

The Depth of True Love

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Well, we turn to God's word again this morning and turn to the book of Philippians with me, if you would, Philippians 1:7. I know that many of us perhaps have plans for Mother's Day later on. Nancy and I are hoping to go see my mother later this afternoon, and if you'll bear with me in just a personal word, I have a great affection for my mom. It was seven years ago next month where I was standing next to her in a hospital room after she had just been treated surgically for cancer and the doctor gave us the impression that she had only six months to live, that she might not even live to see that Christmas, and so here we are seven years later, she's healthier than she's been in the past 20 or 25 years, and my heart is just full of thanksgiving to God that he spared her and gave us those additional years. My mother is a very dear woman to me and I am grateful to God and it's only fitting for me to acknowledge the gratitude in my heart to have my mother still with me to be able to share in another day with her, and I know many of you have met her, she's a sweet, precious woman, and I'm just grateful for that and grateful for all of the love that I have received from her generous hands over the years.

Now with mother's love, we want to make a little bit of a transition to a different kind of love in what we have to say here today. You know, a mother's love as wonderful as it is, for those of us that have enjoyed good mothers, as wonderful as it is, it's not a perfect love. Our mothers loved us through their own fallen natures, right? Our mother's love at its best is temporary because they are subject to death as well as many of you know by sad experience, and our mothers are flawed and our mothers are fallen like we are, and in the end as much as we treasure a mother's love, we find that it's not lasting, it's not eternal as much as we appreciate all that they've done for us over the years. Well, where that should lead you, what that leaves for you in your heart is something pulsating, something desiring something that is lasting, that is eternal, that is real, a love that will never fade away, and that is exactly the kind of love that we have in our Christ.

Before we go to Philippians, let me just take you to Ephesians 1 for just a moment. Ephesians 1 and 2. This will lead us naturally into the book of Philippians. In Ephesians 1, we see something of the eternal love of God expressed for us. In Ephesians 1 at the end of verse 4 it says, "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, it was in love that God appointed salvation for you. From the beginning of time and even before then, God had your highest and best interest at heart and set his eternal

love upon you, including you in the plan of redemption to make certain that you would be redeemed in Christ during the course of your life and that you would be with Christ in heaven throughout all of eternity. This is the greatest and the highest of love and this was not a mere sentiment, this was a love that came at great cost in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look over at Ephesians 2:4. After having set forth the depravity of man and the lostness of man in his sin under the domination of Satan and under doom to suffer the wrath of God, God steps into time in our lives and in verse 4 it says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." Beloved, I want you as much as we appreciate our mothers here this morning, I want something to be really clear in your mind, is that there should be in your Christian heart an even greater love, an even more surpassing affection in the core of your being for Christ and for your heavenly Father who loved you with a love like this. No mother could ever have redeemed you from your sin, in fact, she helped give birth to your sinful condition, right? Nothing personal, mom. I'm just being theological here. Christ has loved you with an eternal love and secured your eternal well-being at the cost of his own life and that's something no mother could ever have done for you, and so even while we honor our mothers on this day and even though we love them and appreciate them, we realize that as Christians we are on the receiving end of a far greater love to which we return our deepest, highest loyalty and affection which no human being can ever replace.

There is an affection for Christ in the Christian heart that no one rivals and we need that to be clear in our minds as we move forward even in this day, and Paul in Ephesians 3, realizing that this is not something that we easily grasp, he prays for us in verse 14, Ephesians 3:14, look at it with me. He says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints," then he goes on a majestic trans-universal flurry of expressing the glory of the love of Christ, that you, verse 17, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Paul prays for the Ephesian church as he writes to them, and by extension we see what Christ would have for us, an ever-growing Spirit-infused knowledge and understanding in our hearts of how wide and how deep and how broad and how far into the future and how far rooted in the past is this great love of Christ that's been bestowed on our souls.

Beloved, Christ is precious and as much as our mothers are precious, Christ is even more precious than all, and I would have you have that clear in your affections this morning as

we go now to Philippians 1:7-8 which is going to be an expression of, in a sense, of Christian love but the Christian love of which we are about to read and to expound here this morning we must always understand is a consequence of the prior love of Christ for our souls. We love because he first loved us. We love in a human realm as Christians only in response to a prior love that was set upon us when we were unworthy, while we were yet sinners, while we were still deservedly under the wrath of God. These things are so crucial for us to understand.

There is a spiritual force, if I could put it that way, there is an affection force in your heart that comes from understanding these things. We look at this love that has been set upon us and it is meant to transform our hearts in love in a horizontal way as well, and this is what Paul is expressing when he writes in verse 7 of Philippians 1, our text now for this morning, verses 7 and 8,

7 For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.

Now what's going on in this passage here that's going to occupy our attention for this morning? What's Paul saying here? Well, let me remind you that Paul has opened this letter with an expression of thanksgiving and love already to the Philippian church.

Look at verse 3, he says,

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, 4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, 5 in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

So Paul has opened his letter here with this expression of love and appreciation for the people at this church. He says, "I love you. I'm grateful to God for you. I'm thankful for you." He's given them a prayer report that expresses how he has prayed for them and how confident he is of God's work in their lives.

Now, you read that at initial glance and you see the depth of the things that Paul is expressing there and you realize that there is something very significant going on in his heart. He is expressing profound feelings for these people that he is not geographically with, he is geographically removed from them, writing from a prison cell, and so what he does here in verse 7 and in verse 8, is he explains for them these strong feelings that he has in his heart and he justifies them. What we find here is that Paul is telling them, "I am not expressing a mere sentimentalism to you, I'm not simply gushing emotionally here, my love that I have expressed for you is deeply rooted and grounded in truth, it is deeply and greatly grounded in the realities of the Gospel. My affections for you are real and

sincere," he says, and what he does in these two verses in the process is that he opens up for us, he pulls back the curtains, as it were, and lets us see into the realm of true biblical love. We see true biblical love illustrated for us in these words that Paul is expressing in verses 7 and 8, and I want to give you three aspects to true biblical love, showing forth the depth of true love.

Now let me pause for just a moment before I go any further here. To enter into Christ, to become a Christian, and to enter into the realm of true, the true interactions of a genuine church, a true body of Christ, is to enter into a realm of love that the world knows nothing about. The love that we experience together as the body of Christ is rooted in realities that are not found in the world and we sense these things as we interact with one another, we sense these things as we care for one another, as we go through life together, what we find here in verses 7 and 8 is an expression of why those realities are and if we can appreciate what the realities are, we're going to give greater thanks to God for them, it will refresh our sense of commitment to these things, and also I would suggest to you that it will also give us a sense of refreshment for our commitment to one another. The commitment that a body of believers have to one another is rooted in very profound operations of the Spirit and things that are true and righteous and outside of our own experience. That's what we want to look at this morning.

Point 1 here is that, what Paul says is that true love is fitting. True love is fitting, and what he's about to say is that he's not been exaggerating in what he has said, and all of the depth of these things, "I thank my God always for you. I'm confident of this. God is going to lead you successfully to the day of Christ Jesus," and it's just bursting and pregnant with all of this wonderful expressions of confidence and love for these people. Now Paul is going to explain why he has all of these feelings that he's expressed in just the prior four verses.

Look at here in verse 7 with me. He says, "For," because, "it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart." Paul says, "It's only right for me to feel this way about you. This is the proper way for me as the founding apostle of your church, this is the right way for me to feel about you." The word "right" comes from the Greek word "dikaios." It refers to something that conforms to acceptable behavior or it expresses that which is required under the circumstances. Paul is saying, "Under the circumstances of the long history of our relationship together, it is required for me to feel the way that I am expressing to you. This is the right way for me to feel." He's saying, "My gratitude for you is the only righteous way for me to respond in light of the history of our relationship and the support that you have been to me in my ministry over these many years." He says, "This is right. It is right for me to be confident about you. It is proper and appropriate for me to thank God for you. How could I do anything else," he says, "in light of all of the love that you've shown to me, which is a reflection of the reality of the work of Christ in your heart? All I can do is be grateful because what has come to me through your lives," Paul says to the Philippians, "what has come to me through your lives is an expression of the love of Christ Himself, and so all I can do is be grateful, to be confident. For me to have any other attitude less than what I'm expressing

here would be unrighteous under the circumstances." So he says, "This is the right thing for me to do."

Now look at verse 7 with me again. He says, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all." That's an interesting word. It's more than just an emotional reaction and in our day and age where feelings are everything, you know, your feelings can redefine, you know, what gender you are, for heaven's sake, and your feelings can justify anything that you want to do, if it feels right do it, it's important for us to distinguish here in the 21st century the way that we've been conditioned to think about feelings, to distinguish that and separate it out from what Paul is expressing here when he says, "It's only right for me to feel this way about you all."

The Greek word that is used here includes not only the sense of emotion but it includes the mental processes as well. The sympathy and the love that Paul is expressing here is a reaction to things that he has thought about, and his thinking about the past history of his relationship with the Philippians, his thinking about what that says about the work of Christ in their hearts, has produced an emotional reaction as well to the things that he has thought about, and here's the thing, beloved, here's what I want you to think and consider, beloved, is this, is that when you interact with and understand the nature of biblical love, you are brought far beyond the realm of pure emotionalism. You are responding to things that have been revealed to cognitive thought. The message of the Bible is an appeal, first of all, to the mind, to the understanding, and then when the understanding is informed, then it has a way of moving in the emotions and you have an emotional response not to something that has manipulated you, like we are used to in all of the entertainment of the 21st century and relationships and all of that. No, your emotional reaction is rooted in truth. It is rooted in revelation. The kind of reaction that Paul is describing here comes from a mind that is engaged with truth and truth is essential to true love.

There is no love apart from truth and what does that do as a practical matter? When your love for someone is rooted in Christ, when the relationships within a local church are deeply rooted in the truth of Scripture, deeply rooted in who Christ is, then there is a stability and there is a reality to love that is rooted in that, that emotion alone can never sustain because emotions all wear out, right? Sooner or later emotion dies down just like a campfire where you squirted lighter fluid on it. Oh, it flames up great and looks really impressive but you all know that that dies down really quickly, and in the same way just a purely emotional idea of love cannot sustain itself through the inevitable challenges of time, trials, temptations, and just the stretch of human relationships.

So what Paul is saying here, look at verse 7 with me again, he says, "It's only right for me to feel this way about you all." He's referring to something that is rooted deeply in his mind and in his understanding. It's not just, "I feel gushy about you," he's saying, "It's right for me to feel this way about you all and the feeling is in response to things that I have been thinking about, things that I have considered with my mind and in my heart." So true love is fitting because it's the right thing to do in response to Christ, in response to love from other Christians that's been shown to you. True love is rooted in the mind and that brings us to our second point here this morning. I continually weary of the

inadequacy of my vocabulary to express the things that need to be said about Scripture. I weary over the limitations of human language to express things, and in those times when I'm thinking rightly, it leads me to a greater dependence upon the Holy Spirit to take his word and to apply it to the hearts of those who hear with power, and to lead it to a sense of understanding and force in your hearts that go beyond what mere human words could produce. Whenever the word of God is open and taught, we are always dependent upon the ministry of the blessed Holy Spirit to help us, especially in a time like this, which brings us to our second point here which is this: true love is deep. True love is deep, by which I mean true love is profound. It is not superficial. There is a depth of earnestness in true love that is beyond the realm of manipulation, it is beyond the realm of hypocrisy. The love of which Scripture speaks here is something that is real and it is deep and it is profound and Paul here in verse 7 writes with a most disarming transparency that speaks to us today. What can I say?

Look at in verse 7 with me here when he says this, he says, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart." Look at that, "I have you in my heart." He says, "Deep within me you are profoundly there. All that our relationship has meant to me over the years has just rooted itself so deeply that it consumes my thinking and it consumes who I am." When he says, "I have you in my heart," he's using a word that refers to the entire inner life of a man, all of his thinking, all of his feeling, and all of his volition, all of his will. It takes up everything about the inner man in his thoughts, in his feelings, and in his will, and it gathers them all up into one great Mission Control Center that animates a man in all that he thinks and in all that he does, and Paul says, "In that inner sanctum of the Mission Control Center of who I am, you're there. I have you in my heart." He is describing his whole person in the fullness of all of his spiritual and mental life. He's expressing, to use a word that I like to use a lot, you'll hear me use this a lot in private conversations, Paul here is earnest. He is sincere in his thoughts and his affections toward them. Paul here is writing in a way and is expressing a reality about biblical love that is a direct contradiction to the way that so much ministry is done today where it is calculated on marketing technique that is designed to provoke a reaction and couches the Gospel in marketing ways, in the same way that you would sell soap to somebody, trying to get them to respond to Christ, in the same way you try to get them to buy soap, and just techniques are used and music and lights and emotional appeals are used to manipulate people when in reality there's not a sincerity of love and concern at the root of it. Paul here would have nothing of that.

Paul says, "I have you in my heart. I'm earnest for you in my thoughts and affections," and he goes on and he explains why that would be the case. He genuinely cares for these people. He's genuinely grateful for them as he goes on to explain. Look at that, "because I have you in my heart." You know, it's hard to get men to even speak that way today in sincerity, isn't it? Paul shows forth a biblical manhood that expresses an earnestness of love in response to Christ and the work of Christ that lays his heart out for all to see and he says this, "I have you in my heart since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me." Paul, let me remind you, went through a lot as an apostle of Christ, went through beatings, went through rejections by his fellow countrymen, felt the opposition of false teachers, felt the

opposition of secular leaders, was in prison even as he wrote this. He was afflicted outside and felt struggles within and for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the well-being of those to whom he ministered, he had suffered both inside and outside, in external affliction and internal concern of soul. In one place he says, "I bear with me the daily pressure of concern for all of the churches."

So there is this weight on this man of God through which he goes through life that accompanies ministry, and Paul, what Paul is saying here is that, "While I've been going through all of that, you've been with me. You've been a partaker of grace. You have shared in it all with me. You have loved and supported me. You have cared for me. You have prayed for me, and even now as I write this letter, I have Epaphroditus, one of your own, standing beside me as an expression of your personal support. You have been with me and strengthened me and helped me through all of the affliction that comes with ministry." The Philippians had sent gifts, they had sent Epaphroditus to minister to him in his need, and in the earnest reality of his tender Spirit-shaped heart, with all of the afflictions that come with that, the Philippians were there expressing their love, expressing their support, in full solidarity with him and Paul says, "Through it all, you've been there and you've been a part of it, and so, of course, I have you in my heart. You have been there for me, you have been with me in the midst of all of the affliction that came with preaching the Gospel as an apostle of Christ."

And these words that he uses, "in the defense and confirmation of the gospel," they've been understood in a couple of different ways, that phrase. It could simply be a reference to his preaching ministry, which is what I tend to think is the case here. He defends the Gospel by overcoming objections to it. He defends it by preaching it without compromise in the face of opposition. He confirms it by proving its truth, by declaring it, by showing the consistency of the person of Christ with the testimony of the Old Testament, and proves over and over again that Christ is the promised Messiah that the Old Testament had set forth, setting forth the redemptive death, the penal substitutionary death of Christ and saying he alone can save you from your sins; come to him by faith that you might be saved, and in all of these ways defending and confirming the Gospel with the course of his ministry over his missionary journeys and so forth.

Some have pointed out, with good reason, that "defense and confirmation" are actually legal terms and that it's possible that Paul is referring to the fact that he will soon stand before Roman authorities to answer charges that he was undermining the authority of Caesar with his preaching. So he's going to have to defend and confirm his Gospel ministry in a legal setting before the Roman authorities and in that way he was defending and confirming the Gospel. I tend to think, given the many years of history with the Philippians, that he's looking beyond, expanding it beyond more than just the immediate occasion that he's about to face with the fact that, "Philippians, you have been with me throughout my ministry ever since I first preached to you alongside the river and God opened Lydia's heart to the things that she was hearing." I think he's bringing in the full sweep of a relationship here and saying, "This is why I feel this way about you all. Through all of the hardship, through all of the joys of ministry, through all of the advance of the Gospel, through the setbacks and the satanic opposition, you have been beside me,

you have supported me, and I love you for it." Either way that you take it, Paul is saying, "Philippians, you have rallied around me with your support and these are the things that I've considered in my heart."

So think with me here in terms of what's being said here. Here's a man, we've seen this in our past preparation in all those introductory messages that we did over a few months. Paul here is writing to a church that he's got a long history with and as he writes this letter and expresses his prayers for them, his confidence in them, he says, "I have such deep love for you in my heart and here's why, we have a history together that shows that you are with me and that Christ is in you." And as he reflects back on that, beloved, here's what's happened: that love has produced an understanding in Paul's heart; they have jointly participated in the grace of God with Paul. Now watch this, watch this: they shared in the grace of Gospel ministry with Paul when the stakes for the Gospel were very high. When Paul was standing alone, so to speak, outwardly speaking, they were with him and they supported him, and that outward support manifested a prior inward sharing in Christ with them. He says, "There's only one explanation for this, it's that you share in the same grace of Christ that's been given to me and I love you for it," he says. "You have stood the test of time. You have stood the test of adversity, and after all of these years, here in my imprisonment, you're here with me, literally with Epaphroditus standing beside me." He says, "I love you for it."

So with everything within him now, with that all expressed, look at verse 7 with me again. He says, "For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me." He says, "Of course, I'm thankful to God for you. Of course, I'm confident. Of course, I pray for you. How could I do anything else?" What I want you to see here, beloved, is this, is that what Paul is expressing is that true love is deep and there is a way for us to think about this in the context of Truth Community Church in the 21st century in the, you know, in the years that we've been together as a ministry, some have joined us along the way, is to realize and to think about each other, for you to think about each other, for me to think about you, you to think about me, and for us to think about each other, everything about what's gone on here over the years, is to realize that we are together in a proclamation of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are together in the proclamation of his word, standing for its authority, standing for its inerrancy, standing for its infallibility, standing for Christ as the only true Savior of sinners, standing for Christ as the only one who can deliver and unashamed to say that every other gospel other than faith alone, in Christ alone, based on the Scriptures alone, is a false doctrine that will condemn men to hell. We share in that together.

Sure, as we go through life, we share in life together, but it's not just on a human level, is it? The reason we're together, the reason that we are in this room and going forward through life together is because of a prior work that Christ has done in each of our hearts individually and then brought us together that we might share together in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us, and in that reality we find our unity, in that reality we find our love. It's all in response to

something that is far beyond each one of us. This exists beyond us. That's what I mean, true love is deep. The love that is manifested within a true local church is something that goes beyond human explanation and, beloved, goes beyond human motivations, and that's why, beloved, that's why, my friends, that's why, my brothers and sisters in Christ, that's why we're so careful to try to protect the unity of our church, protect the doctrine of our church, is because we feel a responsibility to protect a work that God has begun in us, a work that we're confident that he will complete until the day of Christ Jesus, but a work that we realize is vulnerable to outside attack and even, as Paul said, that even from within people can come and disrupt it, Acts 20. And so, beloved, when we understand the nature of true biblical love in the context of a local church, we recognize that there are great spiritual realities that undergird it, that provide it with its power, provide it with its profundity, and it makes us grateful and, beloved, it should make us earnest.

We realize that some people will come and go, some people will come and say, "This isn't for me." God bless you as you go. No offense taken. But for those of us that find our spiritual home here, we find in Paul's reaction the sense that should animate our thinking about one another, what should animate the thinking of members toward one another. Oh, I'm so profoundly grateful for you. How could I do anything else? We share in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel together.

So one of the best ways to produce and engender love in a church over time is to preach the Scriptures with care because it's there, it's in the Scriptures where these truths are revealed, and you can't simply tell people to love one another, to try to get them to do things externally apart from a proclamation of Christ in his word, because it is the realities of Christ in his word that work deep in the heart, work deep in the affections, in the understanding and in the volition that produces the kind of attitude which Paul describes here. It's the attitude he had toward the Philippians, it's the attitude that the Philippians had toward him, rooted in the revealed Christ.

And beloved, let me say this also: it is realities like that that can have a purifying affect in your own life and have a purifying affect in the church as well. What you need to understand is that sin in your life affects the body. Sin in your life, disobedience in your life, affects an entire body. No more than someone could cut off your hand and it's going to affect every other part of your physical body, sin in your life affects the entire body. Now when your mind is rooted in these things of the Gospel, these things that we've been talking about here, all of a sudden sin becomes less attractive to you, sin becomes something that you want to distance yourself from, to repent of, because you realize that the sin in your life is inconsistent with these great spiritual realities of righteous love, of deep love that animate life in a local church. We're a part of one another and your sin affects me and my sin affects you, and that's just the way it works. So when these things are rooted in our mind, it has a sanctifying impact on us.

I'll stop there. Ah, you don't know how much I want to go further into that but I'm going to stop there and just leave it there for now, and invite you, as Christians who are a regular part of this church, to call you to repentance if there is sin in your life that you have not been dealing with. If you're living a double life, professing to be a member of

this church and living a double life, you really need to repent because the sanctifying power and the omniscience searching eye of Christ is directly on you like a bull's-eye right now because it's all been laid out to you and your sin is selfish, it's a rebellion against God and it's selfish toward his people as well. You don't know how people grieve over the sin of others. You must not recognize how one rebellious person can grieve an entire church. You say, "Well, no one knows about it yet." No, but we will because God has a way of exposing these things. Why not repent now, separate yourself from all of the wickedness or the relationships that are immoral or whatever it is, repent of it all, abandon it for the sake of Christ, seek his forgiveness, and incidentally, show love for your fellow believers. It would be enough to say it's rebellion against God and that's true, here in the context of this passage what we're seeing is that it is an attack on those who worship with you week by week. It is time to repent if that's you. And as I stand here, my hope and prayer is that God would make just such a powerful conviction on your heart that it would break you and make you miserable so that you would abandon it for the sake of love, for the sake of an earnest love that is the only fitting response to Christ and being associated with his people. Nothing else is fitting.

So true biblical love is righteous, it comes from deep within a Christian's heart, and yet we still haven't reached the ultimate source of it. I love this part and, you know, if you're like me, what we're about to see is, "How did I miss this? What's in this verse is just beyond anything that I've ever considered before." And that's what we find in verse 8. Let me give you the third point before I forget. I do that sometimes. I get wrapped up, I get moving and move past the thing that's bolded right in my notes here. Point 3: true love comes from Christ. True love comes from Christ. The kind of love that we've been talking about here is a work that Christ does in the hearts of his people, and Paul expresses this. He has to go further. He's still not done talking about the reality of his love for these Philippians. He has to go further to express the spiritual reality, the spiritual source of this love that he's been describing. He says in verse 8, look at it with me. He says, "For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus."

Now notice something that I've passed over up until now. Three times in these two verses Paul has said, "I feel this way about you all." His love encompasses every realm, every nook and cranny within the church, every person great or small in the church is under this expression of love that Paul makes. Look at verse 7. "It's only right for me to feel this way about you all, in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all are partakers of grace. God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Paul's not making distinctions in his mind, he says, "I love you all like this." Can you imagine sitting in the Philippian church when this letter is read, the great Apostle Paul who you know personally, you've seen him face-to-face, suffering in a Roman prison, writes this letter and in his poverty of circumstances, is expressing a richness of soul and he says, "You're on the receiving end of this. This is how I feel about you, all of you." You can only imagine that maybe there were heads that bowed low just a moment and said, "Oh, that's so wonderful. What a wonderful man and how wonderful our relationship, and I'm not worthy of an apostle loving me like that."

But Paul goes on and assures them that what he is saying is true. Look at it there with me in verse 8. He says, "For God is my witness." God is my witness. Paul calls on God himself to affirm and testify to the accuracy and truthfulness of what he has just been saying. He says, "I have you in my heart, in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you are precious to me." And he says, "And God is my witness that what I am saying is true." Now why would he say that? Well, who can really know the inward feelings of a man, right? I mean, Paul could theoretically, I mean, Paul could have said a lot of stuff. We can say a lot of things about what's going on inside us, but men can't witness that directly, they can't witness the motions of our heart directly, they can't testify to it personally by direct observation. No one can see inside of Paul's heart and so he says, "I want to tell you that God will bear witness that what I am saying is true. God will vouch for these deep feelings that I am expressing for you. They're true. You can rely upon them, my Philippian friends," he says. "God knows and when I tell you I pray for you with thanksgiving, God knows. When I say I have you in my heart in every aspect of my mind, emotions, and my will, God knows that what I'm saying is true. You can believe it. You can rely on it. You can trust what I'm saying here."

God is my witness. Look at it there in verse 8 with me again. Look at the text with me again. He says, "God is my witness, how I long for you all." I long for them. It's a strong desire. He says, "I yearn for you. I yearn for your fellowship and I yearn for your well-being. Your well-being is what consumes my heart." And then in the greatest phrase in this passage, we could set it up this way with this question: where did Paul get those kinds of desires? Where did they come from? What makes a man feel this way spiritually about Christians? What provokes in the heart of a Christian man that kind of love and selfless concern for other believers?

Look at verse 8. He says, "How I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." Affection here is a word that originally referred to the literal inward parts of a man: the heart, the liver, the lungs, the kidneys, that place where deep emotions are physically felt. You know what that's like. You have a strong love for somebody and you feel it inside, right? Well, the term "affection" came to be used metaphorically to refer to that inner seat of emotions, those inner feelings themselves. "I long for you with an affection that is deep within."

But whose affection is he talking about here? What's the deep love? Where does true love really come from in the body of Christ? Look at it there in verse 8, "I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus." He's saying, "What's going on in my heart for you comes from Christ Himself. Christ Himself is doing this work of love that is expressing itself through me to you." The indwelling Christ, the indwelling Holy Spirit was producing this fruit of love in the life of the Apostle Paul. The Triune God is the one who empowered him to yearn for their welfare with the very compassion of Christ. What Paul is saying here is that, "Christ is at work in my heart for you, the affection that I am expressing toward you is the affection of Christ Jesus Himself. I am an ambassador of the love that Christ has for you. I am the human instrument at expressing it to you. All of the love and the concern for your welfare ultimately comes from a greater and a higher source, it comes from Christ Jesus Himself who has this internal concern for your well-

being." What he's saying is that, "Christ is at work in me to produce this. Christ is working through me to produce this." Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." The love of God for his people poured out within the hearts of true believers by the Holy Spirit and manifesting itself in the kind of love that we've been talking about here today. This true love comes from Christ, not merely an act of human volition, it's human volition responding to a prior work of the Spirit of God in the heart.

Beloved, here's what we need to understand and here's what sanctifies our minds and our attitudes toward the work of Christ in a local church. Here's what sanctifies our minds in relationships within the body of Christ, that makes it holy and something to be treated with care and to be protected. Jesus Christ is the one who builds his church. He said, "I will build My church." You know, I look out at all of you, my preaching is not the result of that, it's not the cause of that. Christ builds his church, Christ is the ultimate source and the ultimate architect and the ultimate spiritual contractor who builds a church on his word, and when Christ builds his church, he himself is producing the love that is manifested within it. As he works within the hearts of individual believers, as he works through his word, as he works through relationships, Christ himself produces the kind of love which marks a biblical church which is representative of the kind of love that Paul is expressing here in these two verses.

Beloved, that's why it's powerful. That's why it is profound. It's this kind of love, this fitting, deep, righteous love in response to truth, it's that kind of love that is meant to flourish in the life of every true Christian. You see it in genuine concern for one another, spouses, parents, children claiming to be Christian. You see it in a willingness to forgive one another when you've been wronged, just as God in Christ has forgiven you. You see it built around a common devotion to God's word. These are the things that mark true love in a church. This is an expression of the depth of true love. How deep is it? How deep is it? Well, you could say, "Well, it's pretty deep. It goes to the inner heart of a man." Yeah, that's true. To all of his thinking, all of his feelings and his volition, that's really deep love. That's right. If that was your answer on an exam, I'd give you a C+. It's really deep. That's right, but that doesn't explain it all. You have to realize where do these thoughts and feelings and emotions come from? Well, they're informed by God's word, you say. Yes, that's correct. Let's give you a B+. We read these things in God's word and it shapes our heart and all of that. That's right. We're getting closer and getting closer to what the real source is, why it's so deep. But where did God's word come from? Where did the Bible come from? And to whom does the Bible testify? The Bible came from a work of the Triune God as the Spirit of God worked on the writers and produced exactly what God wanted to say. And to whom does Scripture testify but to the Lord Jesus Christ? In the Old Testament pointing forward to him through a system of animal sacrifices and ritual sanctification and prophecies that were fulfilled in his life. The Gospels testifying in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John to the great historical reality of this man who literally walked the earth, and the apostolic writings in his wake explaining the significance of them and interpreting them for us. This Christ is the only Savior of mankind. This Christ loves his people, gave himself and died for them. This Christ is all-in-all.

So we come to the word and we see it testifying back to the Triune God and we trace it back and we realize that this great redemptive plan was rooted in an eternal love of God before time began where we started the message to begin with. In love he predestined us. He chose us before the foundation of the world. So what I want you to see is that the love that is experienced within a true biblical local church is an expression of something really great and profound.

You know, I would want you to know that in a far lesser reality of spiritual life than what Paul expressed to the Philippians but with what I have within me, I see that work in you. I thank God for you. I thank God because I see this kind of love and commitment to the Gospel and to his word being lived out and I realize that as I trace it all back, that ultimately it traces all the way back on the golden chain and all the way back to heaven, all the way back to the eternal counsel of the Triune God and the three persons planned out what he wanted to be the unfolding of his plan for all of eternity, and here we are together in the 21st century enjoying portions of that, sharing in that like saints did in the past. That's what we have here together in the reality of the life of this church. That's why we protect it. That's why we're careful. That's why we love one another. What's happening here is that we're longing for one another with the affection of Christ Jesus by which we mean we're seeing a work of Christ being manifested in us and through us in these external things that we see.

And what do we do in response to that? We go back to verse 3 of Philippians. Paul's explaining why he's prayed this way. What can we do except to say, "O God, I thank You. O God, I'm joyful. O God, I'm confident about what lies ahead." A genuine love in the body that produces – watch this – produces intentional commitment over time, not treated casually but as a reality to be cherished and nourished and I trust that you'll join me in asking Christ to produce it even more in us as we go forward in the future.

Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, we go directly straight to You and thank You for Your affection and Your love for us. What a wonderful Savior You are. How good You have been to us. We rejoice in You. We ask You to produce and mature even more the love and work that You've begun in our midst. Override all of our imperfections, our frailties, our temptations, our sins and our failures. Override it all. Work it all together for good according to Your great eternal purpose that what takes place in this modest local body would be all that You intend for Your great glory, for the edification of the saints who join together, and Father, for the evangelization of the lost that are within our circle of love and influence. We pray for no less than the complete fulfillment of every aspect of all that that might mean, O God, and we pray it all in the name of our blessed Lord Jesus. Amen.

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