

## Praying in Power

### Ephesians 3:14–21 • Part Two

Let's resume our workout in the prayer gym where we left off. The Apostle Paul prays for eternally significant things for the church — that includes us! This profound prayer and expression of worship is difficult to get our minds around because he writes to push us to the limits of human understanding to help us grasp our unlimited God. He uses concrete descriptions to push our finite minds to grasp our infinite God, who is spirit and truth. He heaps up superlatives to the excess in a poetic way to fuel our hearts to love God and worship him. And all of that beauty leaves this dust-bound preacher defeated before he ever gets out of the gate — at least in the power of my own flesh. How can the finite ever lay hold of the infinite? But it is our joyful assignment to lay hold of this boundless God, so let's pray for his help which we must have.

### PRAY

**Ephesians 3:14–21** — <sup>14</sup>For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup>that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup>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, <sup>21</sup>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Quick review: Because of the massive mission God has given the church to display and proclaim his plan of salvation to everyone, every entity, everywhere, Paul humbles himself and kneels before his Creator, King, and Father, praying he would grant us resurrection-level power right at the heart level — right at the core of who we love and what we desire. He prays that Christ would be the gravitational center of our lives through faith. A life centered on Christ is the only way we will accomplish his mission. That phrase in v 17, ***that Christ may dwell in your heart***, pulls up imagery of God dwelling in the center of his people during the exodus. Numbers 2 is where we find the instructions for how they were orient their tents, their families, their very lives around God as he dwelt

## 2

in the midst of his people. God took them out of slavery and death, and lead them to worship him and live in his presence. He provided all they needed while he was leading them to the Promised Land.

They were an example of what was to come to us in Christ. Christ drags us out of the domain of death and calls us to live in presence, seek first his Kingdom, and see him provide all we need. That entrance of Christ into the human heart occurs through faith. It is not something that we work up to in order to earn it. There is not a to-do list with boxes to check in order for Christ to enter your heart. Having Christ in the heart cannot be earned. He undertakes to rescue me because he loves me, not because I have something he needs, or because I'm a good person. God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. We simply trust him, we believe him when he says that he paid the price for our sinful rebellion and he gives that new heart as we turn from our self-will to him. That is massive, and we need that massive of a change to accomplish his mission.

It is his love and our coming to understand it that will fuel Christ-centeredness and faithfulness to reveal the mystery of his Gospel. And that's where we take up now in v 17b: I pray that 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 – that you've been rooted and grounded, in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints, the infinite dimensions of his love.

The foundation of all that we do for God, our ability to know God, acts of obedience to God, our love for God, our love for each other, all of it is rooted first in his love. It is the foundation. He uses a mixed metaphor to help us understand that we can't build anything or make any advance whatsoever. If the very bottom of it is not the love of God. Rooted is an agricultural term that describes what gives life to what shows up on the surface. Grounded is a construction term that describes a solid foundation that everything else can stand on.

- Head knowledge alone will not enflame the heart to make Christ known. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were learned experts in the Law. Nicodemus was a teacher of Israel, but he did not know God. He had to be born again — to be given a new heart that loved God and believed God's love.
- Legalism does not produce life-giving spiritual strength. Legalism chokes and kills. It defiles the purity of God's love and replaces it with some imagined quid-pro-quo transaction: If I do these particular things, God will love me as a reward.

Christ must be the gravitational center of every aspect of our lives, his love must be the life giving route what we do and the solid foundation of what we build on. And what better foundation can we have? Can you imagine any sweeter premise, motivation, or launching pad for all that you do other than that of God's love?

***Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus— Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free.***

***Rolling as a mighty ocean In its fullness over me!***

***Underneath me, all around me Is the current of His love—***

***Leading onward, leading homeward To His glorious rest above.***

It is the love of God that motivated the redemptive plan of God. We cannot move away from that into intellectual argument, academic pursuit, or performative duty and expect the mystery of Christ redeeming the world through his peace-making cross to be understood. Those things not only cancel love is the motive, they are not sustainable. The unloving thinker will lose interest in declaring a theoretical love she reads about, but does not experience. An unloving theologian will eventually explain away the supernatural transformation the Scriptures describe as he examines the text but remains untransformed by love himself. The performer of moral laws absent the foundation of Gospel love will collapse under the weight of knowing that all that external has done nothing to produce lasting peace with God and acceptance by him as a child adopted on the merit of Christ.

The love of God, for sinners who have been made saints is beyond human understanding, yet Paul defies those human limits and prays that we will know what surpasses the ability of the intellect to grasp. He prays that we, with every believer who has entered Christ, would know the breadth and length of God's love. Before we get into those four dimensions, note first that the fullness of God's love is known in the context of the church— all the saints. The bride of Christ as one Church, and the individuals who make up his body are the recipients and magnificent showcase of his love. It is impossible to know the fullness of God's love outside of his church, which displays, for the world to see, the magnitude of his love.

His love is not just feeling — it is not just emotion, it is knowable. Paul prays that we *comprehend* it, that we *know* it. His love is rooted in real acts, real change, real re-direction, and real transformation. While intellect without love is not sufficient, a feeling of love that is detached from God's truth is equally worthless. [I love my puppy! I love the music at Church of the Vibe!] The four dimensions he lists: width, length, height, depth fall into two poetic planes. Length and width have a horizontal nature to them. The life-giving root and stable foundation of God's love that we are to build on stretches to

## 4

the ends of the Earth and to every people group. Matthew Henry captures thus: By the breadth of it we may understand the extent of it to all ages, nations, and ranks of men; by the length of it, its continuance from everlasting to everlasting. That is both sweet to me personally, and infinitely expansive in broadening my heart to who Christ loves for as long as Christ loves them — his love is everlasting.

But the height of God's love lifts my from earth-bound expression of love to heaven to see and understand that he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace. From eternity past, our triune God who spoke all that is into being, Who created it all by his absolute and for his glory alone, who created and established our first parents in a perfect garden, communing with them in perfect love, giving them life and blessing them as they obeyed him — before all of this, the Lamb of God was slain. We see both the height and depth of God's love salvation plan.

It was not a small price. It was not a small distance. He who is infinite entered time. He who is spirit, and without boundary or limit, entered a human body, conceived by the Holy Spirit in the most rudimentary of cells to grow for 9 months in a womb in a human womb. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords humbled himself, taking the form of a servant. The Lord, who is holy, holy, holy — he who knew no sin became sin for us that we might the righteousness of God. The Lord who is from everlasting to everlasting did that by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross.

What is the height of the throne of the Holy One of Israel? And what is the depth of my sinful depravity? And what is the defilement of my soul that required the sacrifice, the death of the holy Son of God to cleanse it?

I pray that you 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. This is not a fleeting love. This is not a conditional love. This is not an emotion-based love, though it certainly should stir our hearts and our affections. This is an infinite, transforming, life-giving, empowering love that is objectively known in Jesus Christ, and only in him. The love your heart longs for is found in Christ; the reason your heart longs for his love is because he designed you thus. God wired into us the vital need to know and experience his love — we know it, we see it, we experience it in Christ alone.

## 5

- His love transforms what we love — that's why it must be the root and foundation of Christian living.
- No human relation can satisfy the heart's longing for God's love, though we are to be continually growing in our knowledge of God's love, pouring it out on, and proclaiming it to others.

Even though his infinite, love, surpasses, our finite capacity to understand it, Paul still prays, that we will know it. He prays that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Without attempting to be a reference. That almost sounds like a silly statement. How can the finite be filled with the fullness of the who is infinite? This gives us some insight of part of what we will experience in the new creation. There will never be a day in all eternity. We are not learning a new aspect of the love God.

O sinner, do you imagine there is some grievous act of sin you have committed that takes you beyond the scope of God's love to cleanse and redeem? If you are thinking your behavior and your moral choices make God love you, you have not begun to come to grips with how wide, how long, how high, and how deep is God's life. Pray Paul's prayer after him, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 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.

Does God have the capacity to do such a work in your life that you come to know this love? Does he have the capacity to forgive all your iniquity, to heal all your diseases, to redeem your life from the pit, to crown you with steadfast love and mercy, to satisfy you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's?

The same God, who calls you to turn from sin to Christ in faith, is the God, who is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think. Does it seem hard for you to imagine this level of cleansing and transforming love? Well, if you can even imagine it or think about it in any way, bring this truth of excess to bear in your mind and heart: far more abundantly.

Two separate phrases of excess that go beyond human understanding or capacity:

Filled with all the fullness of God.

He is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think.

## 6

How big are you? What is your capacity to know God and his love and power? Consider the infinitely excessive over-abundance of his power and love.

### Thimble • Measuring Cup • Water

**It is not merely that you are filled with God's love, but you are carried by it.**

Think beyond the measuring cup filling the thimble. What if is the Gulf of America being poured into the thimble of your life. Or the Atlantic Ocean. But those are still finite bodies. God is infinite.

Pray for this kind of transforming love to shape your heart and mind. Pray that the things that are on gods heart become the things that are laid over your heart. Pray that your weak and feeble efforts are completely overwhelmed by the resurrection power was exerted when Christ was resurrected from the dead. Indeed, the desires of the old sinful nature of the produce death are conquered by the same power that God exerted in Christ.

Pray that:

You are strengthened with power in your heart, so that you are transformed to love what Christ loves.

Your life, every aspect of it, oriented to Christ as the gravitational and motivational center.

Your life is rooted in the life-giving love of Christ and built on the solid foundation of the love of Christ.

In your mind, your heart, and your experience you come to know, the breadth, length, height, and depth of his love.

You be filled with, overwhelmed by, and carried in the flow of the fullness of God and all that he is.

This is how we are live, and if we are to live like this, we must pray for this knowledge that it is beyond us, but not beyond him to reveal to us.

**To him be glory in the church.** Paul keeps returning us to the fact that this is done in the context of all of us together as his people. We won't know this apart from each other as we are in covenant community with each other. Everything that we do here at the church is to be oriented to his glory. There is not a time when we become a social club or an attractive entertainment outlet. We exist for his glory, and his glory alone. The message we proclaim to the glory of God is that the Lord Jesus loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. His praise will never end. The song of the Lamb's worth will never reach a final verse. His love and worth are beyond expression, though we have eternity to do so. God has exalted him to the highest place, that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth, and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to glory of God the Father. Look to him and live.