

The Wicket Gate Magazine

A Continuing Witness



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Paul's Prayer for "Love Abounding" (Pastor's Letter May 1972)

My Dear Friends,

The prayers that the apostle Paul was in the habit of offering up for the churches to which he addressed his letters are full of great significance, chiefly from the point of view that they give us an insight into the great apostle's mind with regards to the things that he considers the particular churches, and the church in general, stand most in need of.

We can never imagine the great apostle ever wasting breath, not even in prayer – that is, as far as requests go – and we can thus be assured that the items which he bears up before the throne of grace are items which have come to occupy a large place in his catalogue of church necessities and priorities. "And this I pray," he writes to the Philippians, after he has informed them that he has, indeed, been praying for them; "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." The prayer continues, of course, to include other things, but it is, surely, not without significance that he places the virtue and grace of Christian love right at the beginning of his prayer and places it as the grounds out of which the other graces that he mentions must spring. This is absolutely basic, of course: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, " and so forth. But, never was a word more debased and more misused in our day than the word which the Holy Spirit of God has employed in the Scriptures to speak of this Christian grace. No wonder the apostle Paul is praying for the Philippians, not only that their "love" may abound, but that their "love may abound yet more and more *in knowledge and in all judgment.*" In other words, Paul's prayer for the Philippians is that they might have an intelligent and discerning love abounding in all the affairs of their Christian life and testimony. And such a prayer requires to be prayed and answered in the churches of Christ today every bit as much as when the apostle wrote to those believers in the town of Philippi.

The first piece of discerning knowledge that so many appear to require today is just what is meant when the Holy Spirit uses the word love throughout the scriptures of the New Testament. There were three words in the Greek language which He may have used, but the fact that He chose only one to the almost total exclusion of the others is in itself full of significance.

The first word is EROS, from which comes that word “erotic” which is so much in vogue today. Eros stands for a purely “physical” love and is related to those actions and emotions which surround a purely physical love. It is the love that exists in a courtship, or in a marriage, and which, to some degree or another, exerts itself even within the bounds of the true Christian courtship or marriage, yet it is found nowhere in the pages of the New Testament.

The second word is PHILIA, and stands for that “brotherhood” kind of love which cements people together around an object of mutual interest or devotion. Christianity would appear to have a large degree of this “mutual object” kind of love about it, and yet, the Holy Spirit of God has seen fit even to largely discard this apparently fitting word and employ one word almost exclusively to describe this love that pertains to God and all the things of God. The word is AGAPE, and denotes that love which God is in Himself and which He displays according to the good pleasure of His will. Those who have been born again of the Spirit of God became partakers of this love (in quality, although, of course, not in quantity) and so, it is said of us that “we love him, because he first loved us.”

It is this pure Christian love, then, that the apostle Paul prays that the Philippians might abound more and more in. And one of the crying needs of our day is that we would endeavour, by all means, to abound in love, but to ascertain, as much as lies within us, whether or not it is pure Christian love – agape – and not eros, or even philia, that is dominating our thoughts and actions. It is, perhaps, easier than we imagine sometimes to allow the emotions and feelings of eros, or philia, to become substitutes for this agape.

The late A.W. Tozer was a prophet that didn't have a lot of honour in his own land, or any other for that matter, but whose discernment of the growing trends in evangelical Christianity has now been abundantly

vindicated in the advent of pop opera and such like which absolutely reek with the allurements of eros. “The influence of the erotic spirit,” wrote Tozer, “is felt almost everywhere in evangelical circles. Much of the singing in certain types of meetings has in it more of romance than it has of the Holy Ghost ... religious fiction also makes use of sex to interest the reading public, the paper-thin excuse being that if romance and religion are woven into a story the average person who would not read a purely religious book will read the story and thus be exposed to the gospel ... The notion that Eros can be made to serve as an assistant to the Lord of Glory is outrageous. The ‘Christian’ film that seeks to draw customers by picturing amorous love scenes in its advertising is completely false to the religion of Christ. Only the spiritually blind will be taken in by it. The current vogue of physical beauty and sparkling personalities in religious promotion is a further manifestation of the influence of the romantic spirit in the Church.

How true is this of our day goes without saying. And yet, how every one of us needs to be aware of the influence of eros usurping the place of agape in our lives. In Christian living and thinking there is no place whatsoever for erotic love to influence us in the things of Christ. The love that is even to exist between the Christian husband and wife – “Husbands love your wives” – is the same love with which Christ loved the Church. (Ephesians 6:25) and that is not eros love, and means that even the husband and wife, as they seek to walk the Christian path and come to many mutual decisions in the things of Christ, must endeavour to ward off any influence of that natural love that exists between them and seek to be governed by the love which Paul prays might abound yet more and more in these Philippians. No wonder he prays, then, that the love might abound “in knowledge and in all judgment,” or, “in all discernment.” We need all our spiritual wits about us to continually ascertain that the love that is moving us in worship, in service, in decision and action is that true agape love, unmixed and unalloyed by any other expression of the emotion, no matter how high that expression may be.

The same also applies with the word “philia.” We may think of it as “mutual object love,” and, as we have already said, this can appear to have some leanings towards “the fellowship of the saints” provided the mutual object that is loved is Christ Himself. When this is the case, of course, it is not philia that is predominant, but agape itself. The dangers arise when

Christians mistake the feelings and emotions they undergo when gathered around some *lesser* object of mutual love and call this feeling or emotion Christian fellowship. Fellowship it may be, but pure Christian fellowship it is unlikely to be. *Philia* exists in the local tennis club when a group of the members begin to enthuse about the forthcoming mixed doubles, or among the supporters of some football team the moment their team puts the ball in the net to win the cup. But none of this is Christian fellowship. Neither is it Christian fellowship, however, in the fullest sense when the mutual object that arouses the “nice feelings” is anything less than the presence of Christ Himself by the Holy Spirit of God. A certain type of gospel sing-along can produce its own type of results and be mistake for true fellowship in the gospel of love for Christ by His church. A man’s method of preaching, or a good discussion on a certain set of truths or doctrines can also waylay the undiscerning into thinking that it is love for Christ that is the dominating force in the company when it is only love for a system, or some other mutual object, that has bound the company together.

No wonder the apostle then, prays in such a manner. He will have his readers abound in a love that is based on knowledge and that is guided by discernment. And the first thing that such knowledge and discernment must discover, of course, is the very nature of love itself, and not be misled into the acceptance of anything less than the real thing – *agape* – in all its length and breadth. That the church of Christ today has largely come to embrace an interpretation of love that falls far short of the Biblical concept of the term goes almost beyond saying. Christian love is not something that floats around on some cloud of sentimental jargon, but is something that has both feet firmly planted on the ground and can stand fast in every situation that confronts the Church of Christ in every age.

Old John Bunyan pictured love aright when he personified it as one of the three sisters who questioned Pilgrim about his Christian pilgrimage. It was she who asked the most searching questions of all about why Pilgrim hadn’t brought his wife and children from the dangers of the City of Destruction, for, indeed love manifests itself in the concern for the souls of men and women and has a desire to pierce through every reason why a souls is remaining on the broad road that leads to destruction. Love isn’t concerned to cater to the lesser emotions and feelings that hold such prominent sway in the lives of man and women, nor is it concerned to give

them an “interest” in the things of the church and so, create a mutual affection with others within the church. It is concerned with bringing them to an understanding of the love of God in Christ so that, in realising that they have been forgiven much they might, in turn, love much. And love with that love with which they have been loved. We may well pray the prayer of Paul for the Philippian people and look for an answer that will become the gospel in our own lives and witness: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.”

Sincerely,

W.J. Seaton (May 1972)



Gleanings In the Psalms (Psalm 41)

Verse 1 “**Blessed is he that considereth the poor ...**” This is the third psalm to begin with the word “blessed.” In Psalm 1, that man is pronounced “blessed” who “delights in the law of the Lord” and who “meditates” in that law “day and night”. Rightly so! The Word of God alone shows us what we are by nature and what God makes of us by grace. The knowledge of sins forgiven is by the Word of God and that second blessedness is pronounced in Psalm 32: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” And now, the third source of blessedness is contained in the use of his life that the forgiven sinner makes to the good of others and the glory of Christ: “Blessed is he that considereth the poor ...” In all things: “Freely ye have received, freely given;” “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” That is no gospel at all which does not set before us the absolute moral demands of God.

Verse 3 “**... Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.**” When a good man is ill at ease in a time of sickness, God promises to “make all his bed.”

Pillow, bolster, head, feet, sides – *all* his bed. Surely that God who made the man knows so well his measure as to make his bed to please him. When Jacob slept on the ground, who would not have had his hard lodgings, therewithal to have his heavenly dream?

Thomas Fuller

Verse 3 “... Thou wilt make all his bed ...” When I visited one day, as he was dying my beloved friend Benjamin Parsons, I said, “How are you today, Sir?” He said, “My head is resting very sweetly on three pillows – Infinite Power, Infinite Love, and Infinite Wisdom.”

Raxton Hood, in “Dark Sayings on a Harp,” 1865

Verse 4 “... Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.” What saith David from the very bottom of his heart in his time of sickness? Not, take away this death only. No! Do not take this sickness and death only away; but take this sin away that hath dishonoured thee and hath separated between me and thee. “Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee.”

Thomas Goodwin

Verse 4 “... For I have sinned against thee.” Saul and Judas each said, “I have sinned;” but David says, “I have sinned *against thee*.”

Verses 7 and 8 “All that hate me whisper together against me ... an evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth down shall rise up no more.” When the Lord smites his people with his rod of affliction for a small moment, their enemies expect to see them capitally executed, and prepare their jubilates to celebrate their funerals. *But they are in too great a hurry, and have to alter their ditties and sing to another tune.*

C. H. Spurgeon

Verse 9 “Yea, mine own familiar friend ... hath lifted up his heel against me.” The sufferings of the Church, like those of her Redeemer, generally begin at home. Her open enemies can do her no harm, until her pretended friends have delivered her into their hands. And, unnatural as it may seem, they who have waxed fat upon her bounty, are sometimes first to “lift up the heel” against her.

Geo. Horne

Verses 11 and 12 “By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity ...” In this text we see two things. (1) How David assured himself of God’s love towards him. (2) How thankful he is to God for assuring him of His love. The first he does by two arguments: one is taken from his enemies, they were prevented in their expectation – “Therefore thou lovest me.” The other is taken from his own estate, which was not one whit hurt or impaired but bettered by them “ Therefore thou lovest me.” Mary and Martha put Christ in mid of but two things; and the first was that Christ loved their brother Lazarus; the second was that Lazarus was sick. “He whom thou lovest is sick.” There was no need to tell Him what He should do, for they knew that He would do all that was needing done for Lazarus, because He loved him.

William Burton

Verse 12 “And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.” This text reveals the insignia of those whom grace has distinguished. (1) Their integrity is manifest – “thou upholdest me *in mine integrity.*” (2) Their character is divinely sustained - “*thou upholdest me in mine integrity.*” (3) They dwell in the favour of God – “and settest me before thy face.” (4) Their eternal future is secure – “and settest me before thy face *for ever.*”

Hints to the Village Preacher

Taking Heed To The Ministry ::

“And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” Colossians chapter 4 verse 17

The Minister and his Office - Thomas Watson

First, Let me crave liberty to speak a word to the Elishas, my reverend and honoured brethren in the ministry. You are engaged in a glorious service. God has put great renown upon you. He has entrusted you with the two most precious jewels, His *truths* and the *souls* of His people.

Never was this honour conferred upon any angel to convert souls! What princely dignity can parallel this? The pulpit is higher than the throne, for a truly constituted minister represents no less than God Himself. “As though Go did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” Give me leave to say as the apostle, “I magnify my office.”

Whatever our persons are, the office is sacred. The ministry is the most honourable employment in the world. Jesus Christ has graced this calling by His entering into it. Other men work in their trade; ministers work with God. “We are labourers together with God.” O high honour! God and His ministers have one and the same work. They both negotiate about souls. Let the sons of the prophets wear this as their crown and diadem.

The Minister and his Weapons - Arthur W. Pink

It was not Paul that was “great,” but rather that the “weapons” he used when engaging the forces of evil were “mighty through God”! And what were those “weapons”?

Prayer, “*the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*,” and *faith* in the One who had commissioned him. Note that we put *prayer* first. Does not the example of the supreme Preacher require us to do so? Did not the twelve declare, “We will give ourselves continually to (1) prayer, and (2) to the ministry of the word”? Then do thou the same. Concerning *faith*, we refer the reader again to Hebrews 11:13. Now fellow preachers, the same three “weapons” are all available to us, and we need no others for the glorifying of Christ and the execution of His commission. Note well, ye preachers, our last sentence. We did not say that no other weapons are needed in order for you to be eminently “successful” in your work, or that your use of the same will ensure prompt “visible results.” *That* must not be your chief concern nor immediate end: and if you make it such, a jealous God is most likely to blow upon rather than bless your efforts. Your paramount care and principal design must be the *glorifying of God*: to make known His excellency, to enforce His just claims upon the creatures of His hands, to bid men throw down the weapons of their warfare against Him, and to be reconciled to Him. If you be a real servant of God’s He has sent you forth to *magnify Christ*: the salvation of sinners

is but secondary and subordinate thereto. God would have a universal testimony borne unto the matchless worth of the person and work of Christ – the gospel is a “witness” to His perfections. God would have proclaimed far and wide the amazing fact that His own beloved Son “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

The Minister and his Preparation – J. C. Ryle

We must take heed that we do not neglect our pulpit preparation. The matter and style of our sermons must be equal to the demands of the times. Some may be ready to say at the end of the week – “I have been attending the school, visiting from house to house, distributing tracts, making speeches; and if my sermons on Sunday are not quite what they might be, at any rate I have not been idle.” We should remember that all work of this description, if it trenches on the preparation of our sermons, *is work ill-spent.*

It is not excuse in the sight of God, if our sermons on Sundays are poor, because we have been working so hard all the week. What costs little is worth little. If a man comes to his Bible on a Saturday, takes the first text that occurs to him, puts a few thoughts together, and then, trusting to his extempore powers, goes with that preparation only into the pulpit the next morning, we must not be surprised if the people complain of sameness in their pastor’s ministrations. There never was a period when the pulpit required more preparation, more serious, hearty, studious preparation, at the hand of all God’s faithful ministers. I must plainly give it as my opinion that clergymen who think that there is no occasion for reading and study make a great mistake, and are likely to bring the ministry into great contempt.

The Minister and his Prayers – C. H. Spurgeon

It may scarcely be needful to commend to you the sweet uses of private devotions, and yet I cannot forbear. To you, as the ambassadors of God, the mercy-seat has a virtue beyond all estimate; the more familiar you are with the court of heaven the better shall you discharge your heavenly trust. Among all the formative influences which go to make up a man honoured of God in the ministry. I know of none more mighty than his own familiarity with the mercy-seat. All that a college course can do for a

student is coarse and external compared with the spiritual and delicate refinement obtained by communion with God. While the uninformed minister is revolving on the wheel of preparation, prayer is the tool of the great potter by which He moulds the vessel. All our libraries and studies are mere emptiness compared with our closets. We grow, we wax mighty, we prevail in private prayer. Texts will often refuse to reveal their treasures until you open them with the key of prayer. The commentators are good instructors, but the Author Himself is far better, and prayer makes a direct appeal to Him and enlists Him in our cause.

A certain Puritan divine at a debate was observed frequently to write upon the paper before him; upon others curiously seeking to read his notes, they found nothing upon the page but the words, “More Light, Lord,” “More light, Lord,” repeated scores of times. A most suitable prayer for the student of the Word when preparing his discourse.

The Minister and his Preaching – Charles Bridges

Our Lord’s pungent addresses to the Scribes and Pharisees exhibit the boldness of a Christian Ministration. The same spirit in the Apostles – unaccountable upon human calculations – confounded their judges to the face. Witness Paul before Felix – a prisoner on his trial for life – “no man standing by him” – hated even unto death by the influential body of his countrymen; yet, mean, and in peril, looking his judge in the face with the power of life and death in his hands, and remembering only the dignity of his office – delivering to this noble sinner and his guilty partner the most personal and offensive truths. How did this splendid example of Ministerial boldness “magnify his Office!” For what can be more degrading to our divine commission, than that we should fear the face of men? What unmindfulness does it argue of our Master’s presence and authority, and of our high responsibilities, as “set forth for the defence of the gospel!” The independence that disregards alike the praise and the censure of man, is indispensable for the integrity of the Christian Ministry.

Luther would have been tolerated on many truths of general application, but his bold statements of justification could not be endured. But the question is not how our people may be pleased, but how they may be warned, instructed, and saved. We would indeed strongly rebuke that modesty, which makes us ashamed of our grand message; or that

tremulous timidity, which seems to imply that we are only half-believers in our grand commission. To keep offensive doctrines out of view, or to apologise for the occasional mention of them, or to be over cautious respecting the rudeness of disquieting the conscience with unwelcome truths; to compromise with the world, to connive at fashionable sins, or to be silent where the cause of God demands an open confession – this is not the spirit which honours our Master, and which He “delighteth to honour.”

The Minister and his Soul – Richard Baxter

See that the work of saving grace be wrought in your own souls. Take heed to yourselves lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others, and be strangers to that effectual working of that gospel which you preach. Take heed to yourselves lest you perish while you call upon others to take heed of perishing, and lest you famish yourselves while you prepare their food. Can any reasonable man imagine that God should save men for offering salvation to others, while they refuse it themselves? Believe it, brethren, God never saved any man for being a preacher, nor because he was an able preacher; but because he was a justified, sanctified man, and consequently faithful in his Master’s service.

Take heed therefore to your selves first, that you be that which you persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and have heartily entertained that Christ and that Spirit which you offer unto others. It is a fearful thing to be an unsanctified professor of religion but much more to be an unsanctified preacher of the gospel.

A Few Thoughts from John Newton

Satan will seldom come to a Christian with a gross temptation. A green log and a candle may be safely left together. But bring a few shavings, then some small sticks, and then larger, and you may soon bring the green log to ashes.

Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil. I observe there is evil, and that there is a way to escape it, and with this I begin and end.

There are critical times of danger. After great services, honours, and consolations, we should stand upon our guard. Noah, Lot, Solomon and David, fell in these circumstances. Satan is a robber; a robber will not attack a man in going to the bank, but in returning with his pocket full of money.



One said that the great saints in the calendar were many of them poor sinners. Mrs. Newton replied, they were poor saints indeed if they did not feel they were great sinners.

I have read of many wicked Popes, but the worst pope I ever met with is Pope Self.

The heir of a great estate, while a child, thinks more of a few shillings in his pocket than of his inheritance. So a Christian is often more elated by some feeling of the heart than by his title to glory.

I remember, in going to undertake the care of a congregation (in Warwick) I was reading as I walked in a green lane: "Fear not, Paul, I have much people in this city." But I soon afterwards was disappointed in finding that Paul was not "John", and that Corinth was not Warwick.

It is pure mercy that denies a particular request. A child walks in a garden in spring, and sees cherries; he knows they are good fruit and therefore asks for them. "No, my dear," says the father, "They are not yet ripe; wait till the season."

Lines Written on an Old Chair Belonging to George Whitefield

"If Love of souls should e're be wanting here
Remember me, for I am Whitefield's chair.
I bore his weight, was witness to his fears,
His earnest prayers, his interesting tears;
His holy soul was fired with love divine;
If thine be such, sit down and call me thine."

BOYS AND GIRLS PAGE

In the beginning God ...”

Dear Boys and Girls,

“In the beginning God ...” These are the very first words that we read in the Bible, because in the beginning there was nothing except God. There were no mountains or rivers, no animals or insects, no men and women, or girls and boys. There was nothing, nothing at all, except God.

As we look around us, boys and girls, we see such marvellous wonders of living creatures, don't we? I was reading about one recently called a “digger wasp.” I wonder if any of you have ever seen one? They are quite common in any piece of dry, sandy ground. They have very thin bodies, usually black in colour with bands or spots of red or yellow. Here is what a book I read said about them:

“Instead of building a nest, digger wasps make a hole, usually in the ground, to put their eggs and grubs in. Before laying her eggs, a female digger wasp goes off to look for a caterpillar. Having found one, she paralyses it with her sting. The wasp drags the caterpillar to the hole she has dug, drops it in, lays an egg on it, then seals up the hole. Later on a wasp grub hatches out from the egg, feeds on the caterpillar and soon grows into an adult digger wasp which then lays eggs itself on another caterpillar.”

The interesting thing, boys and girls, is that the digger wasp has never seen another wasp going through all this complicated preparation for egg-laying. Nor will she see her baby wasp eat the caterpillar for food. For, remember, she seals up the hole after she drops the egg on top of the caterpillar. The digger wasp does all this “automatically” without any thought. We usually say that such things are done “by instinct,” and by this we mean that the insect was born with this kind of behaviour already laid down in its brain.

But, I trust you all know, boys and girls, who *gives* the animals and insects, too, like the digger wasp that “instinct.” It is God, of course, who has created all things. The Bible says, “And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” And this little digger wasp is only one of the millions and millions of creatures and things all over the world that God has created.



“All things bright and beautiful – All creatures great and small;
All things wise and wonderful – The Lord God made them all.”

Love,
Mrs. Seaton