

Theme: God empowers His people to overflow with love — and this love, far from opposing holiness, is precisely what produces it, establishing the church as a holy community of love as it looks forward to the return of Jesus.

I. Intro – The Roman god Janus

- A. Photo of the Roman god Janus
- B. God of beginnings – January named after him
- C. Also god of doors and gates – transitions, both ways
- D. This section is the big ‘hinge’ in 1 Thessalonians
- E. Everything prior was mainly about the past - now we come to Paul’s concerns and instructions for the future
- F. This prayer shows Paul’s concerns for rest of the letter

II. A Holy Prayer

- A. A sudden prayer in the middle of the letter

Now may our **God and Father** himself, and our **Lord Jesus**, direct our way to you, ¹² and may **the Lord** make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

 - 1. Paul suddenly shifts to a prayer (optative mood)
 - 2. He is praying to the Father & Jesus - amazing that a strict monotheist would pray to Jesus! (After Hours)
 - 3. We can learn a lot from Paul’s prayers
 - a. It is a great practice to pray Scriptures - especially Scriptural prayers
 - b. We can pattern our prayers after them
 - c. We learn we can pray to the Father and to the Son - like Paul does!

B. A prayer to be reunited

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, **direct our way to you**, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

- 1. This is really Paul’s prayer for himself.
- 2. Paul wants to be reunited with them (1 Thess 2:18)
- 3. Direct our way - straight, clear path, removing Satan’s obstacles (1 Thessalonians 2:18)
- 4. Letters are good - but nothing is like being together in person

I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. ¹⁴ I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. 3 John 1:13–14

- a. We were made for relationship - image of God
- b. We are created as flesh and blood, localized beings
- c. Relationships are best when they are in person, not mediated by technology

- C. The first part of Paul’s prayer sums up the first part of the letter: his desire to be able to return to Thessalonica

III. A Community of Love

- A. Paul prays they would be a community of love

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and **may the Lord make you increase and abound in love** for one another and for all, as we do for you 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

 - 1. Paul’s prayer now shifts to the Thessalonians and to the future. This part of the prayer introduces some of the key themes for the rest of the letter.

2. To be a community they must be vitally united to Jesus - He will make them grow in love
3. Increase and abound in love - overflowing, ever growing love
4. This is not prayer for a little love - it is a prayer for super-abundant, overflowing love that permeates the community
5. He prays the same things for the Philippians!
And **it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more**, with knowledge and all discernment, Philippians 1:9
6. The need for believers to increase and abound in love is a constant and universal need!

B. A community that loves one another

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in **love for one another** and for all, as we do for you 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

1. The first priority - love one another
2. As a community of those who have been redeemed and have God as Father, we are all brothers and sisters with one another - and so we must love one another
3. As a new covenant community, we must obey the new covenant command to love one another
A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. John 13:34–35 NIV

4. A community of overflowing love will continue to be patient, gracious, & forgiving toward one another, not separating over relational offenses
5. This is a challenge to our highly individualistic, offense holding, “I will go somewhere else” culture. We are called to walk with one another through the good and bad times, holding on to our relationships
6. The Christian life is a communal life, called to practice love over the long haul with people - the New Testament knows no other type of Christian.

C. A community that loves those outside

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in **love** for one another and **for all**, as we do for you 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

1. Love does not stop with our local church - we are also called to love those outside of our community
2. We must love all believers - whether they are part of our church or not. A true spiritually loving community is not exclusivist, but embraces all believers warmly as brothers and sisters in Christ
3. We must embrace the lost - for they too bear the image of God. As God our Father is kind even to those who hate Him, so we must practice love to others - even those who speak evil or mistreat us.

D. A visible example of overflowing love

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, **as we do for you** 1 Thessalonians 3:11–12

1. The Thessalonians had seen the type of love Paul is praying for and encouraging to grow in them
2. Paul, Silas and Timothy practiced sacrificial, patient, forgiving, love - the Thessalonians had seen it
3. True love costs, but it is Spirit's fruit in our lives

IV. A Holy Community

A. The goal - a holy community

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ **so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness** before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:11–13

1. Note 'so that' - purpose/result clause (not separate sentence as in NIV)
2. Our culture pits love and holiness against one another, as if they are diametrically opposed - but this is a lie, for God is Love and Holy, equally and simultaneously
3. The idea that love & holiness are antithetical is false, and misunderstands love & holiness, both of which are expressions of God's character
4. The result of a community overflowing with real love is that they grow in holiness - not that they abandon all ethical standards of behavior!
5. True biblical love is not contrary to holiness in conduct - it promotes it
6. The idea and practice of holiness will be key in the remainder of the letter, occurring 6 times in chapters 4 and 5

B. The power for holiness - from God

so that **he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness** before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

1. The power for holiness comes from God not the self

- a. Holiness is first and foremost a gift of God as the result of our status "in Christ" - we are God's holy people, set apart by His grace. Justification gives us the status of being holy.
- b. Sanctification, our growth in holiness, is fueled by the power of God as He strengthens us to desire holiness and reject sin.
- c. This is why it is part of a prayer - God must work or this will not happen. But because God does work, all Christians can grow in holiness in actual conduct.

2. The focus in the remainder of the letter is holiness in actual conduct - especially in our sexual conduct

C. The motivation for holiness - the coming of Christ

so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness **before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus** with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

1. The motivation for holy lives now is the return of Christ in the future
2. Biblical eschatology does not promote speculation about future events and dates, but rather holiness in our present lives as we look forward to the return of Christ
3. The idea of the second coming of Christ will dominate the second half of the letter, and it provides the motivation for the call to live in holiness as the Thessalonians wait for the coming of Christ

- D. This verse gives the two major themes of Thessalonians
- living in holiness while we wait for the coming of Christ
so that he may establish your hearts blameless in
holiness before our God and Father, at **the coming of
our Lord Jesus** with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:13

V. Applying the Word

A. Am I working to build a community of love?

1. God's will is for all Christians to be part of building a community that overflows with love
2. This is always an ongoing process for every church - BRCC included. We will never "arrive" in this life!
3. Am I helping to build a loving community at BRCC?
4. Am I working to build relationships with others - or just coming on Sunday morning?
5. Am I growing in patience, kindness, grace and forgiveness towards others at BRCC?
6. Am I committed to staying part of the community even through relational difficulties?

B. Am I working to build a community of holiness?

1. God's will is for all Christians to be part of building a community that is growing in holiness
2. This is always an ongoing process for every church - BRCC included. We will never "arrive" in this life!
3. Do I realize that love and holiness are symbiotic, not contradictory? True love leads to holiness; compromise with sin is never real love, but only sappy emotion disconnected from reality.

4. Do I see that holiness is essential to what it means to be truly, fully human? We were created in the image of the Holy God!
5. Am I helping to build a holy community at BRCC?
6. Am I personally growing in holiness, or have I made peace with sin?
7. Am I willing to speak the truth in love to others to help them grow in holiness?

C. The Table of Holy Love

1. This Table reminds us of the holiness & love of God
2. This Table empowers us to live as a holy community of love - while we look forward to the return of Jesus
3. Come and confess sin, profess God's love, receive strength to grow in holy love as we wait for Jesus to come again!

A Holy Community of Love

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

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Communion

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Teaching keywords: holiness; love; community; church; prayer; eschatology

May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones. 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13