

Striving for Excellence (Philippians 1:9-11)

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Archibald Rutledge tells of boarding a small tugboat in the South which he often used for transportation. He soon discovered that it had a new engineer. He was a black man of considerable energy and meticulous habits. He noticed that the usual smells were no longer coming from the old engine room and that everything looked super clean. Rutledge asked how this outstanding transformation had been accomplished in such a short time. "Brother," said the happy worker as he nodded toward the engine, "I've got a glory!" His meaning was clear. The boat was his prized possession and joy. He loved to do his very best for this small tugboat. He did not settle for second best. With zest and self-sacrificing devotion, he poured all his energies into making his boat the best of its kind in that area so he could say, "I've got a glory." This man knew what excellence was all about. He did not settle for anything less than excellence.

The Scriptures tell us that every Christian should strive for excellence in all that he does. He should pour his energy and time into godly living and serving Jesus Christ, so he too can say within his heart, "I've got a glory." The glory that we have is not in ourselves, but as the hymn writer said, it's found in "living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him all that I do." The believer should pour his energies into living a superior and excellent life, which is pleasing and honoring to the Lord in every way. Being satisfied with something good is not enough. We must strive for excellence in the way that we live, and in everything that we do for the Lord, since God is holy and worthy of excellence. We should want to live our lives on the highest plain.

Philippians 1:9-11 says:

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

This is Paul's prayer which is offered on behalf of the Philippian believers. We might pray this prayer for others as well. Praying Biblical prayers is a good practice.

These particular verses, especially verse ten, has impacted my life in a great way. This important truth of Scripture needs to be communicated to the hearts of Christians today in view of the lackadaisical attitude that many possess toward holy living, God-honoring worship, and the overall separated purpose that God has designed for the lives of His people. In our present study we want to focus on the importance of striving for excellence in all that we do in life.

For many today, living the Christian life is summed in the words: “God is still working on me.” Now this is true. None of us have arrived (Phil. 3:12). However, this is no excuse for refusing to practice excellence in our everyday Christian lives. We may sometimes think that God overlooks our faults and is pleased if we give Him partial obedience. However, we have forgotten what Jesus said in Luke 6:46, during His earthly ministry: “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” God is looking for excellence in our overall living, conduct, and speech. Everything we say and do for Christ should reflect excellence and be superior in quality. This means everything that we do should be pure, holy, acceptable to God, and done in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord.

We must also remember that the good can often become the enemy of the best. When we only strive for the greater good and miss the importance of striving for excellence, we can find ourselves compromising and giving in to those things that we should not participate with and associate with in our Christian lives. God wants things done in a right way and holy manner since “The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works” (Psalm 145:17). God wants us to strive for excellence in our everyday living and conduct so we might reflect His own character of righteousness and holiness in our daily living (1 Pet. 1:15-16). When we strive for excellence, God is pleased with our lives, and blesses us accordingly (Prov. 16:7; 1 Thess. 4:1).

“Living for Jesus, a life that is true,
Striving to please Him in all that I do.
Yielding allegiance, glad-hearted and free,
This is the pathway of blessing for me.”

God wants believers to steer away from the world system (1 John 2:15-17) and live commendable and holy lives that are God-honoring to Him (Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 6:20). The only way we can do this is to strive for excellence in all that we do. This

truth and principle for everyday Christian living is desperately needed today because of the worldly and relativistic bent that has infatuated the modern-day church. We must remember that God not only summons us to live a life of excellence; He is worthy of excellence.

Revelation 4:11

“Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

If we are going to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31) we will strive for excellence in our living, speech, and attitudes, since we are representing the King! Excellent or superior living is the kind of living that seeks to represent God’s character of holiness, love, mercy, and righteousness in daily conduct and practice. If we want to live to glorify God’s name, or character and reputation, then we will practice a superior way of living that reflects His holiness. The prevailing attitude that says, “Well, this thing is not all bad and it’s doing some good things” or “If it works, use it” (pragmatism) must be replaced with a new attitude and mindset which concludes: “A holy God is worthy of excellence and I want to approve, practice, and participate with only those things that are excellent or superior in their design.” When we live with the mindset and attitude of excellence, it causes us to weigh everything in the balances, discern what is best, and see if our actions are really pleasing to the Lord.

Preparing for a Life of Excellence

Philippians 1:9

“And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”

Verse nine leads into our main body of text and gives to us the preparatory step for living the kind of excellent life that God requires of each believer. We need to prepare ourselves if we are ever going to live the superior or excellent lifestyle that is pleasing to God, and the only way we can do this is to possess and practice a love, which is rooted in truth and discernment. If we are going to love people with an overflowing agape love (“your love may abound”), a John 3:16 love, or Calvary love, then we will need to love them in the truth (3 John 1:1) and seek to help and enhance their lives in the way of truth.

Love in the Bible never focuses upon *good feelings or a shallow form of sentimental emotionalism*. The focus of love is on knowledge and discernment which translates into godly and righteous living. The words “knowledge” (understanding) and “judgment” (discernment) point to a particular kind of Biblical love that God expects the believer to express through his life. It’s a love that focuses on the knowledge and discernment received from the absolute truth of Scripture (1 Tim. 2:15). Knowledge includes having a working understanding of Scriptural truths and judgment points to how we can make the right decisions based upon the knowledgeable facts of Scripture. When we love somebody we will love them in relationship to “knowledge” (the knowledge received from God’s Word) and “judgment” (discernment gained through God’s Word).

First, this is *a love that knows*. Paul wanted their love to abound “in knowledge.” Elsewhere Paul prayed the saints “might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9). If you want to live a Bible centered life you must know or understand what the Bible says regarding certain actions, attitudes, habits, and many cultural expressions. Many Christians really don’t live a Bible-centered life. Instead, they live a self-centered life. They don’t know what the Bible says regarding living, giving, winning souls, and they possess no guiding principles that will direct them in the way of righteousness. This is why young Christians need to be trained or disciplined (2 Tim. 2:2). Christians can only gain a working knowledge of the Bible as they are taught and then challenged to live for God.

Second, this is *a love that discerns*. Paul also spoke about loving “in all judgment” (Phil. 1:9) which means to love others in a discerning fashion. Paul prayed that these saints would possess a discerning love. In its simplest definition, discernment is nothing more than the ability to decide between truth and error, or right and wrong, based upon the truths presented in the Bible. In other words, the ability to think with discernment is synonymous with the ability to think Biblically. Discernment is not optional for the believer. It is actually required (“prove all things” - 1 Thess. 5:21). The key to living an uncompromising life lies in a person’s ability to exercise discernment in every area of his life. Failure to distinguish between the pure or impure, truth and error, or righteousness and unrighteousness, leaves a Christian subject to all manner of false teaching as well as unfruitful and disobedient living. When we lack discernment we are creating a certain recipe for compromise and spiritual disaster.

Many present-day Christians exhibit little ability to measure the things they are taught against the infallible standard of God's Word. They often engage in all kinds of unbiblical decision-making and behavior without ever discerning the commands and principles of the Bible regarding their actions. In short, they are not armed to take a decidedly Biblical stand against the onslaught of unbiblical thinking and attitudes that face them throughout their day. Discernment intersects the Christian life at every point and God's Word provides us with the needed discernment about every issue of life that we might face (2 Tim. 3:16). Without discernment we would be like a pawn in the hands the world, the flesh, and the devil.

So what is Paul saying? He is saying that a love based upon the knowledge and discernment which comes from Scripture is a true and genuine love. It's a love that will be lived out and demonstrated before the Lord and others. In short, knowing the truth of God's Word and possessing discernment, which comes from the Bible, enables Christians to love God and others in a deeper, richer, and more Biblical way. Here is how it works. The more knowledge and discernment we receive from God's Word, regarding His holy will and purposes, the more we will be able to do those things that please the Lord, and which edify the saints.

Paul Rees said:

"Light without love can be as forbiddingly cold as an iceberg in moonlight whilst love without light can be as flamingly destructive as a forest fire in the dry season."

When we express a Biblical and discerning love toward others we will be able to point them in the way of truth or righteousness and demonstrate Bible-centered and Christ-like living before them. We will also be able to express loving obedience and Christian character before God and others in a greater way when we know truth and discern from Scripture how to live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation (Phil. 2:15).

Lehman Strauss wrote:

"As we develop in this gift of discernment there is a growing appreciation of those things that are best in God's eyes as set forth in His Word, and that becomes the finest quality of Christian character."

Knowing and obeying truth is a mark of Biblical love (John 14:15, 23; 1 John 5:3). If we fail to manifest a Biblically discerning love before God and others, then we are not demonstrating genuine love, nor will we be able to live the excellent or superior lifestyle, which Paul is about to describe in verse ten. A life of love and excellence flows out of knowledge and discernment. Superior living is the result of knowing truth, discerning what is right to do, and then putting it into practice.

"I love Thee, I love Thee
And that Thou doest know;
But how much I love Thee,
My actions will show."

Do you really love God? Do you really love people? If we truly love God and others, we will always be ready to discern between light and darkness, righteousness and unrighteousness, and the workings of Satan and Christ (2 Cor. 6:14-15). We will discern between the good and evil (Heb. 5:14). When we love others it will be expressed in a purifying way (Eph. 5:25-26). Love exercises the mind. A discerning love is ready at all times to judge or discern between right and wrong. It's a type of love that will make a clear distinction between truth and error or holiness and worldliness. True love distinguished between the pure and impure. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 13:6 that love "rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth."

Edwin Hatch grasped the idea perfectly when he wrote:

"That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do."

So let's restate Paul's case once again. The words "knowledge" and "judgment" (Phil. 1:9) connote that loving God and others involves discernment which distinguishes between right and wrong. It's a love that seeks to correct and mold personal living to the standard of absolute truth. This is always the mark of genuine love. Love seeks to correct, restore, and edify others with the standard of truth and righteousness. Knowledge and judgment safeguard love. It keeps love from having no direction, aim, and purpose. Love is to be driven by the knowledge and discernment received from God's Word. As we have stated, knowledge deals with Biblical truth, facts, and general Scriptural principles, whereas judgment

(discernment) deals with the perception or insight of applying Biblical data to everyday living and decisions.

John Walvoord said:

“Spiritual discernment sorts all things out as good or bad in the sight of God determined by divine rather than human criteria ... In a world which has lost its sense of value, a Christian must have unusual sensitivity to what really counts.”

I don't really love you, if I fail to point you to the standard of God's Word (John 17:17), Christlikeness (2 Cor. 3:18), and godliness (Titus 2:12). These two words (knowledge and judgment) give us a better understanding of how true love operates. Knowledge and judgment provide the necessary guidelines that we must follow when exercising love and these two things are inextricably part of what true love is all about (1 Cor. 13:4-6). There are moral and ethical considerations that govern the exercise of love. There is a moral dimension attached to love, which is expressed to God and ultimately to others. Love is not blind – it is discerning. Love actually prepares us to live the life of excellence or the superior life that Paul is going to talk about in the next verse. When we learn to discern or test what is right and proper we will discover, practice, and promote what the Bible calls “excellent” things in our lives (Phil. 1:10).

When we love people with a Biblical and discerning love, we will not cause them to stumble (Rom. 14:18-21; 1 Cor. 8:8-13) by doing those things that are questionable in practice. If we truly love others, we will want what is best for their lives which is obeying God's standard of truth and seeking to maintain a holy standard in their lives that will truly glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31). As our text in Philippians 1:9 states, Paul prayed that his “love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” All true love for others starts and ends with obedience to God's Word. The goal of love is truth. Love revolves around the truth or God's Word.

2 John 1:1 declares:

“The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth.”

3 John 1:1

“The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth.”

Chrysostom said:

"Charity is the scope of all God's commands."

One preacher shares this memory:

"When my parents moved to southern Florida, they sorted through some of the family treasures and divided them among the children. My dad brought me a little box and said, 'Joe, I want you to have this.' When I opened the box and pulled back the cotton, there was an old pocket watch—one of those round ones that usually hangs from a fancy gold chain with a watch fob on it.

"I have a few antique clocks, so I was somewhat aware of the value of old timepieces. That watch did not have a famous maker's name on it, or a brass or gold or sterling case; it did not have a fancy gold chain or watch fob. In fact, it really was a common old watch with a leather thong tied to it. As a watch, it was not something of great worth.

"But my dad said, 'This was the first watch I ever owned. My dad gave me this watch.' I remembered that he and I used to fish the St. Joe River every summer, floating down the river and fly fishing in the evening. This was the watch he used to pull out every once in a while to see what time it was.

"You know, if my dad had taken that watch to an antique store, they would have told him it was worth little, if anything. But all the money in the world could not buy that watch from me. That watch is precious to my father, and since it is precious to him, it is precious to me."

Dear friend, in a similar way we must learn to love what the Father loves (Phil. 4:8). We must know what is precious to the Father and then live in a manner that pleases the Lord ("for I do always those things that please him" - John 8:29). What is precious to God is the unchanging standard of His Word, and when we love His Word and follow it, we will love both God and others in a way that is purifying and spiritually helpful to their lives.

Practicing a Life of Excellence

Philippians 1:10-11 goes on to say: "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with

the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

In verses ten and eleven Paul actually gives three results of true love. One of these results deals with practicing a life of excellence or striving for superiority in our everyday living. We want to highlight this result but also explain two other results that come from a discerning love (a love that knows truth and acts upon it). Of course, the last two results are really conditioned upon the first result, which is seeking to live a life of excellence. The repeated conjunction or connective word “that” (verse 10) sets up purpose clauses which indicate how a discerning love, a love which is based upon the truth of Scripture, is designed to promote a superior way of life (vs. 10a), prepare us for the next life (vs.10b), and perfect us with a fruitful life (vs. 11).

In other words, when a person truly loves with a working knowledge of God’s truth and possesses discernment on how to live and act, he will love in a manner which expresses dedication to God’s holy purposes. He will also love people in a manner that will help steer them away from the error of their ways (James 5:20), guide them in the “paths of righteousness” (Ps. 23:3), and steer them away from the tents of the wicked (Num.16:26). This is because love always promotes a superior way of living, seeks to prepare people for the future, and perfect people, or help them reach the goal of fruitful living, which pleases the Lord.

True love has three purposes.

1. It will promote a superior way of life (10a)

When we love in a Biblical and discerning way (knowing truth and acting upon truth) we will find ourselves living a life that is superior or excellent in its quality and character (“That ye may approve things that are excellent” - 10a). This is the first purpose that is related to love. The purpose of love is to produce a superior way of living. The superior life flows forth from a Scriptural love life. The progression of Paul’s prayer suggests how an excellent or superior life will naturally flow out of a discerning love. Paul is praying that the Philippians might continue in the display of Christian love, which is exercised in the full “knowledge” (vs. 9) and “judgment” (discernment – vs. 9) received from the Word of God, so that they might obey God, honor His Word, and direct themselves and others in a

superior way of living (vs. 10). True love clings to absolute truth and purity in all of its actions, activities, and outward expressions. Thus, a Spirit-produced love in the heart and life of the saint is something that sharpens the moral and spiritual perceptions and produces discernment in relationship to all Christian living and conduct. It directs the believer to a life of excellence instead of a life of rebellion and spiritual apathy.

This is an aspect of love that is totally forgotten by New Evangelicalism or the modern church of today. Discerning love seems to be vanishing away in our present era of evangelicalism. With this vanishing love is the vanishing conscience of believers toward Scriptural knowledge and true Biblical discernment. Love that is connected with “judgment” or discernment will enable believers to follow those things that are excellent and make right choices based upon unchanging moral and ethical principles found in the Bible. A discerning love that is based upon a real working knowledge, which comes from the Bible, will enable us to accurately assess and evaluate every situation that presents itself to us. A discerning love gives us a spiritual radar, so we can make right and proper decisions based upon the unchanging commands and principles found in the Bible, and practice superior living. This is a mark of love that many overlook today. At the end of the day, it is all about priority living (Matt. 6:33) and making right decisions based upon love for God and the truth.

Romans 12:9 says:

“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good”

The following statements in Romans 12:9, which speak about hating evil and cleaving to good, may very well be an expression of the true nature of love. Many expositors seem to think this is a logical progression of thought in this verse and the verses that follow. The verses seem to stress the nature of true love. If love is to be without hypocrisy then it must be based upon the truth of God’s word, which causes a person to hate evil and love only that which is good. How does true unhyprocritical love manifest itself? It does so by always speaking the truth (“speaking the truth in love” - Eph. 4:15), by always standing up for what is pure (1 Pet. 1:22), and always doing what is good (“love the good” - Amos 5:15).

True love does not push sin and unholy actions under the carpet. True love confronts sin and refuses to participate in unholy actions. It always strives to do what is right, holy, and proper. This is the mark of unhypocritical love. In other words, this text in Romans 12:9 is teaching that love is more than just a mushy feeling that comes over believers. Love that is free from hypocrisy is a love that detests all evil things and which cleaves to only those things which are good. It's a love that will stand up for the truth and point people to the truth. This is a true expression of love. This is a love that is pure and holy and acceptable in God's sight.

Many today equate love with tolerance and the willingness to accept different viewpoints on doctrinal issues and worldly philosophies in the church. Love is reduced to tolerance, a spirit of ecumenicalism, and a willingness to practice broad parameters of fellowship. Anybody who combats these things is seen to be unloving since he exercises judgment, discipline, and discernment over various doctrinal, ecumenical, and worldly activities or actions within the church. He is seen to be unloving because he uncompromisingly defends the truth at all costs and speaks with conviction and without apology (2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 4:13, 29).

Was the apostle Paul unloving when he rebuked Peter publicly for his compromise (Galatians 2:11)? Was Paul unloving when he confirmed the worldliness of Demas (2 Tim. 4:10)? Was Paul unloving when he named in the Pastoral Epistles false teachers, compromisers and troublemakers such as Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14)? Was Paul unloving when he forbade women to preach or to usurp authority over men (1 Timothy 2:12)? Was John unloving when he spoke out against Diotrefes (3 John 9-10)? Was Jesus unloving when He condemned the Pharisees and called them snakes and that they were going to be damned to hell (Matt. 23:13-33)? Was the glorified Christ unloving when he said how he hates the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6)?

Love is not merely an emotion. It is not broadmindedness. Love does not mean I should always possess a non-judgmental spirit. Love does not mean I must agree with every new doctrine and practice that comes down the pike. Loving God is embracing the truth that He has given to us and saying that we will follow it without compromise. Love does not sweep the dirt under the carpet! We are to love people in spite of their sins (Prov. 10:12; 17:9), but we are never to condone their sins. Where there is love, there must also be truth (2 John 1:1) and where there is truth, an honest dealing with all sin will occur (2 John 1:7-11).

Love does not mean that I must accept and tolerate everything! Love does not mean that I must agree with everybody and go along with every new church fad. Love does not mean that I must accept and agree with the worldly pragmatic practices and relativistic philosophies being promoted in the present day church. True love means that I will cling tenaciously to absolute truth and never compromise God's eternal truth for personal praise or acceptance ("that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment" – Phil. 1:9). Love is discerning and prepares believers to strive for excellence in their everyday living and all that they do for the Lord. When we love right, we will live right! This is what Paul is saying in Philippians 1:9-10.

John Garner, Former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, once said: "An excellent plumber is infinitely more valuable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because it is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy; neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water."

God wants us to strive for excellence as we practice a discerning love ("That ye may approve things that are excellent" – 10a). Now let's take a closer look at some words that Paul uses in this verse. The word "approve" in Philippians 1:10 means to discern or test. We must "approve" (discern or test) what is according to God's truth and holy way and what is right and best for our lives. The verb means to test with the sense of approval. We should test with the view of only allowing those things which are excellent. The present tense of the verb indicates that a believer must constantly evaluate everything that he does and reassess his decisions and direction that he is taking in life.

When the discerning believer seeks to approve he tests a certain matter, doctrine, practice, amusement, song, worship style, and place in society, so as to recognize its worth, and whether or not he can put his stamp of approval upon it. The word "approve" was used in connection with testing metals and coins, to determine whether they would meet the specified standards. It was the word used to test and determine the purity of gold. The word was also used for trying oxen to assess their usefulness for the task at hand.

The approving or testing process involves the careful examination of the Word of God and those timeless principles that would guide us in a true expression of love. What does the Bible permit or prohibit? This is the real question. Love is not necessarily what we feel but how we obey the Word of God. As we possess knowledge and discernment from Scripture (Phil. 1:9) we will test and approve that which is excellent (Phil. 1:10) and by so doing express love in a greater way toward God and our fellow believers.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 uses the same Greek word:
“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

We cannot approve what is excellent apart from testing. This is what God expects of believers today as they face a wicked and perverse generation. According to this verse, we must discern and examine every teaching, doctrine, amusement, practice, musical selection, and program that we come in contact with, in order to determine if it is worthy to promote and participate with on the basis of God’s Biblical principles, which God has given to us to follow and adhere to in our present day.

When we learn to discern or test what is right and proper we will discover, practice, and promote what the Bible calls “excellent” things in our lives. Instead of shoddy living we will engage in excellent and superior living. Instead of compromising and becoming tolerant we will strive for excellence in all that we do. We will develop a taste for the highest and best! The Bible is the only sure guide in determining the difference between what is right and wrong, what is good and best, and what is temporal and eternal.

The word “excellent” in Philippians 1:10 means, “to carry in different directions.” It was used of people who were constantly being carried in ships to different destinations. The primary thrust of the word means “to differ.” The excellent things are different things because they excel and are superior in their design. The figurative implication of *different things* is that they are different because of their excellence or superiority over other things. The literal rendering of these words (“the things that differ”) suggest that these things are different in respect to their superiority and excellence. Thus, excellent things are those things, which are different in their character because of their superiority and excellence. The entire teaching of this important section of Scripture is conveying the thought that we

must “test things that differ” and connotes how the believer must see the difference between the good and the best by making fine distinctions about every matter.

Sometimes this distinction is not only between the good and evil, or the spiritual and carnal, but also between the primary and secondary, or the temporal and eternal. As a result of proper judgment or testing the believer can practice the superior way of living and live a life that honors and pleases God in a greater way. There are times we must make a choice between the good and the excellent, the acceptable and the best. Only a growing discerning love for the Lord and others (2 Pet. 3:18), which is based upon accepting and practicing the truth of His Word, will stir our hearts to choose the excellent and the best path for our lives and others.

This is one of the most important teachings we can apply to our lives today. In whatever we do we should strive for excellence. Beloved, we should develop a taste for excellence! This is where many Christians fail. They are not striving for excellence in their overall living, music, worship and service for Christ. They are settling for something other than excellence. Many Christians are not concerned about the possible defects in their music and manner of living. As a result, they are settling for something that is less than excellent.

Someone once said:

“True excellence is rarely found; even more rarely is it cherished.”

This is a telling story on our generation today. The quest for excellence is a mark of maturity. However, today we have many Christians, who for many years, have continued to live in an *undeveloped state* in the matter of discernment, so much so, they are no longer willing to approve excellent things. Many Christians are giving God only partial obedience. They only give God those things that they want to give, which they feel comfortable handing over to God, while at the same time refusing to give up other things, which He despises in their lives. Many Christians try to serve God with one hand hanging on to the world and the other hand clinging to some Biblical truth. This kind of living mocks excellence and certainly does not please the Lord.

What are the implications and applications that this teaching can have upon our lives today? In other words, how can we apply this truth to our present day living? First, God does not want His children to see how much they can get away with, hoping that He will not frown upon their manner of living and conduct which is questionable in practice. Rather, we are to strive for the very best things which we know please God!

Second, we are not to see how close to the line we can get. How many of us would want to walk on the edge of a boat where there are three man-eating sharks waiting to devour any victim that slips and falls into the ocean? Many Christians try and get as close to the line as they possibly can. The trouble is this. Sooner or later they slip and fall into the ocean and are devoured and defeated by the enemy (1 Pet 5:8). Eventually they find themselves crossing the line and compromising with the standards of the world instead of following the path of righteousness.

My wife and I were vacationing in southern Florida. We were in the everglades. On one particular day we walked back a long winding path through the tropical forest. When we got to the end there was a large open area with an alligator swimming around in a pool of water. We stood and watched while white water birds landed beside the alligator and began to eat little fish out of the water. The birds knew the alligator was there but risked landing in the pool of water for food. The guide told us that sometimes the birds get too close and they are eaten by the gator. I think there is a lesson in this for all of us. Don't fool with an alligator! Don't see how close you can get to the line of sin. Steer yourself away from the gator! Don't tempt yourself and test yourself. Steer clear of the line.

If you warm yourself beside the fires of the world, you will eventually be burned! It happened to Peter "as he sat by the fire" (Luke 22:56-62). Striving for excellence means a believer will distance himself from the line which passes over into the realm of compromise. He will follow godly, holy, and Biblical standards that move him in a direction away from the line of compromise and contamination.

Many Christians get into trouble by straddling the fence instead of striving for excellence. For instance, Christians should represent Biblical manhood and femininity in the best possible light. They should strive for excellence in the way they dress, cut their hair, and portray themselves in society. Instead of flirting with

the line of immodest dress and contemporary music we ought to strive for excellence in our dress and music. Instead of walking in "no mans" land we should retreat back into the familiar land that we know and love and continue in the things that we have learned (2 Tim. 3:14). Instead of straddling the fence we should stand on the opposite side. We ought to go the extra mile and steer away from all practices which get too close to the line and begin to resemble and reflect ungodliness. It's not always easy to know exactly where to draw the line in every particular situation, but we must share a strong conviction against going "over the line" and getting close to the "borderline." We are to test everything and always strive for excellence!

Third, striving for excellence in living would also mean that we should seek to exhibit quality fruit in our lives so that others will see Christ in us (Gal. 5:22-23). Our homes will reveal if we are living the excellent or superior way of life. We can put on a show in church but the home will reveal what kind of life we are really living before God. The Lord is looking for a life of excellence in relationship to our fruitfulness and Christian character. Our attitudes toward others and treatment of others reveal what kind of life we are really living. Many times we are not practicing excellence in our relationships at home, church, and on the job. Instead of practicing good quality Christian virtues (patience, kindness, mercy, peace, joy) we are portraying to others impatience, partiality, rudeness, unrest, distress, and animosity. This is not the superior way of life.

Dear beloved, we should aim for the high life instead of the low life. The world talks about "the Miller high life" (the alcohol lifestyle) but let me tell you something, it's not the high life. It's the low life. It's not a life of excellence. We should live in a manner that represents our new life in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) instead of the old way of life. This is the superior way of living. Instead of trying to pierce your tongue and wear tattoos all over your body like the heathen do (Jer. 10:2), the Christian should represent a new way of life, a higher way of life, which does not pattern itself according to the dictates of the world (Rom. 12:2; 1 John 2:15-17). How wonderful it is to live life on a higher plain than the heathen do! Life on the highest plain! This is our privilege and should be the desire of every blood-bought believer (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

Fourth, Christians should not attend questionable places and events that would probably hinder their Christian testimony. Instead, they should strive for

excellence and refuse to go anyplace that might jeopardize their testimony for Christ (1 Thess. 5:22). Christians should not view questionable content on TV if they want to strive for excellence. This is a very important principle to teach our children. Our children must learn to approve excellent things. We need to stop listening to and watching those things on TV which are a clear violation of God's holy standard. This principle of excellence or superiority is very important for our overall Christian living. It will keep us from looking like the world, living like the world, listening to the music of the world, and loving the things of this world. We are to only approve excellent things!

Someone wrote:

"In all realms of life, some things are good and others are better. The good can often become the enemy of the best."

This is why we must strive for excellence in all that we do. What we do, where we go, and what we say should all be centered on the excellent or superior way of living. Let's give some more examples that might help us to understand this important teaching of the Bible.

Fifth, young people should not see how much they can get away with on a date. Instead, they must strive for excellence while dating. Christians should not wear hair lengths or hair styles that are questionable, when it comes to distinguishing the sexes. They should strive for excellence. Don't be half of a hippie or half of a feminist by the way you portray yourself before God and others. Seek to maintain a superior standard for living. The Bible still does say it's a shame for a man to have long hair and for a woman to have short hair (1 Cor. 11:14-15). People have asked me, "Pastor, how long is long and how short is short." Now why would a Christian need to ask this question if he wants to live a superior life? If you strive for excellence in your dress and overall appearance in life you will not have to worry about these things. Don't blend the sexes by the way you look and live. Don't see how close you can get to the line. Aim for excellence.

There are many other examples we could give when it comes to striving for excellence and taking the road marked "safe." How about our worship? When we try and join Christian words with the worldly sounding and pagan music of the old life, we are not striving for excellence. Many Christians today are settling for something other than excellence in the realm of their music and worship. Music is not about taste but excellence.

A man who was saved from the rock music lifestyle came up to me and said, "Preacher, this music that is being promoted in the church today is a cheap imitation of my old way of life." He was right. God is looking for excellence in our worship.

How about ecumenicalism? Preaching the Gospel is good. However, when a preacher must compromise with apostasy and Roman Catholicism in ecumenical gatherings to preach the Gospel, or promote worldly pragmatism, then the preacher is no longer striving for excellence (2 Cor. 6:14-17). When I must make deals with sinners in church, play their rock idiom, and put on an act in front of them, then I am not striving for excellence. When a Christian wants to do something good, while at the same time do something questionable to accomplish the good; it's then that excellence is abandoned. God is looking for excellence today ("That ye may approve things that are excellent"). Let's give it to Him! In other words, we should strive for a superior way of living and do our very best in whatever we do. In the end, we will be better off for doing it and so will our churches and families.

We should strive for excellence as we practice and use musical instruments for the Lord, as we sing, usher, study, teach, do secretarial work, fulfill the office of deacon, cook, use our various gifts in the local church, and as we worship the Lord. We should strive for superiority in all our services rendered unto the Lord through the local church ministry. We must always strive for excellence and in doing so we will do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). I repeat. We must strive for excellence. This is because God is absolutely holy and worthy of excellence. God deserves nothing less than the best. Our conduct, character, and course of life should reflect superiority.

What are some excellent things that you need to strive for today? What areas in your life must you improve so that you might represent a superior way of living before God and others? Maybe God has been putting His finger on something in your life that needs improvement.

I remember taking a tour through the Hershey Chocolate World. The man on the recording was explaining how they must mix the chocolate together at the right temperature and how important it is to mix the right amount of chocolate, sugar, and other ingredients together, so a Hershey Bar will taste like a Hershey Bar. If

the chocolate bar does not taste right the consumer will not be happy and the company will begin to lose money. It's interesting that in making chocolate bars there is no such thing as second best. In making chocolate bars they must strive for excellence or else the end product does not taste right and is no longer appreciated.

In a similar way, we must understand that for effective and holy service, the distinction between good and excellent must be made and maintained. Second best is not suitable to God when it comes to doing what is right, holy, and honorable to God. God's holiness calls for excellence and superiority in all that we do. The literal rendering "test things that differ" (Phil. 1:10) would suggest that we need to consider even the smaller details and finer points of our Christian conduct making sure that all we do is pleasing to the Lord.

Dr. Strauss once again remarks:

"Again, as a knowledge of God's Word is essential to a fuller expression of love, that same Word is the test for a finer evaluation of life."

Some things are more pleasing to God than other things and we should make these distinctions so that we might practice only those things that bring the highest praise and pleasure to God.

James 4:17

"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."

The Bible says that when we know to do "good" and don't do it, it becomes sin to us. The word "good" means something that is worthy, excellent, choice or admirable. This is the way we are to live our Christian lives and serve the Lord. We must strive for excellent things in all that we do, say, and practice. To avoid the good is to sin!

Of course, striving to live in a superior manner will naturally call for the filling (Eph. 5:18), leading (Gal. 5:25), and empowering (Acts 1:8) ministry of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives. However, the Spirit helps believers only as they are sanctified through the teaching and proper application of the Word of God (Eph. 6:18; Col. 3:16; John 17:17). Therefore, as the Word of God is applied to the believer's life, he will find himself erecting some standards or barriers that should

not be crossed. Where he goes, what he associates with, and how he presents himself in society will reflect the kind of standards that he has put in place for his personal life. In other words, as the Spirit applies the Word of God to our hearts and lives, and directs us in the way of Christ-likeness (2 Cor. 3:18), we will find ourselves establishing some standards that promote an excellent or superior way of living, which reflect Christ's life.

“Living for Jesus
A life that is true
Striving to please Him
In all that I do.”

Standards are not legalism in disguise as modern evangelicalism promotes. Christians should have standards for their lives today. The Holy Spirit can use standards to help assist us in promoting the excellent way of living (Phil. 1:10), or maintaining a superior way of lifestyle that would best honor and please God.

John Miles, the president of the Bible Institute where I attended, once said this about standards and rules: “Rules are made in times of quiet to protect and guide us in times of stress. Rules are simply goals, fulfilled through God's power, that can help discipline and direct us to God-honoring lives. Rules can make group living more pleasant, declare a stand, and help establish order in lives that are undisciplined.”

Standards are levels of requirement that are placed upon us by others within the family (Eph. 6:1 with Col. 3:20; Col. 3:18), government (Rom. 14:1-7), everyday work world (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22), Biblical institutions of learning (Gal. 4:1-2), and the local church setting (Heb. 13:17). Paul placed various standards of living upon the saints within the stated gatherings so they might keep order (1 Cor. 14:27-35). Paul also placed various standards and restrictions upon the saints outside their regularly stated assembly meetings so that they could corporately function together as a unified, holy, and separate body from the world (see 1 Cor. 10:20; Acts 15:28-29). Standards are also Biblical in order to promote courtesy, love, and edification among God's people (Rom. 14:1-19; 1 Cor. 8:1-13). We also have standards to promote order, decency, and reverence in God's House (Ps. 89:7; 1 Cor. 14:33, 40). Standards (levels of requirement) are rules that help set the house

of God in order and keep it pure in over-all practice and leadership (Titus 2:5-8; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Acts 6:3).

We also have Biblical standards to promote and practice the doctrine of Bible separation, to help us discipline our lives, and declare a stand (2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). The fact that believers in the New Testament were told to not attend certain places (1 Cor. 10:20; 1 Peter 4:3-4), commit various sins (1 Cor. 6:18, 7:1; Gal. 5:19-23), practice disorderly actions (1 Cor. 11:20-21; 1 Cor. 14; 2 Timothy 3:1-7), and dress in a certain immodest or ostentatious way (1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3) would indicate the need for these people to establish both corporate and personal standards that would accommodate these Scriptural teachings.

The saints needed to establish various standards so they might stop doing the very things that were carnal and follow the Word of God that was given by Paul. In addition, the New Testament is full of checklists for Christians that outline the difference between right and wrong and the clean and the unclean (1 Cor. 5:11; Gal. 5:18-21; Eph. 4:31-32; 5:3-4; Col. 3:8-9; 1 Thess. 4:3-7; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 2:13-20). Following these Biblical checklists to help discipline our lives will necessitate the establishing of various corporate and personal standards, which we will need to follow, in order to maintain a pure walk and live above sin and beyond reproach.

Standards can help us live a superior way of life in spite of what the modern “free movement” or our present church generation is teaching. Freedom from all standards will lead to anarchy and rebellion of the worst sort instead of a superior way of life. Look around at the church today! The Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. He can work with standards, which are based upon Biblical principles, to help the Christian develop parameters of safety and strive for excellence in his daily living.

Vince Lombardi once said:

“The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.”

Paul's athletic statement also proves that he was striving for excellence.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27

“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

In this passage we see how Paul addresses the Christian life in athletic terms. The Christian is to subdue his passions and take control over his body, as an athlete would, who has entered a race. In doing this he will run the Christian race and win, which will result in great reward. However, if we are going to win the race and receive reward at the end of our journey, we must strive for moral excellence. No runner who wants to win a race will become lazy in taking care of his body. He will bring his body under subjection and run in a controlled fashion. The same is to be true about Christian living and service. A Christian should strive for excellence and do what is necessary to keep his life fit for the spiritual race. He will be “temperate in all things” and “bring it (his body) into subjection.” The believer who wants to receive reward at the end of the race will seek to keep his life clean by living a life of moral excellence and purity. God is looking for excellence and superiority in all of our living and service.

In Philippians 3:14 Paul said:

“I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

The word “press” was a Greek word used for an athletic runner who was trying to catch his opponent. He was pressing, striving and pursuing the runner before him, so he might reach the goal, which is to win the race. Figuratively this word takes on the meaning of a Christian who is pressing forward with great determination to reach the “mark” or goal of Christlikeness. This athletic wording (“press”) reveals Paul’s desire for excellence in the Christian life. Paul was striving for excellence or a superior way of living as he sought to be more like Jesus Christ in his life. There must be zeal and determination to do what is right so we might be like Christ.

When we “press toward” Christlikeness we will possess the drive and determination to do what is morally and spiritually right. This means we will “approve things that are excellent” (Phil. 1:10) or test everything and make right

decisions in relation to those things which are superior and best for our Christian lives. If we want to be more like Christ, we must practice superior living. This is because superior living reflects God's holy nature and character (1 Pet. 1:15-16). We must develop a taste for the highest and best since God has called us to a higher way of living. We are to "seek those things which are above" (Col. 3:1). Certainly the virtues that are in Christ are superior and it's these very things we should seek to emulate in our Christian lives, so we might live differently than the unsaved world (1 Cor. 3:1-3), as we practice a life of excellence and superiority.

Ruth Paxson said that we should live life on the highest plain. In essence, this is what Paul is teaching when he says we should "approve things that are excellent" or superior (Phil. 1:10a). God has a higher plain of living for Christians that does not reflect the world system and paganism of our present day. We should strive for a life of excellence and superiority in our conduct, character, and course of living, a life that honors and reflects the Lord Jesus Christ.

O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer:
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee! full of compassion,
Loving, forgiving, tender and kind,
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting,
Seeking the wand'ring sinner to find.

O to be like Thee! lowly in spirit,
Holy and harmless, patient and brave;
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches,
Willing to suffer, others to save.

O to be like Thee!
O to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fulness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart."

2. It will prepare us for the next life (10b)

Philippians 1:10 mentions the second purpose of love. It says, “that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.” When we love in a Biblical and discerning way (knowing truth and acting upon truth – Phil. 1:9) we will be prepared for Christ’s return and the next life (Matt. 6:19-21). A love that is based upon God’s Word and obedience to His commands will result in personal sincerity, integrity, purity, and preparation for Christ’s return (Phil. 1:10b).

The “day of Christ” has reference to Christ’s coming in the Rapture and the believer’s subsequent examination at the Bema Seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) and the reward we will receive for eternity (1 Cor. 3:12-15). A love that is discerning will enable believers to avoid what is questionable or wrong in light of Christ’s coming, and our accountability before Him, at His appearing. In view of Christ’s coming and our final examination the believer should seek to live a sincere or genuine life before the Lord.

a. We should be without pretense.

The word “sincere” is a very interesting word. It refers to something that has been tested by the sunlight and found to be genuine. It’s a word that connotes judgment by sunlight so that its genuineness can be seen in the full of light of the day. Figuratively, the word expresses how a believer should be tested or exposed to the light of God’s Word, and be found to be genuine and pure in his motive, service and living, when Jesus returns. Some people are like plastic. They don’t have a conscience. Christians are to be like transparent glass. There should be no hidden impure motive or worldly agenda in our hearts as we endeavor to live and serve the Lord.

James 5:9

“Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.”

Believers should be people with transparent characters. This means their hearts on the inside are the same as their actions dictate on the outside. The Christian life should be “sun-proof” in the sense that Jesus might find no worldly ambitions or fleshly goals in our heart when He returns.

Are you a sincere person? If you are trying to serve God while hanging on to some known sin, then you are not sincere. If you are trying to follow the world and Christ at the same time, then you are not sincere. If you are trying to cover up some particular sin in your life then you are not sincere.

Walvoord again comments:

“By sincere is meant they would have purity in motive, a purpose in life obviously pure and unsullied by selfishness, sin, or worldly standards.”

Now let's put this in the context of love. Our love for God and others must be genuine, open, and transparent. This can only be true when we stand up for what is right, never sidestep the truth, and seek to honor God in everything we do. This can only be true if we have no ulterior motives in our service for God and others. For instance, if you truly love God you won't serve and worship Him out of personal greed and selfish ambitions. For example, many today worship God in order to receive some kind of personal high from their style of worship. Here is another example. When you truly love somebody else you will reach out to help them without expecting anything in return. You can tell a lot about a man by the way he treats those who can do nothing for him. God is looking for transparency.

1 Corinthians 4:5 declares:

“Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”

The point is this. True love will keep our hearts free from impurity, worldly ambitions, selfishness, or living a hypocritical life, which robs us of the superior or excellent way of living. Our life should be comparable to an open book waiting to be read and revealed at Christ's coming. Our motive should be to please the Lord completely in everything we do (“how ye ought to walk and to please God” - 1 Thess. 4:1). The sincere Christian will not attempt to selfishly fulfill his own fleshly goals or appetites as He attempts to serve the Lord. He will want to live to please the Lord in every area of his life.

When a Christian truly loves God, he will be sincere about practicing what is absolutely right and holy in His sight. If we truly love the Lord (Mark 12:30) and are striving for excellence (Phil. 1:10), there should be no pretence in our hearts.

We should not be two-faced in our approach to living and service (“in whom is no guile” - John 1:47). It’s not good English, but the poem below does bring to our attention the importance of genuineness and sincerity.

“Be who you is,
Because if you is who you ain’t,
You ain’t who you is!”

Please notice in Philippians 1:10 that sincerity does not precede excellence. It comes after excellence. Many Christians might be sincere in what they are doing, even if they are unknowingly (Lev. 4:2; 5:15) doing something that is wrong, worldly, or wayward in practice. However, sincerity alone does not substantiate truth (John 17:17) nor is it a test of true spirituality (1 Cor. 2:15). If sincerity were the test of truth then Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and the eastern religions must possess the truth. These people are sincere, but sincerely wrong! True sincerity is manifested when it is rooted in Scriptural truth (Phil. 1:9) or the absolute standard of God’s Word (Isa. 8:20). Genuine sincerity is evidenced when we are walking in the truth (3 John 1:4) and practicing a superior way of living which transcends all worldliness and carnality (Phil. 1:10).

God is looking for sincere believers today whose only aim is to follow truth, strive for excellence, and please the Lord. He is looking for those Christians who have no underlying fleshly motives or goals in their personal lives and service to the Lord. He is looking for sincerity. Let’s bring this up to date once again. Some Christians say they need a “big beat” sound in order to get satisfaction out of their time of worship. Their motive for worship is all wrong. We don’t worship to get. We worship to give! Whenever fleshly motive is behind our worship and service for the Lord, whenever we are living to please ourselves instead of God, we can be sure that we are not practicing true love for the Lord.

Many Christians want to serve their flesh while they attempt to live for God and worship Him. This is hypocritical and does not reflect a sincere passion to do what is right and holy in God’s eyes. Why do you listen to music? Why do you go to church? Why do you visit the elderly? What is the motive behind your actions? God is looking for Christians who are judged by the sunlight of His Word and who are found to possess a genuine desire to do what is pure and pleasing in His sight. God is looking for the real deal! There needs to be a ring of reality to all that we do and say.

I have two pairs of pants that are similar in color. One is a true black pair of pants and the other is a dark navy pair of pants. In the room where I dress for church the dark navy pair of pants seems to be black. One time I tried to match the navy pants to a suit that was made for black pants. It looked good in the room but when I went outside into the sunlight it revealed the contrasting colors to my eyes – and to my wife’s eyes! The sun brought out the true colors. The same is true in relationship to how God knows the sincerity of our hearts. He knows the true motive of our heart. Nothing escapes His omniscience.

Hebrews 4:13 says:

“Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

b. We should be without blame.

In view of Christ’s coming and our final examination we should also strive to live “without offence” (Phil. 1:10), or be blameless, so our life might be in order when Jesus returns. Elsewhere we are told to be in the position where we will love His appearing (2 Tim. 4:8). When we practice a discerning love (Phil. 1:9) and seek to live an excellent or superior life (Phil. 1:10), we can keep our lives pure and be found “without offence” (Phil. 1:11), when Jesus returns. Many Christians will be caught with their hands in the cookie jar! They will be holding on to many fleshly and carnal things in their lives and will not be “without offence” when Jesus returns. This is an awesome and solemn thing to contemplate.

The Greek word which is behind the English words “without offence” (blameless) was used of a smooth surface that would not cause someone to stumble. In 1 Corinthians 10:32 Paul used this word in relationship to causing another believer to stumble. The point seems to be this. The believer should have no fleshly passion in his heart and life when Jesus returns. His life is to be like a smooth surface which is free from all spiritual obstructions that would cause him and even others to stumble. *A Christian should seek to be a stepping stone rather than a stumbling block to others.* He should seek to live a blameless life or a life that is above reproach in his conduct and character.

2 Peter 3:14

“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

If we want to be found blameless when Jesus returns we must also have our sins confessed (1 John 1:9). Keep short accounts with God! The believer must be genuine and sincere about living an excellent or superior way of life if he is going to be “without offence” when Jesus returns. The Christian who will be living “without offence” when Jesus returns is the kind of Christian who is not living for fleshly pursuits but striving for godly living in all that he does (Titus 2:12).

The text says, “that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10). Beloved, someday we are going to stand before the Lord and be examined for our sincerity and commitment to His righteous and holy cause. Let us not lose sight of this coming day of reckoning. Our lives will be examined for what they really were. Every stone will be overturned and only those righteous things that we have done for Christ out of a pure motive will last.

2 Corinthians 5:10 says “that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” In other words, we will get what is coming to us. We will be rewarded or receive payment in the manner in which we have lived. This obviously means we will receive either great reward or loss of reward depending on how we have lived for the Lord and served Him. Dearly beloved, let’s keep our lives pure and our hearts free from hypocrisy. Payday is coming!

The Judgment Seat of Christ for Christians is not a judgment to determine whether or not we will get into Heaven. It’s not a judgment designed to condemn us before the God of Heaven. This is because our works or manner of living have nothing to do with our entrance or justification before God (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus was judged in our place (Gal. 3:10) so we might never be judged for our sins in relationship to our eternal destiny. However, this does not mean God will bypass the way we have lived out our lives upon earth. Each believer will be examined by Christ in relationship to their conduct, living, and service for Christ.

We will not be condemned for our sins but examined and rewarded according to how we have lived out our days upon earth. This will be a telling examination. Nothing will be left unturned. O how shameful we will be for not living for Him! Our ambitions, attitudes, and actions will be brought out into the light and we will be exposed for exactly what we were while living the Christian life. This motivates me to be genuine and sincere in my living. I should want to live with the highest regard for truth, righteousness, and my motive in service for Christ should be pure and wholesome. I should be sincere in living out a life of purity and doing what is truly honorable and glorifying to God.

Steve Lawson relates a story about Dr. Harry Ironside: "At approximately age 13, young Ironside was employed by a cobbler named Dan. Harry's responsibility at work was to take the pelts used in making shoes out of a vat and place them on an anvil. Then he had to beat the water out of them with a wooden mallet.

"This process was very time-consuming. It was work that was best described as drudgery. And, as a 13-year-old, Dr. Ironside couldn't recommend it to anyone. One day young Harry Ironside was walking down the street. He looked in the window of another cobbler shop. He saw that cobbler take a pelt out of the vat and simply would shake the water out of it. He then laid it over his lap and cut out a shoe. This competitor completely neglected the tedious work of beating the water out.

"Harry was most intrigued by this. So he walked into the cobbler shop and asked the owner, 'Mister, how come you don't beat the water out of your pelts like Dan down the street? I work for Dan, and he makes me work long and hard to pound the water out.' The cobbler answered, 'Well, that process is very time-consuming. Also, shoes made like this don't last as long, so my customers will come back to buy shoes more often.'

"To the young mind of a 13-year-old, that sounded like pretty sound logic--especially to one with a sore right arm from pounding the water out. Harry went to talk to Dan about this. He told him what the cobbler down the street had told him. Then Harry asked Dan, 'Why do you have me go to all the trouble of pounding the water out of the pelts?' Dan took his apron off and hung it on the nail in the wall. He said, 'Harry, I need to talk to you.' So they sat down together.

“‘Harry, I'm a Christian,’ Dan explained. ‘I know that one day I will stand before the Lord at the judgment seat of Christ. There, every pair of shoes that I have ever made will be in a large pile. At that time, the Lord and I will go over every pair of shoes that I have ever made. Jesus will say, “Dan you brought your stitches too close to the sole here. We'll have to discard this pair.” Then He will say, “This pair, the nails are just right. Good work! We'll put this pair over here on this stack.” Or Jesus will say, “Here's one that is made perfectly. We'll put it on the right side.” Then He'll pick up another pair. He will say, “Dan, once again you brought your stitches too close to the edge of the sole here. We'll have to discard that pair.” Harry, this illustrates why it is so important for us to take inventory of our lives today. One day--on that final day--we will stand before the Lord, and He will evaluate the work we've done for Him.’”

Dear friend, the way we have lived and how we have served the Lord will be evaluated when we stand before Him someday. Only the pure things and excellent works will stand the test. Nothing impure or marked by the old way of life will be worthy of reward.

1 Corinthians 3:14 says:

“If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.”

Jesus will sort out the good, the bad, and the ugly in this coming final examination day. One thing is certain. The half-hearted, half-baked, and half-fleshly aspects of our living will go up in smoke. No future reward will be attached to carnal living or fleshly works.

1 Corinthians 3:15 goes on to say:

“If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”

One thing is certain. God is going to reward those works that are excellent. He is going to honor those superior things that we have done. Because of this coming day of examination believers need to develop a new attitude about living in general and begin to strive for excellence in all that they do. This is what God expects of our own lives as Christians today. We should not settle for only good things. Rather, we must strive for excellence in both living and service. Everything I

do today matters forever! Our excuses will not hold water when we stand before Jesus Christ at His Judgment Seat. Jesus will not be listening to our excuses when we stand before Him but looking for those acts of excellence we have performed for Him while living upon earth.

3. It will perfect us with a fruitful life.

Philippians 1:11 states:

“Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

When we love in a Biblical and discerning way (knowing truth and acting upon truth – Phil. 1:9) we will also produce what the Bible calls “the fruits of righteousness.” This is actually an explanation of how we can live out a life of sincerity until Jesus returns. If we want to be sincere in our living we must practice righteous living. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to break this down into a separate point. There is a third purpose that is related or connected to love. True love results in the perfection of the believer’s life. In other words, it assists the believer to reach the goal of maturity and Christlikeness. Perfection does not mean to be without sin but to reach a goal. For the believer it means to reach the goal of greater maturity, as we become more like Christ, through living a righteous lifestyle.

This goal can be summed up as “the fruits of righteousness” or living fruitfully which is living righteously. Hendriksen calls these fruits “the fairest fruits of heaven.” They are the evidences of transformed character (2 Pet. 1:5-8) and the righteous works which result from the fruit of the Spirit operating in our lives such as joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). When we possess true love for God and others, we will live a transformed way of life, through the power of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives. Fruit refers to our attitudes and actions that originate from the work of the Spirit in our lives. Other fruits of righteousness would include holy living (Rom. 6:22), praise (Heb. 13:15), giving (Rom. 15:26), and winning souls (Rom. 1:13-16).

Someone said:

“Right living is the fruit of right learning.”

This is very true and takes us back to the original explanation of love. As we learn to possess knowledge and discernment through the truth of Scripture (Phil. 1:9) we will discover how to live right, give right, praise right, and witness right and find ourselves doing right (Phil. 1:11). In other words, proper behavior results from a correct understanding and assessment of Scripture. The more we know what God's Word says concerning the Christian life, the more we will behave (1 Tim. 3:15) in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord (Col. 1:9-10).

a. The provision of a fruitful life.

Our text goes on to say that the fruits of righteousness which are produced in our lives originate from Christ, or they are "by Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:11b), since He is at work transforming us into His likeness. This is the provision and secret of Christian living. We must live our lives "by Jesus Christ" relying upon His inner life and provision (Rom. 13:14). In these three words ("by Jesus Christ") we see the provision for bearing fruit in our Christian lives. The power of Jesus Christ is constantly available to the believer so that he might produce the "fruits or righteousness" that the text speaks about (Phil. 1:11).

God's commands are God's enablements! Jesus Christ lives within the child of God to produce fruit that is excellent in character and a harvest that will last for eternity (Gal. 6:8-9). The fruits of righteous living come from our relationship to Jesus Christ rather than from the law (Phil. 3:9; Gal. 5:23). Law can never provide inward power to live victoriously. Living a fruitful life is not a product of legalism (man's efforts and human attainments). Fruitful living stems from the believer's living and dynamic relationship to Christ (Rom.8:1-4). Paul declares elsewhere that the indwelling life of Christ is constantly available to help us live victoriously and godly ("yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" - Gal. 2:20).

The indwelling presence of Christ is the power for New Testament Christianity and holy living. A life of inward and outward excellence can be displayed only as the indwelling life of Jesus Christ supplies the necessary divine power for duty and conduct. Dear friend, we must draw from the vine today (John 15:1-5), who is Jesus Christ, and derive all of our sustenance and power from Him, so we might live an excellent or superior life. When we draw from His power we can produce "fruit" (John 15:2), "more fruit" (John 15:2), and "much fruit" (John 15:5, 8) that is both pure and excellent in character and quality. It's fruit that will stand the test at the Bema Seat of Christ.

In short, our lives will become richly productive as our character changes, our life stabilizes, our praise and giving increases, and our outreach to the lost reaches new heights. However, the process of spiritual growth and fruit will require some pruning (John 15:2) of certain hobbies, habits, acquaintances, aspects of our occupation, and worldly weights that are bogging us down (Heb. 12:1). The cutting may hurt but it is for our own good and will produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness that will last for eternity (Heb. 12:11). God has called us to an excellent or superior way of living. Let us not live below our calling and Christian credentials.

b. The purpose of a fruitful life.

The last part of our study leads us to the grand finale and purpose of fruitful living. A fruitful or superior way of living will result in the praise of God (“unto the glory and praise of God” - Phil. 1:11c). This is not our praise but the praise of God! Our highest ambition should be to bring praise or admiration to God by the way that we live and conduct ourselves (Eph. 1:6, 12). This text is not talking about praising God through our lips but praising God through our manner of living. Praise is more than singing. Praise to God occurs when the saint reflects the very life and likeness of Jesus Christ through his daily conduct and living. Think of this. Every day I need to bring praise to God by the way that I live and conduct myself. One thing is certain. An excellent or superior life will bring the greatest and highest praise to God. Striving for excellence does bring praise to God. Therefore, all of our day-to-day actions, words, and decisions should revolve around bringing praise to God.

Many Christians come to church with those familiar words upon their lips, “I just came to praise the Lord.” However, the Christian who is striving for excellence in his daily living and conduct will want to bring praise to the Lord in everything that he does, in every decision that he makes, and every direction that he goes. He will want to bring praise to the Lord in all of His actions, attitudes, aspirations, and assignments of life.

“I own no other Master,
My heart shall be Thy throne;
My life I give, hence-forth to live,
O Christ, for Thee alone.”

I have written many things throughout the years to help God's people in their study and understanding of the Scriptures. If I were to pick one study that I have done, which is most important and relevant to our present day living as Christians, it would be this one. Don't straddle the fence. Don't see how close you can get to the line. Don't become neutral. Don't move into unfamiliar territory. Strive for excellence. Dearly beloved, we must strive for superior living or excellence in all that we do since He is "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty" (Rev. 4:8) and therefore worthy of excellence. We must also strive for excellence since our day of reward and reckoning is coming. We want to be without offence when He returns.

Philippians 1:10

"That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

In vacation Bible school, some kids prayed at dismissal time:

"I will do the best I can, with what I have, where I am for Jesus' sake today."

If this is what excellence means, I can live with it!