

040 - Apostolic Prayer 5 - 2015-04-19

Ephesians 3:17-19 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.

Call to Worship: Psalm 63:3

Scripture Reading: Hosea 2:16-23

Sermon: "Apostolic Prayer 5: Ability To Know the Love of Christ Which Surpasses Knowledge"

Benediction: 2 Thessalonians 3:5

INTRODUCTION

As in a castle surrounded by enemies, we sinners see ourselves besieged by sin.

- sin in our own flesh
- sin in the members of our own household
- sin in the members of the church
- sin in the world

The sin hurts; it damages; it destroys; it threatens; it disappoints; it ravages.

What am I going to do? The enemy is surrounding the walls, and my defenders are few and tired. The enemy is also inside the walls with me!

Look and see that sin is not all there is here. There also is love, the love of God for us in Christ Jesus, producing a love in us for Him and for other people. By this love of Christ for us, the Holy Spirit of Christ is at work inside our spirits, waging war against all this sin in us and around us. This is a conquering love, a reigning love. This love of Christ has conquered all our foes, and is now engaged in putting them all under His feet. Our situation regarding sin is not quite so desperate as it can sometimes seem, for there is a tremendous strength in the love of Christ.

By this love, the Lord Jesus Christ has called us to be His disciples. In grateful love we follow Him, following Him with the faith that the Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts. To be good disciples of Jesus Christ, our aspirations must be of the highest sort, and our prayers must be of the deepest kind.

But because of sin in ourselves, we would tend to have low aspirations for the life of discipleship, and to pray low prayers---shallow, selfish, carnal. So our Lord and Savior has sent us, by His apostles, letters to help us. In this part of this letter, the apostle tells us what

he is praying for the saints in Ephesus. 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

Last week we began work on the two things the apostolic prayers asks God to make us able to do; we considered the first of those two things: The apostolic prayer teaches us to pray that God may give us ability to comprehend the vast dimensions of the love of Christ.

Today we work on the second of those two things:

The apostolic prayer teach us to pray that God give us ability to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

TEXT: Ephesians 3:19a

to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge;

BODY

The apostolic prayer teach us to pray that God give us ability to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

I. What is meant by the love of Christ?

Consider the love of Christ in light of Christ being one person both God and man; one person have the divine nature united to the human nature

A. As to His divine nature, the love of Christ means the good will of God toward us; God's will to be merciful to us and do us good

Here I'm working from John Owen, *The Death of Death*

1. It is a common misconception that the love of God for us through Jesus Christ is an affection in the nature of God for every human being, because He has created each of us in His image; so that God loves every human being with this affection, each the same; this concept is thought to have biblical support because of the well-known statement of Christ, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son . . ."
2. But that misconception is intentionally shattered by how God dealt with the twin brothers Jacob and Esau. God's dealing with Jacob and Esau is the definitive proof that the love of God in Christ is not a natural affection in God for all mankind equally, but part of His will to good to certain ones of mankind. What God did with Jacob and Esau is explained in Romans 9
 - a) Romans 9:13-18 As it is written, "JACOB I HAVE LOVED, BUT ESAU I HAVE HATED." (14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! (15) For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOMEVER I WILL HAVE COMPASSION." (16) So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. (17) For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I HAVE RAISED YOU UP, THAT I MAY SHOW MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MAY BE DECLARED IN ALL THE EARTH." (18) Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.
3. God's love is here shown to be His will to have mercy on whom He will have mercy (Romans 9:18)
 - a) That very thing has already been shown in Ephesians 2
Ephesians 2:4-5 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, (5) even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

4. The apostolic prayer is that God will make us able to know this love of Christ for us as to Christ's divine nature, as God

B. As to His human nature, His holy affection for us

We normally use the term "affection" to refer to hugs and kisses and things like that. But those are actually *displays* of affection, not affection itself.

1. there is a kind of affection, a kind of love, that we know very well
 - a) I like what I get from that person; I like what he or she gives me; I like to look at her; I like what He buys for me; I like how she smiles at me; I like how those people treat me---it makes me feel good
 - b) I'll act good toward her, toward him, toward them
 - (1) to keep these good feelings coming
 - (2) to get even more of it
 - c) this kind of affection very readily; we know this kind
 - d) this kind is about getting something for me
 - e) it's not very constant
 - (1) if the object changes, this kind of love changes
 - (2) if the one loving changes, this kind of love changes
 - f) When Christ came here to earth, that is not the kind of affection He had for us, was it? We know, because we did not treat Him in ways He would enjoy.
 - (1) beat Him
 - (2) mocked Him
 - (3) spat on Him
 - (4) put thorns on His head
 - (5) scourged Him
 - (6) crucified Him
 - g) Yet He loved us through all of that; so we know it is not that kind of affection that is His love for us
 - h) APPLICATION: Is that about all that your love amounts to?
 - (1) toward God
 - (2) toward other people
2. the kind of love Jesus has for us is instead a holy, pure, sinless affection [I take the following points from Paul Bayne commentary]
 - a) free, bestowed not for what kind of pleasure can be had, but freely
 - b) true, fruitful
 - (1) illus. We have planted tomato plants; not every one of them is clearly marked. One that is not true will not bear the fruit we are seeking.
 - c) constant to the end

What, then, is the love of Christ? It is the good will of the divine nature and the holy affection of the human nature expressed to us through the one Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- II. What does it mean to know the love of Christ when it surpasses knowledge?
-This is an apparent contradiction, but not an actual contradiction. He must not mean "know" in the same sense.
- A. the love of Christ is so great that it surpasses our ability to know it fully
 - 1. He loves us as God; we, being creatures, cannot know that fully intellectually
 - a) its eternal past
 - b) its eternal future
 - c) its strength
 - d) its freeness
 - (1) God loved us already before He sent Christ to redeem us
 - (2) While we were yet sinners Christ died for us
 - (3) It is objected, "He loves those He knew would love Him."
 - (a) Rom 9:11 not anything in the will of the child, but in the purpose of God
 - 2. He loves us as sinless man; we, being sinless, cannot know that fully experientially
 - B. the apostolic prayer is that God will work in us by His Spirit to make us know it more fully within our limitations
 - 1. We cannot, intellectually, fully know the divine love of Christ for us; but the apostolic prayer is that we will know it more and more within our humanness
 - 2. We cannot, experientially, fully know the perfect, sinless love of Christ for us during this life; but the apostolic prayer is that we will love that way more and more during this life, becoming more and more like Christ
- III. How do we come to know it?
- A. We cannot know the love of God directly, as creatures perceiving directly the attributes of God. But God has made demonstration of it that we can perceive; so we learn of the demonstration; the demonstration being made in the man Jesus Christ
 - 1. In the sending of Christ
 - a) 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
 - b) when you consider God sending His own Son for the express purpose of Him being killed, His blood sprinkled on the atonement cover, for our sins, you are coming to know the love of Christ
 - 2. In the death of Christ
 - a) Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- b) When you consider the sinless man suffering all the torments of crucifixion, and shedding His own blood, drinking the full cup of the wrath of God, you are coming to know the love of Christ
 - 3. In the benefits we receive through Christ
 - a) Such as adoption: 1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!
 - b) When you consider yourself, former rebel against God, filthy with your own sin, adopted by the holy, holy, holy God, you are coming to know the love of Christ
 - B. We see this demonstration in the scriptures
 - 1. having it read to us, having it preached/taught to us, reading it ourselves, thinking about it; meditating on it, memorizing it
 - C. We see the demonstration of the love of Christ in the worship the Lord has ordained
 - 1. baptism
 - 2. the Lord's Supper
 - D. We know these things more deeply by going through the experiences He brings us in His providence
 - 1. know His love in the midst of the worst of this life's sufferings
 - 2. know His love by blessings poured out until your cup runneth over
 - E. We pray that God will give us the ability to know the love of Christ
- IV. APPLICATION
 - A. We are just about to turn the page to Ephesians chapter 4, where we will receive this command from the Lord: "walk worthy of the calling"
 - 1. what is that calling? The perfect Lord Jesus Christ has called us to walk with Him as His disciples.
 - 2. how do we do that?
 - a) lowliness
 - b) gentleness
 - c) longsuffering
 - d) bearing with one another in love
 - e) endeavoring to keep the unity
 - 3. The Lord Jesus said how we are to do it: John 15:12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
 - a) we must know the love of Christ in order to love one another as He has loved us
 - 4. The apostle Paul explains this is how it must be
 - a) 2 Corinthians 5:13-15 For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you. (14) For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; (15) and He died for all, that those who live

should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

The apostolic prayer teach us to pray that God give us ability to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

The love of God is greater far Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star And reaches to the lowest hell.
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled And pardoned from his sin.
O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure— The saints' and angels' song.

Psalm 63:3 Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.

1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

1 John 3:16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Titus 3:4-5 But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, (5) not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died;

JRY:

God certainly is perfectly loving even without respect to creation, for God loves Himself, each person loving each other---Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

-that is worth contemplating

-but that is not the main way God has taught us of His love

to know something about love, consider the lack of love

What aspects of the love of Christ surpass knowledge?
its eternal past

its eternal future
its free election (nothing loveable in the object)

Ussher:

its vehemence: all human examples combined do not equal God's love
its sincerity

Pink:

The Love of God! How blessed is this to the hearts of believers, for only believers can appreciate it, and they but very imperfectly.

Spurgeon:

to know the love of Christ, a man should read the scriptures

Bayne:

a thing incomprehensible in regard of the full and perfect knowledge of it
the spur of all Christian duty (2 Cor 5:14)
the precedent of all true love (John 15:12)

As the person of Christ hath in it two natures, divine and human, so there is a double love of Christ: the one as God, the same wherewith his Father loveth us; the other as man. Both of them have three several branches to be unfolded:

1. His good will as God, and affection or grace of love, as man
 - a. quantity: unmeasurable; quality: free, not for his advantage
 - b. fruitful and true
 - c. constant to the end
2. His works, because true love standeth not in word and tongue, but truth and deed
 - a. in that evil he suffered for us
 - b. in that great good he worketh in us
 - i. emptied himself and became man
 - ii. took the infirmities of our nature (Romans 1:3)
 - iii. laid down his life for us (Romans 5:8); nothing was so difficult, but he did willingly undergo it for our sake
3. The embrace and resting wherewith he doth embrace us and rest in us, which is the nature of love in the thing beloved.
 - a. he doth dwell in us by his Spirit, familiarly apply himself to our spirits

Hodge:

The love of a holy God to sinners is the most mysterious attribute of the divine nature. The manifestation of this attribute for the admiration and beatification of all intelligent creatures, is declared to be the special design of redemption. God saves sinners, we are told, "That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us, through Christ Jesus." (Eph. ii. 7.)

As all the modifications of goodness above mentioned are found even in our dilapidated nature, and commend themselves to our moral approbation, we know they must exist in God without measure and without end. In him they are infinite, eternal, and immutable.

Ussher:

love for elect

-free without desert

-great without comparison JRY: defies comparison

-constant without end JRY: or beginning