

Sermon – 14/12/2008 am

Walk in Love

Study Text: Ephesians 5:2

The apostle Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter to the Ephesian church. One would think that the last thing on the mind of a prisoner would be love. Yet in this letter of only six chapters we find the word 'love' some twenty times. Paul cannot write about Christ without using the word 'love'. As *God is love* (I John 4:8), so Christ is love. The love of Christ surpasses knowledge. It is so wide, so deep and so high that we cannot comprehend it (3:18).

Those who know anything about Christ must know this love of Christ. Those who are in Christ must walk in this love. 'In love' becomes a key phrase of the apostle in this letter – we should be holy and blameless before God in love (1:4); we are to bear with one another in love (4:2); we are to speak to one another in love (4:15); the body of Christ is to grow in love (4:16); and now he tells us to walk in love (5:2).

It is impossible to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ without speaking about love—even if some try! The Pharisees knew nothing of this love. They were in bondage to the law. They walked in fear of judgment and wanted others to walk in the same fear. But perfect love casts out fear. *There is no fear in love; and he who fears has not been made perfect in love* (I John 4:18).

Paul was a Pharisee but he was converted. He cast off the fear of the law and put on the love of Christ. This is the gospel he preached. Do not walk in bondage to the law but in the freedom of Christ. Walk in love.

Walk in Love

The word 'love' has many shades of meaning in English. It is usually thought of the attraction between a man and a woman and in today's society not always differentiated from lust. Such love is self-seeking and even demanding.

The love the apostle speaks of in this verse is far removed from such love. In the language he was using there was a word for sexual love – *eros*. There was also a word for brotherly love – *philos*. But the word he uses here is *agape*, the word for the highest form of love, self-giving unending love. It is the love that is seen in Christ as Paul goes on to explain.

We are to walk in this love, the love shown to us in Christ. Paul continues to refer to living the Christian life as walking. We are on a journey. We are on a road, the road to our heavenly home. We are on the road which Christ laid out before us. We are no longer on the road to death but to life, eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Paul goes on in this chapter to speak about walking in the light rather than the darkness (5:8), walking in wisdom and not as fools (5:15). As we meditate on these words let us think about the road we are on. Are you walking in love, are you walking in the light of God's word?

Christ's Love

As Christ has also loved us (5:2). We are not left in any doubt as to what this love means. The world may have problems knowing what love really is, but not the apostle Paul. The definition of love in the Bible is very simple. It is one word-Christ.

How are husbands told to love their wives – as Christ loved the church (5:25). How are we to love one another in the church – as Christ loved us (John 13:34). Let us be very clear about this. When the Bible speaks of love, when the preacher speaks of love, do not think of love as the world thinks of love. Rather you must think of the love of Christ.

What is the love of Christ like? The first thing is that he has loved us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, loved you if you are saved. Did we do anything to deserve his love? – No! It is unmerited love. While we were still sinners, while we were his enemies, he loved us.

Remember Paul is writing to the church, to those chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (1:4). He does not say that Christ loved everyone in the world. *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son ...* (John 3:16) does not mean every individual in the world. We were all his enemies and some remain so because he has passed over them. What does the Bible say about Esau – *it is written Jacob I loved but Esau I hated* (Romans 9:12). In the same chapter we are told that Pharaoh was predestined to dishonour and wrath.

We all like sheep have gone astray. We were all objects of God's wrath but in his sovereign grace he chose us and set his love upon us. God who is rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, even while we were dead in trespasses, made us alive in Christ (2:4). God is love and in his great love he sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin. In the verse before us the focus is upon the love of Christ which is the same divine love but seen in a man, the man Christ Jesus.

How did Christ demonstrate this divine love? This is where many fall short of the glory of God. Many fail to see the measure of Christ's love. To be sure, Christ demonstrated love for his fellow man in feeding the hungry, healing the sick and standing up for the poor and oppressed. But was this all? Oh no! He was so passionate in this love he was willing to die for what he believed. Now that is great love you might say. That is great love says the world. This is the model more of us should follow. Yes indeed! But is that all; just to die for a good cause?

Did Jesus Christ simply die as the most wonderful man who ever lived? Is this his only legacy, along with the Sermon on the Mount? This is what my neighbour thinks and maybe your neighbour thinks. The other day he wanted some good Christian books for his grandchildren. I was happy to oblige, but sad to think of this man for whom the Bible is just a book about being good. He went to Sunday school, and learnt the few golden rules about living a good life.

Christ loved us and gave himself for us (5:2). What does that mean? He gave himself for us. It does not mean that he just gave himself as an example for us. It was for us, it was instead of us, it was in our place that Christ gave himself. In love he gave, he did not demand. He did not demand anything from us-we had nothing to give him anyway. Christ gave himself. He gave his all while we gave nothing. Jesus gave his life for us.

This giving of himself Paul explains with reference to the Old Covenant practice of sacrifice. His readers were predominantly Gentiles but he expected them to be familiar with the Old Testament anyway. Paul did not expect Christians to know only the New Testament. According to the law given through Moses, blood had to be sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place to make atonement for sin. On the Day of Atonement the priest took the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the ark. He did this because the penalty for sin is death. For death to be avoided a life had to be given. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness

Not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all having obtained eternal salvation (Hebrews 9:12). Christ gave himself the pattern of the Old Covenant offering and sacrifice. He offered up himself as the sacrifice for our sin – your sin and my sin and the sin of all whom he has loved from the beginning to the end of the world.

The sacrifice of Christ was the focus of all the animal sacrifices. It was above all those sacrifices a sweet smelling aroma to God. God was pleased with his total obedience. God was pleased with Jesus giving himself as the sacrifice for sin, for this was God's purpose in sending Jesus into this world.

Jesu was not the victim of man's inhumanity to man. He was not defeated by death, but in his death he defeated death, and the devil. In God's eternal purpose, by Christ's great love and obedience he went to the Cross offering himself as the sacrifice for our sin. This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.

Walk in love. Do you understand what the apostle is calling you to do? You cannot understand if you do not know the love of Christ. You do not know self-giving, self-sacrificing love until you know that Christ Jesus gave his sinless life as the sacrifice for your sin. By the sacrifice of himself Christ saved you from death and hell. By his sacrifice he gave you life, eternal life.

This is our position in Christ. We have been made alive in Christ. Now we are walking in Christ, and walking in Christ we should be walking in love. The love of Christ is infinite and we will never in this life attain to his measure of love. But we must focus on his love and strive to live up to the high calling we have in Christ. As you draw nearer to him you will know more and more of his love and you will find yourself walking in the love of Christ.

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