

Ephesians 3:17-19

Introduction

Coming again to look at this, the second prayer in Ephesians. Already looked at the first two petitions of this prayer – that the Holy Spirit would so work in their lives and deal with them that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith. This leads to the next part of the prayer- **Being rooted and established in love, may have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.** He prays that they will experience all the dimensions of God's love towards them, and concluding on a practical note, how they can know that love in their souls.

Being rooted and established in love

When Christ is at home in the heart, when He is master and host, when He reigns in centre of personality, this leads the believer to be rooted (a botanical metaphor) and established (architectural metaphor) in love. The believer is like a well-rooted tree and well-built house. Love becomes soil, and foundation of the house. Gives him stability and strength in life. There is a firmness, permanence and solidity about the believer. He has depth and strength also. Knowledge is a good thing. So are God's gifts for service. But on their own, they can be dangerous, they can puff us up. It is love which builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1).

Whom does the Christian love? He loves Christ, **who loved me and gave Himself for me** (Galatians 2:20). He loves God who first loved him when he was still in his sin (Romans 5:8). He loves God's law, and like the Psalmist he meditates on it day and night (Psalm 1:2; 119:97). He loves God's service.

*“And call it my supreme delight
To hear thy dictates and obey”*

(Doddridge)

He loves God's people, they are his brothers and sisters, in same family, going to same family home (1 John 3:14). He loves his neighbour (Mark 12:31) and is concerned to do to others what he would want them to do to him (Matthew 7:12). And, unlike the unbeliever, he actually loves his enemies and is able to do so because of the love of God shed abroad in his heart (Matthew 5:43f).

This is the love of which Paul speaks – not a flabby, sentimental, mawkish emotion, but something which is strong and viable. It energizes and urges and drives him on. He serves the Lord but not because it is a duty or job that has to be done. Love gives him dynamic. He does not count the cost. Love fills him with compassion, as Jesus was filled with compassion, and that is the secret of his ministry. He does not merely go through the motions of “saying prayers”, but he knows and loves the one to whom he prays.

Love enables him to stand trials and changing circumstances. Love enabled Job to say, **Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him** (Job 13:15). Love enabled Paul and

Silas, with their feet in stocks and backs bleeding from beating, to sing praises to God at midnight (Acts 16:25).

This love for God, His Son and His people, makes men stable, firm and dependable. Need to make sure we are well-rooted in love, and that our life is founded on it. Need to pay attention to the foundation because there are no shortcuts in the Christian life.

Then this possession of love enables us to comprehend, appreciate and understand God's love to us. Just as one cannot understand music if he doesn't have a musical ear, nor appreciate art without an artistic eye, so we cannot appreciate God's love to us if we do not know what love is. So Paul goes on to speak of our appreciation for God's love for us.

May have power to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpassed knowledge

Concerned that we should know and experience and appreciate the love of Christ to us in all its dimensions. Depths in it we have never realized or imagined. Spend so much time thinking of and talking about our work, our problems and ourselves – but the most urgent and important thing of all is to think of Christ's love for us. Nothing ought to give us greater joy and delight.

Paul speaks of its *breadth* – not confined to one race or group of nations but it encompasses the world. **Here there is no Greek or Jew, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all** (Colossians 3:11). **With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation** (Revelation 5:9). **A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language** (Revelation 7:9).

We get so discouraged because we live in days when most people around us reject God. We forget there are vast numbers in the world at the moment, in every country and on every continent, regularly worshipping God and rejoicing in the work of Salvation. In the glory we shall be overwhelmed at the innumerable hosts of the redeemed. How this should raise our heads and cause our hearts to sing. What has grace wrought!

Paul speaks of the *length* of the love of God. **I have loved you with an everlasting love** (Jeremiah 31:3). Have you ever considered Christ's eternal love for you personally? Your election and choosing was before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Your name was in the Lamb's book of life from the foundation of the world (Revelation 17:8). He knew us in eternity and loved us then. In time, that love has not wavered or varied. He bears with us and never gives us up. He sustains us in times of trials and trouble. George Matheson, going blind, his fiancée given him up, contrasts this with Christ's love in his hymn

“O love that wilt not let me go”.

Love which sees us safely in the glory. Nothing in life or death **will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord** (Romans 8:38-39). **Those he predestined he also called; those he called he also justified, those he justified he also glorified** (Romans 8:30).

His love started in eternity past, continued in time and goes on to eternity future. What comfort and strength. What stay in times of trial and adversity.

Paul speaks of the *depth* of God's love. Glorious truth. Christ was in the form of God, very nature of God, but did not cling to his equality with God. He humbled himself and became man, endured the depths of shame and suffering to save us. Even abandoned by His Father on the Cross, as He bore our sins and punishment. Why? Not for worthy or deserving people, but for rebels, steeped in sin and unrighteousness. **While we were still sinners Christ died for us** (Romans 5:8).

*“From the highest throne in glory
To the cross of deepest woe
All to ransom guilty captives.
Flow, my praise, forever flow.”*
(Robert Robinson)

Finally Paul speaks of the *height* of God's love. This was God's ultimate and final purpose for us. Salvation is more than just forgiveness- much, much more. He died that we might have new birth, making us sons and daughters of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. We have a safe and certain hope of life beyond the grave. Glorious resurrection of bodies, wonderful new bodies like His. Going to be with Him and behold His glory (John 17:24).

Such are the dimensions of Christ's love for us. Paul wants us to comprehend this with all the saints, not just the special few. But everyone has contribution to make. Learn more of it when we share with all God's people and tell experiences. **Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me** (Psalm 66:16). **Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other** (Malachi 3:16).

Ultimately the whole thing is beyond us. The love of Christ passes knowledge. We can touch, sip, taste, but it has depths which are beyond us. Could spend eternity contemplating it, but it is inexhaustible. Never be able to close book and say we know all there is to know about Christ's love for us.

D.L.Moody, Wall Street, New York, had such an experience he could not describe, seldom referred to it “I can only say God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand.”

If you feel sorry for yourself, obsessed with problems and petty things which bring us low, think of God's love for you. How trivial things in the world are compared with this marvellous theme. Survey the wondrous cross, feast eyes on it, be ravished by it, be amazed by it. No more important or rewarding thing than to comprehend and grasp and know this.

The means whereby we can truly know and be sure of this love in our souls

Two very significant words in this passage. “Comprehend” and “know”. “Comprehend” καταλαβεσθαι means to understand with the mind. Understand facts and evidence of Christ's love – such as we have just been considering. Think about,

dwell on it, look at it, study it. “Know” γινωσκει is a deeper word, meaning experience, have direct personal assurance, be told by Him that He loves you. Ravished by and filled with His love. He says “I love you with perfect and inexhaustible love”. That is very important, and something we always long for. On human level, gifts and kindness are all very well. But we long also to be told we are loved – whatever our position in the family. Paul tells us it is possible to be told by Him in immediate direct and personal way. It is possible for us all to know. Numerous testimonies to the reality of this experience, among all types of Christians.

*“Loved with everlasting love
Led by grace that love to know”
(G.W.Robinson)*

Many great hymns express a longing for this:

*“Tell me, Thou art mine, O Saviour
Grant me an assurance clear;
Banish all my dark misgivings;
Still my doubting, calm my fear.
All my soul within me yearneth
Now to hear the voice divine
So shall grief be gone forever
And despair no more be mine”
(W.Williams)*

Everything in this matter depends on our relationship to Christ. In every congregation, besides unbelievers, there are people at varying levels in that relationship. Some to whom the Lord is nearer than breathing. Life is lived very closely in His presence and under His gaze. Christ is everything to them. At the same time there are others, truly Christians, but living with Him at a distance. They have a fitful relationship. Often backs are turned on Christ and see only their own shadows and for the most part taken up with themselves. Need to turn right round and look at the sun. Then they would forget themselves.

Often we live below our privileges. So used to spiritual poverty. Like street urchins looking through windows of large lighted house, gazing at the banquet we wish was ours. What should be our great concern? Press on and seek ever deeper relationship with Christ. Not seek His blessings or experiences, but seek the Lord Himself, spend more time with Him. Our supreme concern should be to know Him, more important than all our church activity.

Then when we put first things first, then His blessings follow. We have personal direct assurance of Christ’s love for us. There will be no holding us back in zeal for Him and service for Him. Not to be content with truth about Him, though not to decry doctrine, but beyond doctrine we must get to the person Himself. There is no substitute in meetings or books for personal knowledge. Seek the person. Get to know the person and walk with the person. Talk to Him, listen to Him, have communion with Him. As a result, your spiritual life will be deepened.

Then seek to be given personal assurance of His love. Be like the Psalmist whose soul panted after the Lord, and thirsted for the Lord (Psalm 42 & 63). Spend time in His word. He reveals Himself to us and speaks to us through His word still. Neglect it at our peril. The greatest assurance of Christ's love is found through the reading of the Scriptures – as many will testify.

Walk in obedience to Him. The more conformed to His will we are, and the more we keep out of our lives what grieves Him, the closer we get to Him. The more He manifests Himself and His love to us. Let go of what stands between you and Him. Do these things with all your heart. **You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart** (Jeremiah 29:13). The casual and half-hearted will expect the Lord's blessing in vain. **I will not let you go unless you bless me** (Genesis 32:26)

Conclusion

What is our relationship with Christ? How do we view Christian life? Are we content to be forgiven, saved and sure of heaven? There is much more to it than that. God grant that we shall not have reason to be ashamed when we see Him face to face and realize we have squandered our lives and missed so much, when we realize what we might have enjoyed.