

The Necessity of The Love of Christ in These Last Days

The opening this morning was how the Lord looks for those that are so-called but not qualified in the eyes of man, but He has made us qualified to be in His presence. He has also qualified us to hear His Word. He has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, that we might have those spiritual ears to hear what He is saying. And that is our desire today to have an ear to hear.

Let us pray:

Lord, we are thankful for the completeness, the fulness of the victory that You have won at Calvary. Lord, truly as it says in Peter: "You have made every provision for life and godliness; there is no lack. And Lord, as we come to this time in Your Word, we would look to You who has no lack and not to ourselves. Lord, we offer ourselves to You that you would have great freedom and liberty, that Your Spirit could work, Your Spirit could move to truly redeem this time for Yourself. We are thankful, Lord, that it is still called today, that it is a time that You can continue to reveal more of Yourself to us to teach us, to train us, to discipline us, and to bring us into more and more of being conformed into the image of Your Son. We offer ourselves to You in Jesus' name. Amen.

Introduction

Today, I would like for us to consider this matter of the "Necessity of the Love of Christ in These Last Days." I tried to produce a shorter title, but I could not leave any of those words out, so I am sorry.

In the days we are living in, we know how critical they are. We see wars everywhere more and more every day. We see famines, we see natural disasters. Everything is going on, and the Lord is trying to wake us up and prepare us. And one of the vital, essentials of living in these last days is really the love of Christ, and it can be so familiar to us that we can overlook it at times. So, I would like for us to stop this morning and look at it. We touched on it a little bit in the past, but I was not able to finish. So hopefully, today we can look at another part of this matter of the love of Christ.

The Lord in His great love reveals to us that if we neglect His love, what will happen to us? In Matthew 24:12 American Standard Version, as He speaks to us about the end days, He says, "And because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love of the many shall wax cold." I like that word, "iniquity," and I like the "multiplied." The love of many shall wax cold.

And a verse we are familiar with in Revelation 2:4: "'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

The Lord Jesus is a full disclosure of God. He does not leave surprises out there. He says, "If you do this, there will be great blessing, there will be great reward, there will be great honor, there will be peace, there will be rest." You can go on and on, but if you do not, this is what is going to happen. If you allow that love to just get away from you and not focus upon it and not allow the reality of it to touch you, it is going to become cold. You will leave it; you will forget all about it, and you will do your own thing. The great battle, which is the conflict of the ages since

the creation, is a battle between the love of God and the self-love of man. We can put it in many different words and phraseologies, but in a simple way it is just a battle between two beings—God and man, the un-redemptive man, and how He wants us to come unto Him.

For the Love of Christ Controls Us

There is an encouraging thing that Paul shares in his testimony in II Corinthians 5:14-15: “For the love of Christ controls (constrains) us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

To me this is one of the keys in Paul’s life. He said, “Look, you can see my life. I have tried to make it fairly transparent through all my writings, of the good times and the bad times, but one of the keys within my life is that I have allowed the love of Christ to control me, and because that love of Christ controls, it leads me on; it is constraining me. I have no desire to live for myself anymore, but I want to live for Him and live for those that He has loved.”

So, as we keep this matter of the love of Christ in our hearts in perspective, we want to see more because it is so vital in these last days, it is so critical. We talk about being prepared, and it is one of those necessities of preparing and being ready. And over and over in many different ways, He has been sharing this in our hearts. But we have to ask ourselves, because when you hear something so much, it just becomes a familiar phrase. Has this thought of being ready really resonated in reality within our hearts? In this call to be ready, do we think that we have tomorrow? There is that little phrase in Hebrews 3:13 that says, “as long as it is still called today.” We still have today, but we do not know about tomorrow, and there are plenty of examples of that.

Knowing the Surpassing Greatness of the Love of Christ

There are really several keys in preparing for His return, but I just want to look at one of them today. I want to look at knowing the surpassing greatness of the love of Christ, and how far above His love is from ours. It is hard to even use the phrase of comparing it to our love because there is no comparison. When we think of being ready, there are other things, like having a living faith, having that living personal relationship with Him, having an ear to hear what He says, and really having a fabulous relationship with the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can get looked over in these last times. We really want to see, and maybe we will talk about it later at some other time. But to stay fresh and being ready for Him requires several different aspects. And it comes back to our life and our walk with Him of staying fresh with Him, and this is what we want to consider.

The Lord in His great love has been speaking to us recently about this. If you remember, Jim Bog shared in his word to us recently, how the exiles were experiencing God’s judgment, but really, they were experiencing His great love to bring them back to Himself. It was a time of discipline, or judgment, however we want to phrase it, which to our flesh can be painful. But when you come under it, and really see what it is, you find that you are actually experiencing in a living way the love of God to our hearts and our lives. What God was after was not to punish the people of Israel by putting them into exile, but He was bringing them under discipline that

they would return to His heart, His purpose, and His desire for them. This is what He had created them for, and they would no longer be living for themselves but for Him who loved them. Thank the Lord for that!

Then we heard from our brother Prem, and how he shared in God's loving call, even from salvation to His return with that simple phrase, "Be ready." Be ready in our salvation, whether it is talking about sanctification, in which there is a being ready and a willingness to be sanctified, to redeem the time that we are living in, and being prepared for His return. God is the consistent One who calls us throughout our life to be prepared. When we are saved, that is not the end; it is like being prepared for the next step. Then you go through the next step where you are being prepared more and more in coming into a living relationship with Him.

Recently, we heard Kenny's sharing of Paul's testimony in Romans 8. It was the cry of the love of Christ to each of us to know that absolute security we have in Him. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Nothing can come in to separate us from that, but there is a security that we have in there. That was the summation argument, the closing argument of Paul's great epistle in those first eight chapters of Romans. Because of all that He has done, there is a tremendous security we have, and we are thankful for that.

God Does Everything out of Love

Throughout the Scriptures, when we speak of the love of God, everything that God does, He does out of love. His motivation is out of love, and Jim pointed out that in our natural frail minds, we need to attach adjectives to His love to help us understand it. It not that we are saying God has all of these different types of love; God has one love, His great love. But to help us understand it, sometimes we will say, "It is a tough love, it is an enduring love, it can be a long-suffering love, a comforting love, a disciplining love, on and on." And this is just touching the very tip of the greatness and the multifaceted nature of His love. It is a fatherly love that at times disciplines, and it can be a little stern. It is a motherly love that can take us into His arms and hold us so wonderfully. And obviously, as we took the table, it is a sacrificial love. Many of us taste each day these various types of love. And that is why as we read those verses to begin with, He warns us about not neglecting this great love that He has given to us.

The Love of Many Will Wax Cold

As we read in Matthew 12 about how the love of many can wax cold, there is a great contrast here in I Peter when Peter speaks of the love of God. It is fervent love; it is a fiery love that keeps us going on and on and on in the fervency and zealously of that love. And it is interesting that when the Holy Spirit writes Scripture, He is never careless with words. He uses the proper word, which we try to speak. I know myself and my limited vocabulary. The sphere of some people's vocabulary is so big, but I have a small sphere, and I have trouble finding words.

He says that the love of many will wax cold. And what he is talking about here is that because of the evil and the intensity of the days we are living in, it can gradually cool off and fade away unnoticed. It is not all at once, but it can slowly fade away, and He used the picture of a candle. As long as that flame is burning on the candle the wax is still hot. And actually, when you put the flame out, the wax is still hot. If you put the flame out and you touch the wax, it is hot. But what

happens? When you leave it there, that wax slowly, gradually, depending on circumstances, waxes cold and becomes solid and hard and resistant to things.

So that is what can happen within our heart if we become distracted and ignore the love of God and get caught up with other things. At first, we thought we were doing great, but the flame was out. We are living on the residue of that flame. Eventually, it just slowly fades away. We have seen enough people in life who go from being zealous for the Lord one moment to automatically being zealous for the world. Normally, within our lives, it is a gradual process; it does not happen all at once. At first, we are so good at being Christians and being hypocrites that we can play-act, making things look like they are going well. Even though the flame is out, we still have some wax there that is hot. So, we can play, we can act like we are still on fire for the Lord. I was thinking this morning. We talk about watching actors in movies or television. What is the definition of a great actor? The definition of a great actor is that you do not know they are acting; they look so real. They are the ones you are impressed with, and this can happen to us believers. That flame can go out, but we still know how to play act, and it can look like we are still on fire for the Lord. However, inside of us it is growing cold, and would that the Holy Spirit awaken us and convict us of it so that we can continue to stay in that place of fervency with Him.

You Have Left Your First Love

Also, we are warned when He says, “Don’t leave your first love.” To me the key word in that phrase is, “Left.” That means you were there. This is not speaking of ones that were cold all the time. These ones had been in first love, and something came along, and they were distracted by other things. I am not going to go into the letter to Ephesus, but they were distracted by other things, and they left their first love. That first love is a quality of love. It is not a sequential type of love; it is a quality. There is nothing else that compares to it, and it is so beautiful. But these ones actually got distracted by all their religious activities. Everything was going great; they could discern good from evil and all of that, but they did not need the Lord. They had some knowledge in their head that allowed them to keep going on, and it took the Holy Spirit to come in and say, “You have left your first love.” They were unaware. They thought they were on fire for the Lord, but they had waxed cold, and they had left that first love.

Another way of phrasing first love, which I know it is not the way we usually look at it in the Bible, but all of us are governed by first love. And the question is, “What is the first love in our life?” Is the first love our job, our family, sports, fashion? It can be anything. But if you go into some people’s closet, there are forty-two ties there, not bow ties, but regular ties, real ties. Or they can have fifty-two pairs of shoes. What is our first love? What is governing us? What is motivating us? This is actually a very challenging time right now if you are a sports fan. There are all of the bowl games, and they are getting ready to start. The playoffs in football are starting, the NFL is winding down, and you are wrestling within your heart; “Okay, let me check this. What is the score? What is this? What is that? What is going on?” I am not saying that you are never to check the scores or never watch the game but may that not govern our hearts and lives.

This requires us to be very honest with ourselves because each of us is susceptible to our love waxing cold, and we can leave our first love. Can we ever say, “I would never do that”? Can we declare: “I am in first love; I would never wax cold”? No, if we are really honest, we cannot say

that. But what we can say with our hearts: “My desire is for my love to stay hot. I desire to stay in first love.” We do not know ourselves well enough to say, “I am in first love.”

I remember Brother Kaung for many years would talk about us as an assembly, and he would say, “You can never say, ‘We are a testimony.’ You can say, ‘We desire to be a testimony.’” That is our desire. We cannot say, “We are a testimony to Jesus.” But we can say, “We have a desire to be a testimony to Jesus.” Because that is our desire; that is what we want within our hearts.

The Cross Delivers Us from Love Waxing Cold

How do we avoid our love growing cold? How do we avoid not appreciating this love of Christ? As with many things in Scripture and with our life with the Lord, it is not complicated. We can avoid it by Calvary, by the cross. Because if you stop and think about it, the greatest display of love in history is Calvary. It is the greatest display of love. On Calvary our Lord sang a beautiful love song. We sing our songs, but He sang the most beautiful song throughout history, but do we have those ears to hear that love song to us that is a continual song? It is like, to use a modern term, which love song is in a loop, and it just keeps playing over and over: “I love you.” Put it in your phone or whatever you are playing with and just set it on loop, and that love song is continual, and it goes on over and over again. And when we speak of Calvary, do we see it as His love? Do we see the cross as the love of God? That is what He wants us to be.

Related to this matter of avoiding and staying in first love, allowing that love of Christ to be real, I do not want to neglect it, but I am not going to focus on it today. The cross has a coworker, and that is the Holy Spirit, the cross and the Holy Spirit work together. You could say that the cross opens the door, and the Holy Spirit comes in and works. So, I might not refer to the Holy Spirit every moment today, but maybe I will consider it the next time. However, when I am speaking of the cross, I am not neglecting the Holy Spirit. The cross is coming in, and that is what we are looking at a little more closely today.

What is the cross to us? Is it positive or negative? When we think of the cross, does your face fall? Do you have a long face? Or do you see it as the greatness of all that has been done for us? Oftentimes, we will say, “The cross is our friend.” Now it may not seem like that, Proverbs 27:6a says “Faithful are the wounds of a friend, ...” So, we see that the cross has a negative aspect obviously, but we are thankful that the cross of Calvary was a cruel cross. He drank the bitter cup that we could drink the cup of blessing. And we are thankful how as you look at the cross, we see that it is so positive because it sets us free from the things of self, things of the flesh, things of sin, things of the world. It sets us free of all the things that entangle us. But when we are speaking of the cross, we are not just speaking of His death.

I appreciate how Brother Sparks always emphasizes this: “When you are referring to the cross, you are referring to His death and His burial, but also His resurrection and ascension, which is the fulness of the work that He did. Through that death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the Holy Spirit came. Calvary always precedes Pentecost, and we need to remember that. Praise God! All that He has done for us at the cross and through this great salvation makes us sons. Our worship today was on little children and ones that could not even come in, the unworthy ones that you read about in Corinthians, but because of Calvary, because of what He has done, because

of His great love, He has made us sons. He has also made us priests and kings to rule and reign with Him. What a glorious work that is! That is how much He loves us. He took us out of that pit: “I was sinking deep in sin.” Oh, but He lifted us up; God lifted me. He lifted each and every one of us up. Praise God for that!

The Cross Brings Us into Spiritual Reality

But what is the cross to us? It actually is so vital, particularly in these days because the cross brings us into the spiritual reality of all that Christ has done for us. We have done and heard and received so much teaching from ones who have shared, and we are very thankful for that. It was mentioned at the family meeting last night that we have had forty-eight family conferences and fifty times together if we count the two at Roslyn. And throughout all those conferences, there has been a consistent theme—God’s Eternal Purpose. God’s purpose for us has been shared. But the question we have, is it experientially real in our lives? As we yield to the cross, what is in our head is made real within our hearts. The battle today among believers at times is not so much teaching, there needs to be teaching, so do not anybody take it that I am devaluing teaching. There needs to be teaching, but there needs to be the working of the cross in our lives to make teaching reality in our experiential daily walk. That is where we lack so much because the cross is not popular. But as we said, the cross is what allows the Holy Spirit to be working within us to bring out the reality of His life.

One example: We will use Peter as an example by the cross bringing in spiritual reality. In Matthew 16, we see Peter’s revelation of Christ: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Peter had a revelation of the church: “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock / will build My church.” He had a revelation of the kingdom: “Here are the keys to the kingdom.” He had a revelation of the cross, but none of that was real to Peter at that point in time. Peter had revelation, and he is like us because Peter loved hearing about Christ. He loved hearing about the church, He loved hearing about the kingdom, but when the cross came, he said, “No, Lord, You cannot do that!” And when the cross comes into our lives, we say “No! Just take me back to hearing about Christ, the church, and the kingdom, but do not mention a cross. I do not want that.”

But the Lord said to Peter, in order for all that He was doing to become reality to him, the Lord concludes in Luke 9:23 because there is a word in there that I like: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”

If you want to come after Him, if you want to enter into the reality of all that He has done as Christ, the church, and the kingdom, the spiritual reality of those becoming real within our hearts and our lives, is going the way of the cross, denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily. That is such a key word. We could actually spend another whole message just on daily life. But let me just mention one thing. When did our Lord go to the cross? How often did He go to the cross? He went to the cross at Calvary obviously one time, but actually, every moment that He spent upon this earth He was walking the way of the cross. He was denying Himself for our sake. Every moment that Christ was upon this earth, He was walking the way of the cross. What does that say to us? Are we any less? Do we need to be walking the way of the cross daily and allowing Him to bring us into the fulness of what He has for us? And this is where Paul’s encouragement means

so much. As we come into that love of Christ it can control us; it comes in in a mighty way to show us the power that it has to help us to live not for ourselves but for Him who has loved us.

The Love of Christ

So, the basic question that each of us as believers have is who or what controls our life? Is it self? Is it the world? You can fill in a blank: "What controls your life?" Or is it Christ? I know this is progressive; I know it is experiential. We are all sinners saved by grace, and we are not going to do it a hundred percent. I am not trying to present us as perfect believers walking along in the love of Christ every moment. That is where the blood of the Lamb comes in, and that is why you are appreciated more and more. But hopefully there is in our lives a progression of moving more and more into the way that He is desiring us to be as He conforms us to His image.

One of the things about His love is that He never forces His love upon us. He shows us His great love as it says in Romans 12:1a: "By the mercies of God." You could say, "By the love of God." How are you going to respond? How do we respond as we see His love controlling us? As we think about His love, how do we respond? He does not force His love; it is sensitive; it is like that picture of a dove. But if our hearts are not open or if we are not in a place to receive it, then we are not able to receive it. Even if we have it in our heart, it can wax cold, and we can leave it.

It is amazing how the love of God is so powerful; it is all magnificent, all powerful. One thing can affect it; it does not change it, but our hearts can affect it. Our hearts can ignore it, our hearts can reject it, our hearts can limit it. The most powerful thing in the world is His great love that moves, it transforms all of us into His image. However, if our hearts are closed, if our hearts are not ready and willing, He does not force. Because He knows us so well, that is why we have the table every Lord's Day. He says, "Remember." He tells us to remember because He knows we forget, but that does not affect His love for us. "In My love I am showing you how you will forget, but I am always there. Every day I am there for you; come and remember Me." Praise God for that! May our hearts be more and more open to really receive the love of Christ and allow it to be working within us in a way.

We talked about the love of Christ, and we asked, "What is it?" Sometimes it can sound so elementary when the children sing, "Jesus loves me." I want to pop your bubble. Jesus loves me is not a children's song. Jesus loves me is a song for all believers. It is an easy one for children to learn; it is one of the first ones we learn, but it is not a children's song, and we do not want to limit it that way. May we see how fundamental and essential it is.

I also remember Brother Kaung saying, "When you try to define the love of Christ, you confine it." You can describe it, and if you look through the gospels, you can see His life; you see a life lived out. As I mentioned earlier, I shared some of this last December, only a year ago. So, I expect all of you to remember, but I shared a couple of aspects of this. And I am going to take a little bit of a quick review, but before I get into that, I appreciated these verses out of II Corinthians 5 as they were written by Brother Wuest, and Steve is the biggest advocate or sales person for Wuest, and we are always selling out. When Steve mentions Wuest, we sell out again. It is a wonderful translation, but sometimes when he translates things, it is almost like a commentary

in the translation because of the way he expands it. I appreciate so much the way he translates II Corinthians 5:14 because he really captures the full essence of it.

“For the love which Christ has presses on me from all sides, holding me to one end and prohibiting me from considering any other, wrapping itself around me in tenderness, giving me an impelling motive, having brought me to this conclusion, namely, that One died on behalf of all, therefore all died,”

There is a love that is pressing on us from all sides. We are surrounded by His love. It is holding us to one end. It is holding us for one purpose. There is one goal, there is one end in view, and it is His heart; it is His purpose of all He wants to do of conforming us to His image and the bride being made ready. It is all done with one end in view.

And that love prohibits us from considering any other. When we are really in love with something, it sets boundaries for us, and you say, “I am not going to do that because I know that will be harmful.” We do not consider any other loves. This one who presses us, who prohibits us, wraps itself around us in tenderness. It is the arms of God loving us and giving us an impelling motive. It is motivating us; there is an impelling motive to press on in Him, to know Him more and more. We have tasted, we have seen, but it makes us more and more hungry. It is impelling us to move forward.

“And having brought me to the conclusion.” And this is very similar to what Kenny mentioned in Romans 8. He concluded this. Paul had seen the love of Christ and He has concluded.

He continues on in the verse, and it is pretty similar to most translations where “one died for all, therefore all died.” But this is a very precious way of describing it because as you see in here, the love of Christ has two aspects. There is a restraining aspect of the love of Christ; that word constraining has restraints, “Not I but Christ.” It is also governing; this is the power that governs us in our life. And it says, “For me to live is Christ.” At the same time, it is restraining but it is also governing; it is pushing us on.

This is where I shared previously on the love of Christ. I was able to cover the first two parts on security and sufficiency. The love of Christ is used three times in the Scripture in these three books, Romans, II Corinthians and Ephesians. In Romans you see the security of the love of Christ, in II Corinthians you see the sufficiency of it, and in Ephesians you see the supremacy of it. So, I mainly want to focus on the supremacy, but I am going to take just a minute or so for the one or two people in here who forgot what I said a year ago and refresh our memory on the security of the love of Christ.

The Security of the Love of Christ

It is used in Romans, and we are familiar with this now, because Kenny just shared it. Romans 8:35: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of Christ. There is security that we have there. And as we see this and he says it basically again in Romans 8:38 where he says, “I am convinced (persuaded),” and he goes through various things, that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

I just want to touch on one word that touched my heart, where it says, “I am persuaded,” or “I am convinced,” depending on your translation. It means to bring about a change by the influence of proven experience. You have actually been through something, and you have proven it. That is like Wuest which I will advertise Wuest again. He says, “I have come through a process, and it is a settled conclusion.” Those things that Paul talked about through tribulation, through strife, various experiences of life, death, hunger, persecution. Those were not just theory; he was not just writing something to be poetic. Those were actual experiences in his life, as you read much of his life. And because of the actual experience in his life, he was able to say, “Nothing can separate us from the love Christ.” Yes, he had been shipwrecked, there were perils, all of the various things he talks about in Corinthians and the list in Romans. But he said, “It is a settled conclusion based on my experience. I knew the truth of it, but as I went through the reality of the experience of it, it became a reality in my heart and my life by going the way of the cross, and it is settled. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.”

Do we know that security these days? The whole world is shaking. A sister actually commented in our prayer group Wednesday night, “Maybe in one way we are already in World War III because the whole world is at war.” Everything is shaking us so much, and the enemy is trying to rob us of that place of security we have in Him. We can be tossed here and there. Do we know the security in anything in life?

The Sufficiency of the Love of Christ

Also, we have in II Corinthians the verse that we have been reading. It speaks of the sufficiency of the love of Christ. If you look at Paul’s second letter to the church in Corinth, the word “sufficient” and “adequate” are two of the key words there depending on your translation. I forget the number of times it is used, but it is used a good number of times. It means in every circumstance and every situation His love is sufficient.

It reminds me of a story that Spurgeon tells. I have told you this before, so you see how your memory serves you. If you have ever seen a picture of Spurgeon, he did not look at all like Philip. Spurgeon looked more like Mac. He was obese, bothered by gout, and he had a horrible diet. He loved to eat, and one day after church after he finished his sermon, he went with this farmer to his home, and his wife fixed a good meal. You know, farmers’ wives fix the best meals because they just use lard and fat and fatback; it is all good, and it is delicious. It is horrible for you, but it is great tasting. So, Spurgeon had this good meal and a wonderful dessert. He goes outside to walk around a little bit, and he looks up on the farmer’s barn, and he sees one of those wind vanes up at the top, and he sees something that is written on it. So, Spurgeon says, “What is that written on the wind vane. And the farmer says, “God is love.” And Spurgeon kind of reared up in a very judgmental way and said, “How dare you put, God is love, on a wind vane. That should be in your house over your mantle, God is love.” And praise God, the farmer held his own. Even with a little meekness, he said, “Well, that reminds me that whatever way the wind is blowing, God is love. Those warm beautiful days, God is love. The fiery winds of winter, God is love.” And that is what He is to us. Whichever way the winds of life are blowing, God loves us, and He is sufficient to carry us through those situations.

The Supremacy of the Love of Christ

Now I want to come more to what is on my heart today about the third part, the supremacy of the love of Christ. This is seen in Ephesians 3:19: “and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” That you may know in your hearts in reality because he had already prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know all of those riches there, that we would know that love of Christ in reality. And as we have already mentioned, what is the supreme manifestation of His love? It brings us right back to Calvary again, because it is the greatest, the most supreme way we can see His love. Nothing can separate us from that love of Christ because of what He did on Calvary; it is always sufficient. However, the problem is not the love of Christ; the problem is our hearts not really coming into it. Loving ourselves too much.

But we see the supreme manifestation of His love in Ephesians in 5:2: “... Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, ...” To each and every one of us He gave Himself.

Christ Loved and Gave Himself for the Church

Ephesians 5:25 He did not just do it for us. He said, “... Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,” There is no greater love than laying down your life. Beyond just the individual it is for the church, it is for God’s heart, it is for God’s purpose. There was an end in view. Everything Christ did there was always that end in view. That is why Paul wrote about that, and as Wuest said, “That love of Christ there is one end, there is a purpose there.” That is what He is after. He is working in our hearts and lives. It is not simply to make us so-called better Christians. It is not to make us more godly, to make us more holy, that is all an aspect of it, but that is the way He is preparing us for what is ahead. He has a call upon our lives, and His great love is the key to the revelation of God’s heart and purpose, and it is the key to understanding His purpose. We can hear about His purpose, we can hear about Christ, the church, the kingdom, the bride, but the key to really entering into the reality of it is that love of Christ really coming in. And we see as the Lord enlightens the eyes of our hearts, and I love how Paul says that in Ephesians 1 because it is the eyes of our hearts. In many ways we have physical eyes that relate more to our mind because that is seeing things in a natural way. But to see things with the eyes of our heart is changing our perspective to see things from His perspective, to see the spiritual reality of it because this is what He is after.

The Love of Christ and God’s Eternal Purpose

And we noticed Ephesians, and I was actually surprised by this. But as you come to Ephesians Paul uses the word for love “agape,” (and it can be a noun or a verb) more in Ephesians than any other letter that he writes. When you first think, “Okay, what letter did Paul use the word “love” in the most? A lot of times we would go to I Corinthians; we would think that. Well, he uses it in Ephesians two more times. It is twenty-four times in Ephesians and twenty-two in I Corinthians. Do not hold me to those numbers; I am not a numbers’ guy.

But as we see the love of Christ in Ephesians, the word “agape” is used more. And to me that shows the connection between the love of God, the love of Christ and God’s eternal purpose. If you remove that love from His purpose, all you have is dogma, all you have is teaching, mental

comprehension and some truth, but you do not have it in life, and that is what Paul is after because the eyes of our heart are being enlightened. The heart itself speaks of love. When you say that somebody is heartless, what do you mean? They do not have any love; they do not care about anybody. If somebody has a big heart, they love everybody. The heart in its very nature speaks of love; it is so intertwined. Throughout this letter to Ephesians, we see this love of Christ coming in, meeting us, and encouraging us.

I am not going to lead you through all twenty-two uses of the agape in Ephesians, but you will see how it is used in relation to God's heart and purpose.

Love was the Whole Basis for God's Calling Us into Sonship

Ephesians 1:4b-5: "In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,"

What was the whole basis for calling us into sonship, calling us into what He wanted to do before the foundation of the world? It was love; love motivated Him, and that is the love that motivates us. It can allow us to press on through to not only being predestined, but we are entering into all that He has brought us into. He created us in Himself for good works that we could be that testimony to His glory. Praise God, we see the vastness and the necessity of allowing the love of Christ to be working so real within our lives with His Coworker, the Holy Spirit.

Again, go to chapter 2:4-5 which is one of John's favorite verses, "But God."

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),"

His great love with which He loved us is the motivation, and He has made us alive together. And it does not stop there. "He has raised us with Him, seated us in those heavenly places in Christ Jesus." In spiritual reality we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. We are here right now, but in spiritual reality we are seated with Him. Do we know that? You cannot comprehend that. If you think you understand it, you probably do not; I am sorry to pop your bubble. We can know about it, we can understand the teaching of it, but to comprehend really, fully all of that, it is beyond our natural minds. He uses words to help us understand it. This is the great work He has done.

Again, with this purpose in view as it says in verse 7: "so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."

As He accomplishes all things, as He sums up all things in Christ, as He says, "The bride has made herself ready," that is showing the surpassing riches of His grace that came out of His love. Praise God! Is this impacting us in a way that we can have a hunger? "Lord, I want to know more of this love of Christ." Not just the phrase, not just hearing about it, but the reality of it, that it could really be motivating us and carrying us on.

The Love of Christ Is the Basis for Building the Body of Christ

Again, we see how within the great work that He is doing in Ephesians 4:16 where it says, “from whom the whole body (this is everybody, the whole body, that is all believers regardless of where you meet or whatever denomination you are in, even whether you are walking with the Lord or not), being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Maybe you are an unbeliever, and you have turned your back on the Lord, He has not turned His back on you. One of the beautiful things when we are born again, every one of us is a living stone. We have His life within us. The issue in us is not just being living stones; the issue in us is being functioning living stones. There is a big difference there. Every believer, whoever is born again, you have a life within; you are a living stone. Is that life being lived out? Are you functioning as a living stone or are we just sitting there doing our own thing, even turning our back to Him.

Love is what is building the body of Christ; that love of Christ is what is doing this great work of building us together. Praise God for that, brothers, and sisters! It is not our knowledge of Him, even though that is important, it is not our actions, but it is His love that is the very motivation for building up the body of Christ, and that will be manifested in our actions. But our actions are the fruit of His love. We love not only in words but in deeds. Deed is the fruit of that word becoming real within us and being lived out. Praise God for that!

The Love of Christ is the Foundation of Our Life

Ephesians 3:17-19: “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts (here is that heart again) through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,”

The foundation of our very life is the love of Christ. This is where He works from, rooted, and grounded in Him. (Roots going deep, foundation being firmly established.) “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the height, and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.”

Knowing that love of Christ. As we look back at these verses, it is comprehending with all the saints. We are so self-centered, we want to be able to comprehend, and that is wonderful, but do we see that there is more? There is a comprehending with all the saints. That is what I love about saints getting together and having fellowship. I very much appreciate you older ones, but you are always going to be the young guys. It does not matter how old you ever get; you are going to be the young guys. Sorry, you have to live with that. But the young guys and girls have their Bible studies, and they fellowship because they are desiring to know more and more and to be able to comprehend with all the saints what God is, who He is, what He is doing, the height, the breadth, the length and depth, knowing His love, knowing His purpose, knowing His heart to be strengthened and encouraged to press on. That love of Christ is that supreme love that surpasses all things, and we want to be able to really come in, that we can be filled up to all the fulness of God. What a phrase!

Conclusion

You know, Ephesians has certain phrases that it uses. You think as you look around, this will never happen, but by faith. Just think about one day it will be a church without spot or wrinkle; that is beyond our comprehension. We see too much with our own eyes. We know ourselves, we know our brothers and sisters, but praise God, in reality that work is going on and being done. Praise God! And that we may be filled up to all the fulness of God. Actually, we have already been filled with the fulness of God because who is the fulness of God but Christ, and we have Christ in us. That is our hope of glory. When we were saved, we did not just get a little bit of Christ; we got Christ in us. Each one of us has Christ in us, and as we allow that cross to be working, as we allow the love of Christ to constrain us, as we allow the Holy Spirit to be moving, we enter in to experiencing more and more of the fulness. Now, to me, the fulness of God that He is speaking of here can only be experienced with all the saints. That is where we started the phrase. It is with all the saints, but each of us have the fulness of Christ within us, so that now we can enter in and enjoy the fulness of God with all the saints. Praise God for those brothers and sisters! That is the supreme love.

The Love of Christ Stays Fervent

I just wanted to touch today on how vital this matter of the love of Christ is in these last days. May the Lord work within our hearts and our lives, and may we not think it so elementary. But would we allow the love of Christ to stay fervent within us. And if it has grown cold, praise God, there is just one step. We can repent, and that fire comes right back on. That fire comes back on, but sometimes that fire is like smoldering embers. If you are out camping and you have some smoldering embers, one little breath, and what happens? That flame comes up. I was going to say it is like the instant gas fires in your fireplace, but that is not real fire. You have those smoldering embers, and then that breeze comes along. You breathed upon it, that breath of life, and all of a sudden, the flames are coming up, and it grows. It keeps going more and more.

The Love of Christ Governs Our Lives

We want to stay fervent like that, allowing the love of Christ to control us. That simple phrase, “not I but Christ,” allowing it to govern our lives, and leading us into all that He has, and really experiencing the reality of the security, sufficiency, and supremacy of the love of Christ. It is an absolute necessity in these days because everything that can be shaken will be shaken, but the things that can remain will remain; and the love of Christ will remain. As we allow that love to hold us, we can go through all the way to the end. And would we have this prayer that the cross would bring us into a spiritual reality of God’s heart and purpose. This is so vital these days.

Comprehending the Love of Christ with All the Saints

We hear much about many other things, but we do not want to neglect the cross, the working of the Holy Spirit in these last days and see the absolute necessity of comprehending the love of Christ with all the saints. That is His heart; that is His purpose. It is not just so that we would be individuals knowing Him. Praise God, we can, but there is a fulness that He wants us to come into, the love of Christ with all the saints, and “all” is a very inclusive word. There is a breadth to that with the width, the height, and the depth. It is all the saints; not just some, not the ones we like,

not the ones that believe what we think, not the ones that have this understanding or that understanding. It is all the saints, because that is where the fulness of Christ is seen; that is the testimony.

Stand Faithfully for the Testimony of the Love of Christ

Sadly, in the world today, that testimony has been weakened because it is not seen through all the saints. But praise God, there are the remnants, the ones scattered here and there that are standing for His testimony, and we want to be faithful where He has us to stand, that we are here for all the saints, that the love of Christ would be seen in us, and we would show forth in our lives, but not just in word. It is easy to stand up here and say, "Oh yeah, we are one with all the saints." And all of a sudden, you meet one. "You mean him too and her too?" No! It is all the saints because we have Christ as our common bond. Let me be clear, it is not that we are embracing all of their teaching, all of their practices, but we can embrace the life of Christ in any believer. That is the connection we have.

So just to reiterate how necessity would govern our hearts and lives, and we allow the love of Christ to be revealed within our hearts in a fuller and greater way. That is one of the ways He prepares us to hasten His return, and that we could be able to be those that are seeking Him, being available to Him, and calling out to Him.

Lord, we do want to thank You for the magnificence of Your great love. Whenever we touch on it, we automatically see that we are just like Amy Carmichael who said, "We are just touching the edges of Your ways." There is more to this than we have been able to even touch today, but we just want to have hearts that are available to You that You would be able to work and reveal within us this necessity of that love of Christ, the necessity of the cross, the necessity of that Holy Spirit, really working within us to make us a people that Your love would not wax cold, that we could be in a place of first love. This is our desire, Lord. We recognize our limitations, we recognize our failures, but Lord, we are thankful we do not have to focus upon our weaknesses and our failures, but just as we did around Your table, we can focus upon You because You are the One that has first loved us. You are the One that has paid that great price that we could be called children of the living God. So, we are looking to You, Lord, in a mighty way to be working within our hearts and within our lives. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

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Speaker	Graham, Mac
Venue	Richmond, Virginia, US
Date	December 15 th , 2024
Link	https://christiantestimonyministry.com/item/the-necessity-of-the-love-of-christ-in-these-last-days