

Divine Love

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[0 : 00] Let us look for a little while this evening at the subject of the love of God. And of course the love of God is in different aspects.

It is, you could almost say like holds in a fabric different ways in which it is expressed and different ways in which perhaps the different persons of the Trinity are involved in that love.

Because God is a Trinity, God is in relationship. And so every aspect of the Trinity, every person of the Trinity is involved in and with the love of God.

But I'd like us to begin this evening looking at verse 25 of Ephesians 5 that we read. Husbands, love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it.

The love that Christ has for his people, for the church, is a love which is prepared to sacrifice himself even unto death in order to secure their life, well-being, happiness, salvation.

[1 : 02] This is the love of Christ. It is a love way beyond what we can really comprehend. Again, we may think we get the gist of it, but it's rather like, rather like saying, the little bits we get of Christ's love, it's rather like saying, well, I can speak Japanese because I can pronounce the word Honda or Mitsubishi or something like that.

Yes, I may have one word, two words, but I cannot speak the language. We may understand little snippets of what the love of God or the sacrificial love of Christ is like, but we do not speak the language.

We cannot plumb the depths of it. We only know a tiny little fraction. Thanks be to God, that tiny little fraction is sufficient for here, for now.

But like all true love, that tiny little fraction, that tiny little seed grows and increases. As our knowledge of the love of God grows, so our love for the Lord and our place in the love of God increases.

So we have here with Christ, husbands, love your wife, even as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. So here we have, in the discussion of likening the love of Christ to the marriage bond, of which the earthly marriage bond is a pale reflection.

[2 : 22] It is, in a sense, in the proper sense, an imitation of the love and the relationship within God. Remember that the Lord said, let us make man in our image.

And so he made man, he said, male and female created he them. And so there is, in every married relationship that is a marriage in the Lord, there is these three persons, the husband, the wife and the Lord, are all directly involved in the marriage, ideally.

So we have this relationship, we have this trinity in the marriage bond, but it can only ever be an earthly reflection of that ultimate deep divine love.

But such is the love of Christ here, that the love that is being described in this latter part of Ephesians 5 is a love that is both headship and sacrificing of itself.

Sacrificing of itself to secure the salvation and the life of the bride, of his beloved wife. But headship here is recognised because Christ is the head of his church.

[3 : 27] He is able to do what we cannot do. And what we find here with Christ taking responsibility for that headship is taking with it all that that headship involves.

The necessity to lead, the necessity to expend oneself on behalf of the spouse, the necessity, if need be, to lay down one's life in death in order to secure the well-being of the spouse.

So it's love even unto death. And we have here, if you like, a reversal of what we find with the first Adam. With the first Adam, yes, no doubt he loved Eve as he ought to.

But what we find early on in their relationship is an abdication of the kind of love that took responsibility. The kind of love that took responsibility for headship.

What we find early on is Adam allowing Eve not only to take leadership in eating the forbidden fruit. That wouldn't have condemned mankind as a whole if he himself had said, No, no, the Lord said not to do that.

[4 : 36] He shouldn't have done that, Eve, but, you know, I'm not going to do it. So we're still going to stay as God's family. You just have to repent. See you're sorry and so on. But, you know, we're still staying as mankind. We're still staying, you know, in right relationship with the Lord because we haven't yet, as a whole, we haven't yet with headships and sinned against the Lord.

But, no, he followed our lead. Now, it's all right for husbands in the Lord to allow, you know, the wives to take initiative in, for example, the Shunammite with Elisha, where she said, you know, let's make a little room for him.

A big part, Elijah, I think it is. No, it's Elisha, I beg your pardon. Let's make a little room for him. And she set a room in the house and put in the table and the stool and the bed and so on.

And he said, well, what's to be done for her? What is she to receive by way of reward? It's her idea. Of course, she runs it by her husband. But he doesn't say, no, you can't do that because I never thought of it.

I'm not going to allow you to do something righteous for this prophet because it wasn't my idea. He says, well, yeah, if that's what you want to do, that's okay. And he approves it and he goes with her in that which is righteous.

[5 : 45] Just likewise we have in Proverbs 31, the virtuous woman, the virtuous wife whose husband can safely trust in her, who is keen, is content for her to lead in the way of righteousness and he to approve all that she does.

It's perfectly right for the way of righteousness to go. But of course, her husband approves and goes along with it. But in the way of sin, as Adam did, instead of taking his responsibility, abdicated responsibility and followed meekly in the way of sin, which of course was completely disastrous for mankind as a whole.

But this is the reverse of what Christ does here. This self-giving love is the kind of love which is the headship, as we say.

It is self-giving and sacrificial. But also it is the kind of love that doesn't have to throw its weight around. It is that kind of love which exercises its authority through love.

And mentioned in the past, of course, we can say it again with all you reverence, Jesus was a man who, he describes a man, obviously God-man, but a man who literally had women falling at his feet.

[7 : 03] Not in the sensual sense, but they literally did. They fell at his feet, they touched the hem of his garment. They fell at his feet, weeping over his feet and anointing them with ointment and so on. They fell at his feet, pleading for healing or help or someone to be raised from the dead.

And they always had gratitude afterwards when he was able to help them. And he never once abused or used wrongly that power and that influence that he had.

They knew they could trust him. They knew they could rely upon him. They knew they could pour their love into this God-man and it would not be trampled up. It would not be abused.

It would not be taken for granted or misused in any way. That's the kind of love and trust that one needs to be able to have in one's spouse and that the wife must need to have for the husband.

So this is the kind of love Christ has for his church. It is likened to the love of the husband and the bride. Of course, we could go into the Song of Solomon and the greater expressions of that love between both the beloved and the lover and so on.

[8 : 14] But of course, God is not just one person in the Trinity. He is three. John 4 tells us God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

Now, we don't have explicit references to the spirit showing his love for the church or for people or whatever in this way or that way. But in some ways, we do.

I mean, for example, 2 Timothy tells us, chapter 1, verse 7, A spirit of love is not, then, as we see here, a spirit of wishy-washy sentimentality.

It's not all romantic hearts and flowers and no good for anything practical or physical or realistic. It's all so sort of head in the clouds and all lovey-dovey and so on. There's a place for romance.

And as we mentioned, the Song of Solomon is full of that. But rather, the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind. Notice how those three are mentioned together. It is a spirit of power because there is nothing more powerful than the love of God.

[9 : 25] And God is a spirit. And it is of himself that he has given us. God has not given us the spirit of fear, but the spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.

The spirit of Christ, the spirit of God, is a spirit of love. It is a powerful spirit of love. And it is not such a spirit of love that causes you to lose your mind, but rather such a powerful spirit of love as enables you to gain control of your senses, your mind, your faculties, your logic, your brain, to see the reality of the truth.

And the truth, which perhaps you are blinded to in a state of unbelief. But rather, the love of God, as given by this spirit of love and of power and of a sound mind, is that which enables you to assess the evidence realistically, to recognize the truth of what is presented in creation and science and biology and physics and all these other things, to see how it all fits together.

How it all declares the glory of the creator. How it all points us to the Lord. How the very work of salvation history points us to the fulfillment in Christ.

How the hopelessness of false religions point us to the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. It is not to be fearful of the word. It is not to be fearful of losing that which we trust most and build our hopes upon because that will all be taken away from us ultimately.

[11 : 01] God has not given us the spirit of fear. But rather, the things that we fear to lose, they might sometimes stop us from committing ourselves to Christ.

The things that we fear to let go of and fear to lose when we finally lay them down at the foot of the cross. We are unable to discover that far from losing them, we are unable to take them up again in the service of Christ.

And for his purpose and for his kingdom, God has not given us the spirit of fear. We were terrified of, oh, I don't want to give up this. I don't want to give up that. I don't want to lose this. I'd love to be a Christian, but I don't want to let go of this thing.

This favorite thing, or maybe this favorite sin, or this favorite possession, or whatever. When you finally lay it down at the foot of the cross, the Lord will enable you to take that which is good and wholesome in what you had and were before and apply it to his service.

And that which was sin, he will take away from you. But he will probably find a way in which you can be fulfilled and satisfied wholesomely and in a good way with other things he will give you, which satisfaction and fulfillment you were seeking in this sin before.

[12 : 15] He will make it more perfect, more good, more wholesome to you. It is not a spirit of fear. That is not from the Lord. But a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.

This is the kind of love it is. Not a love that causes you to lose your mind. But a love that causes you to regain control of your senses, your mind, your brain, your powers of reasoning.

Paul writes to the Romans in chapter 15 and verse 30. Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit, that he strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

Because of the love that the Spirit puts in our hearts, let's pray for one another. You pray for me as I'm praying for you. I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake and for the love of the Spirit.

Whose spirit is it? It's the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of the Father and of the Son. The power of the Holy Trinity. For the love of the Spirit, that he strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.

[13 : 23] Such is the love of the Spirit. A Spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind. The Lord Jesus Christ desires that his children should, his people, his church should enjoy that love which exists between the different persons of the Trinity.

Jesus, remember, prays for his disciples in John 17. The last two verses we read, The love of the Father, The love, in other words, that the Father has for the Son, may be in these his disciples.

And he himself also in his disciples. So that in loving them, the Father is actually loving his own Son, Christ, whom he sees in them. That's what he's saying.

I declare unto them thy name, will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them and I in them. This is part, again, of the Spirit of power.

The powerful love that the Lord has for his people and ultimately for his only Son, Jesus Christ. You see, it's this power that is promised with the Spirit.

[14 : 48] Remember what the risen Christ says to the apostles in Acts chapter 1. But ye shall receive power. Verse 8 of Acts chapter 1. Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you.

And ye shall be witnesses, Anthony, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and at the uttermost part of the earth. That is the love of God, a Spirit of power, of love, and a sound mind you receive that power when you receive the Spirit.

But of course, the love that a husband has for a wife, you know, and a love of a spouse and so on, there's only one, if you like, shortcoming with that in terms of explaining God's relationship to us. And that is that, of course, husbands and wives in an earthly sense do not have any blood relation. They don't share the same DNA. Out of their union there will come, one trusts in many cases, children who will have DNA from both of them and will be a blood relation of both their mother and their father.

But if there are children, then they come from the parents and so they share their blood. But the husband and the wife do not themselves share any blood relation. So there is a sense in which they are, although they become one, they are two separate entities.

[16:07] So it's not sufficient simply to explain the relationship and the love of the Lord for his people in terms of a union and a marriage.

Because there is that little bit that is lacking. And yes, it's the closest, deepest, most intimate human relationship you can have in this world. But there is a sense in which it's not quite complete.

Because the Lord desires us to have, as it were, his DNA. To have not only his spirit, but as it were, his very precious blood flowing, as it were, in our beings.

If I can say that reverently. We are to become, in other words, not just the bride of Christ, but the children of God. So that we have his DNA in us.

We have that close relationship, that blood relationship, if you like. Even though we'd have to qualify that and say, of course, we're not his children by nature. We're only his children by adoption.

[17:10] But at the same time, Christ has become man. So that he can represent us at the throne of grace. So that we are, in a sense, his brethren.

1 John 3, of course, verse 1. Familiar verses, I know most of you will be familiar with. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us. Now we've talked about the love of Christ. Giving himself for his bride. We've talked about the love of the Spirit. Spirit of love and of power. Now we're talking about the love of the Father. Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.

Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God. And it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him.

For we shall see him as he is. We won't just be like him because we'll see him. But we shall be like him because we are made his children. We should be called the sons of God.

[18:19] And now are we the sons of God. How does he make us his children? He makes us his children by becoming our Father. This is the relationship of the Father, Son and Spirit.

And desires to express that love through the sonship of Christ, which lays his life down for the bride and the church of God. But at the same time wants that same church of God to be part of the body. Not just united in a way, a husband and wife are united. Yes, one flesh. But still they are two kind of distinct persons. But he wants them to be part of the body of which he is the head.

He wants them to be children of his Father. These different aspects. These different, if you like, different colours in the one rainbow, you might say.

Is there seven rainbows? Or is there just one bow up there in the cloud? There's only one. But it has different aspects. As I mentioned in the past, if you were to look at the rainbow in the sky, you'd say, oh yes, you can see the different colours there.

[19:20] But you say, well, where does the indigo actually end and the violet begin? Where does the blue end and the green begin? You have an awful job sort of separating them out distinctly.

Because they sort of blend into each other. And such is the nature of the love of God. Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God.

Now some translations put the children of God, which would of course include daughters too, which is fine in a gender sense. The only thing that that has missing is the sense, the understanding that we are made honorary sons because sons inherit.

Sons inherit all that is laid up. That's the understanding of the ancient world. So we're made inheriting sons, honorary sons.

Now God has made us his children, his sons. Therefore the word knoweth us not because it knew him not. Now are we the sons of God. It doesn't yet appear what we shall be. And when he shall appear, we shall be like him.

[20 : 25] And most of us have become more and more like our parents as we get older. We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Now of course, if this love of God in his spirit, in his fatherhood, in his sonship and husbandship, if you like, his bridegroom state which gives his life for the church, if God is pouring out his love in such abundance upon us, then that likewise is going to change the kind of people that we are.

We read in 1 John 4 verse 16, We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love.

And he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. We can't have hatred for one another. We can't have scorn and indifference to one another.

We have to have love for one another if we're going to be the children of God. There's no other way to be the children of God except to have his love flowing through us.

And Jesus could see and identify in his day, you know, those hypocrites amongst the Pharisees. I'm not going to say all the Pharisees were hypocrites, of course, because there was the likes of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus and no doubt others, who were genuine in their seeking after the Lord, genuine in trusting the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 54] So they were all hypocrites. But he could tell the ones that were because they had not the love of the Lord in them. They didn't think they had anything that needed forgiven. As Jesus says, you know, he who loves little has been forgiven little.

That's why the woman that wept over his feet, you know, she had been forgiven much, so she loved much because she's been forgiven much. But, you know, he that hasn't been forgiven much, he doesn't love much.

And he could see the absence of the love of the Lord. Verse 8 to 1 John 4. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love.

You see, we talk about the love of God, and that's true. And the way that that love is expressed in fatherhood, in husbandship, in the bridegroom, and also in the way in which the spirit dwelling within us gives us that power, that clarity, and that loving impetus there.

God is a spirit. We have to be indwelt by his spirit. But we cannot, if we are indwelt by that spirit, do anything other than love the Lord and love one another.

[23 : 03] He that loveth not, knoweth not God. For God is love. And I often quote, of course, from James chapter 2, verse 19, it says, you know, you believe this one, God?

Well, great, you're doing well. The devils also believe and tremble. They know the reality of who God is and what he's like, but they hate him.

And when the Lord Jesus would come into the presence of a demon in Nazareth, a Capernaum, and they all scream and say, oh, what are you doing to us? You know, have you come to torment us before the time?

They know who he is. They believe in him, all right, but they do not love him. And because they do not love him, they cannot be of God. Because the love of God, if it dwells in us, will cause us to love the Lord and to love one another.

He that loveth not, knoweth not God. For God is love. Different aspects, different expressions, different persons of the Trinity. There are three persons in the Trinity.

[24 : 01] There are different ways of expressing that relationship. And sometimes one is more prominent than the other. Sometimes we are encouraged to become as little children and to recognize the fatherhood of God and the sort of big brother nature of Christ.

Who's not ashamed to call them brethren. Other times we may be filled with our mood by the Spirit and with that power and clarity to love the Lord and serve zeal a bit. Seek to outwork that love in practical ways for one another.

Different aspects of the love of God expressed in different ways. But at the end of the day, it's one way that we can identify the true God if he dwells in us.

Because God is love. That doesn't just mean, oh, I love everybody. It's just everything's okay. And let's all say everything's of equal value. Everybody loves something.

Everybody loves somebody. You know, Hitler loved his dogs. And other people may love to do certain sports or whatever. Love coffee or love whatever it is. That's not the love of God.

[25 : 03] That's just a taste, a desire and an affection for certain things. It's not the power of love. The power of love is of God alone.

And even human love, which may be genuine love, is simply a reflection of the love of God.

Because we have the remnants of, if you like, the divine initiative still in us.

Because even in our fallen state, we are still made in the image of God. Even if we deny him, even if we reject him, we can't take that image altogether. We can't remove altogether these little sparks of love that are still there for somebody or something.

Any little thing, any little thing that is in us, that is love, is ultimately of God. But it won't be the love of the Lord necessarily. It won't be the genuine love for others unless his spirit dwells within us.

He that loveth not, knoweth not God. For God is love. It is the different expressions. It is the different aspects. But it is all, whether three persons or all the different children of God, one God, one love, and one desire to have his children, his body, his bride, with them in glory of the last for all eternity.

[26 : 23] And to that end, he is outworking his purposes in every age of the church of God since the fall. And will continue to do so in every age right up until the close of time.

And somewhere on that line, we find ourselves humbled by the knowledge that as the Lord outworks his purposes of love and calling and grace in that spirit of power, love in us, our mind, he is condescending to choose and to use in this present day, even the likes of us.

Such love, way beyond us, that thanks be to God that he has it. Let's pray.