

## **A Prayer for a Loving Congregation's Love to Increase**

Phil 1:1-11(text: 1:9-11)

2 February 2020, Reformed Church of Wainuiomata 10:30 a.m.  
(Put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

### **Intro**

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

About two decades ago, I was an elder – an elder in another congregation.

They were godly people who loved one another.

But...! Suddenly they wanted to do major *building renovations* to their church!

So, they called for a *special congregational meeting*.

However, they were without a pastor who could chair that meeting.

So, guess whom they wanted take up that role for the evening!?

Me! Yes, me who knew next to nothing about the rules of chairing even ordinary meetings let alone a congregational meeting of major financial importance!

But those loving people assumed that, because I looked gifted in some areas, I would also be gifted in chairing meetings! And I was too polite to try harder than I did to get out of the situation.

So, I chaired that meeting – the first congregational meeting I ever chaired!

Well, sadly, it didn't take long before people who, up until that moment, loved one another, started changing the tone of their voices. Soon I saw many angry faces looking at one another and at me!

So, since then, I have been asking myself many times, "Pieter, how was it possible for such godly people, who loved one another, to suddenly get so frustrated & angry with one another?"

Well, our text has given me the answer, i.e. that I who chaired that meeting might well have had love – even Christian love, but love *without knowledge and discernment!*

And it is *such* love which the Apostle Paul (in our text) is praying that the already-loving Philippian church would have in abundance; a love which comes with<sup>1</sup> knowledge and discernment! And this is also the main message of our text for our Wainui church family: that we will love God and one another with an abundance of love that comes with sound biblical knowledge and depth of discernment!

And here are the three points of this sermon...

- Prayer for Love's Increase
- Immediate Reason for Seeking Such Love
- Ultimate Reason for Seeking Such Love

### **A Prayer for Love's Increase (v.9)**

In v. 9 Paul says, "...*it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with<sup>2</sup> (real)<sup>3</sup> knowledge and all discernment (yes with *depth of insight*<sup>4</sup>).*"

Paul loves the Philippian congregation!

It's a beautiful congregation, because their deeds of kindness to Paul, and their self-sacrificial giving for the furtherance of the Gospel, are like beautiful fruit borne by a healthy fruit tree! Yes, the Philippians' deeds revealed that they were in a real, warm & loving relationship with Christ.

And Paul has just praised them for that (vv.3-8).

Yet, Paul's desire is that this Christ-worked love should grow even more and more in this beautiful congregation's hearts!

What sort of love?

*Agāpe-love* – a despite-of love! Like Christ's love! A love which expresses itself in self-sacrificial deeds for the Gospel and for one

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<sup>1</sup> Yes, with the ESV I take the Greek preposition *en* (ἐν) to have the same value as the Hebrew preposition בְּ (ב). Thus, *en* (ἐν) could simply mean "with" here in verse 9. For more on the uses of *en* (ἐν), cf. Robertson, A. T. (2006). [A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research](#) (p. 590). Logos Bible Software.

<sup>2</sup> So the ESV

<sup>3</sup> So the NASB

<sup>4</sup> So the NIV84

another;<sup>5</sup> a love that more-and-more binds the congregation members in unity.<sup>6</sup>

But look! This love is not a *blind enthusiasm/feeling* or a *blind zeal!* No, it is accompanied by *sound knowledge* and *discernment!* You ask, “But does love then need knowledge?” “Does love come with knowledge?”

Of course, it does!<sup>7</sup>

I mean, have we not seen what a lack of sound knowledge can do to one’s love (zeal) for God? For example, remember what Paul once said (in Rm 10:2) about the Jews who *thought* they loved God – yes, Jews who had a real *zeal*<sup>8</sup> for God – however, a zeal not based upon sound knowledge<sup>9</sup> of who God is; of His prophecies about the Messiah who would be the Saviour from *sin*, and not from *political oppression!*

And so, despite the love those Jews *thought* they had for God, yet, due to lack of sound knowledge, they made the biggest mistake of their lives, i.e. they rejected their own Messiah!

So, Paul does not want the Philippians to be like those Jews who, in a knowledge-lacking zeal (“love” for God), went so seriously wrong!

Neither does Paul want the Philippians to have the knowledge-lacking zeal (“love”) of the Judaisers who said that faith alone in

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<sup>5</sup> Thielman interprets “love” here as mainly love for one another: “The term ‘love’ is not further limited or defined, although if it bears the meaning here that it has in the rest of the letter (1:16; 2:1–2), it refers to the love believers should have for one another. Since this meaning fits well with the theme of unity pervading the letter and already introduced in subtle ways in verses 1–2, it is probably the correct meaning” (Thielman, F. (1995). [Philippians](#) (pp. 32–56). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

I think Thielman is right. However, we should remember that love for one another is only pure if it has sprouted from the believer’s heartfelt love for God in Jesus Christ. On this, cf. e.g. M. Henry, “*That your love might abound yet more and more*. He means it of their love to God, and one another, and all men. Love is the fulfilling both of the law and of the gospel” (Henry, M. (1994). [Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: complete and unabridged in one volume](#) (pp. 2321–2322). Peabody: Hendrickson).

<sup>6</sup> A theme highlighted throughout this letter (cf. 2:2; 4:2).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Col. 1:9 where Paul gives a parallel to v.9 of our text, “**And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...**”

<sup>8</sup> ζηλόω; ζήλος, ου *m* and ους *n*: to have a deep concern for or devotion to someone or something—‘to have a deep concern for, to be devoted to, earnest concern’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 293). New York: United Bible Societies).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Rm 10:2 in which verse Paul describes this knowledge-bereft zeal of the Jews, and where Paul uses the exact same word for “knowledge” as here in our verse, i.e. not just the word *gnōsis* (γνώσις) “knowledge,” but the word *epignōsis* (ἐπίγνωσις) “what is known, definite knowledge, full knowledge, knowledge” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 335). New York: United Bible Societies).

Christ is not enough, but that Christians must also keep certain Jewish ritual laws, like e.g. circumcision, and food laws, and feast days.<sup>10</sup>

So, Paul prays that the Philippians' love for God and one another will increase with the increase of their knowledge of who God is and what He has done;<sup>11</sup> and that *that* love will express itself in *all discernment and depth of insight!*<sup>12</sup>

Why is it important to have such a love – a love that comes with sound knowledge and discernment?

Well, that brings us to point 2...

### **The Immediate Reason for Seeking Such Love (v.10a)**

Paul says (in v.10), “*So that you may approve the things that are excellent* (NASB);” “*so that you may be able to discern what is best* (NIV84).”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> In this very letter to the Philippians, Paul fights heavily against such errors (cf. Phil 3:1-11).

<sup>11</sup> Granted, in this life, no human being will have a complete knowledge of God and His will – such knowledge will come one day when we are with God, when we will no longer see God dimly as in one of those ancient metal mirrors, but face-to-face; yes, when *we will know fully as we have been fully known* (cf. 1 Cor 13:12 in which Paul uses the verb *epiginōskō* (ἐπιγινώσκω) “to know fully,” which is related to the same noun *epignōsis* (ἐπίγνωσις) used in v. 9 of our text: ***For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known*** (ESV)).

<sup>12</sup> For “all discernment” (ESV, NASB) or “depth of insight” (NIV84), cf. the Greek word *aisthēsis* (αἴσθησις): ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύη ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει ‘your love will keep on growing more and more together with your knowledge and complete capacity for understanding’ Php 1:9 (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 383). New York: United Bible Societies). Also, cf. “Paul’s term for “depth of insight” (*aisthesis*) appears only here in the New Testament, but in other ancient Greek literature it often refers to “moral perception,” that is, to the ability to know the right action in a given situation. Paul’s basic request for the Philippians, in other words, is that they might express their love in ways that show both a knowledge of how to obey God’s will generally, and, more specifically, of how to make moral decisions based on God’s will in the give-and-take of everyday living” (Thielman, F. (1995). [Philippians](#) (pp. 32–56). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House).

<sup>13</sup> *Ta diapheronta* (τὰ διαφέροντα) Present Active Participle Neuter Plural Accusative of *diapherō* (διαφέρω) “to be of considerable value, in view of having certain distinctive characteristics—‘to be valuable, to have worth.’ οὐχ ὑμεῖς μᾶλλον διαφέρετε αὐτῶν; ‘are you not much more valuable than these (birds)?’ Mt 6:26; εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα ‘so that you will be able to choose those things that are more valuable’ Php 1:10” (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 620). New York: United Bible Societies).

See why Paul wants the Philippians (and you & me) to grow in love accompanied by sound knowledge of God; a love expressing itself in perfect discernment?

It is *so that*, in any given situation, you & I will have the ability to choose good from bad; and the important from the unimportant; yes, so that you & I will not just be able to discern what is correct according to Bible doctrine, but also that, in the give-and-take of everyday living, you & I will know how to make decisions based on God's will;<sup>14</sup> in other words, that in all our decisions/actions you & I will have a sensitivity to the truth of God and the needs of others.<sup>15</sup>

My brother & sister, have we not seen it – sadly too often – how brothers in a presbytery meeting (or in synod) lacked this kind of love – a love which comes with sound knowledge and depth of discernment?

And now I'm speaking not so much about *our* congregation when I ask: have we not seen this lack of love in all-too-many a congregational meeting – especially those meetings where great financial expenses needed to be made?

And how about those times when a well-meaning sister in our churches – a sister with lots of enthusiasm and love (yet knowledge-and-discernment-lacking love) has caused more harm than good there we she was one of many who had to organise a ladies presbyterial or a garage sale or a congregational dinner? See? See how easy it is even for Christ-loving brothers & sisters to start majoring on minor things (or even on wrong things)? And all because of a lack of sound knowledge, or due to a discernment cluttered with subtle selfish motives!

But look! A person with such a knowledge-and-discernment lacking love may not just hurt the feelings of people; no, such person might even at times be *mised doctrinally!* And that is, e.g.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Thielman (ibid), "Paul's basic request for the Philippians, in other words, is that they might express their love in ways that show both a knowledge of how to obey God's will generally, and, more specifically, of how to make moral decisions based on God's will in the give-and-take of everyday living."

<sup>15</sup> Well-said words of Foulkes, F. (1994). [Philippians](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 1250–1251). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

one reason why our church has elders, i.e. so that someone called to an office of authority will check on what is preached from this pulpit!

My brother & sister, Paul's wish is that his best-loved congregation will not be led astray like the Galatians who lacked sound Biblical knowledge;<sup>16</sup> neither that they will be like the Corinthians who had their love for one another cluttered by bad discernment filled with pride and envy!<sup>17</sup>

So, what do we see about this love which knows how to discern best?

Well, don't we see that this love is not just a *sentimental feeling* – that it's not a mere *politeness* which lets a brother or sister go their own way without correcting them?

No, if you & I have this love that comes with sound knowledge and depth of discernment, then you & I will, when needed, act just like our Lord Jesus!

You see, because our Lord possessed this love in perfect measure, He knew when to speak a clear word of warning, like when He told Peter, ***“Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”***<sup>18</sup>

See?

If you & I (if our elders) have this kind of love, then we will seek what's good for one another's *eternal* benefit; then we will

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. e.g. Gal 1:6-9, ***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!***

<sup>17</sup> Cf. e.g. 1 Cor 11:17ff in which Paul points out how their pride has caused them to sin even at the Lord's Supper table! This is also the reason why Paul wrote 1 Cor 12 to them in which he showed them that they did not need to be jealous of one another, for the Christian church functions like a body in which the parts are different while each one is nevertheless important!

<sup>18</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Mt 16:23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

sometimes do everything in our power to keep a brother/sister (a son/daughter) from stumbling off the path of truth!<sup>19</sup>

How will the Christian (you & I) be able to avoid lacking this love (and the disasters that come because we lack such love)?

Well, by doing what Paul says elsewhere in this letter – by focusing on the single goal – the goal of knowing Christ and of considering all else rubbish!<sup>20</sup> In other words, by walking closely with Christ; by being in a personal relationship with Him – a relationship which is certainly fed & grown by spending time in God’s Word!

Well, we have just heard the first reason for praying & striving for this kind of a love, i.e. so that with Christ in mind, we will always *discern what is best!*

What’s the second reason for praying/striving for (desiring) such kind of love?

Well, that brings us to the last point...

### **Ultimate Reason for Seeking Such Love (v/10b-11)**

My brother & sister, all life on earth steer inevitably towards one great event – the return of our Lord Jesus Christ!

What does this mean?

Well, does it not mean that it is in light of *that* day that you & I will live *this* day!?

How are we to live this day?

Firstly (as v.10 says), you & I will want to be *pure!*

How can a human being be pure?

Well, have you ever seen pure silver or pure gold?

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. Paul’s words of Gal 2:5 & 14 *We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you... When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?*

<sup>20</sup> Phil 3:8 *What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ (NIV84).*

Not too long ago, I had the privilege of holding in my hand a 50g bar of 99.99% pure gold; unixed gold; yes, pure as pure can be, without any alloy!<sup>21</sup> And, although this gold bar was not mine, just looking at its brilliance and shine – and feeling its weight – was already a great pleasure to my senses!

Well, the *quality* of this unixed gold – *that's* what God desires also of your/my lives, i.e. that you & I will be *sincere*; yes, without *hidden motives* or *pretence*, but *with transparent character*.<sup>22</sup>

So, in light of *that* day, *pure* is the first thing you & I want to be already on *this* day!

Well, how else will we live on *this* day?

Our text says (in v.10), “blameless!” That means, “not having given any offense to God or people; or to Christ – on that last day!”<sup>23</sup>

In sum, it means that you & I will (as v.11 says) bear the *fruit of righteousness*; yes, tangible proof that we have been made right with God through Jesus Christ; fruits like: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22-23) – and also the *deeds* which *result* from these fruits!<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> /'aloɪ/ **Origin:** Late 16th century from Old French aloi (noun) and French aloyer (verb), both from Old French aloier, aleier ‘combine’, from Latin alligare ‘bind’. In early use the term denoted the comparative purity of gold or silver; the sense ‘mixture of metals’ arose in the mid 17th century.

<https://www.lexico.com/definition/alloy>

<sup>22</sup> The Greek word is *eilikrinēs* (εἰλικρινής) “... ‘unmixed, without alloy’, then in moral sense **pert. to being sincere, without hidden motives or pretense, pure...**” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 282). Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

<sup>23</sup> The Greek word is *aproskopos* (ἀπρόσκοπος), “...pertaining to being blameless in view of not having given offense—‘blameless, without blame.’ ἀσκῶ ἀπρόσκοπον συνείδησιν ἔχειν πρὸς τὸν θεὸν καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ‘I do my best to live blameless before God and people’ Ac 24:16. In a number of languages the concept of ‘being blameless’ as in 88.317 and 88.318 can only be expressed by a verbal expression involving some measure of complaint. For example, the expression in Ac 24:16 may be rendered as ‘I do my best to live in such a way that neither God nor people can blame me’ or ‘... can complain against me’ (Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 776). New York: United Bible Societies).

<sup>24</sup> Also cf. Is 5:1-7, “**I will sing for the one I love**

**a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. <sup>2</sup>He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.**

**<sup>3</sup>Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. <sup>4</sup>What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? <sup>5</sup>Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard:**

You say, “But, pastor, be honest!” “No sin-marred human being will, in this life, ever be able to be this pure, blameless and bearing all these fruits perfectly!”

My brother & sister, I know!

But still, when Jesus comes (or when we go to Him), will not you & I will want to be like a bride adorned for her groom!?<sup>25</sup> Yes, will you & I not want to be adorned with fruit-bearing lives?

You ask, “But how will we do that?”

I know of only one way – and that’s not by our own hard effort! Yes, such fruit-bearing adornment will only come if you & I live with hearts surrendered to our Lord Jesus!

How do I know that?

Well, look at v.11! It says about these fruits of righteousness that they come through Jesus Christ!

You know what? That’s John 15 all over again: “***I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.***”<sup>26</sup>

Even later in this very letter (Philippians) Paul says the same thing (Phil 4:13), “***I can do everything (only) through him who gives me strength.***”<sup>27</sup>

See?

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*I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. <sup>6</sup>I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” <sup>7</sup>The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress (NIV84).*

Also, cf. Mt 7:16-20 *By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them (NIV84).*

Also Lk 13:6-9, *Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’*

<sup>8</sup> “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down’” (NIV84).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Eph 5:25-27 (especially v. 27), *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her <sup>26</sup>to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, <sup>27</sup>and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (NIV84; emphasis mine).*

<sup>26</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Jn 15:5). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>27</sup> [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (Php 4:13). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Only he/she who lives in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ will be ready & adorned to meet Him!

Well, up to this far point in the sermon, you & I have now seen two reasons why we should pray & crave for an abundance of love – a love which comes with sound knowledge & discernment!

These two reasons were:

- So that we will, in any given situation, be able *to discern what is best* (on God's terms & for His glory)!
- And so that we will *be ready to meet our Lord Jesus!*

Question:

Are these the ultimate reasons?

No!

Although these are two vital reasons, here's the ultimate reason (v.11): ***the glory and praise of God!***

See?

See how, this way, the circle is completed? “Fruits descending from heaven must waft their fragrance back to heaven again!”<sup>28</sup>

After all, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!<sup>29</sup>

How will you & I, by any measure, succeed in living to the glory of God?

Again, not when we're externally forced/coerced!

Only when we're moved from the inside out!

So, what will move our hearts to *so* love/glorify God by our fruits!

Only when we see with open spiritual eyes who God is and what He has done for us in Jesus Christ!

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<sup>28</sup> Well-said by Hendriksen, W. 2004. Exposition of Philippians (In: Hendriksen, W. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Book House. p.62-63).

<sup>29</sup> Mt 5:16 ***In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.***

Jn 15:8 ***This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.***

Jn 17:4 ***I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.***

1 Cor 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Eph 1:6, 12, 14, “***...to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves... in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory...<sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory***” (Emphasis mine).

And look! To remind us of that, here we have in front of us the Lord's Supper table with bread & wine!  
Look at these! Taste these! And see what God, in His beloved Son, *has* done for you & me!  
But, don't just look back! No, also look *forwards*! Yes, envisage that day when only those who are in Christ will sit at the feast of the Lamb in heaven!  
I pray that you & I (and all our loved ones) will be ready & adorned for Him, our heavenly Groom!

AMEN (2315 words excluding footnotes)