

BEDWELL GLOBAL MINISTRIES

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ABOUNDING LOVE

This month we start a short series of devotionals entitled “Abounding Love” and in this first devotional we will concentrate on introductory considerations. The foundation for these brief devotional thoughts is Paul’s great prayer in his letter to the church at Philippi. Paul, you recall, writes in chapter 1:1-10. “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and insight, v. 10, so that you may be able to discern what is best and maybe pure and blameless until the day of Christ, v.11, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ – to the glory and praise of God.” Paul was never afraid to grapple with the great truths of the gospel, nor was he afraid to proclaim these truths with conviction and clarity.

This is a prayer of deep insight and understanding of what the Christian character and spirit should be in the life of the Child of God, When Paul prays he reveals what his deepest longings for the church are. He considers them to be fundamental and therefore prioritizes them as vital in lives of the children of God. He is always concerned about establishing and holding to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. He believes them to be of first importance in the believer’s journey with God. He is extremely serious about achieving the heights of excellence in a relationship with God. The heart of his prayer is his

pulsating passion and burning desire that the love of God’s people abounds more and more in knowledge and insight. In this letter, Paul once again returns to the priority of love. He is astute enough to realize that love is indispensable to the development of the Christian and the establishment and witness of the church. Furthermore he knows that the church is not the church without love. Jesus once made clear that the world would know whose His disciples were by their love for one another. The Apostle John put it another way in “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him.” 1 John 3:14-15. He is convinced that the church is not the authentic church without love. He also knows that everything the Child of God does is futile without this love. He knows that even if he can speak with the tongues of men and of angels, possesses the gift of prophecy; understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have faith that can move mountains, and even if give all his possessions to the poor and surrender our bodies to be burned, he is nothing if he does not have love. 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. Once again Paul underscores the priority of Christian love in these verses, and that is why he expresses his concern in his prayer “This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.” Philippians 1:9. To him it is the very main thing of all. To him it is the distinguishing characteristic of the church.

We are faced with the question “What about the contemporary church?” It would not be a misrepresentation of the condition of contemporary church **generally**, to point out two facts.

1. The appalling apathy which is an epidemic disease among Christians.
2. The disturbing superficiality in so many Christians, which is in this modern time the “new heresy.”

What is the answer to these problems? They cannot be solved by a finely tuned program or a carefully designed human strategy. Paul discusses what I believe to be the answer to these challenges. I am convinced that the prayer of the Apostle Paul addresses these problems. These problems are of spiritual nature and answer to them lies in love (agape). A Godlike love and Paul prays for its growth in the church at Philippi. “This is my prayer that your love may abound more and more.” This love, I believe would dispel the prevailing apathy and lack of commitment of so many in the church to do God’s work.

Meticulous methods and finely tuned organization seem to have replaced basic New Testament spiritual dynamics. There may be a place for some of these activities, but it has been my observation that down through the years, ecclesiastical mechanics by themselves have tendency to dull the life of the church, eventually strangling it and the result is apathy among God’s people. With all of ingenious and the continual flood the new fads and gimmicks which are touted to be the solution to church expansion, we have yet to solve the problem of lukewarmness and apathy in the church. While the problem of the lack of church growth has been addressed ad nauseam, the problem of apathy has not been confronted. The truth is that mechanics cannot solve this problem. Any discussion on it results in hand ringing and despair. There will be

no dynamic church growth unless it be rooted and grounded in love.

What then is the answer to it? It is vital that we stop right here and wrestle with it. The Lord had strong words to say about lukewarmness and apathy in the church. Speaking to the church at Laodicea he says *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were one or the other! So because you are luke warm-neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:15-16. These are strong words, but there is no delicate way you can say this because it was a malignant problem which needed a radical diagnosis.* But the severity of His words serves to emphasize how serious He regards this malignancy. Paul knows the answer to this perennial problem and reveals his concern in his prayer. I pray your love may abound more and more. The tenses in the Greek are saying that Paul “keeps on praying” and in his words “your love” (Agape) as Lightfoot suggests is the “inward state of the soul.” and it is a self-less Godlike self-giving love and so it “differs from “affection which is more emotional.” (W.E.Vine).

Is it possible that in our scientific age this answer is considered to be too simplistic and that a more scientific answer to it would suffice”. We need to remind ourselves that spiritual problems are not solved by, fads, gimmicks or technology. The love about which Paul speaks is the fire which will dispel the prevailing apathy among God’s people. What is needed is motivation, but human motivation is at its best temporary and limited and ultimately ineffective. What is vital is that the child of God be constrained by Agape love. I realize that this is not acceptable in an age where man believes that he is the answer to all

things, and that his ultimate goal is self actualization or self realization. But the great need of the church is a people who are impelled and compelled from within. What is vital is a love that comes from the person and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Paul writes in Romans 5:5 that “God has poured out His love into our hearts by His Holy Spirit whom He has given us.” It was love that fueled his mission in the world. If you read the resume of his life, you will stand back in amazement at the hardships he endured for the sake of Christ and His gospel. He wrote that it was the “love of Christ that compelled him.” There is more than just the human emotion of love in Paul. It was agape love, or a God-like love that constrained him. It was a Divine love. It was given to him by God’s Spirit combined with a choice he made to follow after love. (1 Corinthians 14:1) It is a love which pervaded his life through the indwelling Spirit of God. His life, service and thinking was rooted and grounded in this love. Samuel Chadwick once wrote that “Paul’s prayers are the best expositions of his theology.” It would be true to say that this prayer reveals that the heartbeat of his theology is love. I am convinced that the Biblical answer to the present day apathy and lethargy is Divine love burning in the heart. Henry **Drummond** coined the phrase “*The Expulsive power of a new affection.*” *It is love for God and the love of God (agape) that expels lethargy and moves the soul to deeper depths with God.* If the church is going to be the church invincible and victorious, this issue must be settled first, before it moves on to greater things.

The second problem of our day is a disturbing superficiality in the lives of so many Christians. Paul is concerned

about a quality of depth in the Christian and the church. While the modern church appears to be focused on bigger crowds, grandiose buildings, greater finances, new strategies for growth, in general the New Testament is ominously and strangely silent on these things. Paul always addresses the quality of the spiritual life and conduct of the church. This is his prime concern. Note the latter portion of verse Philippians 1: 9. “And this is my prayer: that your love may **abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.**”

These words are challenging the Christian to move from the superficial dimension of a selective spasmodic discipleship to deeper depths of spiritual attainment in the things of God. Bengel points out that “The fire in the Apostle Paul’s mind never says it is sufficient, that the past and present attainments are enough.” (Ritchie Phil. Comm. P. 202) Paul is always exhorting the believers to grow in grace and love and move on in the faith. He passionately prays that “they may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.” This challenge is the open secret of moving from the shallows of Christian experience into the depths of the riches of God’s grace. Here is the antidote to shaking off the shackles of superficiality, to take hold of all that God has promised. Paul pinpoints the qualities vital to a strong growing Christian church. Paul is in step with Jesus when the Lord makes His assessment of the seven churches in Asia. The messages to the seven churches clearly reveal what Jesus considers to be of prime importance in the church. John Stott has written an excellent booklet on the messages of Jesus to the seven churches in Asia. (Revelation chapters 2 and 3) He titled his book “What Jesus thinks of

his church. It is important that careful attention should be given to these seven messages, because it vital to grasp what Jesus thinks of His church, and strive to conform to what He wants.

It is both interesting and significant what Jesus considers to be priorities in His church. He does not call for statistical and financial reports. He does not hound them because their numbers may be down. It is not that these things have no place, but what we are talking about is what the priorities are in the mind of Jesus for His people. What are the qualities indispensable for the church to be His church? What are the foundations for God's people to be effective and fruitful servants in His Kingdom? What is it that makes the church strong? What is it that moves God's people to go deeper into the faith? These questions are relevant, for it is clear that Jesus is concerned with the quality of character and conduct of His people. The New Testament answer to these questions will reveal spiritual principles that prepare and equip the church to reach the world. In future devotionals we will attempt to outline these answers. It must be said that if we are content to live in the dimensions of superficiality we have not understood the priorities of Jesus for our lives. To fail here is to fail everywhere. We have noted that Paul focuses on love in his prayer. He is concerned that the Christian "abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" There are new heights to be reached and new depths to be plumbed on our journey with God.

In these introductory remarks of this devotional, we have briefly touched on the subject of "Abounding Love," We have not given a definitive or detailed exposition of this love, what we have attempted to do, is to stress that

indwelling love (agape) is the remedy for the two diseases we have discussed. i.e. The apathy which pervades the Christian church and the superficiality which one has called the new heresy. The devotionals that follow will deal and address the subject in greater detail, and I trust greater depth. The devotionals that follow will answer the question, **what is involved in Paul's statement "I pray that your love may abound more and in knowledge and depth of insight?"**