

J.R. Miller:

"May you have the power to understand, as all God's people should--how wide, how long, how high, and how deep His love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it!" Ephesians 3:18-19

LOVE is the greatest thing in the world. Paul tells us this, in his immortal chapter in which he sings love's praises. Love is greatest in its endurance. Other things fail; love never fails. Prophecies have their place--but they are like blossoms which fade and fall off when the fruit comes. Knowledge, too, is great; but knowledge becomes old, effete, outgrown, and is forever left behind as we go on to new knowledge. But love abides forever.

A writer in a little poem tells the story of two lovers. First, they sit by a mossy spring, leaning soft cheeks together. Next, we see a wedded pair, stepping from the portal amid sweet bell-notes and the fragrance of flowers. Later, two faces bend over a cradle watching a life that love has sent. Further on, we see the same two, sitting by the evening fire whose warm light falls about their knees, with a cluster of little heads around them. Once more we see them: the fire burns on the hearth, and they sit there as before; but all the little heads by slow degrees have gone, leaving that lonely pair; oh, vanished past! But the same sweet love that drew them close to each other by the mossy spring, so long ago--still binds them together. "Love never fails!"

"Love never fails!" It lives on amid all fadings and vanishings and all changes. Love is life. Loving is living. Not to love--is not to live. When love dies, there is nothing left worth while. The works that will live longest--are the works that love achieves. Leave love out--and all you do without it is sordid. Let love die in your heart, and you may as well be dead. Love is life's light and glory.

There are great human loves. Great is the patriot's love for his country. Some of the world's noblest heroisms have been inspired by love for native land. Great is parental love, whose holy devotion seems most like God's, of all human affections. There are tender stories of the love of brothers and sisters, of friend and friend, of lover and beloved. Volumes could be written telling of the deeds of love. But there is a love greater than any--than all of these together. Human loves are but little fragments of the divine love dropped down from heaven.

Some scientist, trying to account for vegetable life on this planet, suggests the theory that when the globe was ready for it, with mellow, rich, and fertile soil on its plains--but no life yet, a fragment of a meteor from some other world, where there was life, fell to the earth, bearing on it seeds or roots, which grew, thus starting on the globe the life of another world. This is only a theory--but it illustrates the origin of love in this world. Human affection is a spark of the divine fire of love dropped out of the heart of God. All love is from God. The love of father, of mother, of brother, of sister, of lover, of friend, of patriot, of little child--all has come from God.

All the light in this world is from the sun. Wherever you find a beam shining on open field or in gloomy dungeon, it is from the one sun. Wherever you find a little flower blooming in conservatory or garden, in the depth of the forest or on bare mountain crag--the sun painted it. So wherever you find love in a human heart, in a home of beauty or in a hovel, in little child or old man, in saintly Christian or in breast of savage--it is from God. The heart of God is the fountain of all pure affection!

Christ is called the Word. A word reveals the thought, the feeling, the desire, that is in the heart. Jesus Christ revealed what was in the heart of God. God is love. Christ is the love of God brought down to the earth, so that we can see it and understand something of its wonderful character.

The love of Christ "passes knowledge." This does not mean that we can know nothing of it. It means that we can never fully know it. We can never understand all its wonderful meaning. Everything about God passes knowledge. Augustine was trying to comprehend the Trinity, to solve the mystery of three in one and one in three. One night he dreamed that he stood beside the sea and saw a child with a shell dipping up water from the great ocean, and emptying it into a tiny hollow, scooped out in the sand. When asked what he was doing, the child replied that he was putting the sea into his little pond. The great man smiled at the child's folly. "But it is no more foolish," said the child, "than what you are trying to do to measure in your finite human mind--the infinite truth of the divine Trinity." At the best we can understand only a little of the love of God revealed in Christ. But we should seek to comprehend all we can of it.

Paul speaks of the breadth, the length, the depth, and height of the love of Christ. In its breadth--it reaches out and takes in all the world. There is not a tiny grass blade, nor a flower, growing in any nook or corner which can

say, "The sun does not shine for me; the clouds do not drop their rain for me." So in no dreary spot of earth, is there a man, woman, or child who can say, "The love of Christ is not for me."

But while universal, it is not merely a love for the race as such--but is individual. There are men who have a sort of benevolent love for certain classes of unfortunate people, and yet have no care for any individuals of those classes. Their love is only a mere sentiment. But this is not the way Christ loves. He looks down with compassion upon the darkened masses in heathen lands--but has a distinct love for individuals. It is said that He calls all the stars by their names. "Yes," you say, "but stars are so large that it is not unusual that He knows all their names. I am but a tiny speck on one of God's planets. How can He have a distinct love for such a little one--among so many millions of people?" Well, you are greater than any star in all the heavens--for the stars will some day burn out and cease to be; but you are an immortal soul made in God's image.

Then stars are only things, while every Christian is God's child. Does a mother love her children only as a family? Does not each child have a distinct place in her thought and affection? God loves His children in the same way. "But there are so many of them," you say. "How can He love millions as individuals?" God Himself is so great--that it is no harder for Him to carry millions in His affection--than it is for a human mother to love her five or six children. Every child has all a mother's love. She does not love the first one less, when the second one comes. The love of her heart is not divided into fractions and fragments, by the number of her children. Each one has all the mother's love. So each Christian has all of God's deep, eternal love. And His is real love, too--tenderer than a mother's; deeper, truer, stronger.

Or we may think of the length of the love of Christ. We may think of Him in heaven, and His love streams down to earth and touches us. It is more than ninety million miles to the sun--and yet his beams come through all that vast reach of space--and warm the roots of the grasses into life on the spring days, and kiss the flowers into beauty and fragrance. The love of Christ, is as long as from God's throne--to earth's lowliest places.

Another suggestion of the length of the love of Christ comes from the words which tell us of its duration. "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life nor things present, nor things to come--shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Or we may think again of the length of the love of Christ in its wonderful forgiveness, its infinite patience, its mercy that endures forever. Human mercy is usually very short. We ask, "How often shall I forgive? Up to seven times?" We think seven times a wonderful stretch of forgiving. We say that such and such wrongs or hurts done to us are unpardonable. We go a little farther, perhaps, and say, with the air of one who is doing a very saintly thing, "I will forgive--but I cannot forget." So we carry grudges against our brother, and keep our hurt feelings, and refuse to forgive those who have injured us--and yet call ourselves Christlike! If we could get a vision of the love of Christ in its forgiveness, patience, and long-suffering, it would shame our poor, pitiful charity. His love never wearies of our sinning. He forgives not seven times only--but seventy-seven times. He carries no grudges. He forgets, remembers no more forever--our sins against Him--when once we repent and He has forgiven us.

There are evil chapters in your life story, which you would not for the world, uncover to the eye of even your gentlest friend! "He would detest me!" you say, "if he knew these things in me!" There are evil thoughts in your inner life--feelings, emotions, desires, lusts, imaginations, jealousies, envyings--which you would not dare to lay open to your neighbor's gaze! "He would loathe me!" you say.

Yet Christ sees all, knows all--and still He loves. He loves unto the uttermost. His mercy endures forever. His patience never fails. When this love of Christ clasps a human life--its clasp is for eternal years! He says to each of His children, "I have loved you with an everlasting love!" "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you!"

We may think also of the depth of Christ's love. How shall we fathom it? Human love is often a stream so shallow--that it cannot cover even the minor faults and the trivial mistakes of its object. Peter says that charity covers a multitude of sins. He means that when we love a friend, our love hides from our own eyes his faults and blemishes, and overlooks his mistakes and wrong-doings. But our charity as Christians--does it really cover from our eyes the multitude of faults and sins in others, even in our closest friends? Is not the stream too often so shallow--that every grain of sand, every little pebble, and every weed at the bottom shows? But the love of Christ is so deep that it covers everything, hides completely out of sight the multitude of sins, buries them forever in its unfathomable abysses!

We may see the depth of the love of Christ also in His condescension. Never can we know, what this

condescension meant for Christ. We can talk of it, and use words which tell of it; but what it really involved of sacrifice, of emptying of self, of pain and suffering, we never can know. A German artist, painting a picture of the Man of Sorrows, gave up in despair when he came to the face, and painted Him with His face turned away, thus hiding the countenance which he felt himself unable to put upon the canvas. So it must always be, with the reverent friend of Christ, who thinks of Christ's sorrows. His love passes knowledge. We never can fathom the depth of His condescension.

Looking at this wonderful manifestation, who can doubt for a moment the love of God for him? What proof do we need to show us the divine love that was revealed on the cross?

Does any one ask for proof that God loves? Look at the cross where the Son of God is dying for the world's redemption. "Do need a torch to show you the sun?" Do you need proofs from nature from flower, or field, or forest, or sea, or deep mine, or arguments and evidences of the lesser kind--to prove that God loves? Here are the full glories of the divine Being revealed in the splendor of love. We need no torch to show us that dawn.

We may think also of the height of this measureless love. We see its depth in the condescension of Christ to save men. We may measure its height by thinking of the exaltation which the believing sinner receives from sin's depths, where Christ finds him, to heaven's heights, where glory enfolds him! He does not merely lift us out of the horrible pit of guilt and sin--that is only half a salvation; He also sets our feet upon a rock and establishes our goings, and puts a new song into our mouth. He restores our soul, until the old lost beauty is brought back again. He exalts us to be with Him, and to share the blessedness of heaven!

This love of Christ passes knowledge, and yet we are bidden to know it. To know it--is to wake from death to life; not to know it--is to abide in death.

Word reached a mother during the war, that her boy had been wounded. She hurried to the field and found the hospital. The doctor said, "Your boy is sleeping. If you go in and wake him, the excitement will kill him. By-and-by, when he wakes, I will gradually break the news that you have come."

The mother, with her great hungry heart yearning to see her boy, looked into the doctor's face, and said, "He may never waken. If you will let me go in and sit beside him, I promise not to speak to him."

The doctor consented. The mother crept to the side of the cot and looked at her boy. How she longed to embrace him! After a few moments she laid her hand on his forehead. The moment her fingers touched his brow, the boy's lips moved, and he whispered, without waking or opening his eyes, "Mother, you have come." The touch of love's hand reached the boy's soul--even in his delirious sleep.

There is One whose touch means more than a mother's. It is the touch of a pierced hand pierced in love's sacrifice for our redemption. Some of us are unconscious of the wonderful love that is bending over us with infinite yearning. May the touch of that blessed hand reveal to our hearts the love, and may we answer in faith's whisper, "Jesus, You have come!"