

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her”

As we begin our study this morning we are once again given an analogy regarding a member of the family and Christ and the picture that it is in relation to Christ and His church.

Our first analogy was that the wife is to be submissive to the husband even as the church is submissive to Christ.

Here we are seeing the fulfillment of God’s teaching on the importance of the marriage relationship in that it pictures the relationship between Christ and His church.

In the Old Testament economy, the importance of God ordaining marriage as a unique and wonderful relationship that was not to be defiled could not be seen as a picture of its spiritual fulfillment between Christ and His church.

Even in the Gospel passages where Jesus teaches on marriage and divorce He takes its fullest meaning further back than whatever Moses taught and took it to “you have read, in the beginning”.

So, once again, the marriage relationship is a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church and it can only have its fullest expression in the context of the Christian home. This is why whatever civil law may say about marriage Christians are to be obedient to their objective and authoritative source, God’s Word, to understand marriage and the family relationship.

Now, what would the Ephesians have already known about the verse we are looking at when the letter was read to them. Did husbands love their wives? Was this instruction needed? Would loving your wife be something that was not a norm in the predominant culture in which they lived?

We have already determined that many marriages of the day may have been arranged and were not necessarily love matches. However, we cannot say that no man in the Roman- Greco culture never loved his wife. But we can say that this instruction from Paul to Christian husbands lifts this discussion of the husband's love for his wife to the highest plane. It does this because the husband's love for his wife is compared to the love that Christ has for his church, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her".

But, what did the Ephesian's know about the love of Christ for His church? Is this love explicitly and clearly described in this letter? Or, was it taught to them at the birthing of the church and the three years that Paul taught them the whole counsel of the word of God?

We have a few explicit verses about the love of God and Christ found earlier in the letter:

Eph 1:4,5 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

Eph. 2:4-7¶ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Eph.3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

So, there is mention of the love of God and Christ in the letter and it says that they know the love and the part it played in their salvation. Yet, there is not enough in these few lines of a letter to direct the husbands

to love their wives as Christ loved the church. An expression and proof of God's love exists in these lines of the letter but there is not enough information to find practical application from the analogy that Paul gives. Therefore, there must be some other knowledge, some objective truth that they have about the depth of God's love in Christ for them as believers that was taught them when Paul was with them. What he taught them we do not know other than from what Luke records in the book of Acts in chapter 20 that he taught them the whole counsel of the word of God.

Paul, in Eph. 2:4,5, wrote, In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will".

This is no different than what John writes in 1 Jn.5:9 "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. NAS95

I believe that we can presume, rightly, that Paul taught them of the greatness of God's love, from the Old Testament Scriptures, from the Messianic passages specifically, and others that showed the Christ, the Savior to be a suffering servant, a great Shepherd and so on. And added to this all that he knew of the teachings of Jesus as they had been revealed to Him.

So, for us to be able to comprehend the analogy more clearly, we need to understand the specific unique love that Christ has for His bride, the church, so we can understand how we as husbands are to love our wives as Christ loved and loves his bride.

We live in a time when even the blood bought church of Christ is struggling with what the love of God means and often times misrepresents this love in how the Gospel is presented. But even worse is

how it is practiced before a lost and dying world and worst of all amongst ourselves and in Christian marriages

I believe that our misunderstanding of the love of God is deeply rooted in a misunderstanding of the grace of God, which in turn means our understanding of God is weakest regarding doctrine, because the love of God is not rooted in subjective experience but is rooted objectively in God Himself and consequently must first be understood in our study of theology proper, the doctrine of God. And this is what Paul would have done.

For example, the general revelation of God in the creation reveals order and design and incredible beauty. Even atheists stand in awe of the Great Barrier Reef, the Himalayan Mountains and other marvels of what they call “nature”. But the amazing love of God that saves man from the wrath of God cannot be known through the general revelation. It is revealed through specific revelation and that is found in the Word of God, It is not found in the philosophies of men or in the teachings of human religious systems.

The attributes of God are first and foremost revealed in the Word of God. But we do see the results of God’s love lived out in the lives of those He has loved and it should have its highest expression in the love that a husband has for his wife.

In order to really understand what the love of God is, we have to understand the doctrines of the Bible that make it clear to us who God is, what God is and who we are in relation to Him. This is exactly what Paul would have done even as John did in gospel and first letter.

Paul wrote earlier in the letter that the love of God was made known to us through Christ, the Son of God. But in order for something to be revealed

it first has to exist. How did the love of God as part of His divine nature and attributes exist before it was revealed to them or us in Christ?

First, it exists amongst the Godhead. It existed and exists eternally between God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God takes absolute pleasure and delight in himself.

"But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.

" Psalms 115:3.

He can do nothing that is not right and according to all of His attributes.

Even the wrath of God upon the unconverted for all of eternity is right because God says it is.

The love of God is made known to us through Christ. If God is love and Christ is God, then Jesus knows what God's love is.

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." John 17:24.

And Jn. 17:26 tells us God loved Jesus, "And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them."

The "them" that Jesus is talking about are His disciples and all who will believe as they have, not those who will end as unbelievers.

God took absolute pleasure and delight in His son, "While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Matthew 17:5.

"Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles." Isaiah 42:1, speaks prophetically of Christ.

So, the love of God has eternally existed in and with and toward the Godhead. It needed to exist eternally because God is eternal. Although this love has its beginning and end with God, this eternal love did not exist only toward God. It already existed toward and for all who would be the children of God. It preceded our very existence.

The love existed and was in the predetermined will of God. It was appointed a time where it would be ultimately manifested towards those whom He loved,

This occurred when Christ came into the world that we might live through Him. God has always loved His people, before and after the cross.

After Adam and Eve's fall into sin in the Garden, He restored them by grace, and did not love them any less than Abraham, Moses, David, you or me if we know Christ as our Lord and Savior.

As a matter of fact, God has never loved you more or less than He ever did before or after your conversion.

There is nothing you can do to cause Him to love you as a child of God any more or less

than He ever has or ever will. (Note: we can please Him more)

He chose you from the foundation of the world, because Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world and God's love is ultimately expressed by the death of Christ on the cross for sinners who will believe in Him.

God by His wonderful grace saved us, not by any merit that we deserve it or by any works that earned it, but by grace alone through faith, which is a gift from God, Eph. 2:10. Paul echo's the same to the Galatians:

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

God's love is a constant and unchanging thing towards those who are His Spiritual people,

Jer. 31:3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.

Every true saint, before or after the cross was drawn to God by His lovingkindness. There were not two different ways of salvation, all salvation is by the grace of God, Paul knew this.

So, we can come to the conclusion that God's love is expressed above all other ways in the redemption of sinners. No matter how else God expresses or reveals His love, it is ultimately expressed in the historical fact that Christ, the Savior came into this created world for the purpose of satisfying the wrath of God through His atoning blood, so that those who are His, from the foundation of the world, will not perish but have everlasting life. Christ was sent, the apostle of love, the co-equal of God, the obedient Son, who also served.

He came with authority and a commission from God to complete that which God had ordained in His eternal and perfect wisdom to be the redemption of sinful men.

Christ came because only He could manifest the love of God as it needed to be done. He came into the world. Christ came in the flesh, to this corrupt and filthy and fallen world, that God had created perfect. It was now stained with sin. A world which still grows worse and worse because

of sin. But where sin abounds grace abounds even more and God still has a people that He is saving from sin and eternal condemnation and from His wrath, because that is what HE purposed in His wisdom.

Jesus coming into the world is the expression of God's love that leads to the ultimate expression, which is His propitiation for our sins at the cross of Calvary.

The theology of God's love demands that a sacrifice be made for sin and if that sacrifice is made, then there must be repentance associated with that sacrifice.

That is why God regenerates us: being born again is not the end result of conversion, it is the beginning of the conversion process. It is instantaneous. And as God by His mercy and grace has drawn us to Him, there comes the time of instantaneous regeneration of our spirit so we can believe and repent, based upon what we have heard from the word of God which produces faith by the instruction of the Holy Spirit. This is the initial conversion process from spiritual death unto spiritual life by the grace of God. Faith and repentance are both gifts from God. Salvation initiates with God and is completed by God. He truly is the Author and the Finisher of our faith. He is the one who begins a good work in us and is able to complete it. He is the one who is working to will and to do of His good pleasure in our lives and He is the one who holds us accountable for living out the inward life He has changed within in us.

The love of God is wrapped in the theology that is needed in order to know what the love of God is and what it did for us who believe. Until we believe, the love of God means nothing to us. But, we who believe, live

through Him because He gave His life to redeem ours, which manifested God's love.

We can only know ourselves in light of knowing who and what God is. If the love of God is so great that He would send Christ to die for us, then we need to know how great our sin is or we make a mockery of God's love, which makes a mockery of Christ's death.

This is love.

God loved us first.

As all things that were created originated with God, so did love. As all things that were created by a perfect God were perfect, so is His love. Until we know the love of God, by an act of His saving grace, we cannot love God. No man can love, that which He hates, and we all hate God, until we know His love.

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." Romans 3:10-12 and "There is no fear of God before their eyes." Romans 3:18

A few years ago, in Time magazine a feature article was on phobias. An in depth psychological discussion stated that large numbers of the US population are afflicted with arachnophobia, claustrophobia, chemophobia, hydrophobia, homophobia and many more. The most interesting thing to me was that Theophobia, fear of God, was not listed

Where there is no reverence and awe for God, according to His standards, there is no true love for Him.

Here is love.

Christ came and shed His blood so our sins would be forgiven. And not only our former sins, but our present and future sins as well.

What He did for us in the past provides the grace for the blood to continue to forgive as we confess our sins during our life as believers. Here is love.

These sins cannot undo what Christ has settled for us in eternity. Because we were totally unable to come to Him of our own ability, He chose us, without condition and died for us and drew us unto Himself and preserves us forever as His own.

Here is love.

By the Word and the Spirit He enlightens us to what is His will and He enables us, encourages us, and equips us to live according to His will. even as expresses in his prayer of

Ephesians 3: ¶ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Here is love.

We sin, every day, and it cannot, if we are truly saved, do anything to change our standing with God because we are alive in Christ and Christ is in the presence of the Father and we are risen together with Christ and seated in the heavenly places because our citizenship is in heaven and

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, Eph. 1:3

Our disobedience in our life in Christ only affects our temporal living. Certain benefits are withdrawn and withheld, conditionally. Others are unconditional and we cannot keep them from blessing our lives.

Here is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us.

"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Rom 5: 8-10 .

Paul in essence says the same throughout Eph. chapters 1&2

"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

These words were nothing new to Paul, the great Old Testament scholar and the apostle born out of time who was taught by Christ.

The love of God is rooted objectively in God himself and the word of God that reveals Him to us and it is subjective experience based on our personal knowledge of Him and personal communion with Him in and through the Word by His Spirit.

This is not all of what the love of Christ is for His church, but it gives us enough information to begin to see how can a husband love his wife even as Christ loves His church and we will hope to see that , next week.