

24.06.07 Coromandel Baptist 10:00 a.m.

The Love of Christ

Bible Readings = Eph. 5:22-32 and Rev. 21:1-14

Introduction:

- (1) Last week we were considering the nature and importance of Paul's injunction to go on being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).
- (2) We saw that this was the way of wisdom, and the way of light, because it was the way of love for which we had been created. We also saw that the participles of the passage were dependent upon the reality of the fullness.
 - a. *Speaking* in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs; *making melody...*; *giving thanks...*; *submitting*. All these things are the outflow of the fullness of the Spirit. These were particularly in the context of the public worship of the household of God.
- (3) This week, Paul draws our attention to the relationships between husband and wife, but we note that this too is dependent upon the fullness of the Spirit.
 - a. There is no verb in 5:22...it is a continuation of the mutual submission that comes from the Spirit.
 - b. While Eph. 5:18ff. speaks of the public assembly of the people of God for worship, the remainder of the chapter (Eph. 5:22-33) speaks no less of the household of God...but not in their public assembly so much as in their own domestic lives together.
- (4) This passage has occasioned no little comment in recent years, and with rise of certain movements and schools of interpretation over the last 30 or more years, it has not infrequently been attacked (e.g. Mitton, p. 210...this passage 'is not one of the more successful parts of the letter'.) In particular it seems to indicate two things which have become increasingly anathema in contemporary western society: patriarchal family structures and hierarchy. We note in passing the following:
 - a. Though the comment about wives submitting to their husbands has received the most attention from modern commentators, the bulk of the passage is actually about husbands. This is because the bulk of the passage is about Christ, the husband of his bride, the church.
 - b. There can be no possibility of understanding the order of things here described, unless we can see that there is a far wider and biblically pervasive pattern of authority structures in the created order, that reflect the pattern of authority within the Triune life of God. If we have a predisposed objection to authority expressed in any hierarchical terms we will not hear what large amounts of the Bible says, not just about marriage, but about all aspects of life. We will need to say more about this next week.
 - c. There can be no possibly embracing of what is said here, unless it is in the full flow of love. We may need to spend more than one week on this portion of the letter, but must resist at every point any legalistic enforcement of its teaching. The fullness of the Spirit opens up a new possibility and power for marriage (as also fatherhood etc.), *but only as the fullness of the Spirit*, not as a legal 'right' to be insisted upon.

This week we will concentrate on the amazing love of Christ known in the giving up of himself for his bride...and not simply giving himself up for her in his death, but continually living for her in eternity, to nourish and cherish her for ever.

1. The Difficulty of Knowing Love

(1) It is self evident that the whole world thinks it knows what love is.

- The variations on the theme in popular music, cinema, theatre, etc. are endless!
- The persistent belief that true love exists, that it can be found, and that we would recognise it if we saw it, testifies to the depth of the matter of love in human relationships.
- It therefore comes as a sort of shock to us to realise that we cannot know what love is, outside of God who is love. Jesus as the embodiment (literally!) of the love of God was neither seen nor known. Indeed, our response to being loved was to crucify Love!
 - And even more, we cannot know the love of God properly unless we know the Cross, as from 1 John 4:10ff.
 - The whole exposition of Ephesians is built on the apostle's desire that we would be rooted and grounded in love, and to know the incomprehensible love of Christ etc. (e.g. Eph. 3:14ff.), but that this is impossible apart from the ministry of the Spirit (giving us a revelation of God) and the revelation is that of the Father through Christ in his atonement.

(2) In other words, in order to love as husband ought, or to love as a wife ought, or a father ought...we need to know the true love of the true Husband, the True Father etc.

- This is a thought that we will most likely come back to next week, but bear in mind that what we have in our earthly relationships are copies of originals (to use Geoffrey Bromiley's turn of phrase). In the fall we have bad copies of good originals, but we cannot work backwards from the copy to the original.
 - Fatherhood is ontological not analogical. So also marriage. So love.

(3) Systems of apologetics all stumble over the matter of theodicy (i.e. the justification of God). God is love is not a self-evident truth to fallen humanity: we have plenty of evidence (we think!) to show that if there is a God, he cannot be either good or loving. And fallen human reasoning will not be convinced by piling up verses that tell us that God is good, holy, just etc.

- Love is actually known in the action of being loved by God! We can only know love in the Son of His love, through the Spirit who sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts.

2. Knowing Love Through the Son

(1) Ephesians gives due attention to each person of the Trinity. Here in this passage the emphasis is on the action of the Son, but we know that this action is fully one with the plan and purpose of the Father, effected by the Spirit.

(2) In particular, we notice that the love of Christ for his bride is connected with a past tense verb...he 'loved' her and 'gave himself up' for her. (Eph. 5:25). See also other passages such as Eph. 5:2; Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:4; 2:19-20; 1 Pet. 1:18ff.; Rev. 5:9

- The past tense does not mean that his love has been exhausted...he goes on loving his Church (see Eph. 5:29), but that the giving up of himself for her was the pinnacle of the expression of his love.
 - The bride for whom he gave himself was not naturally attractive...see Eph. 2:1ff.; 1 Cor. 6:9ff.; etc.
 - But his goal is to make her to share in the glory and character that he himself has for all eternity.
 - § The goal of his love is clearly expressed...see Eph. 5:26ff.
 - § This is the wondrous miracle of grace...not simply that sinners might find forgiveness, but that they may be caused to live to the praise of God's glory.

(3) R. W. Dale, *Ephesians*, p. 362 'in describing the objects for which Christ gave Himself up for the church, Paul reminds husbands that it was not because the church was free from fault, was free from even gross sins, that Christ loved it so well; He saw its sins, they troubled Him, and yet He loved it. He died for the church, not because its perfection had inspired Him with an immeasurable love for it, and because he was willing to endure any suffering to avert from it undeserved calamity; but because his love for it was so strong that he did not recoil from any shame or anguish to deliver it from its sins and from the sorrows which were the just consequence of its sins.' Husbands...your wife's imperfections (and even gross sins) do not release us from the vocation of loving them...as he loved the church...as he loved you!

- See also Luther, *Three Treatise*, p. 286ff.
- Christ took his bride's sins into himself. This is the unique action of God's love where, alone, love can be truly known.

(4) In this light we must pay attention to the profound mystery of Eph. 5:32f. (cf. Gen. 2:24f.)...the creation accounts were speaking of Christ and his Church!!