

LOVE FOURSQUARE

"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." Ephesians 3:18-19.

Paul's prayers are among the most precious portions of the inspired Word. The words of our text form the consummation of Paul's most beautiful prayer for the Ephesian Christians. This prayer refers back to the great realities Paul has been presenting. In view of the grace which has imparted new life to his readers, Paul prayed that they might discover, by the Spirit of God, the inner life; that Christ might dwell in that inner life; and that they might be rooted and grounded in love. He prayed that this divine indwelling might result in a fuller knowledge and in a deepening spiritual experience of the presence and the love of Christ. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" denotes a permanent residence, an abiding presence. The petition was to the effect that Christ might possess the entire being, purifying the affections, enlightening the understanding and controlling the will.

These words show us how intensely Paul was permeated with and dominated by the love of Christ. To him the love of Christ was the most real and the most absorbing thought in the world.

There are two thoughts in the petition: He prayed that the Ephesians might be able to comprehend the love of Christ in its four dimensions and that they might have an experimental knowledge of it.

Paul prayed that his readers might be rooted and grounded in love, that is, that they might plant their lives in the love of Christ as the farmer plants his seed in the soil. As out of the sunshine and the soil the seed draws that which produces its fruit, so out of the grace of God and the love of Christ we will bring forth clusters of service which will be both a joy and a benediction. We cast our affections down into the character and the Being of God; we wind them about His attributes; we strike them into His promises; and we drive them deep into His faithfulness. There the roots of our affections lie, absorbing and assimilating the love in which they live.

Paul prayed that believers might know the love of Christ, and in the same passage said that it passes our knowledge, that it is something that cannot be known. How can one know the unknowable? How can one comprehend the incomprehensible?

How can one know the love of Christ if that love passes his capacity to know it? The answer is that we may know experimentally and savingly that which can not be known scientifically and exhaustively. Experimentally we may know the love of Christ, but we cannot know it exhaustively. To realize personally, experimentally and vitally the love of Christ is the privilege of the child of God.

One almost shrinks from attempting to speak or to write on the matchless, unfathomable love of our blessed and adorable Lord. While we cannot fully grasp His mighty and eternal love, our hearts can enjoy it, and we can ever know more of it. Concerning Christ's love, which is foursquare, let us consider each of its dimensions.

I. The Breadth Of It.

How broad is the love of Christ? How vast is that field upon which it is bestowed, and for which it provides. The breadth is world-wide. The breadth is seen in His reaching out divine mercy to all sinners who are far off from God. It extends to all races and ranks of mankind—not to the Jew only, but also to the Gentile, to kings upon their thrones and to slaves in their dungeons. "God so loved the world." That is the breadth of His love. Every human being is within the circle of His love. There is not one of the whole human race who is shut out from its embrace. He does not

desire the death of any man. He has an attitude of good will toward all men.

The term "breadth" suggests to us the extent of Christ's love, the vastness of the field for which it is designed and for which it provides. He loves all creatures; not one is excluded. Go to the heart of Africa, and you will find it there! Go to the islands of the seas, and you will find it there! It is a love that knows no distinctions of race or condition. It is like God's sun in the heavens shining everywhere and upon all, so that we can say to every human being on the earth: "Jesus Christ loves you and died for you." His love is world-wide. It is as broad as the necessities of the world and as the expanse of the nations of the earth. The Lord Jesus Christ, "by the grace of God, tasted death for every man," and His gospel is to be preached to "every creature."

There are two valid ways of arguing about the love of Christ, and both of them need to be employed by us. We have a right to say, "He loves all, therefore He loves me." And we have a right to say, "He loves me, therefore He loves all." For surely the love that has stooped to me can never pass by any human soul. What is the breadth of the love of Christ? It is as broad as mankind; it is as narrow as myself. As F. W. Faber said:

"There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.

"There is no place where earth's sorrows
Are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings
Have such kindly judgment given.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the Heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

"If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word;
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord."

His love is so all-inclusive that it takes in every person in this world. He does not want any of you to be lost. He wants you to reach the maximum of your life. He wants to give you peace, joy, happiness and blessings, but He cannot do so unless and until you let Him enter your heart. Because He loves you, He wants you to know Him and to enjoy all the blessings He has for you.

II. The Length Of It.

This term "length" suggests the continuance or duration of His love. The love of our Lord antedates the foundation of the world. It was love which brought Him down from the glory which He had with God into this sin-cursed world, which He entered as a creature. He said, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." This love is not only without beginning, but also without pause. There is never a moment when Christ ceases to love His people.

The length of His love is illustrated by such passages as these: "Christ died for the ungodly." "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." His love is as "long as the longest road; as long as the longest day; as long as the

longest night; as long as life; as long as eternity." It is not a thing of today, suddenly awakened, and that may be just as suddenly laid aside. You may look back, but you will never see its commencement. You may look forward, but you will never see its termination. It lives from eternity to eternity.

To what length will the love of Christ go? On one occasion a plague broke out in Marseilles, France. The chief surgeon, Guyon, called the physicians of the city together to consult about the best means to stamp out the scourge. He said, "The one way to prevent this city from becoming a cemetery is for some man of us to go in and sit down by a case and study it in all its nature and progress, and then after death dissect the body and locate the germ. Who is ready to make the sacrifice?"

The physicians sat there, stunned with the truth of his statement. No one volunteered, for all knew it was the price of their lives to make such a study. Finally Guyon arose and said, "At noon tomorrow I will meet you here, and bid you goodbye. I will go into the plague-infested house and pay the price for the salvation of Marseilles."

The following day he bade his colleagues goodbye and, with laboratory instruments, entered the death chamber. He made all observations while life was in the body, and then dissected the body after death. Completing his diagnosis, he opened his own vein and, dipping his pen in his blood, wrote out the nature of the disease and then the remedy. Dipping the prescription in vinegar, he mailed it to his colleagues, and in seventy-two hours the plague had ceased. He was the last victim of the scourge.

Marseilles erected a monument to his memory because by his death he became the human saviour of his city. Jesus sat down by humanity and saw that its spiritual disease could be healed only by the cross. He wrote out the remedy for sin in His own blood.

In Macao, China are the ruins of an old cathedral. Upon looking at the ruins one observes a cement cross on top of the facade of the building, standing a hundred feet in the air. In the year 1825, Sir John Bowring, the governor at Hongkong, visited this spot. He was a Unitarian in his thinking. He paused and, looking up at the cross that had withstood the euroclydons and typhoons for three hundred years, and being a poet, he suddenly saw the meaning and message of the cross. He took his pencil and pad and wrote the hymn:

"In the cross of Christ I glory,
Towering o'er the wrecks of time,
All the light of sacred story,
Gathers 'round its head sublime.

"When the woes of life o'ertake me,
Hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me:
Lo! it glows with peace and joy.

"When the sun of bliss is beaming
Light and love upon our way,
From the cross the radiance streaming,
Adds more lustre to the day.

"Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure,
By the cross are sanctified;
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that thro' all time abide."

This poem has become one of our stately hymns in American worship. It enshrines the very heart of Christianity. It unveils the love divine. It invites you to come by way of the cross into the Father's love.

III. The Depth Of It.

Let us consider the love of Christ as stooping to look upon such an insignificant creature as man. View the depth of that love in raising sinners from condemnation and ruin. We begin to see the depth of the riches of His love when we reflect on the marvel that the Lord should have loved us at all. The depth of the river of love is best seen in the fact that the Lord Jesus became a man and died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. The wrath of God spent itself on His blessed head.

A sinner cannot go too deep in sin for the love of Christ to reach him. "That whosoever believeth on him should not perish." That word "whosoever" unveils for us the depths of His love. No soul can sink so low that this love cannot reach down to him, save him and transform him.

One of the finest sentences in the English language outside of the Bible was written by Gilbert K. Chesterton, in his book on the outstanding characteristics of the creators of literature in the Victorian era. In this book he attempts to set forth each literary genius, not only in his productions, but in his spirit. When he came to Browning, he said: "Browning was a friend of outcasts whom the outcasts had cast out." That spirit of sympathy and good will is the spirit of Jesus. They never sink too low nor rise too high for Him. All are included in the word "whosoever." The depth of Christ's love is such that it goes down beneath all human necessity, sin, suffering and sorrow. His love is incomprehensible in its depth.

IV. The Height Of It.

The love of Christ, even in this present life, is a height unspeakable, for it has lifted us up to become the children of God. "And if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." Yet, the height of this love will be seen best in the future life. By its height we may understand the lofty altitude to which it raises men in their completed redemption; the infinite dignity which shall be theirs as children of God. The way to measure the height of His love is to begin at the foul abyss of evil and go up to His throne.

A mother's love for her son may not soar any higher than wealth, power or distinction. Her love for her daughter may cause her to desire that she be beautiful, graceful, admired, and then be able to marry well and have a comfortable home. Love's aim always determines its height. That being true, look at the aim of Christ's love: "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." It was the goal of His love that we should share His glory. Such love is infinite in its height. Moreover, His love will never fail.