



THE JOURNEY CHURCH

SERMON GUIDE 4.10.2022

COMMUNION WITH CHRIST The Incomprehensible Love of God

SCRIPTURE:

Ephesians 3:14-21

RECAP:

We are continuing the series on communion with Christ this morning. The premise of this series is that Christianity is much more than merely believing the right things and behaving the right way. Following Christ cannot be reduced to doctrine and obedience. It's about communion with God and fellowship with Christ.

In my message this morning, I want us to see the basis for this fellowship. The basis for communion with Christ is the incomprehensible love of God. It's because of His love that He desires to know us and for us to know Him.

The goal of our message today is to explore the immeasurable depths of God's love. With those things in mind, if you would, please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Scripture Exegesis: Ephesians 3:14-21

A prominent theologian of the 20th century made a stop at the University of Chicago to speak. At the end of his address, there was a Q & A time where a student asked him, *"What is the greatest theological truth you ever learned?"* The question gripped everyone's attention. The esteemed theologian looked at the young man and said, *"The greatest truth I have ever learned is this: 'Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"*

Friends, I think it is fair to say that we will spend all eternity exploring the immeasurable depths of God's love. When Jesus returns you will understand everything there is to know about

eschatology and the end times. When we get to Heaven, the matters of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility will be settled. But you will spend an eternity of eternities searching the vast oceans of God's love and never get to the bottom.

The love of God is incomprehensible. It is inconceivable. It is unbelievable. And yet, His love is knowable. In fact, God desires for us to understand His love to a certain degree. And it is no small degree—Paul says in Romans 5:5, ***“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*** That word “pour” means to bestow generously. The same word is to describe Jesus pouring out His blood for the forgiveness of sins.

God has poured out His love in our hearts by His Spirit; and listen, this isn't our love for God. This is God's love for us! He has filled our lives abundantly with a knowledge of His love for us and here's why: to bring us into intimate fellowship with Himself.

The reality I want you to understand this morning is this: the more you know God's love, the more you will love God and desire communion with Him. What does John say? ***“We love Him, because He first loved us.”*** May the knowledge of His love fill you with a greater desire to commune with Him and love the Lord your God.

That seems to be the essence of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3. In Ephesians 1, Paul prayed for ***“the eyes of your hearts [to be] enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.”*** You will notice, Paul is praying that Christians would understand realities that already exist in our lives. Here, for example, he says I want you to know the hope to which he has called you. He doesn't want us to have this hope. We already have it in Christ. Paul wants to have a greater understanding of this hope. The same is true of God's power in verse 19. Paul is not praying for more of God's power to be poured out into our lives. His prayer is that we would understand the power He's already put to work in our lives. God has given us all these spiritual blessings, and the Christian needs only to come to a clearer realization of their reality. And the greatest spiritual blessing at work in our lives is the love of God. And that's what Paul is praying we would understand in our passage this morning; so, let's look at Ephesians 3:14-19.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” This series has been all about communion with God. Here, Paul models for us how he spends time in fellowship with the Lord—on his knees in prayer. You don't have to be on your knees every time you pray, but many of us would do well to spend more time on our knees before God as an act of humility, reverence, and submission.

Why does Paul get on his knees in prayer to God?

Verse 16, Paul is asking **“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”** This is a prayer of intercession. Paul is praying for the church; specifically, he’s asking God to strengthen them spiritually.

And he wants them to be strengthened spiritually, verse 17 says, **so “that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”** Paul’s prayer is for the church to be strengthened spiritually so that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith. These are all wonderful things to pray for, but even these things are towards a more glorious purpose.

The reason Paul desires their spiritual strengthening, verse 17, **“17b that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”** Paul’s prayer is that the church would come to a deeper and clearer understanding of the love that God has for them, because it’s a love that’s immeasurable and surpasses knowledge.

My wife and I tell our daughter all the time how much we love her. We will say things to her like, “Do you know how much Mommy and Daddy love you?” Of course, she says, yes. But we tell her, “No, you don’t. You won’t understand how much we love you until you have kids of your own. In a sense, the depths of our love for her are incomprehensible.

This is what Paul is saying. God’s love is so deep and incomprehensible that I am praying for you to have the strength and the faith to comprehend it just a little bit more than you do now.

It’s almost an oxymoron. Paul says I want you to know something that cannot be fully known. I want you to know something that surpasses knowledge. The Apostle knows that we will never fully comprehend the love of God; yet he’s desperate that we understand more.

The height, depth, length and breadth of God’s love cannot be measured. You can almost see Paul envisioning the oceans when he speaks of God’s immeasurable love. But even the seas are not a good illustration, because they are finite and can be measured. Perhaps, outer space is the only temporal illustration we can use because God’s love is not quantifiable.

This means my task this morning is impossible. There is no way I can adequately teach you about the immeasurable love of God. And yet we will try.

The Doctrine of God's love

#1-God's love for Himself

It may sound strange, even egotistical, to speak of God's love for Himself. But this is where we must begin because this is where the Bible says love itself originates. In 1 John 4:7, we read, ***"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God."*** That's simple enough, isn't it? Love is from God. God loves others. Not hard to understand. But John takes it a step further when he says in verse 8. ***"Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love."*** Not only does God love others. God is Himself is love. He doesn't merely have love. God is love.

John Piper put it like this. *"When John says that "love is from God," he doesn't mean it's from him the way letters are from a mailman, or even letters are from a friend. He means that love is from God the way heat is from fire, or the way light is from the sun. Love belongs to God's nature. It's woven into what he is. It's part of what it means to be God. The sun gives light because it is light. And fire gives heat because it is heat."* God doesn't just give love. God is love. The essence of His being is love.

This is why Jonathan Edwards called Heaven a world of love. "Heaven" says Edwards, "is His abode forever. [There] He will dwell and gloriously manifest Himself to eternity. And this renders heaven a world of love; for God is the fountain of love, as the sun is the fountain of light."

But here's the amazing thing about God: When we say God is love, we're not saying that God is this singular person who keeps all this love to Himself. The Bible says that God has eternally existed as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and in this Trinitarian relationship, God demonstrated perfect love towards Himself. For all eternity, before the heavens and the earth were made, before man was created in God's image, The Father loved the Son, and the Son loved the Father.

In John 3:35 we read, ***"the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand."*** Perfect love exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Remember at Jesus' baptism, our Lord comes to John the Baptist and tells the prophet to baptize Him. But John says, ***"I need to be baptized by you and do you come to me?"*** ***But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice***

from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The same words were spoken on the mount of transfiguration. When Jesus took Peter, James and John to the mountain, there they not only saw Moses and Elijah but Jesus appeared transcendent and was beaming with incredible light. Peter started saying some crazy things like he was going to start building booths, and God said, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."* Friends, this love between the members of the Godhead did not originate in Jesus' ministry. This is a love they've shared for all eternity. At one time, all that existed was the Triune God.

I don't know if you realize this, but only the Triune God of the Bible can be a God of love. If God is not a Trinity—that is, three persons in one God—then He cannot truly be a God of love. If God is this impersonal, singular being, like Allah, the god of the Muslims, then God had to create a race of people before he could show love and be loved. Which means by necessity that god existed for all eternity loving no one and being loved by no one. That's not a god of love. That's an idol. But the Bible presents a God of love who has always existed in community with Himself. And in the community of the Godhead, God has demonstrated His perfect love among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is the basis for God's love for all people, which is our next point.

#2-God's love for all people

Really, God's love is extended to all Creation. Psalm 145:9, *"The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made."* The Lord loves all His creation, even dogs.

But His love is especially manifested towards people, and when I say people, I mean all men, not just believers. It is true that God is angry with the wicked every day, and there is a sense in which God hates sin, and even hates sinners (Psalm 5:5). But it is equally true to say that God loves the sinner as well. This is what makes God—God. You and I cannot possibly have wrath and love for the same person; yet God can.

This is what theologians have referred to as God's common grace. Towards all humanity, God shows His love and goodness. Sam Storms says, *"While humanity is totally depraved and deserving of God's wrath, God mercifully postpones his destroying wrath and graciously blesses all men, even apart from salvation."*

Think about how God blessed Potiphar's house just for the sake of Joseph. That's God's common grace. Or consider Paul's words to unbelieving pagans that God *"did good by giving*

you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17). Jesus himself said that God *“makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust”* (Matt. 5:45). The Father is described as being *“kind to the ungrateful and the evil”* (Luke 6:35).

When unbelievers enjoy good food, go on vacations, experience the reward of hard work, the blessings of family, the pleasure of nice weather, the enjoyment of sports, relaxation and leisure, these are all undeserved blessings of God’s love that the Lord bestows upon all mankind.

I used to go to recovery meetings back in Indiana. And at this one meeting I attended, there was a man there named Aaron. Aaron was a severe alcoholic—to the point where his life was completely unmanageable. He lost his job, his family and freedom. And then God set him free from his addiction. He repaired his family, regained his career and freedom and began to help others. The Lord did incredible things for this man, but despite all this, Aaron would explicitly and openly spurn the name of Jesus Christ at these meetings. He was not a Christian. He despised Christianity and he wanted everyone to know. I still can’t help but think how patient and loving God is even to those who hate Him. What amazing love!

God’s love towards unbelievers is also demonstrated in the offer of the gospel. It’s true that only those whom God calls to Himself will be saved, but God demonstrates His love to all men by offering them Christ and the forgiveness of sins. *“God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (John 3:16). Listen, I believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation, but I also believe that because of the great love God has for all humanity, God offers to every person on the planet the opportunity to believe upon the Lord Jesus and be saved. That’s God’s love.

God loves all men. But the Lord has a particular love for His people.

#3-God’s love for His people

This is what we call the particular or discriminatory love of God. God has a special love reserved for the church that He does not demonstrate to all of mankind.

Some people don’t like that language. People want to say that God loves all people equally. But this just isn’t what the Bible teaches. It’s true God loves all men (as we just discussed), but He has a special love reserved for Christians.

Think about this: I work with a lot of women in my ministries. And I am grateful for every one of them because without these ladies, my ministries would not exist. I love these women, but I don't love any of them like I love my wife. My wife is my bride and I have a special love for her. I love the children in our church. There are some Wednesday nights when I get to work in the kindergarten class with my wife, and these kids sit on my lap and hug me. I love them. But my daughter is infinitely greater.

God's love for the church of Jesus Christ far exceeds His love for the rest of mankind, and He's demonstrated this love in salvation; a salvation that began in eternity past.

1. **Predestination.** Eph. 1:4-5 *"In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will."* Many people rail against the doctrine of predestination because they think it makes God unloving and unfair. But the Bible presents it in a totally different light. God's love motivated Him to choose us in Christ to be His children before the world began.
2. **Atonement.** Christ's death was a demonstration of God's love. The Bible says, *"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* God doesn't love you because Christ died for you. Christ died for you because God loves. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. The cross is the manifestation of God's love. Paul said, *"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Gal. 2:20).
3. **Regeneration.** And it was in love that God caused us to be born again. Eph. 2 says, we *"were dead in the trespasses and sins...and by nature children of wrath...But^d God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.* He chose us in Christ out of love. And then He brought about the new birth from the abundance of His love.

This is why John says, *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."*

God's work in salvation is an act of the Triune God. In love, the Father chooses a people for Himself to be saved. In love, the Son gave His life as a ransom for His bride. And in love, the Spirit makes us alive and brings us into a saving relationship with God.

This is why Paul says at the end of Romans 8. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No,*

in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

My Christian friends, even in your suffering God is demonstrating His love to you, because ***“we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”*** Another word for God’s goodness is His love. Packer calls it His “cosmic generosity.” God is working all things for your good, even your suffering, because He loves you.

And now, because of His love for you in Christ, God has fully committed Himself to you. Packer says, “God was happy without humans before they were made; he would have continued happy had he simply destroyed them after they had sinned; but as it is he has set his love upon particular sinners, and this means that, by his own free voluntary choice, he will not know perfect and unmixed happiness again till he has brought every one of them to heaven. He has in effect resolved that henceforth for all eternity his happiness shall be conditional upon ours.”

The love of God is incredible. It’s amazing. But it’s also misunderstood.

Misconceptions of God’s love

#1-Love means affirmation and acceptance

The world loves to speak about the love of God. The problem is they don’t understand it, and they don’t understand it because they take their own distorted definition of love and apply it to God.

The world’s definition of love is, if you love me then you must accept me for exactly who I am and you must affirm all of my choices; otherwise, you don’t love me. This is how the LGBTQ community portrays love, and if you don’t agree with their definition, then you’re promoting hatred and bigotry.

But that is not the Bible’s definition of love. Love is not accepting someone without exception, love is giving of yourself to someone for their greatest good. That’s the definition of biblical love. Again, God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. How did God demonstrate His love? By sending His Son to save us. He sent Christ to not only save us from His wrath, but to transform us by His Spirit. God will take us as we are, but He

doesn't leave us as we are. The world says if you love me you can't try to change me. But God says, I love you too much to leave you that way.

The reason the world doesn't understand the love of God is because it doesn't realize that God's love is holy. It is righteous. You cannot parse out God's attributes. God is the sum total of His whole being. This means God's love is holy love. Which means God doesn't love evil. He hates evil. And His love for us is why He won't allow us to continue living sinful lives.

Another common objection I hear when it comes to the love of God is:

#2-A loving God would never send anyone to hell

No doubt you have heard people say, "If God is loving, then how could He possibly send anyone to Hell where they are consciously tormented day and night for all eternity? Doesn't seem like a loving God to me." Maybe you've asked this question yourself.

If so, have you ever considered that the question itself assumes that you are more loving to God? Because what you're saying is that if you were God you would never send anyone to Hell. Because ultimately you believe you know better and you love better than God. If we say that God is wrong to make sinners pay for their sin, then we are saying that we are more loving than God is. We are saying we have a deeper understanding of love, justice, and right and wrong than God Himself. That's not just ignorant. It's arrogant.

Secondly, while it's true that God sends people to Hell, it's also true 1) He doesn't delight in it 2) Sinners choose Hell. Every man who rejects the Lord is choosing Hell over God.

The real question that should be asked is: If God is love, why would anyone choose Hell over Him?

#3-How can God love us if evil and suffering exist?

If God really loved me, then why have I suffered as I have? Why is there so much suffering in the world?

Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote a book entitled, "When bad things happen to good people." Kushner's son was born with a debilitating disability from which he eventually died. His son's death made him rethink everything he believed about God. People asked him if he believed that his son's death was a part of God's plan. Kushner said he could never believe in a God like that.

His conclusion was that because God is love, God must have either chosen to limit His abilities to intervene in this world or He didn't have the ability to do so at all. But no God of love would allow such suffering.

Some people think there's only a couple of options available when it comes to suffering. Either God loves us and can't do anything about suffering because He's not all powerful or God is all powerful, but He doesn't love us enough to do anything about the suffering in the world.

I don't know about you, but neither of those options bring me any comfort. I prefer what the Scripture teaches on the matter. God is all powerful and no matter what we go through, even if we don't like it, and even if we can't understand it, we know God loves us and has good intentions for us. And even if we can't see His purposes fully now, I am going to trust in His love for me.

Application

#1-Demonstrate that you love Christ by obeying Christ

Jesus said, ***"If you love you will obey me."*** And, ***"You are my friends if you do what I command you."*** Why is that? No other relationship works that way. How many friends do you have that you can say to, "The conditions of our friendship is that you obey me"? They probably won't be your friend for long.

But you also don't have any friends that laid down their life for you. Your friends didn't endure hostility and hatred and bear the wrath of God in your place. And so, you see, if you really love Jesus, you will do what He says. I think He's earned that right.

For some of you that means you need to examine your life this morning. What sin do you need to repent of out of love for Christ? Or maybe it's steps of obedience that need to be taken. You know Jesus is calling you to move forward, but you're hesitant. Allow Christ's love to propel you forwards in faith.

#2-Love others as Christ has loved you

The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. But Jesus ratcheted up this command when He told His disciples to love one another as He loved them. How amazing is it to consider that Jesus loves you more than you love yourself?

This means we are to love people sacrificially. We are to love people even when it is inconvenient or messy. Love often requires such sacrifices.

Some of you might consider loving others like Christ by signing up to become Foster Parents.

#3-Love your enemies

Jesus taught a lot of revolutionary ideas; one of those ideas is that we should love our enemies.

Last Monday, one of our members, Jesse Owens, went to the Wilson County Jail as a part of the TJC Jail Ministry. They went into the blocks and were sharing Christ with the men. At the end of their service, it came to pray and our guys asked if the men would share their names so they could pray for them by name. When one man shared his name, Jesse immediately realized that sitting in front of him was the man who killed his uncle. Jesse thought he recognized the man, but his appearance has so drastically changed he didn't recognize him until he identified who he was. Years ago, Jesse would have felt hatred for this man who shot and killed his loved one. But because of the love of Christ poured out in His life, Jesse was able to pray for this man.

Friends, this is what Jesus means when He says, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

#4-Pray that you might understand the love of God more

It really comes down to his love for us all. As we leave here today, all our prayers should, "Lord, give me a deeper understanding of your love for me. Help me understand the depths of your love. And may that understanding produce in my heart greater love for you and your Son. May your love be the fire in my heart that enables me to pursue daily fellowship with you Lord." May God in His mercy fill us with His love.

QUESTIONS:

1. What has been your biggest takeaway from the Communion with God series?
2. Compare God's love being poured into our hearts with the blood of Christ being poured out for the forgiveness of sin.
3. How does Paul model communion with God for us in verse 14?
4. Read Romans 5:6-8. How does Christ dying for the unrighteous illustrate the love that God has for us?
5. Why is it that only the Triune God can be a God of love?
6. Discuss the difference between common love and particular love.
7. Why can't the world understand the love of God (2 Corinthians 4:4)?
8. Read Deuteronomy 7:7-9. Why did God choose the nation of Israel?
9. Can people see your love of Christ by the way you're obedient to Him?