

Approving What is Excellent

by James Jennings

This sermon emphasizes the importance of having love abounding more and more with knowledge and discernment to approve what is excellent. It highlights the need to pray for discerning love, unity, and striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel. The speaker encourages individuals and the church to make decisions that glorify God by seeking what is most superior and necessary.

Scripture: Philippians 1:9, Philippians 1:27, Philippians 2:25, Philippians 4:2, Hebrews 5:14, John 15:5, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Romans 2:18, Matthew 11:29, Ephesians 5:2

Description

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Transcript

Father, Lord, we want sober minds. Lord, not minds that are drunk with thousands of thoughts. But sober, Lord.

There's sobriety there. There's a readiness to receive the Word. And Lord, it's been a long day, but I trust what I have here You want me to share with these saints for their help.

For even my help, Lord, is a refreshment for my own soul. And so Lord, I just pray You'd meet with us right now that You'd make this alive and You would quicken it to our souls. In Jesus' name, Amen.

And real quick, I was going to mention at the nursing home, Marilyn. She's right there. I don't know what y'all's previous conversations have been with her, but do pray for her.

She told me, she said, you're looking at one bitter woman. And she admitted that a lady had stolen from her. She will not forgive her.

And I said, Jesus says if you will not forgive, you will not be forgiven before the Father. You'll go to hell. She said, well, maybe all my good will outweigh that one wrong.

And then that was torn down, and so she realized that's not right. And then she admitted, I do good for others to feel better about the person I'm bitter towards. So she's seeking to do good to other women in

the nursing home to calm her conscience about the bitterness and the unforgiveness towards one woman.

And she admitted all of that. And so it's like, wow, she was actually discerning what was going on in her heart. And maybe she has for a while, I don't know.

But she said, you left me feeling very guilty. And I said, well, that's a good thing. You should feel guilty, but you should run to Christ.

Feeling guilty for your sin, that's her problem. She's not feeling guilty enough to realize He's going to put her in hell. And so she kept saying, I'll go try.

I'll try. I said, no, no. Don't try.

That's an excuse. If you really see your sin for what it is, you won't go try to do anything. You'll turn from it and you'll forsake it.

So I just wanted to mention that. But let's turn to Philippians 1. Paul here writing from prison. We're going to look at v. 9-11.

Paul loved these saints. In v. 3, he thanked God. V. 4, he says, and always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy.

So Paul, he's praying for these people at Philippi. What is he praying? What is his prayer life like? I mean, I want to know how the Apostle Paul prayed so I can pray that way for you guys. Look at v. 9. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more with knowledge and all discernment so that you may approve what is excellent.

Approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. So Paul wanted them to approve what is excellent. And that matters.

I want to think about that right now. That really matters. Excellent.

There are things that are good, but are not excellent. There are things we say that are okay or good, but not excellent. Paul prayed that they would approve what is the most excellent thing.

Excellent, the idea there is superior. And you see there's verses in Luke that says this, he says, you know how to analyze the appearance of the earth and the sky, but why do you not analyze this present time? That word analyze there is the idea of approve. To approve what is excellent is to do some analysis.

You're analyzing this decision, this decision, or that decision, what is most excellent. Or even you're analyzing what you're about to say. There's three options.

I could say this, this, or that. This is bad. This is good.

This is most excellent. So I will say this phrase right here. So excellent, we're analyzing.

That's what it means to approve. To approve, you see that right there. His end of the prayer is that they may approve what is excellent, so to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

Approve is the idea of testing and trying. I mean, we do that naturally all the time. We've done that today.

All of us have had tons of decisions today where we had to try, analyze, and approve what's the best decision to make. Let's think for a moment that word excellent. Approve what is excellent.

That similar Greek word is used in 1 Corinthians 15:41. You don't need to turn there, but this is what Paul says. There is one glory of the sun and another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars. And then he says this, For star differs from star in glory.

And that phrase differs from is the word excellent. So to approve what is excellent is to approve and to analyze what is different from the rest. Out of the things I could say, the decisions that I could make, the decisions that you all as a church could make, what's the most excellent thing? And he said there, another glory of the moon and another glory of the stars.

So you kind of think about a star, right? You look at the sky. That star has a lot of glory. And then you see that star and you're like, wow, that star's glory is different from that star's glory.

You're analyzing what is the most glorious star. Well, the Christian is called to analyze what is excellent. What is superior? What is different than everything else? It's a similar idea.

The word is used in Luke 12. He says this, Consider the ravens, they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them of how much more value are you than the birds. So when you're trying what's excellent, you're looking what has the most value.

What has the most value for the buck, so to speak. If I make this decision, it's so different than that decision and that decision. There is so much value in doing this act for the Lord.

Making this decision. It is so superior compared to all these other decisions. I'm going to go with that decision.

You guys all pass that, right? You guys care about approving what is excellent, right? You guys aren't just saying, wow, what's good? You're thinking I want what's excellent because Christ is excellent. Christ died for me on the cross, so I want to make the most excellent decisions with my life, with my thought life, with my money, with my time, everything. I don't want to be this guy settling for the second and third best.

I want the thing that is of utmost first importance and it is so different than every other decision. I'm going with that decision. Is that y'all's desire? An amen, a no? Good, then let's think about this because you know what we're going to do? We're going to look at how you do this because it's one thing to say, all right, I need to go approve what is excellent, but we're going to see, Paul has some very interesting logic here we need to get.

But before we get there, what is excellent, what is superior? It is the thing that is of total necessity. You must have it. You must have it.

And when do we do this? Every decision. Look what he says here for the reason to do this. Verse 10, approve what is excellent, and then he says, and so be, meaning do this in order for something to happen.

You're approving what is excellent in order to be what? Pure and blameless for the day of Christ. So this is a serious thing. The implication there is if I'm not living a life of approving what is excellent, there's going to be areas in my life that are not blameless.

If you say you're a Christian and you live your life just doing that which is good and not what is most excellent, there's going to be blemishes because of decisions you made. In a way, you could say to not take the most excellent route is to sin because the most excellent route is always God's will. He wants us doing that which is most superior, which is most honorable to Him in the situations that we face.

So, you could say we could apply it to practical day-to-day decisions. I mean, think about the gardener. When the gardener plants a garden, he wants the most fruit, right? So if you want the most fruit, not a gardener, gardeners are planting plants and flowers, but someone who's planting a crop, they want to make the most excellent decisions to get the most fruit at the end of the season.

Isn't that true? As a Christian, we've got to make the most excellent decisions in order to what? We want to bear fruit for the Lord. He even says right here, verse 11, this is to be filled with the fruit of righteousness. Now thankfully, it says right there it comes through Jesus Christ.

Praise God. This is coming through Christ, but approving what is excellent is directly connected to your fruitfulness as a Christian. It goes hand in hand.

Approving what is superior goes directly with that. You think about someone who wants a wife. Who in here wants a wife? You want a wife, maybe.

Do you want a good wife? What did Solomon say? An excellent wife. You don't want a good wife. You want an excellent wife.

You're not going to go out there and think, well, there's ten women and the most godly one, she's excellent, but I'm going to go down the list. No, you're thinking, I want the most excellent. The most excellent.

So this is something that's all the time in all sorts of decisions. Just like that, there's one woman different than the other, which makes the other have more godly character, which makes her more excellent. We're always analyzing things.

Is this different than that? That's most excellent. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, he said this. He said, the whole art of life, I sometimes think, is the art of knowing what to leave out, what to ignore, what to put on one side, how prone we are to dissipate our energies and to waste our time by forgetting what is vital and giving ourselves to second and third rate issues.

As a church, you guys do not want to give yourself to second and third rate issues. You do not want to do that. You want to give yourself to the first rate issues, that which is most excellent.

You want your energy going there, your money going there. You want your prayers going towards that. Not second, third rate issues.

We could get into later, what is that? So approving what is excellent is seeking to give yourself to the first rate issues. We want that. I want that.

I want that so badly. I want to be better at approving what is excellent. Like I said earlier, the nursing home, when you're at a nursing home and all these people who are old, you realize, I'm gonna be in their shoes.

And I wanna live for Christ right now in the present, approve what is most excellent while I have a brain that is working, while I have life to live. But we don't do that at times. We fail to discern what is most excellent.

And there's a couple of years in my Christian life where I thought I need to do what is excellent. I need to do what is excellent. And I kept failing to do what was excellent.

And I thought something's wrong. What am I missing? What am I missing? Look at this text. I'm in the ESV.

The words may be a little different, but the idea is gonna be there. Look at verse 9. Is this my cup? Okay, he says here, it is my prayer. Now he doesn't pray that they might approve what is excellent.

I've thought that for a long time. Paul actually is not praying for that specifically. Look what he prays for.

Three ingredients. It is my prayer that, and what's the first thing he's asking for? That your love may abound more and more. What's the second? Knowledge, third.

And then what words are said in verse 10? That you may, in order that. So Paul isn't even praying for you all to approve what is excellent. He wants that to happen, but Paul recognizes there's something the Christians in redeeming grace fellowship, they need to have first before they will be able to approve what is excellent.

So here I am thinking, I wanna approve what is excellent. I wanna approve what is excellent. And it finally dawned on me one time, I was reading this verse and I saw the logic.

Paul's not even praying for that. That wasn't even his initial direct focus. It was three key ingredients you've gotta have in order to approve what is excellent.

And if you only have two of the ingredients, you don't approve what is excellent. You need all three. And so we're gonna look at all three of those things.

But this is often why we fail to approve what is excellent because one of these three ingredients, love abounding, discernment and knowledge is not present. And we miss it. So let's just think briefly about those three ingredients.

First, he mentions love abounding. And someone would say, well, love for who? And that is a valid question to ask. I mean, in the context of this letter, he's talking about unity.

It's clearly love for the brethren here. He's wanting them to have more love for the brethren. He just talked about verse eight.

Look what he says. God is my witness how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. Paul loved them with the love of Christ.

And then he's praying, I want your love to abound that you love one another with the love of Christ. So love abounding for one another, obviously we need love abounding for God. So think about love for a moment.

Love is such a butchered word where we, you know, love. What is love? There's different things. The Bible says, 1 Corinthians 13, love is patient, kind, doesn't insist on its own way.

Think of that. If you insist on your own way, love's not abounding, and guess what? Can you approve what is excellent? No, no. You can have discernment and knowledge, but if you are selfishly insisting on your own way, you're gonna miss it in approving what is excellent.

You're gonna go for second and third grade issues. You're gonna do that which is bad or good, but not what is most excellent. Love.

Paul said later in this letter, chapter 2, verse 3, he said, let each of us look not only for our own interest, but also to the interest of others. And by doing that, whose mind are we having? He says, have this mind among yourself which is in Christ. So Christ had this mindset of love abounding.

I mean, His love abounded so much He went to the cross and bore God's wrath upon Himself for our sins. Ephesians 5, walk in love. What is that? As Christ loved us, what is Christ's love for us? And gave as an offering and a sacrifice.

So love is about giving sacrificially of yourself. You have to have love abounding. And Paul says here, it's my prayer that your love would abound more and more.

There's not one of us in the room who's a Christian who doesn't need love to abound more and more. I mean, honestly, out of these three ingredients, I need more of one thing. It's not discernment.

It's not knowledge. I need more of those. It's love.

It's love. It's a selfless, I'm not insisting on my own way, Christlike attitude. And ultimately, that's going to be where most of us are going to be unbalanced.

We'll have knowledge. We'll have discernment. We'll lack love.

So we need love abounding in greater abundance. So the point is this, if you're not abounding with others' interest and view, you will not do what is most excellent. You'll do what is most self-centered and the best for your own interest, which at the end of the day, it will not be what is most excellent.

So the second ingredient, so first, you need love abounding if you're going to prove what is excellent. Second, you need knowledge, real knowledge. So Paul, I think the point is, you know there's some people, they say they have love abounding, but they don't have biblical knowledge.

Can they prove what is excellent? No. No, if I come in here today and I say that my love's abounding and I approve of homosexuality or abortion or something like that, there's no knowledge there. That's clearly not the most excellent decision.

So in order to make the most excellent decision, we need to have knowledge of who God is, we need to understand His attributes, we need to understand the Word of God, we've got to have Scripture, we've got to know who God is, we've got to have real knowledge about the Lord. Love abounding isn't blind love. Paul, he even said in 1 Timothy, there's some who have a false type of knowledge.

They call it knowledge, but it's false. And we need to watch out for that. Because just like we talked about this morning, sometimes we have knowledge, but it's not according to the Scriptures and it's false

knowledge.

We don't want to hold on to that. We need to get rid of that. But look real fast at Romans 2. Flip to Romans 2. Getting hot in here? I wore a long-sleeved shirt, so I must have.

Everyone is. Yeah, I've thankfully survived. It's been nice up here.

Well, look at Romans 2. 2.18. You can wait a second. Verse 18. Talking about the Jews.

The Jews, they rely on the law. Verse 18 says, they know His will and approve what is excellent. They approve what is excellent because you are instructed from the law.

Now, obviously, the Jews had the Mosaic law given to them as a physical nation. And God's had His will revealed in that. Now, they failed to keep it.

They were miserable hypocrites. But the fact is, it says they could approve what is excellent because they knew His will because they knew the law. Now, for us, it's different.

In Matthew 11, what does He say? He says, learn of Me, of Christ. The Christian, they learn of Christ. We're not going necessarily and running to the Mosaic law.

We're running to Christ and yes, seeing how He interprets certain things there and we're looking at it through the lens of Him, but we're ultimately learning of Jesus Christ. And that's how we can approve what is excellent. The ultimate way to approve what is excellent is having more and more knowledge of Christ and understanding how He lived His life.

The more you learn of Christ, the more you'll have true knowledge. It's not necessarily you go and memorize the Levitical laws and the Mosaic law. You go and look at the person and work of Jesus Christ.

And you guys have been reading the law of Christ every other week or so. And that whole text in John 13 says to love as I have loved. I mean, that's the Christian life.

We look at Christ and we're seeking to imitate Him. And so here, it's just interesting in verse 18, it says they knew His will and approved what is excellent because they were instructed from the law. You will only know His will and approve what is excellent if you're being instructed from Jesus Christ.

You've got to have Christ as your instructor. You've got to be seeking to imitate Him. Husbands, love your wives.

How? As Christ. Forgiving others, Colossians, as Christ. As God and Christ so forgave you.

I mean, Christ is gone to again and again is our example. So we need knowledge. We need knowledge.

We need to know who God is. We need to know the Scriptures. We need to know who Christ is, of in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily.

Third ingredient is discernment. This is huge. Maybe some people, this is their main area they lack.

And it makes them fail miserably in approving what is excellent. They don't have discernment. They don't have discernment.

Let's think of this. Hebrews, it says, powers of discernment are trained by constant practice to do what? To distinguish good from evil. So when you think of discernment, you're thinking about distinguishing.

It's kind of that same idea of analyzing and approving what is excellent. Discernment, it says, when is the right time to do something? Discernment says, when is the right place to do what I'm going to do? Think of timing. What's something people who lack discernment do at a bad timing? Or what's something, people who call me at 4 a.m. in the morning to just want to chitchat, there's a lack of discernment there.

That's a poor illustration because that doesn't necessarily happen. It's not that real. I don't know.

I'm a loss for illustrations there. Maybe I had something in my notes. I don't.

So the timing and the place in which to act, the person to act upon. So discernment isn't just about the timing, but who's the right person to act upon. And so I go home with my kids.

I wrestle a ton. I'm tickling them. I get my daughter under her armpit.

I'm just going all out at home. That's a really good context to be going crazy with my children. Do I go to the grocery store and do that? No, I've got discernment.

That's the wrong... Did you do that with your kids? No. The point is discernment. Even in the Sunday gathering, discernment, what's appropriate for the meeting, during the meeting, what's not appropriate.

If we don't have discernment, if we don't analyze that, we could think things, say things, do things that it's just not the best timing for it. It's not the best timing. So discernment is vital to proving what is excellent.

So those are the three ingredients. Love abounding with real knowledge and all discernment. You need those three things to prove what is excellent.

You don't just wake up and say, I'm going to prove what is excellent today. You pray, Lord, let my love abound more and more with all knowledge and discernment in order that I might prove what is excellent. And when I saw that, it freed me.

It helped me see why I was failing to do this. So let's just think for a moment, what happens if I lack one of these ingredients? What happens if I lack one of them? In balance number one, love without biblical knowledge of the claims of God. Kind of already hit on that.

It produces sincere people who are wrong. Sincere people who are wrong. In balance number two, knowledge and discernment without love.

Now that's a big one. Knowledge and discernment without love, it produces judgmental, critical people. Paul said knowledge puffs up, love builds up.

Paul said if I understand all mysteries, so they're knowledges, and have all knowledge, if I have all faith but have not love, I am nothing. So there again, how essential is your love abounding to proving what is excellent? It's so vital. You know, knowledge without love, no patience.

I've got all this knowledge, discernment that person's wrong, I'm not gonna bear with them. I have no ability to show patience with them, they're wrong. I totally discern they're wrong.

Well, guess what? Even if you discern they're wrong, bear with them, love them some. Give them a chance. That's what you'd want them to do to you.

This type of person, they get irritated with those who are slower than them, and they don't approve what is excellent. So the third imbalance is knowledge plus love without discernment. And that is already mentioned.

You don't see the time to act. You kind of miss approving what is excellent based on just not seeing the real need. You kind of meet someone's need, but you missed it.

That really wasn't their real need. You lack discernment on what to say. It's kind of like you said, the right thing.

Like Job's counselors lacked discernment. They said things that in a way there was truth in them, but it didn't apply to the guy. They pegged the wrong man.

So they lacked discernment. Was their counsel most excellent? It wasn't. They had knowledge.

They thought they had love. I mean, they got to Job, and how long did they wait before they opened their mouths? Think of that. Seven days.

If one of you all has a child die or something, and a brother comes over and waits seven days before opening his mouth, that would make an impact on you. I mean, there's a sense of entering into the suffering. So these guys who went to Job, there had to have been some love there for the guy, but no discernment.

They didn't approve what was most excellent. So, those are three imbalances. If you miss one of these ingredients, you don't get the right amount of ingredients, and you don't get the result of approving what is excellent.

So Paul, in summary, he's praying for love abounding rather than cold knowledge. Yet, not just love abounding without biblical knowledge, yet not just love and knowledge, but discernment on how to apply the knowledge in the most loving way, depending on the circumstances and situation. And why? So you might approve what is excellent.

Now, we're nearing the end, but let's think of a couple examples of this in this book of Philippians, okay? A couple examples of this right here. Look at chapter one, verse 18. Actually, verse 17.

Okay. The former proclaimed Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. Okay, pause.

People are preaching Christ. That's good. What's their motive? To afflict Paul in his imprisonment.

Now, I want to watch. What's the most excellent decision if you're the apostle Paul? If your love is abounding with knowledge and discernment, and people are preaching Christ in order to afflict you, what's the most excellent decision you can make? What do you guys think the most excellent decision is? He says it right here. Verse 18.

What then? What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. That's incredible. You approve the most excellent decision when people are preaching Christ

in order to afflict you is to rejoice? Come on, Paul.

No, he had love abounding. He had some knowledge there, and he had discernment to see they're preaching to afflict me, but you know what? Christ is being preached. I rejoice in that.

And love abounding, you know, he could have had a lot of self-pity. I mean, honestly, if you're in prison and people are out there preaching to get you more afflicted, your initial response, if your love is not abounding, is to feel sorry for yourself, is to want them to be quiet, to stop. I mean, how are you going to rejoice? And Paul rejoices.

He had all the three ingredients. His love was abounding with knowledge and discernment. He approved what is excellent.

He was analyzing it. Do I have a self-pity party? Do I get depressed? Do I get angry? Even righteous anger? No, I rejoice because Christ is preached. So, that's one, not self-pity, rejoicing.

A second one. Look at chapter 1, verse 21. For me to live is Christ to die is gain.

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Now look at this. He's analyzing, yet which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

So Paul is analyzing. He's trying to see which star differs from that star in glory. What is the most glorious, Christ-exalting decision I can make? He says, which I shall choose, I cannot tell.

I'm hard-pressed between the two options. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. That's probably the most excellent decision, right? If it's far better, wrong.

Let's go on. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. When he says more necessary on your account, what three ingredient is being displayed right there? Love abounding more and more, and discernment too.

He discerns it's more fruitful to not go to glory yet and to stay with Him. But love, love abounding, that's far better, but it's more loving to stay and remain with you all. And so he says there to remain is more necessary.

Notice that word necessary. That's the idea of approving what is excellent. You've got five decisions.

You've got five things you could say. And you look at all five, and there's one of them that stands out, and you say that decision is necessary. That is superior.

That is the most excellent. Guess what? Forget all the other four. We're going with that one in faith.

Convinced of this, so he was convinced, he says, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and join the faith. He was totally thinking about them. Glorious.

So another real quick, 2 Philippians 2, look at verse 25. Paul in prison had a brother named Epaphroditus who was there with him and was ministering to his needs. If you're in prison, and you've got a Roman guard chained to you as the commentators would say, and you've got a guy there ministering to your needs, do you want that guy to leave? Do you? I personally would like him to stay.

He's ministering to me. Look what Paul says here. Verse 25, I have thought it necessary, same idea again, to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier and your messenger and minister to my needs.

Why? For he's been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed, he was ill near to death, but God had mercy on him. Verse 28, I am more eager to send him, therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him and that I may be less anxious.

So, Paul's love is abounding. And he's saying, you know what, I'm in prison right now and I'm suffering and this brother here is ministering to my needs, but you know what, I want those saints at Philippi to rejoice. And it's more necessary to send Epaphroditus to them.

That's what's most excellent. If his love was not abounding, he wouldn't have made that decision. He wouldn't.

You can't. And remember, all love abounding is having the mind of Christ. He had the mind of love.

He was love incarnate in the flesh. So, one more example here. Chapter 4 in Philippians.

Look at verse 2. There is a problem between these two sisters. And he says, I entreat Eodia, I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. The idea there is to have the mind of the Lord.

Similar word that Paul used earlier. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the Gospel with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are written in the Book of Life. So there's a disagreement.

And Paul comes in and he's asking them to have the mind of the Lord. To agree. When there is a conflict, and you've got two parties, and they're unwilling to find some unity, not meaning you have to agree with the other, but you can love them without agreeing with them, so often love's not abounding there.

And you don't approve what is excellent. Love says, I'm going to be reconciled. That's most excellent.

I'm going to do what I can. There's times I've tried to be reconciled to people and they didn't want it. And they shut the door on me.

Self insists on our own way, and we refuse to do such. We don't want to agree with one another. We want to take our stand firm and say, I know I'm right, you're dead wrong.

I'm not going to budge. I know I'm right. I know I'm right.

Now look, there are things you need to take a stand on and say, I know I'm right. I know I'm right that if any man's in Christ, he's a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come.

So, obviously we need to be dogmatic on the essentials of the faith, but the non-essentials, we need to be careful. So, many people, they sometimes, they think they're approving what is excellent, but they're blind to see they did not have love abounding in that decision. And it just wasn't excellent.

It was poor. It wasn't that good of a decision to make. So, in closing, we already looked at this.

Is this approving what is excellent a big and important deal? Yes. Your love abounding more and more with discernment is a big deal. Sorry, I was trying to, what did I write? It's a big deal because if you don't

have these things, you won't approve what is excellent.

And look back at that verse again. Notice these connecting words. Verse 9, it's my prayer, okay, what are you praying? Love abounding more and more with knowledge and discernment to get something.

To get you to approve what is excellent. To get something in order for something. So be pure and blameless for the day of Christ.

What does it mean to be pure and blameless for the day of Christ? Well, one thing it means is you're filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ. And what's all of this to? What's the purpose of all of this? To the glory and praise of God. If you don't approve what is excellent, you know what happens? God does not get the maximum glory from your life.

And people will look at this church and they'll say they do good things, but they don't do excellent things. And that will look bad on God's part because it will make it appear like God is not as glorious that we should be approving what is excellent. But is not Christ? He is most excellent.

And He demands that we approve what is most excellent. And when you get a fresh glimpse of Christ and His excellencies, it makes you want to approve what is excellent. The last thing you want to do is approve that which is less superior.

It's like, Lord, what is the most superior decision we can make? Individually, as a church body, what is the most necessary thing we can do? Let's do it with all our hearts. To the glory and praise of God. So, where does this discerning love come from? I want you guys to answer that.

The text says it. It's very clear. Now, it does say, fill with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Christ.

So yes, Christ is working all the fruit in us. John 15, apart from me, you can't do anything. But what's something practical you all can do to help each other approve what is excellent? Don't fall asleep on me yet.

It's right there in the verse. Pray! What's Paul doing? It is my prayer. I mean, ever since I felt like this text became real to me, I've tried to pray that for people.

Lord, it's my prayer that you all will have love abounding more and more with knowledge and discernment so that you might approve what is excellent and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ. Fill with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God. We should be praying that.

We should be praying that in all of our decisions. Lord, help my love abound. I mean, how many decisions do we make that are wrong just because love is not abounding? And we think we're approving what is excellent and we can miss it.

Yeah, we need to know our Bibles. It comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ perfectly had love abounding with knowledge and discernment and approved what is excellent in every single decision of His life.

I mean, think of that. Every decision Christ ever made was most excellent. His decision to be a carpenter was most excellent.

So when we think of approving what is excellent, this doesn't mean... this isn't just in the spiritual realm. It's in everything. Everything.

Christ approved, you know what? My love's abounding. Here, this woman is at this well. This isn't culturally acceptable.

My disciples are gone. It's just me and this woman. But you know what love demands? I talk to this woman.

And they were kind of surprised when they came back. She was converted, went to the town, evangelized to them. I mean, God saved people.

Love was abounding. He could have had some strict law. I'm not going to talk to that woman right now.

This isn't culturally acceptable. Love abounding more and more with knowledge and discernment. He realized that's the thing to do.

I'm going to reach out to that woman's soul. I mean, how many decisions we have. And so I want to encourage you all.

Make sure you've got love abounding. I think the thing that usually happens is people have discernment. I say that, but a lot of times people lack discernment.

And they have knowledge, but there's a lack of love. There's too much self-interest involved in a decision. A selfishness.

Not a self-interest meaning for my own good, or for the good of my family, or for the good of the church. I mean, there's a right. That's love being interest for those people.

But this idea that I have to have it my way. When love abounds, and knowledge and discernment, you approve what is excellent. And a lot of times, it's not your way.

It's someone else's way. And so this is a key to unity. You know, Paul, even in this very letter, look what he goes on to say here in chapter 1, verse 27.

He wanted their life to be worthy of the Gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you or I'm absent, I may hear of you that you're standing firm in one spirit with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel. You hear that? Striving side by side. With one mind.

But what did he just pray for the church? He prayed there to prove what is excellent by having love abounding more and more with knowledge, and that ultimately is pointing to the mind of Christ. So having this mindset is a key to being able to have unity and strive together side by side with one another. Satan wants to do everything he can to not get you guys to strive side by side together.

You're kind of side by side, and then what happens? Distance, distance. This guy has all this love abounding. He's trying to get closer.

This guy, discernment, knowledge. And then this guy finally gets his love abounding. Ah, we're striving together.

They may disagree, but we're striving together for the goal of Christ. Yeah, we may not agree on that non-essential thing, but my love's abounding. More and more with knowledge and discernment.

So brethren, approve what is excellent. You want to be a church of approving what is the most superior, most necessary decisions you can make. When you get together to make decisions, that's got to be right there on the mind, not just as a church, but individually.

If you don't do this as individuals, you're not going to do it as a church. I mean, it starts in your own heart, in your own life. Do I even desire this type of radical thinking of wanting to approve what is most excellent? And if you feel kind of dull and this doesn't excite you like it should, just go think about what Christ has done for you.

When you look at the love of Christ, you'll realize I'm a fool to want to do second-rate issues. I want to approve what is most excellent for Him. So that's all I've got.

Approve what is excellent, but first, have your love abounding more and more and more and more with all knowledge and all discernment. Let's pray. Father, it is my prayer, Lord, for every believer here tonight, that they would indeed approve what is excellent.

And Lord, I say that and right away, you'll realize how do we do it? And so, Lord, I pray right now for this church, for these brothers and sisters, Lord, would You let their love abound more and more? Please. Or give them more love for one another. Any thoughts of disapproval of other people in the subtlest ways, or well, my way's right and theirs is wrong.

Lord, whatever little thoughts, we know it. These thoughts come that Satan is our adversary. He's a slanderer.

Lord, would You let their love abound more and more? And Lord, here we hear that through constant practice, our powers of discernment are trained. We get better. And so, Lord, I pray, would these brothers and sisters have more discernment? Lord, those who lack discernment in certain areas, I pray, Lord, through constant testing and training that they would grow.

And Lord, I pray You'd give all these brothers and sisters and myself more knowledge of who You are. Lord, open our eyes to see more of You. Help us to learn of Jesus Christ.

Lord, because we want to prove what is excellent. We want to have lives lived for proving what is most necessary. Help us to lay aside every sin and weight which clings so closely and run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Look into Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. And Lord, we pray You'd fill us with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Yourself. Work in us to will and to work these things for Your good pleasure.

Lord, do that. Work in us the desire to want to live this out. And so, Lord, we need You.

I pray You'd give grace to these brothers and sisters. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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