

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel, Brighton
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EPHESIANS 3 v 19

"And to know the love of Christ which
passeth knowledge, that ye might
be filled with all the fulness
of God"

The mystery of salvation is in the Person of Christ. The greatness, the awfulness, the sweetness, and the mercy of God, are all exhibited in, and flow from, the Person of Christ. Viewed nakedly, there is a terribleness in God. Viewed nakedly, I say, that is so far as it is possible to a creature to view Him. That He is; that His Name "I AM THAT I AM" expresses the awfulness of a Being so infinitely superior to ourselves, without beginning, immense, incapable of change, of increase or diminution; possessing the only free will that exists, and decreeing, and so decreeing, that what He decrees must come to pass. That His foreknowledge of things is founded upon His decree that those things shall be. That He created the world and upholds it by the word of His power. Man! O what is he? There can be no proper comparison between the infinite and the finite. Therefore, God has said of men, that they are but as a drop in the bucket, as the small dust of the balance, less than nothing and altogether lighter than vanity. Providece, we think we can play with, but it deals with us, it shapes us. We come, we come into this world, we fill the little niche allotted to us. We suffer, we do, we refrain from doing. We will go into this city and dwell there a year, and buy and sell and get gain, whereas it all depends upon a will secret to us, that controls us. Second causes, upon which we impinge, fixing our attention, forgetting the first cause, we blame if they are adverse, we praise if they are favourable. But what are all these things, but just instruments used by Him who ordained such and such things. O what is man! what are we? This congregation, what is it? Small dust, less than nothing and lighter than vanity. What room for pride is there? One proud man provoked God greatly once. He said, admiring the great city in which he was king, this is the great

Babylon that I have built, and we know what God did to him. O man forbear to boast. But there is that in God which is made, to a believing heart, unspeakably, sweetly, irresistibly attractive, God "in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them", making His only begotten Son "to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". There is no man on earth, who knows anything of God thus manifesting Himself, who does not feel some attraction to this God. According to the sight he has of God, in this particular, so is the attraction he feels in Him. The attraction I speak of is expressed in the Psalms, in that beautiful word - "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee O God". God is attractive, and the awfulness of His Being, and the terribleness of His decrees, and the greatness of His majesty, are all veiled to mildness. They can be borne, they are bearable, they are sweet. Have not some of you found that? The Apostle in this epistle so profound, so beautifully sets forth God in His dealings with, and for, His Church. The Apostle begins, early in the epistle, to bless God. "Blessed be" God, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". There God the Father had regarded men as lost, and in His eternal goodness purposed that a number, that no man could number, should be saved, and He gave this people spiritual blessings. They had lost their temporal blessings, had lost Eden, by sin; had lost the image of God by sin; had lost all right to His favour, by sin. And now He would give them other blessings of another nature, spiritual blessings, a heaven above, not another paradise on earth. "All spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ". And these are, as you know, predestination "unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself"; the obtaining of redemption by Jesus Christ. And how also all these things, as in Christ, were brought to pass and brought to light and made over to the objects of them - "according to the good pleasure of His will". In the second chapter the Apostle relates to the people something of their own experience - "And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins". You walked as others walk, you did as others are doing, lived as others are living, were under the same dominion of the god of this world, "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience". But the time came when God "who is rich in mercy, for

His great love wherewith He loved" you, called you. "You hath He quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins". And this quickening was an amazing mercy. It, as it grew in them in the power of the Holy Ghost, as life developed in their experience, brought them to this - "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ". And these Ephesians, thus taught, found they now had some experience of the Trinity. "For through Him", Jesus Christ, "we both", Jew and Gentile, "have access by one Spirit unto the Father". He brought them thus on their way, and now the Apostle, continuing this, his teaching, tells them that they are built on one only foundation - Jesus Christ - and that they are built on that foundation "together for an habitation of God through the Spirit". That the work of grace in them is like the work of a builder who is erecting a building. He brings stone to stone and bonds them all together, and the end is this, that God may dwell in them as in a temple. He is a prisoner for the sake of this people. He was the apostle of the uncircumcision, and for their sakes he was a sufferer, and was filling up that which was behind of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for His body's sake, which is the church (Colossians 1 v 24) and he will have them know how that God had revealed the mystery of Christ in him and other holy apostles and prophets. And part of it is this, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel".(Ephesians 3 v 6). And these people, dear to God, were also dear to the Apostle, and he had a fatherly, tender interest in them. His heart was with them and his prayers were for them. So he says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

What I would attempt, this evening, by the Lord's help, is to speak a little of

Firstly, the love of Christ

Secondly, the knowledge of it

and notice in the next place what the Apostle says about the love of Christ, that it "passeth knowledge", and what is meant by that, and

Lastly, his desire that these gracious people might be "filled with all the fulness of God".

I am to speak first a little of the love of Christ. It is the love of God, for Christ is God. He is one Person in the Trinity, equal with the Father and the Holy Ghost, in nature. There is a distinction of Persons in the Trinity but no difference in the nature of the Persons in the Trinity. One God. "Hear O Israel, the Lord thy God is One Lord." "I AM THAT I AM". That Name belongs to Christ. Said He, to the cavilling Jews, "Before Abraham was I am". Trinitarians, all of them, believe in three Persons, co-equal and co-eternal. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal. Not three Gods, One eternal God, subsisting in three Persons. The second Person is the Son, who, in the fulness of time, was sent by His Father, and freely came. And this Person, Almighty God, loves His people. It is the love of the Man Christ Jesus; yes, it is the love of the Man Christ Jesus, and what a love it was we shall see if the Spirit opens it to us. It was, first, a self-denying and emptying love. It is written of Him, by Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, that "He was in the form of God". The "form of God" means that He was God. Strictly, as we understand the word, and as we apprehend "form", God has no form. It is said to the Jews, by Moses, that when God revealed Himself to them they saw no form. God would have them worship Him without the aid, as men speak, of any form. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing"(Exodus 20 v 4) "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20 v 3). And the Lord Almighty, therefore, of whom it is said, and as I have quoted, was in the form of God, is God. Yet it is also declared that "He took on Him the form of a servant", was really a servant to Him, His Father. "Behold My servant". And what was He a servant for? "To serve in things pertaining to God". "Every High Priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God"(Hebrews 5 v 1). Ah, it is of vast interest to us, whether He served for us. There is no limit to the interest. If we have an

interest in this there is no limit to it; it is eternal. Awful is it to be destitute of an interest in this great word - "He took on Him the form of a servant". What must a servant be? Obedient. Was Christ? "He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross". It was an emptying love, self-emptying love. He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant....." (Philippians 2 v 7). Think of it, and may we know that. Go to Christ, by faith. See Him, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. See Him bowed beneath a load of sin, prostrate in Gethsemane's garden. Hear Him say to His Father, "If it be possible let this cup pass from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." There He is Almighty God, very man, in that one wondrous Person. As Paul says to the Corinthians, "the mystery of God". There was the "mystery of God" So the love of Christ was a suffering love. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." "God commendeth His love towards us in this, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly". The scene of suffering love, as set forth on Calvary, is beyond all words. No description that is adequate can ever be given of it by human tongue. The love of the Father in sending His Son and delivering Him to death, in inflicting just punishment upon Him. The love of the Son in freely yielding Himself to all that suffering willingly. O how willing was Jesus to die. And the love of the Spirit in qualifying His human nature, in itself a creature, but united to Deity. The love of the Spirit in qualifying that human nature can never be properly expressed. The love of Christ is expressed in His sufferings. He would suffer. Ought not Christ to suffer these things. And when Peter, in his ignorance of what Christ had come for, said that He should not suffer as He had predicted concerning Himself, Christ said to him "Get thee behind Me Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God". It was God's will, the will of the Father - it was the will of the Son - that this suffering should be. It was the suffering of a vicarious Person who was there for others. It was the suffering of a Person to whom sin had been imputed and therefore, suffering was necessary, was just. It was the suffering of a loving Person who, seeing that His church must, and could only be, saved by His death, offered Himself willingly, without spot to God. It was the love of One who, rather than that His children should be lost, would put Himself into their place, their exact condition under a broken law, and take on Himself

all the penalty and all the sorrow, all the guilt, all the grief, all the shame, and all the death due to them. It was the love of a husband who gave Himself for His wife, that He might sanctify her with the washing of His precious blood, and present her to Himself spotless, without blame or blemish or any such thing. It was the love of a Mediator who put Himself between an offended Father and an offending child, and who would open His mouth for the dumb and does open it, and will to the end open His mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. It was the love of a mighty captain, the captain of their salvation who, being made perfect through suffering, will bring them all home to Himself. The love of a mighty God who, on their behalf, becomes, in His own description of Himself, a man of war. The Lord is a man of war and He comes and intervenes for His children, takes on Himself their protection, takes them into His own hand and care and guardianship, and sees to it that no harm shall reach them, though suffering comes to them. It is the love of an eternal, unchangeable Lover, and His love is, like Himself, unchangeable, for God is love. If one could speak properly of this it would be attractive to spiritual minds. There is that in God, Jesus Christ, that does attract people and it needs but to be spoken of at all properly, under the help of the Spirit, to be attractive to those who feel themselves so unlovely, so unlovable, so unloving as all do who are taught of the blessed Spirit. Ah it is a great thing to a child of God to hope that he is loved of God. Now, said the Apostle in his prayer for these Ephesians - "I pray that you may know the love of Christ". I might add much to it if I had grace and wisdom.

I might speak of it as being a patient love. It was patient once as we read, when He went to His church and called her His sister and said to her "Open to Me, My beloved, for My locks are wet with the dews of the night". You would think, knowing something of His love, that she would have sprung up instantly on hearing His voice, and with much delight opened the door, but no, she was in bed, she had put off her shoes, and washed her feet, and how could she defile them. But Christ patiently bore with all that and, rather than be put off, He put in His hand by the hole of the door and left myrrh on the handle of it, the influence of His grace, whereby she was brought off her bed of idleness and brought to seek Him with earnestness.

It is a forbearing love. "Yea, many a time forgave He their iniquity and did not stir up all His wrath, for He remembered that they were dust, a wind that passeth away and cometh not again".

And one word more here, it is an amazingly devising love. Every husband who is worthy the name devises happiness for his wife. It is, as it were, a life to him as a husband to do and to seek to do that which will contribute to her happiness. And may not one say that this is the love of Christ? Has not all His infinite wisdom and goodness been, if I may so express it, brought to bear on this great matter? How shall He make His church happy? By sanctifying her. How shall He fit her for His presence? By justifying her. How shall He deliver her from her bondage? By buying her with His own blood. How shall He deliver her from all evil? By protecting her. How shall He bring her through her difficulties? By guiding her with His eye. How shall He supply her needs? Out of His own fulness. O what good has the love of God devised for His people. And how shall He lodge her? By preparing mansions for her. I go to prepare a mansion for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also.

In the next place, there is the knowledge of this. This is to be known; this is to be experienced. Christ is knowable; Christ's love is knowable. If we are ignorant of it, woe unto us. O but what is it to know this great love? It is to have the forgiveness of sins. It is to have intimations of His mercy. It is to see Him on the throne of grace, to hear His blessed voice, to hear Him speaking in trouble, as when He said of old "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest". There is love in every word that He speaks. His accents are accents of love. Having loved His own which were in the world, He spoke to them. He says to some - "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee". And when He lets out this, His love, into a sinner's heart, that sinner is acquainted with it, he knows it. How shall one describe the experience that is given, that is wrought in a sinner when the love of Christ comes? It is a warm, a powerful influence. It creates a glow in the heart. It creates wonder in the mind. O why this love to me? Rutherford said - "I did not love Him, but He would love me and I could not refuse to be loved, but I do

wonder that He should let such a black sinner kiss so fair a face." If you have ever had a little of the love of Christ let down into your heart by the Holy Ghost, you understand that language in some measure. "I did not love Him". O the bitter enmity of our hearts to Christ. O the sacred, wonderful change that a sense of His love makes at once in the sinner. He speaks a loving word sometimes - "Come unto Me" - when you may have been feeling - to whom can I go? Friends are of no use here, my burden is my sin. My sickness is in my soul, my fears are for eternity. To whom in such a case can I go? No courage perhaps to go to God until He says "Come unto Me I will give you rest". I have rest. I have got through my sorrow, my death, for you. Now come to Me and I, the Lord of life, the Prince of peace, will give you rest. And it is rest. They know it who have had it. It is rest, rest in God, rest respecting eternity, rest respecting sin, with respect to conscience. It is rest. They know it in their troubles. In the day when they cry unto Him He speaks to them saying - "Fear not". They know it in their dangers. Surrounded by dangers, He says to them - "Fear not little flock it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". They know it in their wants. He says to them - "Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; he shall never die". They know it in their weakness for the strength of Israel comes to them and helps them in their weakness. They know it under their temptations for He comes and says to them that He will rebuke the enemy and the avenger for their sakes, and will bruise Satan shortly under their feet. They know it as they feel their poverty, for He comes to them at times and causes them to understand that everlasting riches are made over to them. "Durable riches and righteousness" He gives to them.

That they might know the love of Christ. This is something beyond speculation. It is something different from, and much higher than, reason. It is a heaven wrought experience. It brings with it a sensation that the people of God alone understand. It works the most profound humility. It fills them with a sense, most deep, of their utter unworthiness. And yet, with all that, they have it in their hearts, a persuasion that God really loves them. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love". He lets them know it often in His providential dealings with them. By losses they gain, by trading they are increased. The Apostle Paul had some experience of this when

he said "Yea, doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them but dung that I might win Christ" It comes to them in a way of freeness beyond all expression. Sovereign is this love, freely given is this love, powerfully shed abroad in the heart is this love of Christ.

That ye may know the love of Christ. And sometimes it comes in a way of great surprise when people have been thinking and fearing that because of their sins and their deep unworthiness, surely, even if they get to heaven at last, they must walk the rest of their days in darkness. They judge themselves, and the Lord comes and surprises them with a love visit, and they see that His reckonings are not theirs, that their thoughts are so low. He says "My thoughts are not your thoughts neither are My ways your ways. For, as the heaven is higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts". And great is that surprise, and sweet is that surprise, and welcome is that surprise that the love of Christ gives them at times. I did not think this, said the sinner. I looked for more judgment, I looked for further chastening, I looked for deeper mortification, I feared further strokes of His hand, instead of which He has come and comforted me with love, and surprised me with love, turned painful providences into sweetness, and made me realise how good a God He is to deal so gently and so mercifully and so pitifully with me.

That ye may know the love of Christ. Yes, you will find it with your cross. The old enemy may have been trying to write hatred on your trial and God, the Son, will cause you to see love inscribed upon it. The old enemy has been trying perhaps to make you think that the rod that is on you is really a sword to cut you off, whereas Christ will come and let you see that what He has done was to make room for Himself, for His love and to make you more comfortably acquainted with it, more intimate with Him, who is a lover, an eternal lover.

That you may know it, not suppose it, not imagine it, not speculate about it, but to say it is here in my heart, shed abroad there by the Holy Ghost. Here as an influence, a power. Here as a

voice, here as a sweetness, here as a living fire in my heart, moving me to, causing me to, love Him in return. If you get this, let me tell you in one or two words somewhat of the effect of it. If the sun were to shine brightly tomorrow morning and you should turn your eyes to it and try to gaze there for a very short time and then turn your face away and look upon the earth, at some of its things, how would they appear to you? O so dim. The light that had played on your eye would be so strong as that these dark things would be darker. If you get a view of Christ loving you, dying for you, saving you, teaching you, leading you from your birth onward, calling you effectually, helping you many times, and sometimes holding the sweetest and most intimate communion with you, and you look at His Person all through good, great and glorious, on His work so perfect, on His righteousness so beautiful, on His grace so sanctifying, on His promise so confirming, on His blessed home prepared for you, so blessed and certain, what will time things be? More attractive than ever? No! More full than ever? No! More dim, less attractive. A thousand ties you may have. Love will loosen them all.

That ye may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, in its fulness. It is infinite. How than can you know it? Bless God, we can taste it, we can apprehend it in the power of the Holy Spirit, but we cannot comprehend it. You may take up a little of the sea and believe in the greatness and vastness and depth of the sea, and yet not know it. The love of Christ in its greatness passeth knowledge. We can measure it in some way - I will speak with reverence - we can measure it in some way. How? How far have you run away from Him? So is the length of His love manifested to you. How deep is your sinfulness in your own sense of it? So will be the sense of the depth of Christ's love. How high has your guilt risen in your own sense? So high, and infinitely higher, will be the love of Christ to you, and you will have some little apprehension of it. And the breadth of it - O how broad have our wanderings and our follies been, and yet what has covered them? Love has covered a multitude of sins, covered them all.

That ye may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge and be filled with all the fulness of God. The fulness of His grace, the fulness of justification, the fulness of sanctification, the fulness of the promise fulfilled, the fulness of the covenant which is

ordered in all things and sure. And eventually, the fulness of heaven's glory, worshipping a temple not made with hands, and living in the light of a sun that never sets. That ye may be filled with all the fulness of God. O how rich are the people who are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ Jesus.

AMEN.