

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (15-12-1996 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Ephesians 6:23-24

Additional Reading: John 14:16-27

Grace to all who love Christ

Introduction

Now to the close of Ephesians. Seen the great truths which constitute the Gospel, Christ's rescue of us through the Cross. New life, new people in Christ. Then the kind of life which follows, in the home, marriage and at work. Behaviour in the church, our struggle against the powers of evil, and the equipment available for us. The life of prayer. Then Tychicus the postman to whom we owe a lot.

Now to final greetings- **Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love** (Ephesians 6:24). With sincerity, constant love, unfailing love, **shining ever brighter till the full light of day** (Proverbs 4:18). The apostle turns to Christ, as he has all the way through, and implores God's favour on those to whom the Lord Jesus is the supreme object of their love.

The place of love for Christ in the Christian life

The enthronement of Christ in the heart, and making Him the supreme object of our affection and devotion, takes us right to the heart of our Christian experience. Here is the great test by which we may know we are saved. Consider how our salvation has come about – first we heard the Gospel, of God's provision of a Saviour through Christ's death and resurrection. We believed on Him. Trusted Him to save us. Committed ourselves to Him. Given a renewed life and heart. One of the effects of this is our love for Christ. Love for Christ does not save us. It is trust and commitment which lays hold on Him and brings salvation. But one of the great evidences and proofs that we are His, and He has changed us, is that henceforth we have a love for Christ.

No just coldly acknowledge Him, but make Him the centre of affection. Soul on fire with love for Him. Not just love His kingdom, or His people, or His cause, but love Christ Himself. And not loving Him as a memory or as a doctrine, but love Him as a living person, not a figure in history, but someone who is alive now and is as real to us as we are to ourselves. Personally attached to Him. He is dear and our love goes out to Him.

*“Jesus, the very thought of thee,
With fullness fills my breast.
My Jesus, I love thee,
I know thou art mine.
I will love thee in life,
And I love thee in death
If ever I loved thee,
My Jesus, tis now.”*

No man who grasps the Gospel and what Christ has done for him can dismiss these verses as mere empty sentiment. Christ began in heaven in eternity past, and was in very nature God. See Him as the co-equal and co-eternal Son, reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and then consider the enormous stoop He made. Conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Placed in the manger from which animals fed in the stable in Bethlehem. **He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him** (John 1:11). Recall His agony in the Garden. Rejection by religious leaders, the mockery of His trial, the insults and suffering, nails in His hands and feet. Separation from His Father as He bore our sins so that we might not be condemned. The His glorious resurrection and His present ministry making intercession. The prospect of His coming again for us. Who was all this for? Worthy people, good people, attractive people, nice people? The very reverse – people about whom it is written **There is no one righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God... There is no one who does good, not even one... There is no fear of God before their eyes** (Romans 3:11-18). Yet despite that, **The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me** (Galatians 2:20).

Does the debtor to the tune of a million pounds, which he can never clear, love the one who pays it all, and then daily supplies his needs with fresh capital, and takes him into partnership? Does the prisoner of war love the man who risks his own life to break through the enemy lines to rescue him? Does the drowning sailor love the one who risks his own life and plunges into the sea, dives after him, catches him by the hair and by mighty effort saves him from watery grave?

The answer is obvious. A child could answer the question. Yet here we are dealing with an even greater rescue - by one who is altogether lovely, of one who is utterly undeserving. Not just at risk of life, but at cost of life. Not just from debts or watery grave, but from eternal condemnation.

The words of Jesus to Peter after fishing trip following resurrection, come to us with force – **Do you truly love me more than these?** (John 21:15). It is not good enough to say “I am orthodox” – Peter was orthodox, he recognised Jesus was the Christ the Son of the living God, and yet Jesus still questioned his love. We can be clear and sharp about doctrine, but our hearts can be dead and dry. It is not good enough to say “I hold a position in Christian work. I do this and that.” So did Peter (an apostle!), but Jesus still questioned his love. “I give to God, I’m generous and thoughtful” – as was Peter, who had forsaken all to follow Christ, yet still the question came. “I’m zealous for such and such a Christian cause” – so was Peter, zealous enough to want to walk on water with Jesus. All these things – right belief, service, zeal, generosity – can be present, as much as the forms and ceremonies which others trust on. But all are empty shell and worthless unless at the bottom there is love for the person of Christ. Like a cage without a bird, or a skeleton without life. Do we have a warm love for Christ in our hearts? Nothing can compensate for the lack of it.

The effect of love for Christ in the Christian’s life

When a man loves Christ, and that is the great motive and principle of his life, everything will be affected. He will be constrained to act in a particular way, his motives will run along certain lines. He will want to obey the Lord, not because he is

badgered or bullied, but because he wants to. He will want to spend time with Him every day. This is natural for people who love each other, and so it should be in our relationship with Christ. Love for Christ will make us want to listen to Him speak through His Word. We will want to speak to Him, tell Him our problems, ask for His blessing, ask what would please Him, and ask for His guidance. Love makes all these exercises a joy and delight.

So also love motivates obedience to His commandments. **If anyone love me, he will obey my teaching** (John 14:23). **If you love me, you will obey what I command** (John 14:15). **This is love for God: to obey his commands** (1 John 5:3). Love delights to please the beloved. When we love Christ we want to please Him. We are anxious not to grieve or disappoint Him. We will read His Word and store it in our minds with a view to pleasing Him.

Our relationship to His people, our attitude to work and matters of truth and honesty are affected. What does He say about these things? What would please Him? What would Jesus do? Love drives us to do something for Christ, it makes us want to serve Him as much as we can. We do not have to be dragged or shamed into pleasing Him. Service to the Lord is not given out of duty, but out of love, and it is a delight. The nurse in a hospital may do her duty conscientiously and well, giving a sick man his medicine at the right time, feeding him and ministering to all his wants. But there is a great difference between the nurse and the wife who is tending her dying husband. One acts from sense of duty, the other acts from love and affection. The nurse does her duty and is paid, the other acts because of her heart. So it is with service for Christ. Little is done for His cause out of a sense of duty. Hands will not move with real enthusiasm until the heart is filled with love.

Love cheerfully bears self-denial and endures suffering and gives “adhesive” power to our work. Man’s frown is not our concern as long as we know Christ’s smile.

Love for Christ prepares us for glory. Mark of every single person in heaven – love for Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. **A great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language** (Revelations 7:9). Yet they all are of one mind – they love Christ. Only way to prepare for heaven is to learn to love Christ down here on earth.

Love for Christ is the mainspring for obedience, for fellowship with Him, service for Him and preparation for Heaven.

Solemn consequences awaiting those who do not love Christ

What of those who do not love Christ – and there are multitudes of them. Bible speaks in very clear but alarming terms. The most terrible words in sacred Scripture are about what awaits such people. **If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him** (1 Corinthians 16:21). “Let him be an anathema”. Paul calls down a solemn curse on all who do not love Christ, such is the depth of his feeling on the importance of a right relationship with the Lord. If any man’s heart is not aflame for the Lord, he is not alive to God and spiritual things. He has no new birth. He is God’s enemy. His mind and affections are out of order. His human nature is totally corrupt if he does not see Christ as the altogether lovely one. Whatever he is like outwardly, his rebellious heart

has rejected God's own Son, His love for sinners, His offer of salvation, which cost Him so much. Could do nothing more awful than refuse the love of Christ and His compassion and offer to save. Better not to have been born than not to love the Saviour. God's curse rests on such a man, and Paul, in his vehement jealousy for the Lord, says "and let it rest there".

Not loving Christ – is there anything more terrible? If you are not a Christian, it is not a matter of not having time for religion or for church, the essence of your state is that you do not love Christ. How condemning. He means nothing to you. You don't want to know His love and His salvation. Have you really considered the consequences?

Conclusion

This text brings a challenge. It divides the congregation in two. Either love Christ, or not. Friend of the Gospel, or foe. Received Christ, or rejected Him. Believe Him, or make Him out to be a liar. No neutrality. Either one thing or the other. If you love Christ, you enjoy God's grace. If you do not love Him, you are under His curse.

To those with love for Christ, but dragging feet in service and commitment –is something wrong with your relationship with Christ? Have you gone your own way somewhere, and left your first love? Repent, get back to where you were. **Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with undying love.**