippians. In light of God's sovereign grace, in light of God's sovereign love for them, he prayed that the Philippians would respond to that sovereign love and care and that they would do so by 'abounding' in love: love which is active, wise, and helpful. That's what love is. Love as Paul explains it here, love as we find throughout the Word of God is an active love; it is wise love; it is helpful love. And that's his prayer for the Philippians in verse 9 through 11.

Paul was always praying for the Philippians. He had a great affection for that church, and a special relationship with them. Later, in verse 1 of chapter 4, he calls them his "joy and crown". Here, in verses 3 and 4, he tells them of the *joy* they gave him and how he thanked God for them whenever he thought of them—which was all the time. There must have been some low moments for Paul—even the apostle Paul sitting in Rome, in chains: But the thought of the Philippians, he said, cheered him up and moved him to thank God for them.

The reason for his thankfulness and joy is given in verses 5 and 6. There are really two reasons. The first in verse 5; the second in verse 6. The first is because of their "participation in the gospel". These were active Christians. The Christian life was their life. The ministry, the progress of the Gospel in their city and throughout the world was the priority of their lives. And it had been the priority of their lives from the very beginning, he says "...from the first day until now." (vs5b).

They participated in different ways. He doesn't really outline it here but as you read through the book you understand that they were involved in all different kinds of ways in promoting the Gospel and participating in the Gospel. They did that by promoting the truth through evangelism, no doubt, in their city and in other regions around their city. And no doubt teaching the Word of God to their own people, building one another up in the faith in that way. But also participating in the Gospel through their monetary gifts, sharing their possessions with those in need.

The Philippians were among those Macedonian churches that Paul mentions in Romans 15, who made a contribution of money to the poor saints in Jerusalem, which

was a great concern of the apostle Paul, (we see that in the books of 1 and 2 Corinthians). He wrote of them in 2 Corinthians 8 as well: How they gave with “joy” and “liberality” out of their “poverty” and, he said, “beyond their ability.” (vs3). They were very poor churches, those Macedonian churches; and Philippi was one of them. The Philippian church was a Macedonian church, but they gave of what they had to help others in need. They sacrificed and they did so gladly out of love for the brethren and love for Christ. And that kind of generosity and spirit of Christ was evident in them “from the first day”, Paul said. (vs5b).

Luke recorded that in Acts 16. We had a brief lesson on that last week in our introduction to the book and how the warmth and hospitality of the Philippians is seen in that chapter. When Lydia was converted down by the river, the first thing she did was invite Paul and his companions to her home. They resisted; they didn't want to be a burden on her, to be a burden on this new convert, so they declined. But she insisted and they yielded—and she showed great hospitality and care to them.

When the jailer and his family were converted they washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, they fed them, and they rejoiced with them. That's the Christian life and it was evident in these Philippians from the beginning. They were warm, and helpful, and hospitable, and generous—a giving people. God's people are not cold and closefisted; they're generous because our God is generous. Our God is a giving God. The Philippians ‘participated in the Gospel’ and exhibited God's giving grace “from the first day until now”, (vs5b), Paul said, as he wrote his letter to them.

They had sent him a gift, and a helper who brought the gift. And what reinforced his joy and increased his joy is he knew it was real. He knew that it would prevail, it would not stop. And this affection for him and this loyalty to the Gospel, and this participation in it, this Christian life they were living would not prove fake. It was genuine and would continue by God's grace.

That's what he says in verse 6. In one of the more encouraging verses of the book, and really I would say, one of the most encouraging verses in all of the Bible:

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Every child of God, all the elect, will be saved in the end. God promises that. None will be lost. And none will go *incomplete*. What He begins, He finishes, and finishes well, always.

Now, Paul could not have had that confidence if the work of salvation were ours alone—or even if it were synergistic, that is, if it were a combination of God and man—of us working together with the LORD. If it was in any way dependent upon us, conditioned upon us, there'd be no sense of assurance in that. Just the opposite, really, because we so often don't finish what we begin. We lose interest, we lose strength, we get overwhelmed, we fail. We fail all the time—but God doesn't. He never gets tired; He never loses interest in us or loses affection for us. He never changes toward us; His love for us never diminishes. It is eternal. It is unconditional. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Heb 13:8).

And He has a goal. Everything He does is designed to reach and accomplish that goal. Nothing surprises Him. He's omniscient; He knows everything, He sees everything. He has a plan and purpose for us, to 'conform us to the image of Christ', (Rom 8:29, 2 Cor 3:18), to glorify us, to bring us to perfection. That's the plan. That's the image. That's the 'masterpiece' that is in His mind and His plan for us.

And He knows everything. He knows what's coming before it comes. He knows the beginning from the end, and everything in between. He's not surprised by anything that we do—and uses it all. He uses it all because He's not only omniscient, He's omnipotent. Nothing can frustrate God. He's all powerful. Nothing can prevent Him from accomplishing His purpose and rescuing those He set His love on from all eternity; and bringing about His great purpose for each one of our lives.

The church, the people of God, all of God's people, from beginning to end, the elect from all ages: from the time of Adam, through Israel, into the church—Jews and Gentiles of all kinds are His masterpiece. He began the work in each one of us individually and He will end it successfully. That's what Paul says; that's the promise that He gives.

The first convert in the church of Philippi is a great example of that. We looked at it last week when Lydia was converted and how Luke records it in Acts chapter 16, verse 14. She was there by the riverside and Paul was giving the truth of the Gospel. Speaking the Word of God to them, speaking the Gospel, when, Luke writes, “The Lord opened her heart to respond...” to the message.

And that wasn't unique: That's regeneration; that's the new birth; that is how all of us come into the family of God. We don't come on our own. We don't give birth to ourselves. We're born into the family of God. We're brought into it by the Lord God, by His sovereign grace He opens our heart. —It's another way of saying, ‘He *gives* us faith.’

Some of you may be saying, ‘Didn't you cover that last week? You're getting into the sovereignty of God again, and here we go?’ Well, you can't escape it with verse 6; that's what it's about.

And when you see that verse in light of other things that Paul says: for example, Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4, about God's loving us and choosing us from “the foundation of the world”—and how we're born into this world, as he points out in Ephesians chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, “dead in our transgressions and sins” we see that we have no ability in and of ourselves. And in light of all of that, you know that God must take the initiative in choosing us, in calling us, and in bringing us to faith.

Now certainly when we come to the Lord, we come of our own volition, we come understanding the Gospel, we trust in Christ. —It's a matter of our *knowledge* and our *will*, and all of that plays a part. But if our faith is the *beginning* of our salvation then what does Paul mean here? Does it mean then that Paul's not correct?

No, our faith can't be the beginning because God begins the work, not we ourselves. There's something that happens before we believe—and that's God's work. That's His beginning work that really goes ‘to the foundation of the ages’; from all eternity. But then in time, (in our time, in our lives), our faith begins with His calling us to Himself and His work of regeneration. That's really what Paul's speaking of here. That's what he's referring to here; God begins the work.

The Lord did that with Lydia, did He not? The Lord "opened" Lydia's heart "to respond to the things spoken by Paul", (Acts 16:14)—so He takes the initiative. He took it with her; He took it with those Philippians. And He takes it with us—with everyone who is a believer in Jesus Christ.

And having begun the work, He carries it on. He doesn't wind us up and then let us run on our own. He doesn't begin it and then let us finish it, (we'd never finish it if that were the case.) He is always empowering us all along the way. "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you." That's the great promise of Hebrews chapter 13, in verse 5. And that's the promise that the Triune God gives us; that's the assurance that we have. It is the assurance that we will persevere to the end. Every believer in Jesus Christ will persevere to the end; our faith will never fail.

But as we often say, the 'Perseverance of the saints' is really the 'Perseverance of the LORD with the saints', or the 'Preservation of the saints.' God keeps us saved; He causes us to persevere. And He will do that unto the very end, "...until the day of Christ Jesus. (vs6b). We are protected and preserved by the Holy Spirit, who is the seal upon our hearts. And He's the seal upon our hearts until the very end—until God redeems us and glorifies us.

Now that truth overjoyed the apostle Paul. His friends in Philippi were going to be saved ultimately and certainly, as every believer in Jesus Christ will. And in the end they would be made perfect—in the perfect image of Jesus Christ. But in the meantime God would be blessing them and enabling them to do just what they were doing—and that was serving Him.

So he was joyful and thankful for them. And as he explains in verse 7, it was 'only natural and right for him to feel that way about them'. He had them, he said, 'in his heart.' He had a strong affection for this little church off in the east because, he explains, in both his imprisonment and his defense of the faith in Rome, they had been "partakers of grace" with him. And what he means by that is, 'They stuck with him. They helped him.' Not everyone did that. Many in Asia had deserted Paul at this time of need.

Later in the chapter, he wrote of some there in Rome who were preaching the Gospel, (and they were preaching the Gospel, the *genuine* Gospel), but they were doing it from a terrible motive. They were doing it out of jealousy of Paul and for the purpose of making his situation in prison more difficult.

Paul was despised by many people—and neglected by many people. But these believers in Philippi had stayed loyal to him. They loved him—and helped him with their prayers, with their encouragement, and with their money—what little of it they had. They sent Epaphroditus with the gift to Rome to minister to Paul there in his chains. — That was the Philippians. That's the kind of people they were. They were *kind*, they were *concerned*, they were *sacrificing* people—and maybe especially that way for Paul; after all, he had brought them the Light.

This was the city of Philippi, a very Roman city. It was a thoroughly pagan city when he and Silas and Luke and the others arrived there with the Gospel. And so they came into this part of darkness and they gave Light, the Light of the Gospel, of the Good News, and as a result of his preaching the darkness was lifted. They were delivered from it, they were delivered from the devil and from death and despair—just as you and I have been, having put our faith in Christ.

Now think of all that you've been delivered from. You've been delivered from the darkness of ignorance; you've been delivered from the power of the devil himself. And you've been delivered from the penalty of sin, (and actually the power of sin). We could elaborate on that for the rest of the hour and, really, not come to the end of it. You remember the life of that Philippian jailer, he comes to the end of himself: He's about to fall upon his sword; he was in utter despair—and the Gospel rescued him from that.

And I suppose many of us, most of us, all of us perhaps, if we really understood the nature of life outside of Christ would be in utter despair as well. But the Gospel delivers us from that. And having understood that, these Philippians, well, they could not forget or neglect Paul who had brought them life.

So, he loved them. He said, "...it is only right for me to feel this way about you all..." (vs7). And naturally, 'he longed to be with them', he said, "with the affection of Christ Jesus.", (vs8b). He wanted to be there with them. He wanted to see them. He wanted to see the jailer and his family—and that slave girl who'd been delivered from the demon *Python*. And he wanted to see Lydia and all of her household—and many others. There were many who were saved later on, who are mentioned in this book, that we don't see in Acts chapter 16. He wanted to be there with them for he had a great love for them.

But unfortunately they didn't have the same affection for one another—and this is really the reason Paul had to write this book. He's writing about love and his affection for them and their affection for him, but unfortunately there were divisions among them—and so he wrote to heal that breach. That's one reason he wrote this letter: Certainly to thank them—but also to encourage them to come together. Later in chapter 4, he encourages two women, Euodia and Syntyche, to resolve their differences and "...to live in harmony in the Lord." (Phil 4:2).

That is hinted at here in his statement of affection for them. It's not just his affection but you'll notice the way he describes this in verse 8: It's "the affection of Christ Jesus", which is a serving affection of love. It is a sacrificing love. It's a uniting love for others.

And I think we see the great example of that in the Gospels, in John 13—and maybe Paul had this in his mind. After the Lord washed the feet of the disciples, He returned to the table where the disciples were sitting, partaking of the Passover. And He gave them what He called "a new commandment". It was, "...that you love one another, even as I have loved you." (vs34).

Well, how did He love them?...because this defines for us the nature of love, of the love that we are to exhibit toward our Lord and toward one another. How did He love them? Well you see that when He humbly bows before them and washes their

dusty feet. He loved them sacrificially, humbly; He humbled Himself. He became their servant.

And that's the affection that Paul had for the Philippians; the love of Christ, the love that Christ had for them, the love that Christ has for us. And that kind of love is what advances unity among believers. And that's really what Paul is looking for here. That's what he's praying for here. His prayers were full of joy and thanksgiving for the Philippians. In every thought of them he rejoiced.

But he also has a petition for them, a prayer, a request: and that is that, 'They love each other.' That's in verse 9, "And this I pray, that your love may *abound* still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment..."

Paul used that word, *abound*, quite a lot. It's used something like 39 times in the New Testament; and of the 39 times that it's used, Paul used it 26 times. So Paul spoke about *abounding* quite a bit. Christ promises a life like that. He promised us the "abundant life". He says that in John chapter 10, in verse 10, "...I came that they may have life, and have *it* abundantly." That's what He wants for us: Not just living, not just making it, but a life that is abundant in all that He has for us. And so Paul was saying, 'Let's live it. Let's abound!' And he wanted the Philippians to abound in love, to increasingly grow into the likeness of Christ, to be like Him by overflowing with love.

Now he doesn't limit love. He doesn't put a cap on it, a lid on top of it; but He does put controls on it. "Abound," he says, "in real knowledge and all discernment." Love is not feeling, at least it's not just feeling. It involves that. In fact, I can't imagine genuine love, abounding love, that has no feeling for those that are loved. But it's not just that. Love is also intelligent and discriminating. It not only encourages, it admonishes. It corrects. It takes hard measures when necessary to bring discipline, in order to bring order into a person's life.

We see that in parenting. Good parenting involves more than hugs, (though it does involve that). A child ought to know that his parents or her parents love them and enjoy being with them; and have an open, free relationship with them. And so love is

that. But it's also laying down rules for children; and it involves discipline when the rules are broken. That's guidance.

But that requires discernment, such as not being too harsh. In Ephesians chapter 6, Paul instructs children to 'obey their parents'. That's a response of love to parents. But then he tells fathers not to 'provoke their children to anger'. In other words, 'don't be too harsh with your children.' But, he says, "...bring them up in the discipline and the admonition of the Lord." (vs4). That involves discernment; it involves instruction in the Scriptures; it involves truth. That's part of the Christian home: learning Christian truth and conduct.

And that is essential for the church and has to take place in the church as well. Essential for the church is making known the truth. That is essential if love is going to be really helpful. It must be intelligent. It must be wise, and willing to do tough things, like give a gentle rebuke—or be submissive and serve.

Serving is a response of love; and that takes humility. That kind of love takes skill; so Paul was praying that for the Philippians. He was going to the source, so to speak. He was going to the source so that they would have more truth and wisdom, so that their "love may abound...", as he says, "...in real knowledge and all discernment."

We don't just have these things, knowledge and discernment. They don't just appear in our mind. They come through study. They come through putting ourselves under the ministry of the Word of God. This is an important place to be. Sunday Schools are important places to be. Spending some time during every day of the week, or as much of the week in Bible study is an important place to be; reading the Scriptures, reflecting upon the Scriptures. These things that Paul speaks of here, real knowledge and all discernment, don't just happen. They come through study; they come through prayer; they come through this kind of discipline. And that's what gives us a vital, healthy, Christian life.

And as I say, it comes through prayer: And Paul was praying that God would give this to his friends. That He would impart this kind of love to them—which is wise love, active love, helpful love.

But as I say, he's going ultimately to the source in doing that, because ultimately all of that; love, wisdom, knowledge, all of that comes from God. It's a gift of God. It's a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, who enlightens our lives, who enlightens us. He is our teacher. He is our guide. So we need to ask God to impart these things to us. We need to ask that our Teacher and our Guide open our spiritual eyes, open the eyes of our heart and impart knowledge to us, and give us the discipline and the wisdom that we need to be students of the Word of God and to study it. These are God's gifts. They come from Him, and so we're to look to Him for those very things.

But having said that, we pray for them. We also receive them through our efforts of study and prayer—which means through a disciplined life, sometimes a sacrificing life, sacrificing our time, (it's not a bad sacrifice), but giving up some of the pleasures that we have, some of our entertainment, in order to spend time in God's Word in study and prayer.

That imparts a wise, discerning life. And the results of it are great and Paul gives them in verses 10 and 11. And they are internal and external; they are sound character and a productive, fruitful life. That's the successful life.

First he says in verse 10 that they will be able to “approve the things that are excellent”, and live a life that is “sincere and blameless.” Now that's the good life. The good life is not the rich life, the fast life, the fun life. This is the good life, because it is the orderly life; it is the peaceful life; it's the productive life. And when I say productive, I mean temporally productive—but also eternally productive.

It's a truism, I know, but life is about choices. And mostly it's not about choosing between good and evil but between good and the best. Now that takes wisdom to “approve the things that are excellent.” And that comes from within; the Proverbs make that very clear. Proverbs 23, verse 7 says, "As a man thinks, so he is." The things with

which we fill our mind affect the way we think; and therefore affect the way we behave. And those who shape their minds on the Word of God will develop a desire for what is excellent—and will choose it and will act upon it. The result is a life that is, what Paul describes as, “sincere and blameless.” That means something like a life that is flawless and faultless. It's a life of character.

That second word, *blameless*, literally means ‘not trip’ or ‘make stumble’. And it means either that we won't trip other people, we won't cause them to stumble morally, or it may refer to ourselves. We won't trip ourselves up—we won't stumble in some moral sin.

The first word, *sincere*, means ‘unmixed’, or ‘pure’. And it's illustrated well from the Latin equivalent, which Paul's Roman friends, those men and women of Philippi would have known. They would have understood Latin and they would have known that word in Latin, which is the word from which we get *sincere*. Literally it means ‘without wax.’ Some of you who studied Latin will know this.

And there's an interesting story behind it. When ancient artisans made pottery or porcelain, it would sometimes crack or chip. And so a dishonest dealer would just fill in the crack with some wax. It could be seen through the sunlight, but if you didn't check it, if you just looked at the object without examining it, it would seem to be whole. It would seem that everything was fine because the wax could cover over the flaws. So an honest merchant would mark his pottery, ‘Sine Cera’, which means ‘without wax.’

That's what knowledge and wisdom produces in us: It produces a life that's pure. It's a life that is flawless. It doesn't have these cracks. It doesn't have these blemishes. It's flawless. It's blameless. Not perfect, of course, but this is the character of it. It's a life that doesn't offend and it's a life without major messes. It's a life that is helpful to others and distinguished by what Paul calls, in verse 11, "the fruit of righteousness."

What is that? What is the fruit of righteousness? Good deeds? Well, yes it is. But it's something more specific than that. Paul consistently uses the word *righteousness*, of ‘imputed righteousness’, the righteousness of Christ put to our account in justification.

Later we see that in chapter 3 in verse 9, where he speaks of, 'a righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.' In other words, 'On the basis of faith, not works, not anything we've done, but we receive it through faith alone.' At the moment we believe in Jesus Christ, God forgives us all of our sins and pronounces us to be innocent. We're still sinners, but our debts have all been paid. He counts us innocent. And not only that, He imputes the righteousness of Christ to us and counts us to be completely righteous, like Christ.

And we have the Holy Spirit within us. Our hearts at that moment are sealed with the Spirit of God and we are able to live righteously. We're able to love and help others. That's the "fruit of righteousness." That's the natural consequence of the justified life.

In 1 Corinthians 13, beginning in verse 4, Paul says, "Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous;...does not act unbecomingly;...bears all things...". In other words, love is selfless and caring. That's the righteous fruit of a changed life, of a justified life—and what Paul wanted to *abound* among the Philippian Christians. He saw it in them; he praises them for it, their loyalty and their diligence in the work of the Gospel. He had much to praise them for.

But he wanted to see more of that. It cures the ills that disrupt relationships, love does. It's what the world doesn't know. It's what these Philippians did not experience before Paul came to their town with the Gospel. It's what the world cannot give. It's what the world does not see among themselves and it's what the world needs to see in us. And what we need to receive from one another; love that is unconditional, love that is intelligent, love that is wise. And this is not natural for us.

Again, Paul's praying for this; he's praying for it because it comes from God. It's what He produces in us. It's the *masterpiece* that He is producing and making us. It's what you and I need to be: people who love one another intelligently, wisely, sacrificially.

Now that is a lifelong work. Paul prays that they would abound in love because there will always be room for more love in us. As long as we're in this world, and in this life, we'll never reach the full capacity of love. And the reality is we'll fail along the way.

We're to be "sincere and blameless"; but we'll never be that perfectly and completely in this life.

But it's as we study the Word of God that that begins to take shape and increase in our lives; as we study the Word of God the love of God begins to increase in our lives. And we have the assurance that God is doing this work in us—and that He will not stop doing this work in us, and with us, making us into His masterpiece. That's the promise that Paul gives here, "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus", (until the day He returns), that's the assurance that He's going to complete His work in us.

And that is both encouraging and motivating. The certainty of victory gives incentive to strive for victory now—to strive for this kind of life. It's a genuine possibility; in fact we're called to live this kind of life—and He empowers us to do it. God has made us new; that's what we are. Everyone in Christ Jesus is a new creation. We're children of God. We're kings and priests. We are righteous in God's sight, so we are to live according to what we are. And someday it will be a complete reality—we will be glorified.

H. A. Ironside told the story of an artist who conceived in his mind a great picture, which he meant to be his masterpiece. So he set out working on this with a large canvas and he began by putting in shades of gray for the background.

And while he's doing this, a friend enters unnoticed. The artist was working on, enthusiastically; unaware that his friend was there. When he finally notices him he asks him, "Well, what do you think? I intend it to be my greatest work ever." And his friend couldn't help himself. He started laughing and he said, "Well, to be honest with you, I don't see much there. It's just a lot of splattered paint." And the artist realized the situation. He said, "Ah, you can't see what is going to be there. I can."

And then Dr. Ironside wrote, "So it is with the Father. He sees in every believer that which will be fully brought out at the judgment seat of Christ, and is working toward that end."

And He will work unflinchingly toward that end. He will accomplish that—that's the love of God. He will never stop the work; He will never cast us off.

And the right response to that, to such unconditional, unchanging love, is to love Him. And we love Him by loving His people, by loving those for whom Christ died. May God give us that. May God give us a desire to love His people and cause us to abound in that love.

If you're here without Christ, if you don't know Him as Savior, well, we invite you to come to Him. He died for sinners, (and we're all sinners). All who believe in Him are saved at that moment. They are forgiven. They are declared righteous, fully accepted by God forever; and are given eternal life and the promise of glory to come. May God give you an understanding of your lost condition and your need of the Savior—and come to Him.

And may God bless each one of us with an appreciation for what He has done for us, what He has given us, what He is doing for us at this present moment, and the glory that's to come—all because of His grace. That should motivate us to love Him and love one another. Let's pray,

Father, we do thank You for Your goodness to us. We thank You for Your grace. We thank you for this great passage of Scripture that encourages us to abound in love; in love that's wise and discerning; love that is based on the truth. And love that we have for You and for one another because of Your love for us, because of the work that You began in us.

Long before we understood You, You knew who we are. You set Your love upon us from the foundation of the Earth. You took the initiative. You came to us. You brought us to Yourself. And we thank You for that, Father. Thank You for Your sovereign grace and Your patient, continuing love and grace in our lives. We thank You for all that we have in Christ, and it's in His name we pray. Amen.

(End of Audio)