

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3

“14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

To Know the Love of Christ

As you can guess from my sermon title, we are going to be talking about the love of Christ this morning!

Love is another of those words that we can find all over the Scriptures, with most translations having some 500 occurrences. As we saw with the words mystery and grace, context is often important and sadly with love we have to also account for the abuse this majestic word has been subjected to in our modern world. As we often review on Trinity Sunday we know that the Bible clearly teaches us that God is love: It is not only something He does, but rather it is His very nature!

➤ **That is why Love is a majestic word and we will see Paul’s use of it here to be of the highest order.**

Love is also something that is reflected in God’s creation. There are of course His loving actions in relating to all of His Creation in this amazing world...

➤ **But we also know that man, as made in His image, reflects that image as those who can also love.**

We will see this with marriage in the coming chapters! So why do I say that the word love has been abused in our modern world? Well, I can begin with myself as a sad representation of this current age: While I understand the majesty of God being love and the wonder of love between God and His creatures and the love of man toward God and our fellow men and women, I still find myself saying things like ‘I love popcorn’ or “I love going to the ocean.”

➤ **I would argue that this cheapens a word that should be used as the Scriptures use it.**

And I am afraid that I am not alone among those who may not conquer such bad habits in my lifetime. Perhaps we can do better with the next generation. But sadly this is not the only abuse of this grand word today... Our culture now abuses this word when it is used to justify abhorrent behavior by saying those who violate God’s ordained marriage bed should NOT be judged because they are in “loving” relationships.

And yes, sadly, we also have a more general problem in our fallen world, where even those relationships that should demonstrate true love come up very short. And this is a MUCH bigger problem today than it has been in the recent past. The love of Christ surpasses the love of a father or mother for their children, but when parents fall short, or even fall into the grievous sins of sexual or physical and emotional abuse, we often allow that to taint our view of any love.

The same is true with marriage, where the love of a man and women should glorify God and demonstrate His love: But sadly with our divorce rate running at 50%, even in Christian circles, we again have this tainting our view of God’s love.

With all of that in mind we should clearly see the importance of praying for each other as the Apostle now prays for these Saints at Ephesus. The Apostle Paul begins verse 14 with the phrase we saw back in verse 1: “14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”

Seeing ‘for this reason’ again reminds us that for these past few weeks we have been studying Paul’s parenthetical comments with regard to his ministry to the Gentiles. As he began to share his prayers for these Saints here in Ephesus, he remembered the overwhelming love of Christ toward himself, and reminded them about his ministry of Grace and why he was a prisoner of Christ!

When saying ‘for this reason’ Paul is taking us back again to the end of Ephesians 2: “19 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Yes, as we just reviewed, we live in a fallen world full of disappointments, yet in the midst of these troubles, we remember that we are citizens of heaven fitted together and prepared to be the dwelling place of God, in the Spirit! Thus, Paul is once again driven to his knees on behalf of these Saints:

“14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...”

- Whether we come from a good family or a poor one, we are now named after our Father in heaven.
- As those who have been baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit we have a right to the riches of His glory.

Let that sink in for a moment!

AND the Apostle prays that our inner man be strengthened by the Spirit of God Who has full access to those riches.

- This is the exact opposite of what the world encourages us to do, teaching that we must only trust our inner man for the strength and wisdom that we need.

Finding God and His riches is far more important, and beneficial, than any effort to try and ‘find ourselves’ as the world encourages in so many ways. We must also remember that Paul is here praying for the Saints and not the world. The world is welcome to hear the truth that he shared about the Gospel of Grace in chapter two and in faith become a child of God: Something we encourage each and every week in our worship service when we call folks to repentance and declare the Good News of forgiveness.

BUT Paul is now praying for those Saints and only they can respond in faith...

- The riches of God’s glory are NOT available to anyone who is not in Christ!

This is pictured in a beautiful way by our Savior Himself when He gave the Apostle John those letters for the Churches [again, letters addressed to Churches and not the world].

Sadly these grand truths have often been used wrongly, especially when we come to the Church at Laodicea:

In Revelation 3 we come to the Church famous for being lukewarm rather than hot or cold: At verse 17 we have Jesus explaining why they have such problems: “Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—” [*mention their fame*]

- They are suffering from perhaps the most dangerous sin that Saints can suffer under: Ignorant pride [*mention Lewis*]

And as we would expect the solution is to turn to Jesus... “18 I [Jesus] counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.”

Now I must remind us again that Jesus is writing to the Saints at Laodicea:

- Jesus wants them to remember who they are and that they have access to the riches of God’s glory!

This grand truth is often forgotten when the next few verses are wrongly used in evangelism... [mention the picture of Jesus standing outside]

What I want us to take in this morning as we study the Apostle’s prayer, is that Jesus gives this illustration to His people because He wants them to have life and life abundant...

“20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21 To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne. 22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.””

This is not a picture of a helpless Jesus hoping someone will make the right decision for salvation...

This is our loving Savior wanting us to enjoy the full riches of the salvation that He purchased for us a great cost.

And I trust you can see that this is now exactly what the Apostle Paul prays for with these Saints here at Ephesus...

“ 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.””

Now obviously those Saints at Laodicea were in more trouble spiritually than the Saints here in Ephesus, but such prayers are in order in either case!

Look around the room brothers and sisters and see a local congregation of the Church: The Body of Christ! Because of what Jesus has done for us we have all been baptized into His name, identified with Him and we are now capable of loving one another in a very sacrificial way!

And the Apostle Paul this morning has encouraged us to pray one for another:

[mention the prayer calendar]

We should learn to pray such prayers in a very personal way...

“Lord, I pray that you would grant Todd, according to the riches of Your glory, to be strengthened with might through Your Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in Todd’s heart through faith; that Todd, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that Todd may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

- Try to imagine with me for a moment, how rich our relationships would grow in the coming months and years IF we faithfully prayed such prayers one for another?

I think we have an example of this very outcome in the life of the Apostle Paul that he shares with us in the book of Philemon, where Paul wants Philemon to take back a runaway slave who has become a Christian:

“8 Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, 9 yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, 11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

With such prayers, and results in mind, let me close with some encouraging words from the Apostle Paul given long ago to the Saints at Colossi that were an encouragement to me as a young Christian and have only become more and more important as I have matured in Christ:

Colossians 2:1 “For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, 2 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

- **May we be those who to come to know more and more, the love of Christ & the riches of God’s glory!**

Communion Meditation: Revelation 3

“18 I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.”