

God's great love for us

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[0 : 00] Loved, adopted by a heavenly father, sealed by his Holy Spirit, existing in Christ.!

That is that we are loved in Christ. Just look at how much attention Paul pays to this love that God has for his people. It starts there in verse 5.

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons and daughters through Jesus Christ. If your version simply says sons, understand that as sons and daughters.

And by the way that's perfectly legitimate linguistically. Alright? Don't get hung up about that.

That is absolutely what Paul meant. He meant men and women. You are adopted as his sons and daughters. Then look at how Paul prays.

[1 : 18] Chapter 3. Turn on a couple of pages. 3 verses 18 to 19. He prays that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints.

That's all God's people. To grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. And to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Love. How we all long to be loved, don't we? This was why in her teen years Sharon had that struggle that she's just described.

My father, I've always wanted a father. Need to be loved by a father. And yet his world was a pagan world.

It was a very different non-Christian world. And it created that struggle in her. She longed for the love of a father that she'd never had. And really it came down to a question.

[2 : 25] God the father or her biological father. And some of you may have experienced just that sort of struggle in one way or another. If we had a choice even between being well thought of by others or being loved by one person.

I think almost all of us would say I want to be loved by someone. That that would be our first choice. To know we are loved is such a privilege.

And such an incredible joy. And God's love for us is one of the greatest of the blessings, says Paul, that we have in Christ.

So turn to another wonderful part of these two opening chapters then. To verses 4 and 5 of Ephesians. Look at how it starts out.

Because of his great love for us. God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ. Because of his great love for us.

[3 : 31] And again I want in this session this morning for us to take our eyes. As I hope we have in each of the sessions. To take our eyes off ourselves. And put them on the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here I want us to see two reasons. Why God's love is utterly amazing. First, the love is amazing because it is revealed in Christ to sinful people.

Verse 1. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. God made us alive when we were dead. He did this by sending Christ to die for us.

We know this wonderful gospel message, don't we? It is this death of Christ that Paul constantly comes back to. When he talks of God's love for us.

Or of Christ's love. You see, the crucified Christ is at the very heart of our understanding of the love of God for us.

[4 : 42] Look at what Paul says in chapter 5. Turn on there if you will. Verses 1 and 2. He says, speaking to Christians.

He says, be imitators of God therefore. As dearly loved children. And live a life of love. Just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

You see, even when Paul wants us to imitate Christ. This is our job as Christians. To image God. To imitate Christ. Even when he says that.

It is Christ's sacrifice on the cross that provides the example for us. For Paul, Christ's death on the cross is the greatest demonstration of God's love for us.

In Romans 5, Paul puts it like this. God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[5 : 49] And that's where chapter 2 starts. We were dead in our transgressions. And here in chapter 2 verses 2 and 3.

Paul doesn't beat around the bush as he describes our sinful state. Before God's grace has started work in our lives. He speaks of these Ephesian Christians.

He brings himself into the statement. All of us lived among them at one time. That is among these pagan peoples. Gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature.

And following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature's objects of wrath. Or objects of God's judgment. But because of his great love for us.

God. Because of his great love for us. God did this in Christ. God did this in Christ.

[6 : 51] We're people who have done what we wanted. We put ourselves first. Rather than God and our neighbour. We've followed the cravings of our sinful nature.

Says Paul. And if we think about this for a moment. We'll have a much greater appreciation. I think of God's love for us.

You see. I think we can understand. Somebody dying for somebody else. I think we. If we put it in sort of family terms.

I think we can understand. A father who jumps into a rushing river. To save his child. And dies in doing so. We can understand that.

But. Even then. It's not quite the same as what Jesus does. Is it? Because. Because. That father. I guarantee you. Did not jump into that river.

[7 : 50] Saying. I will die for my child. Rather he died in. Hoping they would both be saved. Right? That they would both get out of the water. So it's not even there. Quite the same.

But we can sort of understand. Dying for somebody else. But would we consider. Dying for. Somebody in our road. Who we. Knew. Had just come out of prison. And had committed murder. And. Had been just a terrible.

Terrible person. Would we say. Oh yes. I'll jump in and die for that person. Or whatever might be asked of us. I think we find that a lot harder.

And yet. It's even more so than that. For what God does with us. We are dead in our transgressions. And Christ comes. And he dies for us.

[8 : 48] Taking the very judgment of God on us. And he does it. Not by accident. He does it. Because he loves us. He does it.

Because as we saw yesterday evening. Saying. This was God's plan. The triune God's plan. Father. Son. And Holy Spirit's plan. From before the foundation of the earth.

That he would show his love. To a sinful fallen world. And to people. Who would turn to him in faith. It is an extraordinary demonstration of love. In a way we have no human comparison. Really. God chose to do this.

In order that we. Might not have to die. Eternally. Spiritually. Spiritually. Christ died for us.

[9 : 48] When our nature. Says Paul in Ephesians 2 verse 3. Was that we were children of wrath. That is deserving God's judgment. We were just like the rest of mankind.

We were just like that liar. Or that thief. That you would never consider dying for. Yet even though we were like that. Christ dies for us.

So first. This love of God. For us in Christ. Is amazing. Because it's revealed to us. Who are sinful people. Secondly. This love is amazing. Because in Christ.

We see the loving heart of God. And I want to delay on this. A little bit more. This is where we come back. To that lovely word. Grace.

That we talked of last night. Look at verses 4 and 5. Because of his great love. For us. God who is rich in mercy. Made us alive with Christ.

[10 : 44] Even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace. You have been saved. And here I suggest. That first we see. The loving heart of God.

Is a heart. That is full of grace. Yes. We talked about that last night. But Paul is bowled over. By this concept. Just as we ought to be.

It is by grace. The grace of God. That undeserved. Unmerited. Favor. And love of God. That you are saved. And for emphasis.

And again. Out of sheer enthusiasm. In these chapters. Verse 8. He repeats it. For it is. Says it again. For it is. By grace. You have been saved. Through faith.

And this not from yourselves. It is a gift of God. God. You see. God. Who is. So holy. He had to shut.

[11:39] Adam and Eve. And all future generations. Out of the garden of Eden. Out of paradise. Because of their sin. Knows that unless. He himself.

Brings about salvation. It cannot happen. The heart of God. Is full of grace. Secondly.

The loving heart of God. Is a heart. That is rich. In mercy. Because of his great love. For us. Verse 4. God. Who is rich. In mercy.

Now. Mercy. Is not really. A very popular word. These days. I don't know. Whether you've. Realised that. Or taken note of that. The lynch mob.

Mentality. Is fostered. By our tabloid. Newspapers. By media. Of various sorts. Especially by social media. People always want.

[12:36] Their pound of flesh. These days. Who's to blame? This is always the question. Isn't it? You know. There was that. Absolutely catastrophic. Airline disaster. With Air India.

You know. The very first thing. On the news. The minute. They had announced it. Was. There is. There is. However they put it.

But a search. Into whose fault. This would be. Was it the pilot's fault? Now. Of course. We need to look into things like that. I'm not saying we shouldn't. But it is interesting.

Our whole mentality. These days. Is. Who's to blame? And it's somebody else. It's never us. Who's to blame? The mob mentality. But God.

God. The one person. Who is our creator. Has an absolute right. To demand of us. Anything that he wants. Is rich.

[13:29] In mercy. And this is gracious mercy. In other words. It's a mercy that we just don't deserve. It comes in spite of us.

It comes just because God. Loves us. And again we find. As Paul puts it. That this is all. In Christ. As we place our faith in Christ.

So we see. In Christ. Precisely. The nature. Of that. Mercy. And grace. And we see it's cost. As Christ.

Died for us. He's rich. In mercy. We're so reluctant. To show mercy. And yet God.

Shows mercy. To the most awful. Terrible sinner. As that sinner. Turns to him. In repentance. And faith. Thirdly.

[14:27] The heart of God. Is working. To draw people. To himself. Look at chapter 2. Verses 12 and 13. For this is a. Another of the great riches. We have. In Christ.

He says. You were separate. From Christ. Excluded. From citizenship. In Israel. And foreigners. To the covenants. Of the promise. Without hope. And without God.

In the world. But now. Note it. In Christ. Jesus. You who were once. Far away. Have been brought near. Through the blood of Christ. I suppose.

This. Is really. The greatest. Of all the joys. Of God's people. As we come to understand it. In the context. Of Ephesians. Paul says.

Most of you. Were Gentiles. You were in darkness. You were dead. In your transgressions. You were not. Part of God's people. You weren't part of Israel.

[15:24] But now. Through Christ's death. For you. You too. Are truly. Sons and daughters. Just like. Abraham. Moses.

And David. Now. We all. Have our prejudices. Don't we? Even when we do evangelism. I don't know whether. This is you.

But we somehow. Think that certain people. We talk to. Are more likely. To become Christians. Than other people. I don't know whether. You've ever. Felt that. But. I guarantee you.

As a minister. Over many years. I still. Often start conversations. With wondering. Whether it's worth. Talking to this person. Because I don't. Can't see them. Coming to faith. You know. Whereas with somebody else.

I think. Oh yeah. Maybe. And so. I spend more time. And we have to get. Out of that. Sort of. Prejudicial. Mindset. Because it's not. The mindset. God has. In the temple.

[16:21] What Paul is drawing on here. Is that in the temple. In Judaism. In Jesus day. The outer courts. Were the only place. Where true. Gentile believers.

Could get close to God. But they were not allowed. To go into. The most holy area. In the center. Where it was believed. God had specially revealed.

His presence. So the Gentiles. Were as it were. Could be real believers. But they were kept. On the outside. In fact. Paul refers to it.

Later on. As a dividing. Wall of hostility. We know. That. From. From history. We know. That. After the court. Of the Gentiles. There was a big sign. In the temple. Saying. Only Jews. Or. Only Jews. Can go beyond. This point.

[17:18] And this is what. Paul is building on. He's saying. Look. You didn't even know. You weren't party. To all the promises. Given to Abraham. And Isaac. And Jacob. And you weren't party.

To that at all. And yet. God. Brought you. Into his. People. You were once. Far away. And have been brought.

Through. To God. Through the blood. Of Christ. The heart. Of God. Was always. To draw people. To himself. In gracious. Forgiveness. And acceptance.

Even when the temple. Was designed. By David. And by God. Or by God. And by David. The court. Of the Gentiles. Wasn't to be. A dividing place. It was to be.

The very place. Where those. Who were not. Jewish people. Could indeed. Come in. And in the end. Could find God. And encounter God. And all of that.

[18:13] Had gone wrong. It had become. A racial thing. It had become. Instead of being. A light to the world. The nation of Israel. Had caused. A dividing.

Wall. Of hostility. So the nations. Could they come to God. We said last night. That's the great. Mystery. Of the Bible. Paul said. Paul says.

Earlier on. We looked at it. Last night. In Christ. The mystery. Is revealed. And what is that. Mystery through the Old Testament. It is. How can Gentiles. People like you and me.

How can Gentiles. Ever be saved. And the answer is. In. Christ. We have been brought. Near.

To God. We're in Christ. And God is never. Far away. Never far away. Of course. There are days.

[19:08] When I. And I'm sure. This is true of you. Feel nearer. To God. Than other days.

Sometimes. I feel. Far away. From God. Because of my sin. But it's not.

Possible. To be closer. To God. Than to be in Christ. We need to understand that. It's an important thing. To grasp. And am I.

Only. In Christ. When I. Feel. Close to God. No. I'm in Christ. Because I'm loved by him. And saved by his grace.

So what happens. What's actually happening. When I feel. Far from God. Well actually. My feelings. Are lying. There's nothing.

Satan would rather. Have me think. In my life. Than that God. Has moved away. From me. And that I can no longer. Reach him. Because I've sinned. Satan would love us.

[20:05] To feel that. God. And what the scripture. Is saying. Is God. Has so loved us. In Christ. He is in us. He is within us. We are in him.

We cannot be. Far away. From God. His Holy Spirit. Indwells us. His Holy Spirit. Doesn't just come and go. He is the one. Who guarantees it.

For us. That we belong. To Christ. And this is because. Of God's incredible. Love. For us. But we don't.

Always. Feel like that. And the trouble is. In this day and age. You know. It's. It's quite a serious issue.

Because. Our feelings. Seem to be. The big principle. If I feel this. Then it must be right. Mustn't it.

[21:01] I remember. As a young curate. A couple. Who were purportedly. Christians. Coming to me. And saying. We feel. That we're in love. With other people. Literally. I mean. This was a curate.

Right. One of the very first. Pastoral cases I had. And they came to me. And they said. Paul. You know. God. I just feel. That God. Is. Wanting me. The man said.

To be with this woman. And she said. And I feel. God. Is wanting me. To be with that man. This is a married couple. Purporting to be Christians. And I.

I mean. As a naive curate. I had. Less. Pastoral. You know. Pastoral sensitivities. Are always an issue. But I had very few. Pastoral sensitivities. In those days. And as I said.

Well. Your feelings are lying. Aren't they? I'm not quite sure. How they took it. I don't really remember. In the end.

[21 : 55] They went to another church. Because our minister. Said. You know. You cannot be living. In such blatant. Open sin. And still be coming to communion. In this church.

They went to another church. And the church. That church. Said the same thing. I don't know. Whether they ever learned. Their lesson. But. But. But. What was the problem there? The problem was. That it wasn't.

The love of God. And his word. That was guiding them. Which quite clearly. Simply says. Well. You're wrong. Okay. So get your act together. Ask God to help you.

Learn to love each other. Or whatever. It was that they let their feelings. Drive them. And we see this in so many ways.

I was. I was talking earlier about. How important it is. As Christians. We understand. Our identity. Is to be found in Christ. What's the problem. In today's world.

[22 : 48] It is that people say. My identity is found. In my feelings. I mean. Let me be controversial. For a moment. And say. You know. I feel I am this sort of person.

Or I feel I am this sort of person. Well. There are questions. And issues. To deal with there. But at the end of the day. As a Christian. Our identity lies in Christ. It doesn't lie.

Where our feelings. Might take us. And so. Actually. What we have to do. And it's a struggle. Through Christian life. Is to bring.

Not just our actions. And our deeds. Into line. With what God wants of us. We'll talk more about that. This afternoon. But what we also have to do.

Is to say. Lord. I don't feel this. I'm not. My feelings are going astray here. And we have to say. Lord. Help my feelings. To become more God like.

[23 : 49] More Christ like. I don't love this person. Over here. But Christ does. So. If I'm going to imitate Christ. Christ changed my feelings. Towards this person.

And so we let God's word. And his promises. And his love for us. Guide us. Into the very people we are. And that means it affects.

Every area of life. It's another place. Where we get things so wrong. If we've been brought near to God. In Christ. Then we are near him.

We are surrounded by his love. Wherever we are. Whether at work. Or in church. Or in our families. There is no divide. You see.

Between the secular. And the spiritual. Here. If we understand. What it is. To be loved. And in Christ. Paul isn't saying. You know. Every time you come together.

[24 : 45] You sing so beautifully. And you just. That's where you are. To be found. In Christ. He doesn't say that. He's talking to people.

Who are living out there. In the real world. People who are having to burn. Their books of magic. Because life is changing. Around them. As they become Christians. There's no secular.

Spiritual divide. We come to church. As God's people. We are encouraged. We're built up. In the world. We don't become somebody else. On Monday morning. Or we shouldn't. Because out there. We are in Christ. And it's quite. Humbling sometimes. Isn't it? To think. When we're at work. On the Monday. That Christ is right there. By his spirit.

In our lives. There to help. Help us. To image Christ. At work. We'll talk about.

[25 : 40] What that means. Again. This afternoon. But this is the. Extraordinary beauty. Of the love of God. That we have in Christ. He is. Everywhere. With us.

And it was bought. At great cost. And as we look. At what it is. To be loved in Christ. We see. Something of this. Amazing. Heart of God.

Full of grace. And mercy. That reaches out. To draw people. To himself. Maybe. This is the big message. For you. This weekend.

You long. To belong. You long. To know. The love. That Sharon. Found. When. God drew him. To herself.

I mean. That. That story. It was a little bit. Difficult. At the beginning. To hear. Exactly. What she was saying. But. But that story. Of God's grace.

[26 : 35] I mean. A seven-year-old girl. Who has only heard. Jesus. As a swear word. Sitting in a room. With a drunken. Stepfather. With cans of beer. Piled up.

Beside his chair. Happens to switch. The channel. To Billy Graham. She listens. And asks. Christ. Into her heart. Kneeling.

Behind. The drunken. Stepfather's. Chair. Isn't that grace? Isn't that love. Of God? This is how God works. Not always in exactly that way.

We all come to faith. In different ways. But it is. Utterly. Extraordinary. His grace. And I hope. That you know. Something of this. Today. If you don't.

Then. Hear him. Calling you. Today. Because if you. Turn to him. In faith. Even with simple faith. The simple faith. Of a seven year old.

[27 : 32] If you turn to him. And say. Lord. I want you. In my life. Today. I want you. To be my Lord. He will take you. Out of darkness. Into light. He will mark you.

With his Holy Spirit. And even when the. Father of. This world. Wants to draw you away. As he wanted to. Deliberately. Wanted to take Sharon.

Away from the Christian faith. As he wanted to draw her away. So God. Stepped in. It was a hard time for her. She seemed to move away. From the faith.

For a while. She fought the faith. But in the end. He drew her back to himself. Because. She was marked. By the spirit. This is God's love. This is God's love.

For us. Maybe as a Christian. You just need to hear this again. And be amazed. With the apostle. And refreshed. By these truths.

[28 : 27] You belong. You're loved. You have the spirit. As a guarantee. You're redeemed. You're in Christ. What more could you want?

Let me finish. With these. Words of Paul's prayer. From Ephesians 3. Verses 17 to 19. You can make this a prayer. For yourselves.

Make it a prayer. For other people. Around you today. Paul says. I pray that you. Being rooted. And established. In love. May have power.

Together with all the saints. To grasp. How wide. And long. And high. And deep. Is the love of Christ. And to know this love.

That surpasses knowledge. That you may be filled. To the measure. Of all the fullness. Of God. Amen.

[29 : 24] Amen. Amen.! so so so so so