

Greetings:

The study that Pastor Pat brings on Sunday mornings is a reflection of the study for that week. It represents a lot of research. Not all of what he has prepared is communicated. In an attempt to continue the learning process, he is making available his study notes to the congregation.

They are edited, but not “book” ready. To the critical eye mistakes can be found. So he asks that you take the material with humility, teach-ability, and charity.

Enjoy and if you should have any questions or corrections, please do not hesitate to email him at pastorpat@waukeshabible.org.

Date: **October 4, 2009**

Title: **The Overwhelming Power of God’s Redemptive Love**

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Theme: Paul wants the love of Christ to overflow in and then through the church, His body.

Author: Patrick J. Griffiths ©2009

Waukesha Bible Church is a family of families seeking to live in **the Storyline of the Bible**. She is determined by design to have a **God-centered, Christ-exalting worship; a Word-centered teaching** focused on personal **discipleship** through intentional and systematic instruction; a **Global-impacting mission** that resolves to be a **church planting church**; and a **Grace-based fellowship** where disciples are invited to live under a **reigning grace** characterized by a **Gospel-driven sanctification** that celebrates a divine **monergism** to the Christian life.

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Introduction:

This is Paul's second recorded prayer in this short letter. Let us remember that Paul initiated the prayer in 3:1, but interrupted his thought from verses 2-13 and now picks up the prayer once more in verse 14. The prayer that follows must be put in the context of chapters 1 and 2.

Paul is showing how the love of God is greater than the container holding it. It is like trying to stuff too much into a plastic or paper bag and finding it woefully inadequate to carry all that is asked of it.

The Storyline:

"Essentially, it is a prayer that the young Christians may discover the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It means knowing God as the all-loving, all-powerful father, it means putting down roots into that love - or, changing the picture, having that love as the rock-solid foundation for every aspect of one's life."¹

The Problem:

I publicly confess that I am lost in the vastness of who God is and what He has done. I am lost as to what this love looks like in the world, the church, and in my home. I work hard at loving my wife in a way she understands, and I work hard at trying to understand what God's love looks like in this community of faith.

Questions:

1. Is v.15 suggesting that all of humanity has one Father?
2. By "family" is Paul referring to both Jew and Gentile?
3. What is v.16 doing in our context?
4. How vast are the "riches of His glory?" What is this anyway?
5. Why the "inner man?"
6. What is meant by "Christ dwell in your hearts" (v. 17)?
7. What is v.18 doing?
8. What is the parallel thought of v.19 with "love of Christ?"
9. What is the fullness of God?
10. What is Christ-likeness?
11. What is v.20 doing? How does it do this?
12. What strikes you as odd about v.20?
13. What is Paul's petition? How does Paul believe the petition will be fulfilled?
14. If the prayer is progressive? What is the bottom line?
15. What is v.21 doing?
16. What note does Paul strike in his conclusion?
17. The reader should understand God's power is compatible to Paul's prayer.

18. What does Paul want the reader to have?
19. Why does Paul believe this is possible?
20. Paul believes the reader can have all of this because God is able (v.20).
21. What can we/you do to promote and reveal the love of God for others?
22. Do you need to repent of poor attitudes towards others within the body of Christ?
23. The power to forgive lies within you. By forgiving others you release yourself from their control. Let it go.

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the love of Christ flowing to us and through us to others.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose His love over our own.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of loving Him and others without boundaries.

Outline:

I. Paul's pattern (vv. 14-15)

A. Paul's humility (v. 14)

The phrase "bow my knees" communicates an act of submission, humility, and reverence. This is because of the unique relationship that the believer has with God the Father. He is the Father over His household. "The ordinary Jewish attitude of prayer was standing, with the hands stretched out and the palms upwards. Paul's prayer for the Church is so intense that he prostrates himself before God in an agony of entreaty."²

What does "for this reason" speak of? It is either looking back to the great unifying truth of salvation or he is explaining why he now bows his knee before the Father.

"What is the cause which makes him pray? We are back again at the basic idea of the letter. Paul has painted his great picture of the Church. This world is a disintegrated chaos; there is division everywhere, between nation and nation, between man and man, within a man's inner life. It is God's design that all the discordant elements should be brought into one in Jesus Christ. But that cannot be done unless the Church carries the message of Christ and of the love of God to every man. It is for that cause that Paul prays. He is praying that the people within the Church may be such that the whole Church will be the body of Christ."³

Friend, if there is not peace within the church there is no possible way we will reach our community for Christ. It is interesting to place the idea of humility with the boldness and confidence granted to us because of Christ (v. 12). Although we come with boldness and confidence this does not preclude a spirit of humility and unmerited.

B. God's paternity (v. 15)

"The center of Christian belief is the approachability of God."⁴

Let me unpack this by saying what Paul is not saying. Paul is not saying that God is the Father of everyone everywhere. What Paul is saying is that God is the Father of all those who are in Christ regardless as to ethnicity, culture, geography, or generation. I love how the Disciple's Prayer of Matthew 6 begins, "Our Father." No matter how significant the division between us, there is still only one Father and He is equally ours.

II. Paul's prayer (vv. 16-19)

"Theoretically Jew and Gentile are one. Paul now prays that they may be united experientially."⁵ This prayer must be within geographically distinct assemblies within definable regions. I do not doubt the larger national or global implications of this idea, but there must be real "teeth" to all of this on a local level. "The objects of the verb are the two infinitives 'to be strengthened' (v.16) and 'to dwell' (v.17)."⁶ "The Spirit is the mode in which God communicates Himself to men and women."⁷

"In essence, he asks God to grant that forthcoming request according to the wealth of his essential being."⁸

Initially I must note how these elements are already present positionally in Christ. Paul is praying for their "felt expression" within the immediate church. **You are this academically, but do you know this experientially?**

A. To be strengthened (empowered by divine ability - inner man [v.16])

This is the same truth expressed in 1:19.

- How vast are the "riches of His glory?" What is this anyway?
It probably refers to the intrinsic worth/worthiness of God's person/character.
- Why the 'inner man'?
Because it is here that the battle is won or lost. We are spiritual beings engaged in spiritual battles (Eph. 6:11-17). To think otherwise is to be headed down the pathway of defeat.

"The inner man was a phrase by which the Greeks understood three things.

- There was a man's reason.
- There was the conscience.
- There was the will."⁹

B. To be indwelt by Christ (ongoing submission to Christ - the heart [v.17])

What is meant by "Christ dwell in your hearts?" I do not believe it is salvific. I see a parallel in Col. 3:15-17. The idea is Spirit indwelling and controlling. The exhortation is to yield,

submit, present. "Reference is not to the beginning of Christ's indwelling at the moment of salvation. Instead it denotes the desire that Christ may, literally, 'be at home in,' that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in, believer's lives"¹⁰ "The indwelling of Christ is the higher boon which is in view as the end and effect of the strengthening."¹¹

"At the heart of all this is a phrase which has become popular in the language of Christian experience: 'that the king may make his home in your hearts, through faith.'" ¹²

Again, our present problem is the individualizing of this passage. The intent is not His indwelling in the individual, but His indwelling in the Church and His indwelling in the Church is seen in the practical display of loving one another. It does not exclude the individual, but it is far more than the individual. Paul speaks to the Church, His body.

Verse 17 speaks of "being rooted and grounded in love." The imagery is graphic. You and I, as part of a living organism, are firmly planted and deeply rooted in the soil of God's love. We are equally built into the very structure of God's building, Christ the chief cornerstone. We derive our nutrients from the love enriched soil of God. Both are perfect passive participles. There is a strong statement concerning a past event with continuing results. There is certainty and endurance to the idea of rooted and grounded.

"The metaphor takes its point from the absolute necessity of the roots if the plant is to live, let alone flourish. Paul does not envisage a mere occasional loving impulse; he sees love as at all times basic to Christian living. With 'rooted' Paul links 'grounded,' thus combining agricultural and architectural imagery. Again the apostle uses the perfect passive participle, which indicates what is permanent. A solid, well-laid foundation is a necessity if a building is to last. Paul is saying that love is that foundation for the believer."¹³

Verse 18 puts together a pile of superlatives, purely explanatory. If we could simply lay hold of God and His majestic attribute of sacrificial and impartial love, it would electrify our lives. "'In Love' is highly emphatic by position in the Greek."¹⁴

- C. To comprehend and know the love of Christ (to experience and express Christ's love - the mind/comprehension [vv. 18, 19a])

"The dimensions of redeeming love are admirable: *The breadth, and length, and depth, and height.* By enumerating these dimensions, the apostle designs to signify the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, the unsearchable riches of his love, which **is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea**, Job xi. 8, 9."¹⁵

"It is as if Paul invited us to look at the universe - to the limitless sky above, to the limitless horizons on every side. To the depth of the earth and of the seas beneath us, and said, 'The love of Christ is as vast as that.'"¹⁶

Think for a moment about **the vast expanse of space**. When we speak of light year we speak of something that we cannot process. Yet this is how vast God's love is within Himself and for His people.

- D. To be filled up with all the fullness of God (ongoing transformation of character – the total person [v. 19])

“To know the love of Christ is to know Christ Himself, in ever widening experience, and to have his outgoing and self-denying love reproduced in oneself”¹⁷ “To know experientially the love of Christ.”¹⁸ “This last (**ina**) being climactic, or the great end of the whole supplication.”¹⁹ Remember the words used throughout the letter to describe God: “unfathomable,” inexpressible, unsearchable, and surpassing.” Now he speaks of breadth, length, height, and depth.

- If the prayer is progressive, what is the bottom line?

That we might be filled up to the overflow with the person and work of God. Let us take everything we read in 1:3-14 and then let us pack all of this into a finite package. What we are to be is bursting at the seams with all that God is in us and through us to those around us. There is an explosive aspect to what we have.

- Notice the verse. What strikes you as odd?

To know that which passes knowledge - to be filled with all the fullness of God - this is the language of contradiction. It is the same idea in Heb. 11:27, ‘to see Him who is invisible,’ ‘to know the unknowable, to know fully that which cannot be fully known.’

Rom 5:5 “God has poured out His love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” (Liquid love)

Notice the inclusive nature of the petition (v.16 ‘inner man’, v.17 ‘the heart’, v.18 ‘the mind/comprehend’, and v.19 the totality of your being.). Notice also how the verses are progressive from “to be strengthened” to “filled up to all the fullness of God.”

It is like blowing up a balloon that will eventually pop! I want to believe this is an already/not-yet prayer. We are in process, yet there is more. Yet when I read this I am overwhelmed with a sense of my inadequacy. I do not always love people the way I should. In fact I do not always love those closest to me, or even God, in a manner that is worthy of Him.

John Wesley correctly noted how, “The Church may have its faults; church members may be very far from what they ought to be; but in the fellowship of the Church we find the love of God.”²⁰

How then can I move forward with this idea? I believe the answer is in verse 20.

III. Paul's praise (vv. 20-21)

Paul gives a two-fold conclusion: First, the expression of his faith in the ability of God; Second, the expression of his desire for the glory of God. His confidence is deposited in He who is able.

A. God is able (v. 20)

"There is an inexhaustible fullness of grace and mercy in God, which the prayers of all the saints can never draw dry. Whatever we may ask, or think to ask, still God is still able to do more, abundantly more, exceedingly abundantly more. Open thy mouth ever so wide, still he hath wherewithal to fill it."²¹

- What is v.20 doing? It concludes the petition. How does it do this? By pointing out that **despite the impossibility of the petition, God is able.**
- What strikes you as odd about v.20? The petitions fulfillment is according to the power that works within us. Notice how the prayer has come full circle with v.16.
- What is Paul's petition? For the believer to know the love of Christ.
- How does Paul believe the petition will be fulfilled? By the power of the Holy Spirit working within us. We have within us, individually and collectively, the Holy Spirit as both seal and guarantee.
 1. We are citizens of His kingdom/country
 2. We are family members of His household. He is our Father.
 3. We are individual elements making up His building
 4. We are a temple for His indwelling

This is what we are internally, and this is what we are to be externally. Though the prayer of vv.16-19 staggers our minds, God is able to perform and fulfill every one of the requests.

B. God is worthy (v. 21)

Paul concludes the prayer by pointing to God. The entire letter is given over to the church. I know I can speak of our need to love churches that are geographically or ethnically distinct from us. But I really have no trouble loving them because they are not sitting next to me. I have trouble loving those who are closest to me -- in my home, at the work place, and in this local church. God says when His love overflows through us to those around us there is glory in the church. God did not do all that was done in Ephesians 1:3-14 so that there would be division or strife within the church. We must fight for unity within the community or we will betray the cross.

Let us not forget the words of John 13:34, 35.

³⁴ "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ **By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**" (John 13:34, 35).

Because He is able, He is worthy of whatever praise we can ascribe to Him.

Shepherding the Sheep (What's the NEXT STEP?)

This material was originally compiled many years ago. We have seen this before, but it always amazes me how God takes a study that is expositional and systematic and He forces it to collide with life. The entire book of Ephesians is a call to community and oneness in light of God's immeasurable work of redeeming and adopting. Division happens, and the Proverbs tell us it happens because of pride. Very seldom do I point at people and speak to their specific sins. I cannot do with infallibility, but God the Holy Spirit does. Each of us has to face the working of God in our own lives as individuals. Let us not think of others when we think of the text, but rather let us turn the light on our own lives and see if God is speaking to us.

Years ago I went through a very traumatic experience. I remember saying to myself, "I will never become what I loathe." The situation dealt with division and strife. I cannot control what others might say of me, but I will not speak ill of them. God's love flowing to me and through me cannot be the author of my strife. I am compelled to love you because He first loved me. Let us work to be lovers of Christ and His Church. It isn't always easy, but it is always right.

1. God has made all believers one in Christ (vv. 1-13). How might we run contrary to God's desire for unity?
2. When you look at your own prayer life, what does it look like? Does it look like vv. 14-21?
3. Friend, let us get our gaze off ourselves and get them back on God. It is only when we see Him that we will be able to love one another without malice or strife.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 39, 40.

² William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 128.

³ William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 128.

⁴ William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 129.

⁵ BKC, 631.

⁶ Bratcher, 84.

⁷ Mitton, 132.

⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, 477, 478.

⁹ William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 131.

¹⁰ BKC, 631.

¹¹ Salmond, 314.

¹² N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone*, 40.

¹³ Leon Morris, *Ephesians*, 105.

¹⁴ Moule, 98.

¹⁵ [emphasis his] *Matthew Henry's Commentary on Ephesians* 3:18.

¹⁶ William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 132.

¹⁷ Bruce, 329.

¹⁸ BKC, 631.

¹⁹ Eadie, 258

²⁰ William Barclay, *Galatians and Ephesians*, 133.

²¹ *Matthew Henry's Commentary on Ephesians* 3:20.