

## WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Knowing the Love of Christ

Ephesians 3:14-21

I've been going through some spiritual challenges lately. I have been coming to an awareness of my lack of love towards people. I am learning that this lack of love for others is rooted in an anemic love for the Lord. A waning love for others and a weak love for Christ are two sides of the same coin. My guess is that I'm not alone in this challenge. As I am learning to help myself, I rejoice that God has given us His Word to bring us what we need as we face our frailties and shortcomings. I've been seeking His help concerning this, and it has been quite uncomfortable and at times a bit disconcerting. And in His patience and long-suffering, I am learning and want to help you this morning as well.

These concerns arise in my heart when I read God's Word. God's word has the power to cut to the thoughts and the intents of the heart and remove all pretense. It is the voice of our loving Father, as He cuts and prunes away deadwood, and cleans out the wood, hay, and stubble in our lives. Jesus prayed that we would be sanctified by the truth, and then stated that Thy word is truth. He is so faithful to fulfill His promise to bring us to maturity. He uses His word to cut us, chip us, sand us, and form us into the image of His Son. This morning I invite you to listen to some of the passages that have been getting my attention. If you will carefully listen and allow the Spirit to speak through His Word, He will prepare you for this morning's message. Feel free to just listen as I read, or you can turn to the passages and read with me.

Matthew 22:34-38

<sup>34</sup>Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. <sup>35</sup>One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: <sup>36</sup>“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup>Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ <sup>38</sup>This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup>And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Matthew 5:38-48

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ <sup>39</sup>But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup>And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. <sup>41</sup>If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. <sup>43</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor <sup>z</sup> and hate your enemy.’ <sup>44</sup>But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup>that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup>If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?

<sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

I John 3:16-18

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. <sup>17</sup> If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

<sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

1 John 4:7-12

<sup>7</sup> Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

<sup>9</sup> This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

I Peter 4:8-9

<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray.

<sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

These are just a few of the many commands for us to love God and love others. The effect is humbling as I begin to understand the perfect love of God, and the amazing love of my Savior. He loves us not in just word, but He came and gave the ultimate sacrifice of His own life on Calvary as the supreme demonstration of love. And He demonstrated this love while we were still sinners. He loved you, and He loved me while we despised Him, and mocked Him, or just ignored Him. He sought us, and found us, and brought us out of death to life, and saved us. Meditation on the love of Christ for us as demonstrated at the cross is a great place to begin and end when I am faced with my lack of love. How can I look and behold my Savior and not love Him.

Not only am I humbled, and overwhelmed by His love and mercy, I am compelled and called to respond in love toward others. If I love Him, how can I not love others? So this is what this message is all about...

“If you find your love for others lacking and are discouraged by your uncaring attitude towards others, you will also come to recognize that your love for Christ is also anemic and weak. The great news for you is that our Father offers us a beautiful and effective remedy for this malady and sad state of mind, heart, spirit, and passion. It is found in the letter to the Ephesians.

First we need to take a brief look at the whole letter for context, and then we will focus on a specific passage that addresses our problem.

This letter penned by the Apostle Paul teaches us that God has a passion for His glory and fame. He is actively displaying that glory through the execution of His eternal plan of redemption. In this letter Paul expounds this eternal plan and purpose of God - to bring together a people from all nations and tongues into one united family to be assembled for His honor and glory. In chapter 1, Paul begins by praising God for this plan that includes his choosing, calling, redeeming, and adopting a people into His family. As Paul considers the reports of the faith that these Ephesian believers had in the Lord Jesus, and the love they had for each other, He breaks into a prayer of thanksgiving for them, and then asks that our Father God would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation so that they may come to an even deeper understanding of God's purpose and also be enlightened to the amazing supernatural resurrection power that is available to them to enable them to live a godly life in light of this great salvation – to the praise of God's glory.

As Paul continues in chapter 2, he reminds them of their past, where they had come from – a life of selfishness, sin, and contempt for God. They used to live by their unclean desires, and for themselves. Yet God in His great love and mercy intervened and changed their hearts, opened their eyes, and transferred them out of their spiritually dead state to a new life in Christ. Through faith in the good news concerning Christ, Paul explains that God saved this people to form one unified body of Jews and Gentiles together. This is the mystery of the church, one body of people consisting of both Jews and Gentiles, where God chooses to make His habitation and place to show forth His greatness and His praises to the whole earth.

In chapter 3, Paul unfolds this great mystery that was previously hidden, that the Gentiles are included with the Jews as one great family. Then in chapters 4 through 6, he gives practical instruction on how they are to relate and live together in a covenant community of brothers and sisters with one Father, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. He finishes the letter encouraging them to stand firm and strong as they resist the devil and pray for Paul as He continues to take this gospel to call others into this kingdom.

Fast forward to today. You and I are in that same family, and called to display the same amazing grace, glory, and power of our God and Savior. For us to fulfill this calling, it takes the supernatural power of God operating in each of our lives. When the fullness of God is dominating our lives, it is evidenced by lives filled and overflowing with the love of God. When that love is small, then we need to ask Him for His power and His help.

I think that it is clear from God's word He wants us to be filled to overflowing with His power, His love, and His presence. If you are his child, your heavenly Father wants you to be filled with His abiding presence love and power so that you might display His glory and presence. If you truly know Him, there is a deep yearning within you that desires to fulfill this purpose and calling. In the depth of your soul, you want above all else to live for the praise of His glory and greatness. If there is such a yearning in your soul, a burning within your heart, a deep desire to see our God and His Son Jesus Christ, your beautiful Savior and Lord, praised, worshiped, appreciated, adored, obeyed, and exalted by others, that is evidence that you are truly saved. If you have no care or desire for such things, then you are dead in your sins and have need of a new birth. I would invite and encourage you to check and see if you are in the faith, and if you are not sure, call out to Him and ask Him to save you.

I am speaking directly to those who know the Lord and have this desire to glorify Him, but like me, recognize a lack of a consistent passion for the glory of God that shows up in an indifference to the needs of others, a mediocre attitude toward my God and Savior, and at other times, a complaining grumbling burdened spirit when considering the work of the kingdom and all that is to be done. It also shows up as an indifference to the lost souls that surround me. This ought not be! God has a higher calling and experience for us.

If you have that desire to be lifted from this place of waning passion and love, if you want to be rekindled and revived in your love and affection for Jesus and His people and His kingdom, mission, and work, if you want the Lord to fill you with His love and compassion for your brothers and sisters, and for the lost, and for Himself, then this message from Ephesians is for you. I have been praying that our Father will use this message from His Word to fan our smoldering embers into a forest fire ablaze for His glory. Our great God is worthy of our full commitment, desire, passion, heart and spirit. I pray that He will grace us with the gift of repentance and fill our hearts with a passion for His glory! Now let's read this prayer and consider its message:

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

<sup>14</sup>For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup>I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup>may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen

The first overall thing I understand from this prayer is this: For us to love God and love others as we ought, we need a supernatural endowment of power from on high. We need to be filled to

overflowing with the very presence of God Himself. We need to have the fullness of God permeating our thoughts, our desires, our wants, our motives, and our pursuits. We need an agape love that transcends mere human affection and sentimentality. We need the very power that raised Christ from the dead present and operating in our lives. We need a love that can warm the coldest, most indifferent heart; a love that perseveres through every hardship and prevails in the midst of hatred, strife, and abuse. We need a love that cries out for forgiveness for the ones that are putting our bodies to death.

And this is what Paul is asking God to give these believers. We have the same need. We have the same calling. We are in the same family. We serve the same risen Christ. We have the same Spirit of God in our hearts. This is what I need as I face my indifferent, self-centered fears that pull me away from involvement with others. I need to ask God for this supernatural strength and presence of my Savior. He will give me the courage and confidence to take the risk to get involved in the lives of others. The prayer begins by stating that Paul knelt and prayed to the God and Father of all our brothers and sisters, past and present, from every nation, and race, and kindred, and tribe. This prayer is for all of us.

He prayed in verse 16 that they would be strengthened in their inner man. Our primary need is not physical. Our outward man is perishing. It will be changed when we meet the Lord. Though He quickens our physical body as He sees fit, our deeper present need is to be strong in our inner most soul; in our deep thoughts, in our passions, in our desires, and our motives, and our hopes and dreams. Do you feel and recognize your real need this morning. Oh that God may soften our hearts and open our eyes to see the hurting, and not just see, but feel, and care, and love, and help, and heal. This is the heart of our Lord and Savior. This needs to be my heart. I need a deep change within. I need a strength that appears and overcomes my weakness. I need His light to shine and glow within my dark soul. And as He answers my cry, changes begin to happen as my inner man is strengthened. The Lord of glory takes up residence in my heart, and makes His home with me. He begins to take control of my wayward affections, and subdue my selfish thoughts and desires. He rules and dominates my heart. He makes my innermost being His home. The joy and pleasure of His presence becomes my greater desire.

Now look at verse 17 and 18 – My heart, my innermost person, now being the dwelling place of Christ, is rooted and established in love. Are you seeing how God restores the love for Him and others that has been so weak? My responsibility is to humble myself and bow and ask my Father to strengthen me with His power, his eternal omnipotent supernatural Holy Spirit resurrection power, so that Christ can make his home in my heart. And when we are abiding together and I am living in loving submission to Him, then my root, my foundation, my center of gravity, my core value is His love. The same love that He displayed when He died for my sins. The same love that caused my Shepherd to leave the 99 and come after my lost soul. The same love that reached down into the mire and muck of my sinful state, and pulled me out and rescued me. The

same love that offered Himself to bear my sin and my shame and the punishment for my guilt. Yes, it is that very love that takes root in my life and begins to drive my emotions and my passions and my decisions and my actions. What I must do is pray and ask for this power to fill me, and fill my church family. Then I can begin to get my arms around how wide this love goes, that it extends to the whole world, to my enemies, to those who irritate and aggravate me; to understand how long this love is, long enough to cross the ocean to people I've never seen nor met, and high enough to reach all the way to heaven, and deep enough to go to the depths of the most depraved and wicked to set them free. This love is so strong that it cannot be defeated. Nothing can kill it. Nothing can stop it. It is the greatest power in the universe. It is God Himself. God is love. We must pray that we would be filled with an abundance and overflow of this love so that we will come to know this love that surpasses knowledge. This is an experiential knowledge that exceeds explanation and comprehension. I need to pray, you need to pray, we all need to pray that we would be filled with a complete and overwhelming fullness and abundance of God's presence, love, and fellowship. Full, overflowing, blazing, alive, amazing, and glorious. That we would be filled and consumed with the glorious love and grace of our Savior.

What I coming to understand is that what has been lacking is my humble asking God for this grace. This is nothing that I can earn. This is nothing that I can produce. This is nothing that I can merit. This is nothing that I can find within myself. This power and strength and supernatural understanding and enabling is a gift of grace that must simply be received.

Please give this to me. Lord, please give this to us. Please make your abode in our hearts. Take away and remove all that offends you. Open the closet doors. Take out the trash. And fill us with your fullness to an overflowing love and compassion for others that manifest in the practical meeting of needs. A kind word. A listening ear. A helping hand. A meal. Some groceries. A ride to an appointment. A card. A smile. A hello. A kind touch or hug. O Lord, fill me with your heart, with your presence, with your grace, with your mercy. I need you. We need you. This world needs you. Use us. Fill us. Overwhelm us. Seize us and overtake us.

I hope that you have been praying with me. So how can we expect God to answer such pleas for help, such requests for His presence and His enabling power to live this life of love and holiness? Look at verse 20. He is able and will do immeasurably more than all we ask or even imagine. He is going to do even more than what we just prayed!! And however He specifically answers these prayers, we can be sure that it will be empowered by His Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. As His children, this is the same Holy Spirit that is already at work within us. If we pray and believe that He will answer and change us, that He will come to make His home within the depths of our desires and motives, then He will come and fill us to a fullness that will overflow to all of those around us. If you ask Him for this, then you will begin to understand just how

deep and wide and long and high His love is. And His love will become your foundation, your root, your anchor, your guiding principle as you move through your daily life.

I encourage you to continue to pray this prayer for yourself and our church. I am asking you as my church family to pray for me that I would have this love, this zeal, this passion, this presence of the living Christ every day. I am certain that He will answer this in amazing ways for His glory.

**Hymn 415 – He Giveth More Grace**