

What Can You Expect? V. - To Know the Unknowable Love

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts, through faith, being rooted in love and having your foundation in love . . . to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17,19).

“Behold what sort of love has the Father given to us that we should be called the children of God? And we are” (I John 3:1).

“The fruit of the Spirit is love . . .” (Galatians 5:22).

How can you know something that cannot be known? Paul says that when we are filled with the presence of Christ, we are able to know the unknowable love. What exactly did he mean?

In the first place, of course, we must understand what we means by the words “know” and “knowable.” To understand this statement it is crucial that we understand the difference between flesh and spirit. The flesh has to do with all of our human attributes, both physical and psychical or the area of intellect and emotion. When Paul uses the word flesh, he is not necessarily indicating something that is unsound, but rather that which is the natural function of the human body and soul. Again, we must understand how Paul uses the word “soul.” In Hebrews 4:12, he speaks of the Word of God as a two edged sword dividing between soul and spirit. So obviously, there is a difference, although many tend to include soul and spirit together. This is where a good deal of confusion comes in the church, because people often confuse experiences that are purely soulish, with experiences that are spiritual. The Soul includes all activities of the mind, whether intellectual or emotional. That is why one must be careful how much credence one gives to the feelings. One can have great emotional experiences in music, for example, that have nothing to do with the Spirit. Some of the most inspirational music that humans have ever created has been the work of persons that were anything but godly. One has only to read the biographies of some of the greatest composers to see the truth of this. Rock music, as another example, can give people a “high” very akin to a religious experience. And so, of course, the emotions connected with love. The improper defining of the word has led to great confusion and distress. Usually when Christians talk and sing about loving Christ and God, they have in mind emotional feelings. Some of the classic hymns of the church—“O How I Love Jesus;” “Jesus Lover of My Soul;” “More Love to Thee;” are songs that engender a concern for an emotional experience with God. For some people such emotions come rather easily. Emotional capacity is, for the most part, a genetic matter. And yet, such emotional expressions are often used as a gauge of spirituality. And that causes distress among those who are not as emotionally oriented.

But the word used for love in the New Testament—*agape*—of which we have spoken at length in previous articles, does not refer to human feelings of affection, but rather a caring for others that is the expression of the Holy Spirit within. This is the basis upon which Paul declares that the “fruit of the Spirit is love.” He is not saying here that if you possess the Holy Spirit you ought to show it by greater feelings of affection, nor is he saying that if you don’t have

greater feelings of affection you do not have the Holy Spirit. To have Christ within is to have the Holy Spirit within. If you ask Christ to come in, He will. The evidence that he is there is that you care about Him. That is not to say that you have “caring” feelings, but rather that you are interested in Him and want Him in your life. It is this caring that causes one to pray to Him and to learn about Him. It is what causes one to seek out the assembly of the believers and want to fellowship with them. Love for Christ is thus not judged by how one feels emotionally.

This kind of caring comes with the coming of Christ to take up His abode in one’s spirit. At that point, all of the attributes of Christ are resident within the believer, as Christ is resident within. That does not mean that the human will express all of the attributes of Christ, or that the human becomes another Christ. We take on the nature of God, as Peter tells us, but we do not become gods. As Christ dwells within us, he expresses His caring through us. Thus, Paul says “The love of Christ compels me.” He did not say love for Christ, but the love of Christ. It was the love of Christ within Paul reaching out to whom he was ministering. It had nothing to do with his own personal feelings. The mind or intellect, which is also the seat of emotions, may not participate at all in the process of caring that reaches out to others.

Thus, one may be compelled to minister to those for whom one may not have personal feelings. This is the “fruit of the Spirit.” There is no way to gauge it on the basis of one’s human feelings. Conversely, negative feelings do not in any way indicate that the Spirit is not there. It was the human spirit that was damaged in the fall and it is the human spirit that is restored in salvation as the abode of Christ.

The physical and psychical (or mental) aspects of the human did retain great capacities even after the fall. To this day, humans are very like God in so many ways. And thus the human emotions can counterfeit religious types of experience, even if they do not possess Christ within. That is why the so-called “great religions” of the world are so deceptive. They seem like a pathway to God, and indeed, use many of the expressions that are used by those who are the children of Christ, but what they lack is the very presence of the Spirit of Christ within, which they can only obtain by the identification with Christ and His sacrifice. By the same token, the church has many counterfeits. Many activities and experiences are very religious, and satisfy the soulish needs, but may not be expressions of the Spirit of Christ within. Of course, the Pharisees are the great example of this as Jesus Himself pointed out.

So then love, as Paul is using it here in Ephesians, refers to the love of Christ which is in us, rooted and founded in Him.

So in what sense is it unknowable? It is unknowable in the human mind, but understood in the spirit. Paul tells the Corinthians—“*Eye has not seen nor ear heard neither has it entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him.*” And he says further, “*The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned [discerned in the spirit].*”

So what can you expect? You can expect to possess the love of Christ in your spirit, if you have asked him to come in and that such love is there, even though it may not be felt by the human emotions, and that such love will express itself through you to others, even though you may not realize it. You cannot gauge the love of Christ in your spirit by the emotional expressions of the natural mind.

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