

The love of the Beloved

Ephesians

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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:17-19
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Ephesians 3, we'll read from verse 16,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Amen. Thus far as we read the word of God.

So it's from the middle of verse 17, "...that ye, being rooted and grounded in love." Our theme this evening is "The love of the Beloved." The love of the Beloved. The people of God love our Lord Jesus Christ. He is their Beloved. But they love him because our Beloved first loved us. There is a sense in which we approach verses like these with an immense sense of inadequacy for the subject. It's interesting to notice that though these verses are so rich and so full, yet even the commentators become rather thin in their comments because there is a sense in which of inadequacy to adequately declare the meaning of these things.

We've seen that the apostle, because of the church's high calling in verse 10, and because of the access we have to the Father through Christ in verse 14, prays for the Ephesian church and indeed for all the saints. He prays that God will answer according to the riches of his glory, that is, according to all his glorious attributes in line with his wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth, and especially his power and his love which are so greatly displayed in the manner in which he answers these prayers, and that God and the Lord Jesus Christ would strengthen them in their souls by the Spirit. We saw that the Holy Spirit strengthening and working in the believer is that when the Holy Spirit dwells in him, that Christ dwells in him and the Father dwells in him. As Christ said, "We will make our abode with him," and he's speaking of the coming of the Comforter. And he desires then that God by the Spirit would dwell in them and strengthen them, and that

in dwelling is also described as that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith because although it's describing what God does at his own initiative, the effect of it is a consciousness of the presence of Christ through believing on him so that the work of the Spirit in strengthening increases faith in Christ and the consciousness of the indwelling of Christ in us and Christ with us, so that the indwelling entails consciously having believing views of the Lord Jesus Christ and how we need to have an increase of faith to believe properly and fully all that is written of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In 1 Peter 1:8, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:." How then do we love him without seeing him? Well it is by believing. It is through faith, through believing views of Christ that we love him, and it is as our faith increases and our believing view of him increases that our love for him increases.

So we love Christ by believing. That's how we see his loveliness, not with physical eyes but with the eye of faith. We see him as the one whom our soul loveth and this introduces the next step of the petition. First of all then, rooted and grounded in love. Rooted and grounded in love, "that ye being rooted and grounded in love." This refers to our love, that is, our love to the Lord above all and then to others. And we are to be rooted in this love to the Lord. As we believe, the more we see Christ by faith, our love to him increases and we are to be rooted in this love, that is the soil of love to Christ is the tree, as it were, of our Christian lives is to be rooted and this must mean that the whole Christian life draws its vitality and fruitfulness from love to the Lord Jesus Christ. As a tree draws its nourishment from the soil, love to Christ must be the spring of action in our Christian living otherwise our Christian lives become a drudgery of outward conformity to outward Christian standards and duties, and even this will begin to crumble in time.

It's hard trying to live like a Christian with a cold heart toward the Lord. It is a drudgery. Therefore this love to him, stemming from faith in him, is to be cultivated, and this is stressed even more in the second term used, being rooted and grounded or founded. It's the idea of the foundation of a building. Love to Christ is foundational to all Christian living. Our Christian behavior and speech must rest upon love to Christ in the heart. Christians do not, like other religions, merely conform to an outward ethic, albeit a Christian one. We must love the Lord Jesus Christ and our outward conformity to biblical standards must be the outworking of inward love to the Savior in whom we, though we see him not, yet believing we rejoice with joy unspeakable.

And isn't it a lovely thing to meet Christians who obviously love the Lord Jesus Christ? Isn't it a refreshing thing to meet Christians whose lives obviously are dominated by love to the Savior? The beauty of the Lord is upon them. Their lives are governed by the thought of what honors the Lord Jesus, what is well-pleasing in his sight. Nor is this fragrant quality necessarily proportionate to correct understanding, though it should be the more we understand, the more we should love the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowledge is not getting rightly applied if it doesn't lead to that.

The idea of fanaticism must not trouble us. We cannot love Christ too much. Fanaticism is when emotion is severed from the word. But we can't love Christ too much. That's not

fanaticism. It's not getting carried away to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all our hearts. And here the idea of a foundation must be intended to convey the thought of that which is carefully laid and we must give attention to the state of our souls and of our love to the Lord Jesus Christ and to our neighbor and especially to the people of God. We must be careful to monitor the spiritual temperature of our souls, lest carelessness and indifference to the Lord bring us loss of joy in our outward obedience.

You remember in the Song of Solomon, and the Song of Solomon and chapter 5 and verse 2, "I sleep, but my heart waketh: it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night. I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them? My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him. I rose up to open to my beloved; and my hands dropped with myrrh, and my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh, upon the handles of the lock. I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone: my soul failed when he spake: I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." Spiritual indifference, spiritual, lapsing into spiritual lethargy and complacency is not as easily remedied as many imagine, as that passage would show.

The Ephesian church seemed to be going on as always in the book of Revelation, but the Lord Jesus could see that all was not as it once was. Revelation 2:2, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate." You see, if we've been looking at this church, and we look at the things mentioned in verse 2 and 3, and then in verse 6, we'd say this church in Ephesus is still going strong as always, still apparently as steadfast as ever, but Christ knew that behind the outward there was a decline in love to him.

So then we must be watchful lest spiritual stagnancy and complacency creep over us. We must then be attentive to this foundation of love to Christ. There are two errors to avoid. There is a contentless Christianity, a Christianity with no content, that's all emotion and there's nothing solid. That's one thing. But then there's another thing to be avoided, a Christianity that sees mental knowledge as all that there is and that's not true. There is to be joy and peace in believing. There is to be godly sorrow that worketh repentance. The kingdom of God consisteth in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. Mind-led Christianity, but not mind-only Christianity.

That joy unspeakable and full of glory mentioned in the verse in 1 Peter 1:8, that cannot be if Christianity is merely cerebral, if it's all and only to do with the mind. There must be truth. The point of entry of the truth is the mind, and the mind must lead the way but the

affections should be stirred to love to the Lord Jesus Christ. The woman who washed Christ's feet with her tears, she loved much because she had been forgiven much.

So this love to Christ must show, it must show in love to others, especially the people of God. If we do not love our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen? This stands in contrast to that bitterness. Bitterness of spirit eats away at spiritual vitality, whereas those who are walking in communion with Christ, they love the brethren and they have a forgiving spirit. Then secondly, knowing immeasurable love. Knowing immeasurable love. Verse 18, "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." As believing views of Christ bring with them love to Christ so that we love him, as we love him, we increase in appreciation of his love to us. It's as we have believing views of him, we see his love to us, and our love to him is stirred and as we love him, so we appreciate more his love to us. There is a certain revolving, a cycle here, that faith in Christ and appreciation of his love to us, causes us to love him, and as we love him, we see more of his love to us.

Now verses 18 to 19 we take as two statements of essentially the same petition, "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge." We take it that this comprehending of the breadth and length and depth and height, and this knowing the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, to be one and the same thing stated in two different ways. But let us notice a knowledge that only saints have and can have. This is a knowledge, this knowledge of the love of Christ, that you may be able to comprehend with all saints, with all saints, but only saints because only saints can comprehend the love of Christ. Only the people of God have any of this knowledge of his love. Only those sanctified by the Spirit in the new birth, the beginning of sanctification, only they have anything of this knowledge of the love of Christ. And the world knows nothing of it, not at all. It's not that they know a little and Christians know more. They know nothing. That is why they say to the Christian, "What is thy Beloved more than another beloved?" They know nothing of him. They see no beauty in him. But the people of God know, "My Beloved is fairer, the chiefest among ten thousand and altogether lovely." They can speak of him however poorly because they know him and they know something of his love. But the world can see nothing in him. That is why a Christian is of a completely different mind to the non-Christian. He loves what the world hates and he hates what the world loves, not as utterly as he ought, but nonetheless so. He's on that narrow way that leads to life. They are on the broad road that leads to destruction. They have different interests, different priorities, different loves, different concerns, different joys, different sorrows from the ungodly.

But the apostle says that you may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height. Comprehend or apprehend, the idea is of grasp, grasping hold of in our minds and hearts the breadth and length and depth and height. What is this reference to breadth and length and depth and height? There have been many ingenious interpretations of this verse but the simplest is that the apostle is speaking of its immensity in all directions, that it's so vast that he may be able to comprehend what is the breadth and length and depth and height, as if it's so vast we can't measure it.

Here is something that is immeasurable, something infinite, something beyond finite understanding and that's why he goes on to say, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. To know the love of Christ which passeth, that word passeth, it's the idea of pass over. It's as if finite knowledge, this is so great that it it overwhelms finite knowledge, it passes over like a sea going over the wall, it just overwhelms the limits of finite knowledge. And yet the apostle, you might say, seems to contradict himself, to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge and the word know and knowledge are essentially the same word. So he's saying we are to know something that cannot be known. But the idea is this: though our capacity is limited, he would have us to know to the full extent of that capacity, even though this love itself is beyond the reach of finite capacity, but to the full extent that we are capable of, he would have us know this love of Christ. Even though it overflows the bounds of finite creature's capacity, yet within that capacity he would have us know it.

A love that is so great in its grace, while we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly. Without strength, ungodly, ungodly and utterly incapable of making ourselves godly in the slightest degree, Christ died for such. Immeasurable in its grace, immeasurable in its constancy. Having loved his own, he loved them when he was in this world, he loved them to the end. It was constant. It was from eternity and it was constant in the God-man Redeemer during his earthly life and it is constant in him now that he is exalted to the right hand of God. Immeasurable in its cost. He poured out his soul unto death as an offering for sin that he might justify the transgressors. Who can understand the cost of redemption to the Redeemer himself? It is without money and without price to us, but he bore the sin of many. And it is immeasurable in its everlasting benefits that his people, that multitude which no man could number, should be washed in the blood of the Lamb, that they should be delivered from the guilt of sin and ultimately in heaven from the entire presence of sin and from the bodily effects of sin, from all that sin entails.

It is immeasurable love. We can never over-appreciate the love of Christ to us. It's not possible. Our fullest, purest grasp of the love of Christ falls short in this world and even in the world to come, it is but the grasp of a finite creature, the apprehension of a finite creature of an immeasurable love. Never be afraid of loving Christ too much. We said that's not possible and it isn't. And never be afraid of thinking too highly of Christ's love to us. It isn't possible. It is overflowing the bounds of finite knowledge. It is surpassing the breadth, the length, the depth, the height, the vastness. But we must progress in the knowledge of this love to the full capacity of our finite beings. Again, fanaticism is not thinking too highly of Christ's love. Fanaticism is when feeling is divorced from scripture, from the word. That's fanaticism. That's a dangerous delusion. But there's no delusion in thinking highly of Christ's love. None. There's no danger of being too taken up with the love of Christ. It's said of Samuel Rutherford that he was obsessed with the loveliness of Christ. What a glorious obsession. Oh, that we had more of it while we are in this world.

We cannot love him too much nor think too much of his love and then, thirdly, be filled to capacity with God. Verse 19, "that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." Filled with all the fullness of God or filled unto all the fullness, the plentitude of God.

And the thought then is to be filled with his indwelling, this desire of the apostle, this prayer that they would be more and more indwelt by God and by Christ, by the Spirit. He desires more and more of that indwelling so as to be conformed to him. To be filled with his indwelling Spirit so as to be conformed to him insofar as finite creatures can be. There are things about God that can never be true of creatures but so far as what is true of God can be conformed to infinite creatures, that's what he desires. That the Spirit of Christ might so work in them and fill them that they will be holy as he is holy and perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect.

This is the goal and it's fully realized in heaven. "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." The two go together. Satisfied when I awake with thy likeness. True, the Christian has contentment in Christ. There is a holy contentment in Christ and yet there is a sense in which there is a holy discontentedness that we are not more like Christ. But in heaven there will be no such conflict. We will be satisfied when we awake with his likeness.

But you might say does that mean that all development and progress is finished in heaven? Well no. There will be no more progress in holiness because we will be perfectly holy. There will be no more sanctification because we will be at last perfectly sanctified. But there will be progress, development, increase in capacity. All will be fully blessed and satisfied when they awake with his likeness but there will be an increase forever in our capacity for blessed enjoyment of God.

So then in this world we desire that to the full capacity of our finite beings we should be filled with the fullness of God, with the plentitude of God, and then in heaven we will be satisfied but we will be ever increasing in our capacity and our discovery of the riches of God's glory and of his grace in Christ Jesus. Those who think that the enjoyment of God is such a tame thing that an eternity of it sounds monotonous to them, they know nothing of the enjoyment of God. They haven't tasted. But those who've tasted, they know that there is in God that which can satisfy the soul forever and ever so that in heaven there will be this perfect blessedness and this perfect freshness, a constant freshness, never any stagnation or staleness in the enjoyment of God. Here because of our sin we fluctuate, we wax hot and cold, but not then, there will always be that perfect satisfaction and that ever fresh discovery of the riches of God's glory in Christ Jesus. "In thy presence is fullness of joy and at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." Amen.