

Comprehending Christ's Love

Ephesians 3:14-21

Intro—Ticket in high school. Knew officer Evans could get me out of it. I couldn't grant my request but I knew a guy who could make it happen. Paul is about to ask something and he starts with a reminder that God has the authority to do what he's about to ask.

"For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named"

In the Ancient World naming both requires and demonstrates authority. In many ways it's the same today. You name your pets. Maybe when you were a teenager you named your car. You children don't name you. Children don't pick their own names, we name them (some parents abuse this—la—a, abcd). But that is their right as parents.

In the Bible, what you name you have authority over. It's significant in Gen. 1 when God creates the world, he names everything. He calls the light "Day" and the darkness "Night", he calls the expanse above the waters "Heaven" and the dry land "Earth" he's not just getting organized. He's declaring his authority over all things, not least people who he names "Man" or "Adam" on day 6. And so what Paul is saying here is that every family whether in heaven or on earth, comes originates in God and is under his loving, wise, unmatched authority. And it's that authority that Paul invokes here, but he knows that only God has the power and is in a position to grant the prayer request he's about to make.

And he asks vs. 16 **"that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."**

This is what Paul is requesting. That through the power of the Holy Spirit, they would have a deeply rooted and fully formed faith in Christ. (Two quick side notes: he doesn't pray for changed circumstances and Christ dwell in their hearts through faith!) Now here's something that's interesting and we saw it earlier in the book. The people Paul is praying for are believers—we know it because chapter 1 says it. So why is he asking that Christ might dwell in their hearts through faith if they already have faith?

And the key to understanding this lies in the words "heart" and "dwell". In the Bible, the heart is rarely a biological reference. In the Bible, the word heart most often refers to the seat of our emotions, and will, and beliefs, and passions. Similar to when we say I love you with all of my heart. We don't mean "I love you with 2 atria and 2 ventricles", we mean, "I love you with everything I have with my emotions, and beliefs and willing commitment." And it's those emotions and beliefs and will that Paul's referring to here. Paul wants them to move beyond a faith that merely trusts to a faith that treasures Christ and a life that's transformed by Christ. He uses this word "dwell" which means to inhabit to settle down in. It has the idea of permanence. **Moment and then it's gone.** Luther said, "I preach the Gospel to myself every day because I forget the Gospel everyday."

So Paul's not praying that these people would have a saving faith—they already have that. He's praying that the faith they have would move to varsity level; that their faith would move from the kiddie pool to the deep end. That Jesus would completely consume and transform every area of their life.

Like a sponge dipped in water is wet but not saturated, these believers are saved by Christ but not saturated with Christ. There are still areas and compartments that are dry and he's praying that Christ's would trickle

down and soak every part of their lives and our lives and that they would stay that way. This is what Christian growth and maturity looks like.

He continues this idea in vs 17, “that you, being rooted and grounded in love” that is God’s love, and then he spends the next two verses asking that God would help us comprehend the love that we’re rooted in—that we’d grow in our experience and understanding the love that we’re already rooted in already have a foundation in.

For example, parents told you love was powerful you believed it. Then you got a boy or a girl and yall passed notes and you said I love you and you experience the love that you had only previously believed in, but then you’re 16, and you think you know love, then you get married and see know love in a whole new way. The love you believed in when you were 5 your grown to comprehend more and more. This is that idea of progressive understanding and experience of God’s love that Paul is praying for.

He’s saying you have roots, but you have yet to go deep into the soil of the Gospel, you have a foundation (that’s what grounded means), but you have yet to be built into a something magnificent. Your saving faith is a good starting point but it is not a good finishing point. Roots are supposed to grow. A foundation is meant to be built upon.

And this is where I see so many believers stall out in their faith, their roots never grow down they never move beyond that lowest common denominator of saving faith. Their faith isn’t centered around asking “How can I find my deepest joy and satisfaction in Christ, how can I be consumed by his love?” Their faith is centered around the question, “How can I get to heaven.” And once they figure that out they’re good. They’re not really interested in growing into a deeper knowledge of God’s love and allowing it to consume every part of their life. They just want to make the cut. They want to be the person who escapes through the flames. (1 Cor. 3:15) What if I said to Rebecca, “what’s the minimum I need to do for you to not divorce me?”

And can I tell you I talk to folks like this, and they’re almost never encouraged and energized by their faith. Perhaps other than some moral guidance and a reservation in heaven, Jesus doesn’t seem to offer them very much in the present. Their thankful for the work of a Christ they barely know. They have a lot of gratitude in their hearts for heaven, but very little love for Christ. Is that wrong to be thankful for Jesus. No, it’s wrong if you’re nothing *but* thankful for Jesus.

Dating “I love you” “Thank you” Gratitude is a good starting point, but it’s not a good finishing point. I fear that too many believers are content to cross the finish line of faith with little more than the roots of gratitude they started with on day one. God forbid that anyone in this room hear Jesus says I love you face-to-face and not be able to genuinely muster anything but a thank you.

That’s not what God wants, and that’s not what Paul wants, and this why he’s praying that these Ephesians who have tasted God’s love and believe in God’s love, would be filled with wonder and joy as they comprehend the magnitude of his love, that’s exactly what he prays in vs. 18, “may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”

Want to point out the phrase at the very beginning of that, “comprehend with all the saints...” God has designed you to see and savor and experience the wonder of his love, in Christian community. God wants your relationship with him to be personal but friends it cannot be private. God has designed his love to be comprehended and experienced in Christian community which means that if you’re not intentionally doing

life alongside other believers, you're never going to experience God's love like he wants you to experience it. This is why we have small groups. Small group exists to help each other see and experience and love the glory of God. This is where most of the ministry in our church happens in small groups. Not from the pulpit from groups who week in and week out show and share the love of Christ with one another, through meeting, studying, praying, talking, eating laughing, crying, playing, texting, calling. And when you see how God is stating those suffering, when you see how God is helping people fight their sin, when you see how he's bringing people together who didn't used to like each other—you see the love of God from a whole new perspective. And so if you're not in small group please join one. There are sheets out at the welcome desk. Don't rob yourself of experiencing the fullness of God's love alongside other saints...

That's what Paul is praying for here. He uses that word fullness intentionally, not simply get your feet wet, but that you'd consumed by, defined, by filled with his grace and mercy and power and all the privileges that come with being his son to daughter. And his argument here is that the way you're going to experience that fullness, is by understanding how much God's loves you. The more we comprehend about how much we're loved by God, the more we love God. The more we understand about how much God delights in us, they more we will delight in him and Christ dwelling place in our hearts gets larger and deeper. And we tend to struggle with the idea of God's love. It's a beautiful concept but we struggle to actually experience it.

Word and feeling association. "Vacation" "Summer" "In-laws" "God" Fear guilt and shame across this room. And if that's you, then I can promise you God brought you here this morning to hear this Word and meditate on God's love. Paul wants you to understand the incredible magnitude of God's love for you.

That's what this phrase means here, "breadth and length and height and depth" is communicating the idea of magnitude and bigness and totality and it's best understood as a describing the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge in vs. 19. Jesus storybook Bible calls it, "Never stopping, Never Giving Up, Unbreaking, Always and Forever, Love." Paul wants you to feel the weight of this love that, in every way and from every angle is matchless and inexpressible unlike anything in this world. What do you mean?

Well to begin with, this love isn't performance based. There's a part of us that craves love for who we are apart from what we do. We want someone to love us for us... We want a love that we don't have to constantly earn and who's love doesn't diminish when we fail. We want someone who will stick with us even when they have a better option. We only find that in the Gospel. There are weary Christians exhausted because day after day you're working to be good enough for God and you wonder if you've done enough...and the answer is you haven't and you won't—this is hard to accept that why Paul prays for strength to admit that you need someone else— Christ did enough, and God loves you because of Christ...he sees you as if you did all the thing Christ did and avoided all the things Christ avoided, when he sees you, he sees you through the lense of his son so you can rest (deep breathe?) Which means then that not only is God's love not performance based it means that...

Love that can't increase or decrease. Paul is not praying that God's love for you would increase. He's praying that your understanding of God's love for you would increase. As we walk journey through the Christian life, our love for God increases his love for us does not. And the more we understand and experience that love, the more enjoy the fulness of God in all of life. So we know about his love, but we're growing until everything we do is touched by it.

It's like a dad gives his kid one of his t-shirt and he wears it, but the t-shirt is much bigger than him, and eventually he grows into it and it fits perfectly, not because the shirt changed but because he grew into it. And now he's functioning and living in that t-shirt like his dad hoped he would when he gave it to him.

And so when you're old and wrinkly and the fellowship you have with Christ is sweeter than it's ever been, and the feelings of guilt have finally dissolved in light of the cross, and you feel overwhelmed at God's grace as you walk down the road and look at the sky, it's not because God loves you more, it's because you've grown into the gift he's given you and are living into functionally operating out of the love of God that's been yours before the foundation of the world. It's a love that's not performance based, doesn't increase or decrease.

Love that likes you—I always believed in a God that loved me but didn't like me. He didn't rescue you because you earned it. He didn't rescue you because he needed you. He rescued you because he delighted in you. (Ps. 18:19)

Love that takes away our shame—I feel like we miss this, we feel like Jesus died to forgive us of our sin, but wants us to live life under a cloud of shame to show him that we're really sorry. But that's not it. Jesus didn't just die to take away the penalty of sin, he died to take away your shame. Two goats in the wilderness!

I know brothers and sisters in Christ who truly love God, and want to serve God, and their daily emotional posture is still characterized by shame over something they did 20 years ago. Like they've repented, they know God has forgiven them but they still exist in a state of shame. But Chase you don't know what I've done, maybe not but I know what Paul did....Paul killed Christians. He was a murderer. And in 1 Cor. 4:4 "For I am not aware of anything, against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me." When we repent of our sin and trust Christ, he doesn't just take away sin's penalty, he takes away sin's shame—the shame of a lost marriage, the shame of an addiction, the shame of criminal activity, the shame of an abortion, indeed the shame of murder all swallowed up in the invincible love of God. You don't have to walk around wearing some scarlet letter as penance for your sin because Christ wore it for you and when he said "It is finished" he bought a robe for you that has been washed white in the blood of the lamb. That's the kind of limitless love we're talking about here. That's the kind of love Paul wants you to grow into. It's a love that's not earned, a love that can't increase, a love that delights in you, a love that takes away your shame and...

A love that never ends—Psalm 103 says that God's love is from "everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him." The love existed infinitely prior to the creation of the earth and will exist infinitely after the creation of the new earth. And like the boy who loved the girl, like the teen who loved his date, like the husband who loved his wife 10 billion years from now we will still be growing in our understanding and experience of the love that surpasses knowledge.

And in light of all of that, Paul prays, "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever, and ever. Amen."

That Amen signals the conclusion of the first part of the book of Ephesians. You'll remember we said that the book of Ephesians was divided into two halves. Chapters 1-3 talk about what God has done and chapter 4-6 talk about how we ought to live in light of all the truths in 1-3. And Paul ends this section just like he started it with praise. And I love this phrase "To him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." Like you take your wildest dreams and most insane imaginations and that is kindergarten level for God.

Like we don't even have a category for his ability. Like imagine king David says God can you make me a chariot that goes twice as fast as all the others and has horses that never get tired...And God says, how about I give you a Lamborghini Aventador LP-700 245 miles per hour, 0-60 in 2.8 seconds, and 740 horsepower. He would have responded, "Is that better than a chariot?" This is the disparity our thoughts and our abilities and his...it's incredible...but I want us to be careful here because we miss this...we get so pumped up about God's power that we miss how God has designed for that unimaginable power to be expressed. Look at the text... **"according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the Church..."**

Shannon fixing things—I do nothing. God isn't like that. He hasn't planned to do unimaginable things *for* us as much as he plans to do them *through* us. That's how he gets glory—in the church. God does not intend to read the lost in our city for us, but through us. Our neighbor for us, but through us.

Hudson Taylor said "Expect great things from God attempt great things for God." I want it to be said that we attempted great things for God, that we could play a meaningful part in God getting glory throughout all generations forever and ever.