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Sermon preached by Mr. F. L. Gosden, at "Galeed" Chapel,
Brighton, Sunday morning, 28th November 1965

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"And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgement; that ye may approve things that are excellent, that ye may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God".

Philippians 1 v.9-11.

Paul tells us that he had the care of the churches daily upon him. O what an apostle he was! in each of his epistles you find him praying for the particular churches. What an example, how short one feels to come. And this church at Philippi had a very warm place in the apostles heart. It was a church established through his ministry by the Spirit; and he had this confidence that the good work which God had begun in them was the work of the Spirit and that it would be performed, or perfected, unto the day of Jesus Christ.

"This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more". He prays for this same thing, to the Ephesians he says there, "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth, the height and depth and to know the love of God which passes knowledge!" Everything really that is of God passes knowledge, surpasses human knowledge, as "No man by searching can find out God" and as the world by worldly wisdom cannot know Him, so the things of God can only a spiritual man know. They are foolishness to a natural man, however intelligent he may be, however advanced a scholar he may be, which knowledge and intelligence is useful to the things that are natural, but I believe indeed I am persuaded that we shall increasingly realise as we go on that there is nothing natural that can penetrate the spiritual. And this is one of his prayers - "And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more". This love is a spiritual love. There is a natural love, and a good thing there is, it seems the best rag that is left in fallen nature, human love, but it is altogether different from a spiritual love. A spiritual love is the love of Christ, indeed it is of the same nature and proceeds from the everlasting love of the Father. We shall never love God with our own love, we can only love Him with His love; and it is wonderful how in both the 15th and 17th chapters of John the Lord Jesus Himself shows that the love with which the Father loved Him is the same love wherewith He loves His people; and this love is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost.

Now if we have not this love of God in Christ, we are none of His, whatever we possess. O how discriminating and heart searching is that chapter, the 13th of the 1st Corinthians, where we get an inspired definition of true love. We may well read that chapter - rather it would be well if that chapter should read us, as to whether we really possess the love of God. Universal charity is a very great thing, "And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more".

As the natural sun controls all the laws of nature, all of them, so the love of God is the moving influence of every grace of the Spirit in the soul. Faith works by love, but we may easily be deceived, there is something to be distinguished between the love of God and personal liking. There are some people we may like and some people we may dislike, but personal liking cannot be substituted for this spiritual love, and we need, as I feel, to be very careful upon this point. There may be some people whose natural personality and temperament may be very irritating to us, but if ever we have felt the grace of God in their hearts we shall be able to surmount those things that are distasteful and esteem them the excellent of the earth. But there is a standard in the Word of God by which we may know whether our love is of God. The apostle Paul says, "By this shall ye know that ye love the people of God, when ye love God and keep His commandments". So that unless we love God, we have no right standard as to whether we spiritually love His people. But what a beautiful grace it is! It is the only grace that will remain after death. There will be no need of

faith in heaven, no need of hope, because the favoured soul will be put in possession of that for which he has hoped. "His expectation shall not be cut off", but love will still remain, "It knows no change but to increase", and

"Love all defects supplies,
Makes great obstructions small".

O that it was more manifest ! Alas how often small objections are made great because of the lack of love, and it is only that, that will endure unto the end and it is well to constantly remember that. If we have spiritual love, it is the love of Christ communicated to us. That love which many waters could not quench, nor the floods drown. Not all the temptations, sufferings, ignominies of the Lord Jesus could quench or drown that divine love that filled His heart. And it is well to remember this too, that the love of His people is not an imitation of His love, it is not a type of the love of Christ, but it is the actual love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost and as nothing could quench or drown that love of Christ, so where that love is, not anything, not life and all its changing scenes, not all the sufferings and temptations, vexations and calamities or persecutions will ever be able to quench or drown the love of God where it is. It is the secret why any endure unto the end.

Love is as strong as death. And the apostle, he was confident that these Philippians possessed that love of God in their souls. "And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more". So that there is a love that increases in experience. It is so naturally. An infant, it knows but very little of its parents, it knows enough to know where its comfort, its food, its rest, is, but knows but very little of its parents. But it grows, grows in love and in a knowledge of its parents, and so where this love is, there will be a growth. Peter says, "Grow in grace and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ", and loving is the main grace of the Spirit. Where there is no love there is no other grace of the Spirit. Indeed, that is true of every grace of the Spirit, you cannot have one and not have all, and to my mind it is a great encouragement to a poor sinner who feels that he is unworthy not only to be less than the least of all saints, but unworthy of the least of God's mercies. If you have the least you must have all, If ever the Lord should look upon you, you must have all that He is, He has nothing to do with a reprobate. He never speaks to a reprobate. O to have the least evidence in your heart that the Lord has had anything to do with you at all. Mercy if He has that much to do with us as to give us to feel our deep, deep need of Him, and I venture to say this, that the very least that He may have done for you has love in it. If He has brought you just to feel your deep need of Him by the conviction, by the Spirit in your heart of your universal sinnership, in that sense of your need of Him there will be an element of love to Him and ^{of} knowledge of Him of Whom you feel to need.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more". Permeate the whole soul, abound so as to reach every faculty of your being. O this would, and this alone would enable you to lay aside all guile and all malice and all hypocrisy, all evil speaking and evil thinking, that bitterness can never dwell where love is. "That your love may abound yet more and more". That it may spread in your soul and in your experience; and this can only be by a knowledge of Him whom you love. As for instance, "That your love may abound yet more and more in the Scriptures, and this will be in proportion to your experience. Experience grows; experience both with respect to our sinnership and therefore, our greater need in the sense of it of salvation, and in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus and His all-sufficiency, His divine ability, His sweet mercy, His invincible, saving, sanctifying, supporting grace, His justifying righteousness. In experience we shall grow in our sense of a need of Him in all these, His saving benefits. And the apostle prays that their love may abound yet more and more in knowledge. We shall never attain to a complete knowledge of the things of God, and never with respect to God Himself,

nor of Christ, and I am thankful to believe that. If we could attain to a full knowledge of God, He would cease to be God. He is incomprehensible, and you will be thankful for that. Your sins can be comprehended, your sins can be underbottomed by the love of God, the blood of Christ, the eternal Gospel, cannot be underbottomed, it goes down beneath the uttermost sinner, and the apostle prays that their love might abound yet more and more in the knowledge of Christ. Everything is in Him; it has pleased the Father that it should be so. It has pleased the Father in the covenant of grace that the Lord Jesus should be appointed the Head, the Foundation, that He should be appointed to become Man and thereby a Mediator, a Substitute, a Redeemer, and the apostle prays that their love, because this was the love of Christ in all His condescension, it was divine love that moved Him and for that same love to move us and for that same Spirit to guide us into the love of Christ, as this same blessed apostle prays for the Thessalonians, that the Lord would guide them into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ, and if you are led and this love grows in a knowledge of Him - not merely a historical knowledge, in word, as in the Scriptures, but in an experience of Christ, the Holy Ghost taking of the things of Christ and showing them bringing them into the heart, so that the Gospel is made a substance in your experience, nourishment to your faith whereby it grows, "And this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge". And this is greatly by the Word of God. It is what the Scriptures are given for, for a knowledge of salvation, a knowledge of the Saviour. Good news of the Gospel. Revealing Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Now does our love abound more and more in knowledge in reading the Scriptures? Do we grow? or are we continually children tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine? O what a mercy to be established, strengthened, settled, rooted and grounded in Christ, in the fertile soil of the Gospel. How deep is that soil, and as the Holy Ghost leads you about and teaches us so our faith will strike deeper and deeper in a knowledge of the Lord Jesus. We shall grow more and more with respect to the doctrines of the Gospel. We cannot grow with respect to the doctrines if they remain doctrines floating in the brain. Doctrine is like a prescription. You take a prescription to the Chemist, but if you keep that prescription and just read it, it will do you no good; and if you take this prescription, a divine prescription for every disease of the soul, revealed by the Great Physician, to read it will do you no good; what you need is the application of that which is prescribed, the very essence of it and therefore, there will be a growing in the knowledge of the Gospel in every one of its foundation doctrines.

To the Ephesians the apostle says, "Ye are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." Now the foundation of the apostles and prophets are the doctrines of the Gospel, and your love will unite you unto Christ in every doctrine. Love is a uniting grace. It is naturally, you can never be united to a person whom you do not love. But if you love a person there is the unity at once.

Let us look then at one or two of these doctrines which will unite us in love unto the Lord Jesus. The first foundation doctrine of the Gospel is the incarnation of God's dear son. We all know about it, but do you love it? Can you truly say -

"I love the incarnate mystery
And there I fix my trust".

Love will unite you unto Christ when you see that infinite stoop, that He condescended to lay aside, He veiled His glory, He never left it; that is impossible, and when He became man He did not change although He became what He was not before, He did not cease to be what He was, the eternal, immutable, infinite God the Son. I love, I do love that incarnate mystery. I feel myself so bad at times that I

fear I dare not express anything like love, but then right on the top of my sinnership, this ransom, this love that brought God's dear Son to take human nature for the very purpose to destroy the works of the devil, to redeem sinners, why my friends, it lays a foundation in the heart, the only solid foundation that can save a poor sinner who feels to be sinking in the deep mire of his depraved nature; and you will grow. O you will love the Lord as you view Him in human nature !

"Til God in human flesh I see
My soul no comfort finds, "

But when you see Him, by faith, a Man, a real Man.

"This I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in the knowledge of Christ". It is eternal life. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent", and you will feel it, you will feel sometimes your very faith growing, drawing, as the sun draws up the vegetation, the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, so under the means of grace, by the Holy Ghost's inshining, you will feel at times the very life of God in your soul and there is a living love in that life. It will draw you after Him. I know, I hope years ago, under the preaching of the Gospel you could almost sensibly feel ^{as} and you sat in the pew your very faith striking down unto Christ and your very heart lifted up to Him toward heaven, and there was a definite influence upon your spirit which was teaching to profit. Felt the vital benefit of the Gospel, as streams from the river of God flowing into your heart, love is in it.

I venture to say this, if you have got a religion without love it will not last, it will be quenched, it will drown. The sun of persecution will arise and it will wither up everything but the love of Christ in the heart. Paul so esteemed this love and in his experience he was persuaded that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord". Have you this persuasion? As you sit there and the Lord shows Himself through the lattices of His Word, as you sit and trace His goings and feel them and sometimes get a glimpse of your forerunner, is there underneath a persuasion, perhaps not at the moment, of your interest in that love, but you could feel, "I am persuaded that whoever is possessed of that love of Christ nothing will separate, and if you feel that how your heart will go out unto the Lord,

"O love divine how sweet thou art,
When shall I find my willing heart
All taken up by Thee".

"This I pray that your love may abound yet more and more". in the knowledge of Christ in the Gospel. And this will be an evidence of your union unto Him. We are joined unto Him. If the Scriptures did not reveal this and if it is not an experience that may be known and felt we dare not speak about it. It is amazing to me sometimes that poor insignificant sinners, withered blades of grass can be and are so united unto Christ by eternal union, by which they receive from His fullness all that He is and all that He has and that the benefit of all that He has accomplished and the benefit of all that His love has laid up for His people in heaven, O what growth this is !

"This I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge". I know when we look at a text like this and then look at ourselves, we may sink. What do you know? Well, Paul in this very blessed epistle, he says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, - forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto the things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus", not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after". You will never do more. The

experience, the knowledge of Christ as it abounds more and more is like the horizon, you look across the sea, you see the horizon and if you take a ship and go to the spot of that horizon, you will find there is still another horizon before you, and so it will be in the knowledge of God, you will go from horizon to horizon in your knowledge until you are favoured to reach that haven of rest, and then you will never know Him fully. Throughout the ages of eternity there will be an unfolding and a revelation of the glory of God in Christ.

"But this I pray that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge". So that in reading the scriptures you will go in the beginning, precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little, but there will be an abounding, an increasing, and there will be that before you that will draw you on. O this is the thing, Christ will be made precious, precious in your need of Him. Precious as you see the infinite sufficiency that is in Him, a sufficiency that lacks nothing. When you see the suitability of that fullness, that there is a fullness the nature of which is suitable to the state of your soul; suitable, not to righteous people, to sinners, and you will grow, grow as you grow up into Him in all things. That is a beautiful word of the apostle, not only grow up unto Him but grow up into Him, grow into Him as you read the word of God by the Holy Ghost, your experience will grow into the things that you read, right into them, and this is what the apostle prayed for, "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgement". The margin is sense.

There are spiritual senses as well as natural senses, and you will sense things out. This sense is an anointing. It is a standard of anointing by the Holy Ghost. We were reading at the prayer meeting about the Shepherd, "A stranger will they not follow for they know not the voice of strangers". Your knowledge will be in all judgement. If you grow in a knowledge in your experience of Christ in the Gospel, it will give you a right judgement of things, a sense of things. You will sense an atmosphere; and it is the only way that we can try the spirits whether they be of God, it is the only way that we can go on to the 10th verse, "That ye may approve things that are excellent", it is in good order, it is for love so to abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgement that ye may be able to approve things that are excellent. O this is an important text and when it begins to walk up and down in our hearts I know it makes me to feel to come lamentably short, my ignorance of the truth and of Christ is painful to me, shameful to me, makes it very difficult for me to come into the pulpit.

O but this prayer ! you feel to need it for yourself, I need it for myself, and this growth, this spreading, this abounding more and more of love is by exercise. We shall never increase and grow in grace by indolence, by being content and satisfied with a mere head knowledge of the doctrines of truth, you will never grow like that because there is no life there. It is only living things that grow, dead things may accumulate, an accumulation of dead religion is a poor affair; and he prays this prayer for the people because he was confident of this very thing, "that He which had begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ"; he was confident that the seed was sown and that it was germinating and therefore he prays that he might see it develop, grow.

O may the Lord give us to grow in grace and especially this grace of loving, more and more in knowledge and in all judgement.

Amen.

Transcribed verbatim and not edited for publication.