

The Power of Love - Mr Murdo A Murray (Elder Stornoway)

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[0 : 00] We can turn then to Romans chapter 8 and read again at verse 38. 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, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to come.

Be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. I was wanting particularly to focus on these last few words.

Be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And I thought it would be, first of all, useful to think of what love is.

And I must admit, I really struggled with this because it's such a concept that in a way we can't understand it.

We know what it is when we experience it, but it's hard to put into words.

[1 : 34] The Bible talks about four types of love. There's affection. affection.

And affection is particularly the situation that you would have with a mother and a baby, where there is affection that bonds them together.

So that's a particular love. Then there's the aspect of friendship, where we can have a loving relationship with other people.

And we cultivate friendship. And that's another particular aspect of love. Then there's the aspect of love that involves two people coming together.

Eros is what it's called. So that's one, which is probably the one which is most abused in our world today, in terms of the sex industry and everything that goes with it and television and these things.

[2 : 54] But that's another area. And the other one, the last one, is charity or agape, agape love, which is the one that relates best to the love of God.

And the Bible tells us that God is love. And everything that we know of love flows from the fact that God himself is love.

I came across a piece of writing by Alec MacDonald, who was a former moderator of the Free Church of Scotland. And he put this love in this context.

Love is the deliberate, kindly pursuit of the highest good of another person, irrespective of their desert or cost. So that's the sort of love.

But probably the best definition of love is actually John 3.16 and, again, in Romans chapter 5, as we read there.

[3 : 56] So the Bible itself defines love for us in the sense of this agape love. So that's the sort of the general concept of love.

But we can look at it in terms of taking a sweep, as it were, from eternity to eternity. Useful just to have a sweep of the various ways in which God's love is demonstrated in these arenas.

So the first one is in eternity past, before time, before the world wars. And this is where the Trinity comes into its own.

There are, of course, many people in the world who don't accept the concept of Trinity. But the Bible is very clear on it. That there is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

And that God was in place before anything created came into being. And in that arena before time, there was love between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 16] Because love needs an object. Love needs someone to love. So the concept of just having a God, one God, alone, doesn't really dovetail into the concept of love.

Love demands someone to be loved and someone to love. So that's where the Trinity fits in. So before the world wars, in eternity past, there was the love of God between Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

And it's from that love that the plan of salvation came. So then we can move into, as it were, into time.

And what was the concept of love that came when creation and time came into existence? Well, it was covenantal love.

It was a love that God set in a covenant. Now, a covenant is usually, from our point of view, we understand it as a contract.

[6 : 35] That's maybe the easiest way to start with, a contract. There are conditions to the contract. They have to be fulfilled. If they're not fulfilled, then something happens in relation to mitigation or loss or whatever.

But with God, it's different. This covenant that God made with man, it's different. Because although there's an expectation, and we sang about it there in that last psalm, there's an expectation of actually doing what is right and doing what God commands.

However, God's covenant indicates that God will deal kindly and lovingly with people, even if they break the covenant.

And I think that's something that we tend to forget. But there is a condition attached to that. So, the covenant was made.

To some extent, you've got, even in Genesis 3.15, you've got God saying that the seed of the woman would bruise or crush the head of the serpent.

[7 : 59] So, there's a promise there. God's covenant always has a connected promise. So, although we break our side of the covenant, and the people in the Old Testament broke their side of it multiple times, yet God kept His covenant.

And God kept faithfulness to His own covenant. So, that was the situation that you had as it moved into time in the Old Testament. But then there came, in the fullness of God's appointed time, there came Jesus, the Eternal Son, came into time.

And He was the epitome of the love of God. And what He did on the cross was what really matters to everybody.

So, it was a pivotal point of history where God sent His Son into this world to die on a cross of darkness and sin and shame so that we could be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Now, one of the things about this particular thing is if we think back to the covenant and to the love of God in eternity past, and then we come into this situation, God in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself.

[9 : 33] But the point is, God demands righteousness and justice.

And His covenant stands if we are out of Christ. And this is something that people tend to forget. People think, oh, the love of God, God is a God of love, and He will forgive and forget and all the rest of it.

But the reality is, as this verse points out to us, we'll be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

And that's the only way that we can be reconciled to God. And if we choose not to be reconciled to God, then we are expected to fulfill the demands of the covenant that God set up initially.

In other words, the commandments of God. And we cannot do it. So, God is providing us with the remedy. He's giving us the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Savior.

[10 : 50] And He's telling us that if we ignore that, then He still has to be just, and He has to deal in righteousness.

And it is only in Christ that we can escape the wrath of God. So, it's important that we grasp that. That's what happens there.

And one of the things in relation to love, when we think of the cross, love is sometimes most keenly felt in the absence of the object of love.

So, for example, you would have, in times of war and death in war, you would have what would be called maravron, spiritual sort of feelings about situations that had happened.

People were lost, and people would sing about that. In sadness, but also in love. And there's a sense in which on the cross, where Jesus has been made to be sin for us, and the wrath of God is poured out on Him, there is a sense of the absence of love.

[12 : 19] Because Jesus could look to His Father as He came into the world, and He had a relationship with His Father, a relationship of love.

But there must have been on the cross a point at which the wrath of God was being poured out on the Son, to the extent that He was crying out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And that comes across as the absence of love. And in a way, it has to be for our benefit, that He is forsaken, but He still holds on to the fact that it is His God, My God, my God.

So, there's a sense of which God still loves Him, but there is an abandonment that is attached with the reality of the sufferings that were required in order that we could be saved, so that Jesus is alienated from God the Father on our behalf.

And that's a wonderful thing to be thinking about, what He has done for us. He has given Himself in such a way as to become totally alienated from the Father and the Father's love in that context to be made a sacrifice for sin so that He could satisfy the just demands of sin and so that we could be made the righteousness of God in Him.

[14 : 06] So, the wonder of it all comes at the cross. That's the tipping point. But then, as we move along into the experience post the cross and the experience of Christians in the world, what does the love of God mean for us?

Well, the love of God means that we have been brought from death to life, from the power of Satan to God. It's giving us a newness of life.

If it's giving us... Sometimes, I think it's fair to say that it can be like a spark, a spark of love, so that many of us will understand that there came a point in our own journey where something happened. Whether it was in our reading of the Word of God, whether it was in our interaction with other Christians, or whether it was none of these, a spark, a divine spark, the Spirit of God came into our being in such a way as to give us thoughts that were not there before, gave us an aspect of God that was not there before.

And I think the thing that we need to think about there is if you have that spark, if God in His Spirit has brought that spark into your being, don't smother it.

[15 : 52] Don't smother it. Because a spark can easily... You know that when you try to light a fire. You start small, and you try to light it.

You put the firelighter in. You put the match on it. And before you know it, you can smother it. Don't smother it. The best way not to smother that spark of eternal love that's touched your being is to go to the Word of God and to fan it into flame because it's His Word, and His Word is life, and His Word is love because God Himself is love.

But He is love in the context of what His Son did for us. And that's the wonder of saving grace. And it's important for us as we go along life's road if we put our trust in Christ, that we try to show forth the praises of Him who died for us and gave Himself for us and to seek to show others something of the love that God has demonstrated to us.

And if you look at that chapter 5 there where we read earlier, chapter 5, at verse 8, but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And it goes on then, since therefore we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God.

[17 : 45] So the wrath of God is there. The wrath of God is there against sin. And the wrath of God, it wasn't just in the covenant that was made in the early days with Abraham and Moses.

It wasn't just there. That covenant stands. But it can be dealt with and was dealt with at the cross of Christ by the Son of God who gave Himself for us.

And it's to give people an understanding as we meet people, to give them an understanding that what has touched our lives is the love of God in Christ.

Christ. And that Christ is now in us through His Spirit. Christ has gone to be with the Father. He came into the world. He gave Himself.

He died. He rose again. And then He ascended into heaven. But He sent His Spirit to be in the world. And it's His Spirit that touches our hearts and lives in our hearts.

[18 : 54] And it's His Spirit that can create the spark. that lights the heart of man towards the love of God.

And we need to demonstrate our love for our fellow human beings. For those we live with and work with.

And sometimes it's those that we live with that are most difficult in a sense because they are nearest to us. And the reality of what we are is sometimes more evident to them. We can perhaps put on a face when we meet people outside. But when we're at home, we are what we are. And sometimes it's not very nice.

But we must try and have the love of God operating more and more in our own hearts so that others would know that we have been with Jesus and would know, therefore, that something has overcome us and that there is something there for them as well if they but accept it.

[20 : 10] Now, of course, people can't just accept Jesus in the sense that it's a two-way process. The process begins with the Spirit of God touching a heart.

But then there is the requirement of acceptance because there is a choice. It is for us to choose to accept what Jesus has done. And it's important to recognize that.

But someone once put it this way. You go to a door, you knock on the door, you go through the door, and you turn around and you see on the other side, chosen from all eternity.

And the Apostle Paul in Romans is making that very clear that we have been chosen from all eternity. There are people that will say nowadays that that's not the case, that it's all about choice. But that's not what the Bible says. The Bible makes it very clear that God was in eternity electing some to everlasting life. And the reality is some people will use that as a cushion and say, oh, but if that's the case, I don't need to do anything.

[21 : 23] It's all going to happen for me. Well, sadly, that law that was there from the beginning still applies. That if you don't have Christ, you have nothing.

And you have to then meet the demands of the law and justice of God on your own. But the offer of Christ is there and it's there for all of us.

But then as we look beyond what happens in this world, we are all moving on to eternity. And if we just even think about the horizon of time and look to the beyond.

Now, for some of us that may come in death, but it may come with the end of the world as well for others. But there is a horizon there beyond which we all must go.

and the word of God makes it plain that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

[22 : 32] So, we have a responsibility to, if we were going to have to go to court, we would make a case and we would work on that case.

And I think it behoves us all to think about that horizon that we are all going to have to pass into the great eternity and think, well, we are all going to have to meet with the judge of all the earth.

What is my case in terms of God's law and its expectations, in terms of fulfilling that law? How am I going to stand before that judgment seat?

What am I going to say? And I think the more we think of that, the more we would come to recognize that we have no case.

But the point is that when we go beyond the horizon into the eternal realm, we have nothing that we can do. There is nothing that we can do.

[23 : 36] As the tree falls, so it shall lie. But here, in time, as we try to think about the case that we would make before God and we come to realize that we have no case, that we are before the judgment, the just judgment of a righteous God, we can come to realize that there is nothing we can do.

He has done it all. He has provided His Son to be our Savior. And what an affront it is, if we are to turn around and say, no thank you.

No thank you. He has done for us everything that is needed for us to be able to go to that judgment seat and to stand in the righteousness of Christ.

That's the beauty of what He's done. In a legal sense, it is the case now. He has made us righteous in Christ, but He is still making us righteous as we go along as well.

The process of sanctification goes on, but in a legal sense, we are deemed to be righteous, even for the righteousness of Christ. And that righteousness will stand us on that day.

[24 : 55] And as we go towards that reality, how will we experience the love of God? Well, it's a difficult one to even think about.

But there is a sense in which as we move into the great eternity, it is the Son of God Himself, the Son of righteousness righteousness.

That will be our focus. And that will be enough. It will be enough. It is enough for time. But in time, we are still bound in sin.

And we cannot have the reality of the perfection, of the love that He has put into our hearts. But there will come a day when sin will be no more. and we will be able to see even as we are seen and known as we are known. But it is Christ that we will be looking at.

[26 : 02] Some people say, well, I'm looking forward to seeing so and so in glory. That may be, but I would have thought that when we see Christ, we'll be seeing all that we want to see because it is the Lamb of God that was slain.

He was the one that died for us and gave Himself. And He is the one that we will see in all His glory. Glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

Now, I came across, it was a song that my father used to sing very often. Now, it's in Gaelic, and I'll read it in Gaelic, just a verse of it.

He died in the of it. He died in the ending of it. He died in the ending bevoen.

Syn raume huweth parstje chavie at jesusicht ng hoort. Syn toshoch hae san toshoch hae nu the rikisad paro slipuwe. Now the gist of that is basically this love is so strong that death cannot drown it or have any effect on it just as was being said there.

[27 : 34] And as we reach the gates of glory that love and its application to us is just starting to give its fragrance because we get some of it here but the reality is yet to come.

So here we have it again. It's the same thing but it's in bold for us here 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.

May the Lord bless to us his love toward us. Let us let us pray. Lord we thank you for the wonder of what you are and what you have done and we pray that we might see something of the glory of the Son of God who is at the right hand of the Majesty on high and that we might have some appreciation of what he has done for us so that while we are in time and while the spark of the Spirit in our hearts encourages us to accept Jesus that we would take him into our hearts and give our lives to him for when the tree falls it will be fallen forever.

Oh Lord have mercy upon us then and pardon our sins for Christ's sake. Amen. We can conclude now singing in Psalm 145 the second version in the Scottish Psalter Psalm 145 at verse 7 Psalm 145 second version at verse 7 They utter shall abundantly the memory of thy goodness great and shall sing praise as cheerfully whilst they thy righteousness relate The Lord our God is gracious compassionate is he also In mercy he is plenteous but unto wrath and anger slow Good unto all men is the Lord

O'er all his works his mercy is Thy works all praise to thee afford Thy saints O Lord thy name shall bless the glory of thy kingdom show shall they and of thy power tell that so men's sons whose deeds may know his kingdom's grace that doth excel These verses they utter they shall abundantly They utter shall abundantly hear the memory of thy goodness great and shall sing praises cheerfully!

[31 : 22] What say thy righteousness relate The Lord our God is gracious Compassionate God O'er is he also In mercy he is plentious But unto wrath and anger slow Good unto all man is the Lord For all his works his mercy is

Thy wise all place to thee afford Thy saints O Lord thy name shall bless The glory of thy kingdom show Shall they and of power tell!

That so man says it may know His kingdom s grace that hath excelled Closing a word of prayer. Lord blessed heavenly we thank you wondrous love that demonstrated in the person of Jesus and that here we the peace God the blessing comes putting in for eternity pardon now Christ's Amen