

CITY OF GOD (Cont'd): Hebrews 12:22

Chapter 12, verse 22, of Hebrews, "We have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." We have seen that city is described in symbolic language in the 21st chapter of Revelation, verse 9, "One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke to me saying, 'Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.'" And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the Holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." He says, this city is the bride of Christ, and Paul says the bride of Christ is the church.

Hebrews says, "We have come" to this city. We are looking at only one aspect of the city, that it is the city of God. We discussed the fact that it came down out of heaven from God. The church is from God. Our second point was from Revelation chapter 21, verse 11, "Having the glory of God." This city, the church, is filled with the glory of God, and we found that the glory of God is the presence of God. The church is the people of God; the church is the presence of God, God dwells in His people. The third point we were going to discuss is the church is filled with the love of God.

This city, the church, is a city of love, it is filled with the love of God. I base that upon Revelation chapter 21, verse 16, "And the city is laid out in a square." We have a perfect square, in fact, it is a perfect a cube. The city's length, width, and height are equal. "and its length is as great as its width; and he measured the city with a rod, 1,500 miles; its length and width and height are equal." Now, how in this world do we, do we get the love of God out of that? He is talking about the city being a square, and he talks about its width and its length and its height. How do we get the love of God out of that?

It is my opinion we should interpret Revelation by using scripture to interpret scripture. That is the best way we can be confident we understand the context of the symbols in Revelation and what they mean. We look to the context of other passages of the Bible that use the same symbols used in Revelations to describe, interpret, and understand what God is saying in Revelations. Any other source is man-made speculation and subject to the lies of Satan.

If you turn to the third chapter of Ephesians, this, to my knowledge, is the only other place in the scripture where these figures are mentioned. Paul is praying, in verse 14, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;" now listen to what he says in verses 17-19, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."

When he talks about the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, he is talking about love. When John sees this city in Revelation, giving us the breadth and the length and the height, and the measurements are a perfect cube, John is using the same language that Paul uses when Paul talks about the love of Christ and the love of God. Upon that basis, I am saying that this city, to which we have come, is filled with the love of God. It is the city of love. Whatever is said in scripture about love is looked at in the context of the church because the church is the only institution on earth that knows anything about the love of God. Christian people are the only people on earth who know God as love. Christians “have come” (past tense) to the city, they are a part of that city of love.

Look at what Paul says, I want you to be “rooted and grounded in love.” We place a great deal of emphasis on being rooted and grounded in what we call Christian doctrine; but Paul says, “Be rooted and grounded in love.” Teaching from the word of God is important. We cannot be rooted and grounded in anything else if we are not rooted and grounded in scripture. I have no patience with men who preach their opinions. We are to be rooted and grounded in the Word, which brings us to the place where we can be rooted and grounded in love. That is where the Christian is to stand. Rooted and grounded means standing, it means being planted, being firm, we are planted in the earth. Some Christians are so heavenly-minded, they are no earthly good. We are to stand in the world, we are to be in the earth. That is where the love of God is to be shown. We are to be rooted and grounded, he said, in this love, firmly planted.

Notice what he says next, that you “may be able to comprehend with all the saints the breadth, the length, the height, the depth, and to know the love of Christ, which,” he says, “surpasses knowledge.” That seems to be a contradiction, I want you to know something that surpasses knowledge. I think the knowledge that he is talking about is human knowledge. The love of God, knowing the love of Christ, and comprehending the love of Christ, surpasses human love. There is no human knowledge that can understand or explain or comprehend the love of Christ. It surpasses human understanding. So, this is something that is spiritual. You cannot rationalize it on a human basis. You cannot compare it with human love.

I have heard preachers give illustrations. I have a hard time with some illustrations trying to describe the love of Christ, and the love of God to us through Christ. Many preachers talk about a mother, risking her life by running into a flaming building to save her child. That is love, but it is human love. That is love motivated by the child being hers. There was no motivation in God's love. There was no reason why He should have loved us, and we cannot comprehend, or explain why He did. That is beyond human knowledge.

On the human level, or from the level of the world, we cannot understand it because it surpasses (human) knowledge. But Paul says, I want you to comprehend it, to understand it. In scripture, there are many things Paul says he wants us to understand; in fact, his prayers for the most part are praying for Christian people to have knowledge and understanding, to know what God is doing in the world.

It is my opinion that the majority of the church today, the Christian world, does not have the foggiest idea what is going on in the world as far as God is concerned. They do not have the foggiest idea of what God has said in His Word about much of anything. Paul said, you can know the love of God, you can comprehend it, and you can understand the love of God in Christ.

Paul is saying, when God tells you to love, you understand what God is saying. When God tells you to love and when God talks about love, you comprehend that and get that into your thick skull, and you make it a part of your life. You do not ignore it. You understand it, you know it, and you comprehend it. In fact, that passage that we read in I John, chapter 4, and we'll be coming back to this, but in verse 16, "We have come to know and we have believed the love of God which God has for us." We have come to know it. That is what Paul wanted them to do . . . to understand it, to comprehend it, to know it, and John says, "we have believed it." It is something that you believe, by faith. Faith comes from hearing ... I'm hearing. I am hearing from the Word. When God talks about His love, you had better believe what He says. Just like when God says in His word, "You have come," you had better believe you are already there, in Christ.

A few editorial comments: When God tells you the things He has done for you in Christ, you had better believe it exactly the way God described and apply it using the same "tense" in which He said it. With everything except our new bodies, pay close attention because they are all in "past tense" (it has already happened, it is available to you right now by faith, exactly the way God told you deliberately using "past tense" language in scripture). And, most important, you had better start to reject all man-made doctrine (lies of Satan) that push "past tense" completed things over yonder after Jesus returns (except our new bodies).

Anytime God uses "past tense" to identify what He has given you, you had better believe it, by faith, it has already happened to you, it is already available to you, including access to heaven, to the very throne of God in heaven. God wants you to actually enter heaven now, live there the rest of your natural life, walk around, see everything, enjoy everything in heaven, live in heaven now, by faith. God wants you to now use all of the heavenly resources that He has placed at your disposal in what God calls "the heavenlies." God is not going to add anything more to heaven than what He has already made available to you, by faith, for you to now use and enjoy, this very minute, if fact, since your new birth (you have missed out that long already). He repeatedly tells you in scripture the only thing, and there is just one thing, in heaven and on earth He has not given you, and that is your new body.

Can you comprehend how much you are missing by not believing God . . . "Faith comes by hearing," you have never been told, you have never heard and so, of course, you have never believed. That is sad, so very, very sad. Start believing God. Revisit all "past tense" passages, and by faith apply them now to yourself and your children. Believe God and His Word, apply them to your life and begin to now live in them for the remainder of your life. And Be Sure you tell your children and your grandchildren. Do not deny them the faith you have been denied by no one telling you, no preacher (for over 2,000 years) believing

God enough to preach it, no elder believing God enough to demand it be preached and taught in the church God gave him responsibility to grow and mature. Stop the continuous rejection of God's Word that has occurred up and down the line from allegedly learned Bible scholars to Sunday School teachers for the last 2,000 years. Why and how have the elite rejected God's Word; because all of these in authority for 2,000 years had to see before they believed, thus allowing Satan to enter, insert his lies, and deceive the elect, rather than learn the truth from the faith sequence scripture describes in verses like Psalms 27:13.

Believe in the love of God, come to know it. Notice then, "The one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." That word abide is "live." You live in the love of God, and the love of God lives in you. The result of this, going back to Ephesians, if you comprehend and know the love of God, the result is, he says, you will be filled. See? To know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. You may be filled with all the fullness of God. That is a remarkable statement.

It becomes clear to us why it is so remarkable when we read from Colossians 1:19, speaking of Jesus, "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure that all of the fullness dwell in Him." Now, go over to Colossians, chapter two and verse 9, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form," King James says, "Godhead." Closely notice the "tense." It does not say dwelt. It says "dwells" (present tense). It was not only in Christ when He was here upon the Earth, it continues to dwell in Him in bodily form, and that is in Christ's body upon the Earth, it dwells in the church. The fullness of God continues to dwell in Him (Christ) in bodily form, that is in His people. And so, he says, in verse 10, "In Him, you have been made complete." Complete is the same word as full or fullness. "In Him, you have been made full."

And isn't that exactly what Paul says in Ephesians, chapter 3, we read earlier, "that you might be filled up to the fullness of God." To me, that means everything that God wanted to reveal to mankind about Himself was revealed in Christ. When Christ was here upon the Earth, He represented God. Everything that man could understand and know about God was to be seen in Christ. Christ said, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father." This was a complete and full revelation of all that God is. At least it is all that man can know and understand and comprehend.

And now Paul tells us that same fullness dwells in His people. The only way man will ever come to know God is to see Him in His body, that means in His people, as they manifest Himself in their lives and through His word. God's people, the Christians, are the ones who are responsible for telling it. That is the result of being rooted and grounded, and knowing and comprehending the love of God . . . that you might be filled with the fullness of God.

Today's churches and the people are filled with everything else except the love of God. We are filled with self. We are filled with ambition. We are filled with the world. He says, "I want you

to be filled with the fullness of God." But, let's look at what that will do. At first, this might seem like "old hat" to you, but it is line upon line and precept upon precept.

Beginning in Romans, chapter 8, verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" I guess we ought to say, "What can separate us from the love of Christ?" Paul was looking at it personally, "Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" That summarizes just about anything that can happen to a human being, and we are all going to face that tribulation. There is no use closing our eyes and saying, "A Christian doesn't have troubles." **In fact, that is when you get into trouble, is whenever you become a Christian. And you get in worse trouble when you become a serious Christian. And you get in deeper trouble whenever you begin to know and to understand the Word and try to live by it, and show people what the Word says.**

Yes, there is tribulation. It is physical, it is emotional, it is spiritual, it is all kinds of things we face in the world. We face the same thing the rest of the world faces. The difference is: we have the answer to it and the world does not have the answer. The answer to it, Paul says, is the love of God. It is the love that God has revealed to our inner soul, "Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? Just as it is written, 'For thy sake, we are being put to death all the day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'"

That is the way the world considers us, or the way the world usually considers us, "as sheep to be slaughtered." But Paul said, No, that is not true, we are not sheep for the slaughter. We are not fighting a losing cause. We are not being wasted. He said, "In all these things," not from them, but in them: in tribulation, in distress, in persecution, in famine, in nakedness, in peril, in sword, and in what the world considers us to be, which is false, "But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us." We are more than conquerors. Not only do we conquer, but we are more than conquerors. Not only do we have life, we have abundant life. We are overwhelmingly conquerors through Him who loved us.

There is the secret. It is the love of God that takes us through this. The writer goes further, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord." That takes in just about everything. Paul is not talking of imaginary things. He is talking about things that are desperately actual, and we are super victors. He said in the midst of them all. This is not by our own ingenuity, not by our own courage, or our own determination that gets us through it. It is His love, because He loves us. God is not going to let anything insurmountable happen to us. Even when they take our life, God will get us through it. The Apostle said it is His love that gets us through it. We "have come" to the city where the love of God is. You will not find it any other place, but in the church. And sometimes you may think that you don't find it there, but there is one thing for sure, you will not find it anywhere else.

Now, let me say something else about this. Back to Revelation, chapter 21, verse 16 again,

"the city is laid out as a square." Laid out means it is designed, it does not just happen, it is deliberate. You can say the same thing about love. The church might be the repository for the love of God, it might be the only place where the love of God is found, it might be where God dwells, and therefore, love dwells within the church, but that does not just happen.

In John 13, these familiar verses, in verses 34 and 35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." A new commandment? Had not these Jews had known the commandment of love since Moses, "You will love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul and your mind" (everything you have), The 10 Commandments: the first four summarize man's relationship to God: you are to love God; the last six summarize man's relation to his fellow man . . . you are to love your fellow men and You are to love your neighbor as yourself, Matthew, chapter 22, verse 40, Jesus said, "On these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets." And now he says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." Haven't they been doing that?

No, because He qualifies it, "even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." We are to treat one another exactly the way Christ treats us. That is new . . . did you get that? Can you understand that? We are to treat one another the same way Christ has treated us. And any time you get out of that boundary, when you get out of those lines, you are out of the love of God. And we will look at what that means, of course, as we go along.

"As I have loved you, you ought to love one another." That does not only mean you should be willing to die for one another as He was willing to die for us, but you must be willing to live for one another as He lives for us. It is in your life that you show this love, and that is the criteria, and it is the only criteria, God has given us whereby men will know that we are Christian. They will know we are Christians by our love. John 13:35, "By this all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for one another." That is the only criteria, or standard, that God has given us whereby the world can measure and see whether or not we are Christian.

Usually, we base it upon what we believe, what doctrine we believe, do I believe the right things, do I practice the right things, do I belong to the right church, do I conduct myself as I ought according to the rules of my denomination, or according to the standard of a hierarchy? Jesus says the one standard and the only standard whereby people may know whether or not you are My disciples is that you love one another as I have loved you. It does not make any difference how long you have been a member of the church, how high-up you are in the church's organization, how much influence you may have in the church or in the community, or who you are. If you do not love people as Christ loves you, it does not mean a thing. That is what he says.

It is deliberate, by faith. It is a design thing. **In our daily lives, we are to treat one another as Christ treated us. I John, chapter 3, look at that. Begin in verse 18, "Little children, do**

not love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth." Do not just talk about love, do not tell people how much you love them, show them. "I love you in the Lord." I hate that statement. It seems like an excuse, "I would not love you if it wasn't for the Lord," or maybe they wouldn't love you, "but I love you because I have to." Don't talk about it. Do not tell people how much you love them, show them. Don't love with word or tongue but "in deed and truth."

A husband who is always telling his wife how much he loves her, but never shows it, does not love her. And that is the way it is with anybody. Your love for God, your love for other people, you can talk about the love of God, you can sing about the love of God, you can get chill bumps whenever you are singing about it, or whenever people preach about it, but if you do not show it by your actions, by what you do, by deed and truth, it doesn't amount to anything. Live it. I John 3:19, "We shall know by this, that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him, in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things." We even may be condemned in our heart, but God is greater than that. And if we love, He knows that.

Verse 21, "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God;" and he then connects this with prayer, "and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight." That is talking about love. **You cannot get your prayers answered if you treat other people like dirt, if you are not showing your love toward people, you might as well quit praying.** You cannot pray for them and at the same time not love them.

Verse 23, "And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us." He puts love for one another on par with believing that Jesus is the Christ. Before we baptize people, we usually have them confess that they believe Jesus is the Christ. That is a big thing with a lot of churches. They call it the good confession. Why don't they have them confess how much they love one another also? He puts it on the same level. Verse 24, "And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And we know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us."

Over in the I John, chapter 4, verses 7 and 8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." Don't talk to me about being born again and about knowing God if you don't love one another. Verse 8, "The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

It is your life that proves it, verse 17, "By this, love is perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world." This does not say as He was, it says "as He is" right now, "so also are we in this world." Verse 18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear." Christian people go through life being afraid. That is a sin, to be afraid. Christians are not to be afraid, love casts out

fear. Continue to love one another as we go through the tribulations of life, just as Christ loves us.