

039 - Apostolic Prayer 4 - Ability to Comprehend the Love of Christ - Ephesians 3:17b-18 - 2015-04-12

Call to Worship: Zephaniah 3:14, 17

Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! The LORD your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Sermon: "Apostolic Prayer Part 4: Ability to Comprehend the Love of Christ" Ephesians 3:17b-18

Benediction: Jude 20-21

Ephesians 3:17-18 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--

INTRODUCTION

Our Lord and Savior, our dear Jesus Christ, the very Son of God, said to us, "If you love me, keep my commandments." His apostle, John, put the point to us this way, "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Obedying the commandments of our Lord and Savior is serious business, and is very closely connected with our love for Him.

We know also from the scriptures, both old testament and new, that by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in us, we delight in the law of God in our inner man. We love the Lord Jesus and we love His commandments, and it is the delight of our souls to obey Him.

But, there is sin remaining in our flesh, and we are surrounded by a sinful world under the sway of the very devil Himself. So as long as we live this present life, trying to obey the commandments of Christ, there is a war on between the Holy Spirit of God in our regenerated inner man, and the temptations to disobedience arising from the devil, the world, and our very own flesh.

So, to resist those temptations, to fight that long war, we must have help from God. We must fight with weapons that are not carnal, but spiritual. And so the Lord's apostle Paul, when he needs to issue to us the commands of Christ for us, prays for us, and tells us what he's praying for us, as part of fitting us out with spiritual armor, weapons, and provisions for the long struggle. In telling us about his prayers for us, he teaches us what to aspire to ourselves in the Christian life, and what to pray for, for ourselves and for each other.

We would tend to have low aspirations for the life of discipleship, and to pray low prayers---shallow, selfish, carnal. But this prayer of the apostle, this apostolic prayer teaches us some things by its general characteristics.

1. Apostolic prayer asks God not for what we think we want, but for what we really need
2. Apostolic prayer bows to God, not trying to bend Him to our will, but bending us to His will
3. Apostolic prayer appeals to God the Father, our wise, loving, rich, powerful Father, providing well for His whole household
4. Apostolic prayer asks that God gives to us, admitting that we are very needy, and must have His help

We see that this apostolic prayer is in three requests; two of those have subpoints, so there are five requests in this prayer:

that He may give you [two things] (16)

-to be strengthened [G2901] (16)

-Christ to dwell in your hearts (17)

that you be able [to do two things] (18)

-to comprehend (18)

-to know (19a)

that you be filled [with one thing] (19b)

We have worked together already through the requests that God may give you two things:

1. to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man
2. to have Christ dwell in your hearts through faith

We begin work today on the two things the apostolic prayers asks God to make us able to do; today we consider the first of these two:

The apostolic prayer teaches us to pray that God may give us ability to comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ.

TEXT:

Ephesians 3:17-18 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--

BODY

The apostolic prayer teaches us to pray that God may give us ability to comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ.

- I. The basis for our comprehending the dimensions of the love of Christ
 - A. we are rooted in the love of Christ
 1. as I grow in comprehension of the dimensions of the love of Christ, all of that growth will be as of a plant rooted in the love of Christ, drawing nourishment from the love of Christ
 2. or to put it in terms of the church: all of our nourishment, as we grow, each of us a branch in one tree or one vine, comes from our roots in the love of Christ
 - B. we are grounded in the love of Christ
 1. all the building up of my comprehension of the love of Christ is a building on the love of Christ
 2. all the building up of us as a church is building upon the foundation of the love of Christ
- II. The fellowship in our comprehending the dimensions of the love of Christ
 - A. this is something that is needed by all the saints
 - B. this is something we are about with all the saints
 - C. APPLICATION
 1. in the next chapters, we will be receiving the commands of Christ for His church; much of the will of God for His saints pertains to how we relate to the rest of God's saints in His churches; as you hear these commands and seek to obey them, consider that you are a saint trying to comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ for you, and you are dealing with other saints also trying to comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ for them
- III. The vastness of the dimensions we are to comprehend in the love of Christ
Let's take a moment to ponder this thing we are being taught to pray for the ability to comprehend: the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ. Let me bring forth some thoughts from the scriptures to start our minds working on this.
 - A. How wide is the love of Christ?

1. the bible tells us that the saints who have died are at rest together and with Christ in paradise, while those who have died in their sins are in fiery torment in hell; and the bible says that a great gulf, and great chasm has been fixed between the two, so that anyone who would want to cross from hell to heaven cannot cross
 2. the love of Christ, then, is at least as wide as that chasm, because the Lord Jesus, dying on the cross for the sins of sinners, said to the penitent, believing criminal beside him, "Today you shall be with me in paradise."
- B. How long is the love of Christ?
1. the bible tells us that we all like sheep had gone astray, each of us to his own way; and we had strayed not a little way, but all the way from the fold up into the wilds of the mountains
 2. the love of Christ, then is at least as long as the distance from the sheep fold up into the mountains, because Jesus said that He is the shepherd who came to seek and to save that which was lost, going all the way up into the mountains to find the lost sheep, and then all the way back home rejoicing in having found it
- C. How deep is the love of Christ?
1. How far down did the Son of God descend to save sinners from their sins?
 - a) the Son of God is one of the three persons that make up the One True God; He is called the Word of God and the Son of God
 - b) He always is, and so was before creation; and He is that Word of God by which everything was made that has been made; and so He is above creation, He transcends it
 - c) Yet He humbled Himself and came all the way down here, a mighty long way down from being above the universe
 - d) He became a man, and not even a king among men, but a lowly man, a man not being served, but serving
 - e) He went even lower and let Himself be counted a criminal; not only a criminal, but a criminal deserving the death penalty
 - f) Not deserving it Himself, he let Himself go down under the wrath of God, suffering the penalty of sin for sinners
 - g) He let Himself be killed, and by crucifixion
 - h) He let His body be laid dead in the earth
 2. the love of Christ, then, is at least as deep as the descent from the throne of heaven to the depths of the earth
- D. How high is the love of Christ?
1. there is a lake, not of water, but of fire; it has been prepared for the devil and his angels, but it will do for both body and soul of every sinner who remains unforgiven by God; in the depths of that lake of fire all rebels against God will spend eternity in torment; but those who trust

themselves to Christ are sent not down to that lake of fire, but up to the new heavens and new earth, to the very presence of God, to the home the Lord Jesus has prepared for us

2. the love of Christ, then, is at least as high as the distance from the bottom of the lake of fire to the heavenly Jerusalem where God is the light and we will be forever with the Lord

IV. APPLICATION

- A. Understand that the ability to comprehend with all the saints the vast dimensions of the love of Christ is an ability that you probably do not have that much of; therefore pray for it, for yourself and for others
- B. Strive to gain that ability; exercise those muscles; think on these things
- C. Face your troubles in the understanding that the love of Christ is so vast that nothing troubling you is near so big; none of your troubles will take you away from that vast a love; no troubles will be so big as to separate you from the love of God for you in Christ Jesus
- D. consider that your troubles are what God is doing in answer to this prayer prayed by the apostle; in each of your troubles God is showing you more of the love of Christ for you
 1. You are prayed for that you will be able to comprehend how wide Christ's love for you is. You will learn better if you have a shipwreck, and the channel between you and the shore is very wide, and the Lord loves you all the way to the shore.
 2. You are prayed for that you will be able to comprehend how long Christ's love for you is. You will learn better if he gives you a very long labor to perform, or a very long wait to endure, and He loves you all the way to the end of that long trial.
 3. You are prayed for that you will be able to comprehend how deep Christ's love for you is. You will learn better how deep it is if He sends you into deep suffering, and you see that no matter how deep your suffering, His love is deeper.
 4. You are prayed for that you will be able to comprehend how high Christ's love for you is. You will learn better how high it is if He sends you on a very arduous climb up a very steep path, and you find that no matter how high you have to climb, His love is there with you in the climb and at the top.
- E. begin to think about the commands that you have learned from Christ already, and the ones that we will study in Ephesians 4, 5, and 6, in terms of obeying them in comprehension of the vast dimensions of the love of Christ for us and for all the saints.

The apostolic prayer teaches us to pray that God may give us ability to comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ.

Romans 8:35-39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER." (37) Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (38) For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, (39) nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

in love rooted and founded that you be able
en agapei errizomenoi kai tethemeliomenoi
to comprehend the love of Christ
to know the love of Christ

RWP: [not quoting] in the text “rooted and grounded” come before “that” *hina*, but proleptically, so that the right reading is, “that, rooted and grounded in love, you be able . . .”
JRY: and this is the reading in KJV, NKJV, ESV, and NIV

rooted and grounded in love

JRY:

The love of Christ for me is being drawn up into me like the nutrients a plant draws from the soil.

Bayne:

that they might have a sight of the love of Christ, that so they might share in the affections of the gospel of Christ without fainting

what is this love? God’s love in Christ, Christ’s love. The context doth cast us on this sense.

that these Ephesians which had tasted the love of God might be more fully persuaded and better grounded in Christ’s love, against their own weakness, by means of Christ in them, that thus strengthened they with all other believers might be able to cast all matters in their mind and by diligent consideration to take a view of the large measure of Christ his love, and thus come to know that in some part which cannot perfectly be known of us

Calvin:

love . . . for the Divine grace and kindness exhibited to us in Christ
The firmness and constancy which our love ought to possess are pointed out by two metaphors.

Love should be so thoroughly fixed in our minds, so as to resemble a well-founded building or a deeply-planted tree. . . nothing will be able to shake us

Hodge:

The love in which we are to be rooted is not the love of God or of Christ toward us, but either brotherly love or love as a Christian grace without determining its object. It is that love which flows from faith, and of which both God and the brethren are the

objects. It is for the increase and ascendancy of this grace through the indwelling of Christ, till it sustains and strengthens the whole inner man, so that the believer may stand as a well rooted tree or as a well founded building, that the apostle here prays.

Geneva:

[meaning the love] With which God loves us, which is the root of our election

Gill:

or rather in the love of God to them; which is the root and foundation of salvation; this is in itself immovable and immutable; but saints have not always the manifestations of it, and sometimes call it in question, and have need to be rooted and grounded in it; which is to have a lively sense of it, and to be persuaded of interest in it, and that nothing shall be able to separate from it.

Clarke:

In this [love], as its proper soil, it [the soul] grows. On this, as its only foundation, it rests.

Ellicott:

Love is not itself the root or foundation (for this is Jesus Christ Himself), but the condition under which growth takes place.

love is

- 1) the recognition of an existing unity between spirit and spirit, and
- 2) a means of making that unity energetic and deepening it continually

Henry:

The more intimate acquaintance we have with Christ's love to us, the more our love will be drawn out to him, and to those who are his, for his sake

comprehend

Bayne:

by diligent consideration to take a view of the largeness of Christ his love

with all the saints

width and length and depth and height

How wide?

How wide was the separation between you and God because of your sin?

How long?

How far had you strayed from God; how far did the Shepherd have to go seeking you to save you?

How deep?

How far did the Son of God descend?

transcends creation

took on our humanity

servant

criminal deserving the death penalty (seems nothing lower at that point, but there is something lower)

dead in the tomb

How high?

How much higher is the home Christ has prepared for you in heaven than the place of punishment in hell prepared for the devil and his angels, which you deserve because of your sins?

Romans 5:3-9 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; (4) and perseverance, character; and character, hope. (5) Now hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit** who was given to us. (6) For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. (7) For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. (8) But **God demonstrates His own love toward us**, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

APPLICATION:

Bayne:

the feeling of Christ his love wherewith he hath loved us is a thing able to embolden us against all persecutions

see Romans 8:33-35

illus. a person with good shoes may walk over thorns or broken glass

[not quoting] consider that the difficult or unpleasant experiences God sends our way are answers to this prayer, occasions that will teach us the largeness of His love

JRY:

How wide is it? You will learn better if you have a very wide channel you must swim.
How long is it? You will learn better if he gives you a very long labor to perform, or a very long wait to endure.

How deep is it? You will learn better how deep it is if He sends you into deep suffering.

How high is it? You will learn better how high it is if He sends you on a very arduous climb up a very steep path.

Begin to think about the commands that are coming, and obeying them in love.