

SERMON THEME: FACING THE END WITH SOBRIETY

SERMON TITLE: THE LOVE OF GOD & THE PATIENCE OF CHRIST, BY PR RUFUS CHAN

SERMON TEXT: 2 THESSALONIANS 3:5 (NIV)

⁵May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the patience of Christ.

PROLOGUE

- The hymn 'Jesus Loves Me':
 - Was initially composed for a sick child.
 - Speaks of the enduring love of God, and the divine care for people in hardship.
 - Missionaries used this hymn as part of their evangelistic efforts in China since the 18th century, and this hymn quickly became a favourite among the people, with its simple melody and relatable message.
 - Demonstrates that the Christian faith is a simple yet profound truth of God's love.
 - We possess a love and endurance that surpasses all earthly troubles.
 - This song of comfort and encouragement is present in today's text.
- Review of last sermon:
 - We learnt of the hostile circumstance surrounding the Thessalonians church, and the challenges and difficulties they had in the advancement of the gospel.
 - In light of the eschatological undertone in 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul concludes the letter with this statement in his belief that the church will do what is right for the sake of the gospel.
 - The New Living Translation offers a better read of what we will learn from today's text:
 - "May the Lord lead your hearts into a full understanding and expression of *the love of God and the patient endurance that comes from Christ.*"

A. THE LOVE OF GOD

- The limits in our knowledge of love to the worldly expression of brotherly/fatherly love, hinders us from having knowledge of and in experiencing God's full love for us.
- There are four main types of Biblical love:
 - Storge – Family Love.
 - Shared between family members.
 - Characterized by affection, care and a sense of responsibility towards your family.
 - Philia – Brotherly love.
 - Shared between close friends, or family members.
 - Characterized by mutuality and sharing between persons.
 - Eros – Romantic Love.
 - Shared between two individuals in a relationship.
 - Characterized by intense longing or desiring a need for physical connection.
 - Agape – God's Love
 - Often referred to as the 'unconditional love'.
 - Highest form of that God has for humanity.
 - It is a selfless love that puts the needs of others before oneself.
 - Characterized by compassion, forgiveness and a desire to help others without expecting anything in return.

- When we think of loving God, we tend to think in the capacity of the 'eros' love, which brings a disconnect when God's love does not fit well into the category of 'romantic love'.
 - The 'agape' love is vastly different from the 'eros' love in that it is:
 - A giving kind of love that reaches people,
 - A selfless and inherent love for others without regards to the possible/lack of reciprocal value.

Agape	Eros
Sacrificial giving	Acquisitive desire and longing
Comes down	Upward movement
God's way to man	Man's way to God
God's grace	Man's effort
Unselfish love	Egocentric love
Lives the life of God, therefore dares to lose it	Seeks to gain its own life
Freedom in giving	Will to get and possess
Primarily God's love; God <i>is</i> agape	Primarily Man's love
Sovereign in relation to its object	Determined by the quality, the beauty and worth of its object
Loves its object and thus creates value in its object	Recognizes value in its object and therefore loves it

- *God's love always come before and is never conditional on what we can achieve.* (E.g., When God declares of His love for Jesus even before Jesus began his ministry in Matthew 3:17.)
- Everyone shows love differently, and is categorically summarized in Gary Chapman's theory on the 5 love language:
 - Physical touch
 - Acts of service
 - Gift giving
 - Words of affirmation
 - Quality time
- *Our limiting capacity in viewing love restricts how we see the 'agape' love from God.*
- God's *agape* love encompasses all of the five expressions of love.
 - God professes His love to us through His word (*Words of affirmation*).
 - The Bible is full of God's love to us through words, it is His love letter to humanity.
 - Jesus is the acting agent of this love, and the Holy Spirit helps us understand His love in fullness when we read the Bible.
 - Jeremiah 31:3, 1 John 3:1, Isaiah 54:10.
 - It is offered to us unconditionally out of His 'agape' love for us, and unless we stretch our hands out for it, we will not understand the fullness of His love for us.
 - God demonstrates His love through His Son (*Gift giving*).
 - He sent His only Son to us so that we might live through him.
 - Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:19, Luke 22:27.
 - God's love is displayed through Christ's death on the cross (*Acts of service*).
 - Christ's death on the cross is the supreme act of servanthood.
 - It goes beyond the atonement of our sins, it gifts us a new life, a new hope and a new purpose.

- God reveals His love through the Holy Spirit (*Physical touch*).
 - Most challenging form of love expression that we struggle with, as God is divine and intangible.
 - It comes as a tingling in the heart, the stirring and evoking of our spirit man.
 - God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with love, and with the proximity of the Holy Spirit, we are therefore experiencing quality time with God every day of our lives (*Quality time*).
 - Romans 5:5, John 14:16
 - God's 'physical' touch can also come through in the encouragement we receive from the Christian brothers and sisters surrounding us.
 - *A compilation of God's goodness and faithfulness in our lives is equally important as the book of conviction.*
 - It serves as a reminder to us, of our personal experience with God's love, when we go through days of persecution, destitution and/or loneliness.

B. PATIENCE OF CHRIST

- Paul also prayed for our hearts to be directed towards the patience of Christ.
- Patience here refers to the enduring act of steadfastness in carrying out the Mission of God when faced with trials and oppositions.
- In Christ's perseverance through His life and ministry, we gain 3 lessons on perseverance:
 - Importance of Perseverance.
 - Christ's perseverance sets an example for us as we face our own trials and challenges, and is evident as He faced oppositions, rejections, physical sufferings and bore our sins (Hebrew 12:1-2).
 - We are comforted that because He had dealt with the struggles of this world personally, He understands our challenges and strengthens us in our struggles.
 - The letters to the Thessalonians warn us that the bitterness of the world will intensify, and the man of lawlessness will continually create confusion and delusion.
 - Just as a good father prepares the child for the path, our heavenly Father prepares us for these impending happenings, building us up through His words, so that we can stand firm and face these challenges with confidence.
 - Value of trusting God.
 - Christ was working for the salvation and reconciliation of humanity to God.
 - He sets His eyes on the prize despite His knowledge and fear of the treacherous road ahead; like a runner setting his sight at the end of the race, despite the arduous running route ahead.
 - He demonstrated endurance throughout His life and ministry, trusting in God's timing and guidance of the salvation process – He did not rush the process, but trust that God will bring vindication to man.
 - *Perseverance involves a steadfast commitment to God's will and purpose for our lives – especially in times of hardship and going against the grain, and in misunderstanding.*
 - Paul tells the Thessalonians that the message on the Second Coming of Christ is true – *be steadfast in the message.*

- “When the train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don’t throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer. “– Corrie TenBoom.
- Power of forgiveness.
 - Forgiveness is a deliberate and conscientious choice to let go of anger, bitterness and resentment, it is not a feeling.
 - *To learn how to live a life of Perseverance, is to learn how to forgive*, just as Jesus chose to forgive those who wronged and persecuted him.
 - If Jesus had not forgiven the people who had wronged him, he would not have made it to the cross.
 - By letting go of bitterness and resentment in our lives, it is us emulating Jesus as He did when He went to the cross - He died a better man, not a bitter man.

C. CALL/CORE OF THE CHURCH

- Implications of these two points for the Thessalonica church and for the church of today:
 - Taking the text at face value, we only conclude that it gives us a better understanding of God’s love and of Christ’s perseverance.
 - But there is a deeper significance of this text, revealing the call of the church.
- Paul prayed for the Lord to direct our hearts to “the love of God” and to “the patience of Christ”.
 - In Greek, these two phrases are known as ‘genitive’ phrases.
 - Taking the text deeper, we will begin to see...
 - Genitive is a case, predominantly used for showing possession/relationship.
 - E.g. in the phrase “the love of chocolate” = “the love **for** chocolate”, with love being the subject, and chocolate being the object, since a non-living thing like chocolate (being the subject) is incapable of having love for an object.
 - In the case of a plenary genitive, God is the subject of the actions (subjective genitive), **and** the object of the action (objective genitive), e.g.:

"May the love of God fill your heart"



PLENARY GENITIVE



- Applying the case of plenary genitive to the sermon text today:
 - “The love of God” = “God’s love” **and** “the love FOR God”.
 - “... the emphasis would be on believers being directed toward the love God gives which in turn produces increased in them for him. “

2 Thessalonians 3 | NET

tn The genitive in the phrase τὴν ἀγάπην τοῦ θεοῦ (tḡn agaphn tou qeou, “the love of God”) could be translated as either a subjective genitive (“God’s love”) or an objective genitive (“your love for God”). Either is grammatically possible. This is possibly an instance of a plenary genitive (see ExSyn 119-21; M. Zerwick, Biblical Greek, §§36-39). If so, the emphasis would be on believers being directed toward the love God gives which in turn produces increased love in them for him.

- Comparing the sermon text in its original form against the translated version applying the case of plenary genitive:

Original text (NIV)	Translated, Plenary Genitive
May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the patience of Christ.	Now may the Lord direct your hearts to God's love for you <u>that you may</u> increasingly love him, and to Christ's steadfast resolve <u>that you may</u> stand steadfast in him.

- Seeing the text in consideration of the plenary genitive applied, we now understand that it is not just a one-way appreciation of:
 - God's love, it is also for us to enter His love, and grow in our love for Him.
 - Christ's endurance, it is also for us to enter His endurance, and to remain steadfast in Him.
- The case of the plenary genitive applied sheds a clearer understanding on Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian church and for us:
 - We know God's love, in order to grow in our love for Him.
 - We know Christ's patience, in order to stand firm in Him (ref 19-Mar-2023 sermon).
 - We can love God through the 5 love language too:
- Physical touch – Aid to those in need. ▪ Words of affirmation – Praise and worship.
- Acts of service – Service to the church. ▪ Quality time – Daily devotion.
- Gift giving – Tithes and offerings.

CONCLUSION

- Love is a volitional undertaking.
 - If we will ourselves to love God, we can.
 - Karl Barth, author of "Church Dogmatics", summarized his life's work in one simple fundamental truth– "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. "
 - *Jesus's love for us is the foundation of our faith and hope.*
 - Early version of the hymn to remind us of Christ's love for us:

Jesus loves me—this I know,
For the Bible tells me so;
Little ones to Him belong—
They are weak, but He is strong.

Jesus loves me—loves me still,
Though I'm very weak and ill;
From His shining throne on high,
Comes to watch me where I lie.

Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me,
Yes, Jesus loves me—
The Bible tells me so!

Jesus loves me—He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide;
He will wash away my sin,
Let His little child come in.

Jesus loves me—He will stay
Close beside me all the way;
If I love Him, when I die
He will take me home on high.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you know that God loves you? In what ways have you felt/know God's love for you in your life?

2. What can we learn from the patience of Christ? What are some present situations where you can apply what you've learnt?

3. Describe your current state of love/endurance for God and how can you increase them in your daily living?