

**Eph 3:17–19 (ESV)** 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.

### 1. These three verses tell us the Apostle’s object in this prayer

- A. It is all leading here – the strengthening in the inner man – Christ being at home in your heart - faith
  - 1). It is all meant to take us here – to knowing the love of God in Christ

**Transition:** I want to start our look at this passage with some general observations

## I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

### FIRST: The highest attainment in the Christian life is to know the love of Christ

#### 1. False teachers talk about money – authority

- A. They even make the Holy Spirit the super–star of the church – something he never wanted
  - Jn 16:14 (ESV)** He (The Spirit) will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
  - 1). He came to glorify Christ not himself

**Point:** If you want to experience the fullness of Christianity you will be lead to this passage

- A. Paul wants you to experience is a love that no words can express
  - 1). A love that can only be experienced
  - 2). That is what makes teaching this so difficult – it is so experiential
    - a). I can lay out a solid theology – what justification – atonement – redemption is  
But this is experiential – subjective – all that theology is meant to lead to

**Transition:** That leads us to our next general observation

### SECOND: We are dealing with actual love – not just a theological concept

#### 1. This is a personal experiencing of Christ himself

- A. This is where all our doctrine – all our theological understanding is meant to take us
  - 1). I fear much of our theological study falls short of this  
We add truths to our mind without desiring to know the God of those truths in a deeper way
  - 2). We can teach on the love of God – write books – do series  
But fail to experience the love that we are teaching on
- B. Lest you mistake what I’m saying – I’m not saying theology and doctrine is unimportant  
“Don’t worry about those big words like propitiation. Just let Jesus love you.”
  - 1). No! I believe the understanding of doctrine is the road to knowing the depth of God’s love
    - a). There is a reason Paul took us to the heights of theological truth in Eph 1-2
      - 1a). But he doesn’t leave us with theology – knowing the great truths of our salvation
      - 2a). He desires for us to experience God’s love – to experience his fullness

**Point:** So theology is essential – it tells us how we are love and much we are lved

- A. But we don’t want to stop there – book learnin’ about God’s love
  - 1). That would be like Carri writing me a bunch of letters telling me how much she loved me  
But I never experience that love – it’s all just words and letters
    - a). For me to enjoy the fullness of that love it must become experiential
- B. But do this with the love of Christ – we call the Bible God’s love letter written to us
  - 1). We read about the cross – and say “What love was demonstrated on the cross”
    - a). I’ve said it – “If you ever doubt God’s love just look at the cross”
  - 2). But Paul is saying I want you to really know the person who hung on the cross

To personally – experientially – subjectively know that love that put him there

**Thought:** It is more than a mere intellectual appreciation of the love of Christ

DA Carson: Paul is not asking that his readers might become more able to articulate the greatness of God's love in Christ Jesus or to grasp with the intellect alone how significant God's love is in the plan of redemption. He is asking God that they might have the *power to grasp the dimensions of that love in their experience.*

A. So we see we have a blending of theology and experience

- 1). The healthy Christian life will have both

**Transition:** If we only have only theology or only experience we will be lopsided in our Christianity

### The Two Extremes We Must Always Watch Out for In the Christian Life

A. Subjective or experiential abuse

- 1). We can over emphasize experience – it is not checked by God's Word
- 2). This leads to the heresy we see rampant in the church today – in the NAR movement
  - a). God's word must be primary – why Paul had all that theology first
- 3). If our experience contradicts what we see in Scripture we must not do it

a). Let me show you how this works – why we need Scripture

b). How many have been in a church where everybody is speaking in tongues?

Supposedly that is the Spirit moving. Right? But is it?

Will the Spirit ever contradict anything written in the Scriptures?

c). What does scripture say? It is very clear

**1 Cor 14:27 (NIV)** If anyone speaks in a tongue, *two*--or at the most *three*--should speak, *one at a time*, and someone must interpret.

1a). Not all at once – the Spirit led the Bible writers to write “One at a time”

2a). So when everybody is speaking at once – that is NOT the Spirit moving

d). But why does the Spirit have restrict it to two or three – one at a time

**1 Cor 14:23 (NIV)** So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand *or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?*

1a). The answer to that is YES – I've seen this happen

2a). Churches doing that damages one of the reasons a church is here

To reach the world – it damages our witness

**Point:** I love the subjective/experiential side of Christianity – but it must be governed by Scripture

- 1). If it isn't we will move into unbiblical practices

B. The other extreme is avoiding experience all together

- 1). This is the take it by faith gang – experience – feelings is the slippery slope

a). So just take it by faith and keep those emotions at bay

- 2). This is the knee jerk response to those falling all over the place

a). This group isn't going to get close to an experience

- 3). This leads to a cold – dead orthodoxy that isn't attractive to anybody

**Point:** One extreme everybody thinks your crazy – lousy testimony

The other extreme everybody thinks your dead – lousy testimony

A. The balance is truth governed experience – the experience truth leads us too is amazing

### Third: This love gives us great security

**Eph 3:17 (ESV)** so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, *being rooted and grounded in love,*

#### 1. Our life is sunk down deeply into the soil of God's love.

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- A. This love is the kind of love that is rooted so deeply it cannot be shaken
- 1). The kind of love that we walk through this world absolutely convinced God is with us
    - a). Not always just taking that by faith – thought sometimes we must  
But God wants us to have a conscious awareness of his Son  
A conscious experience of that love expressed to us
  - 2). When Paul said in 2 Tim 4:16-17 that Christ stood at his side when he was on trial
    - a). Do you think he was saying – I didn't sense anything but I took it by faith  
NO! His standing with Paul was as real as anybody standing with Paul
      - 1a). Because he was there in reality – experientially – Paul could stand  
His roots sunk deeply into that love drew up the strength he needed
  - 3). Shadrach, Meshack and Abednego refuse to bow to King Nebuchadnezzar
    - a). They were thrown into the furnace heated up 7 times  
Did they die? No! they're in there walking with a 4<sup>th</sup> that looks like the Son of God
      - 1a). They weren't in there saying – Boys let's take it by faith that God is real  
No! Jesus came to them – walked with them – strengthened them
  - 4). Corrie Ten Boom – the Hiding place – God was so real to them in the concentration camp
    - a). Betsy her sister was becoming weaker – but she looked more and more angelic  
She was so deeply rooted in the love of Christ – wherever she went it changed
      - 1a). The barrack they were placed in – constant fighting – stealing  
Betty's presence changed that place – they became friendly – helped each other  
They had Bible studies – Why? She carried the presence of Christ with her
      - 2a). Jesus was more than a theological concept – he was alive in her life
- B. Have I told you about Wo Ming Dao – and his wife Deborah
- 1). I had the privilege of meeting him in Shanghai on one of our smuggling trips
  - 2). He was a Pastor - they came and picked him and his wife up on the same night
    - a). He spent some 20 years in prison – while they did their best to brain wash him
    - b). Eventually – they realized they couldn't change him – they ended up giving him one wish
      - 1a). His wish – sing a song to his Savior so everybody could hear  
He went out in the courtyard in the middle of the prison and sang to his Lord
      - 2a). I sat in his run down apartment – feeling like I was with the Apostle John  
I felt so shallow – so undone – I thought this is a believer
      - 3a). I asked him could we do anything for him – I expected him to answer like we would  
Yeah can you give me some money  
His answer – Pray that I would love Christ more!
  - 3). What could make a man so strong – he could hold up under the regular beatings – the constant emotional manipulations – the brainwashing?
    - a). The love of God was not just a theological concept – it was his everything
      - 1a). His roots were sunk deeply into his love – it was grounding his whole life
      - 2a). Our of that love – that presence of his Lord – he stood strong
  - 4). I could tell you the stories of so many Pastors I met in China – Viet Nam - Ukraine
    - a). The years they spent in prison – the beatings – they all had the same story
      - 1a). We could not be changed – why?
      - 2a). They all were experiencing the same love

**Point:** All of these stories – the boldness was there because the life was rooted and grounded in the love of God

- A. Living for him – knowing him was greater than anything the world could offer

- 1). Knowing his love was so great no threat could make them compromise that love

#### **Fourth: We grow in our enjoyment of this love**

##### **1. You may feel you are so far from what I'm talking about – I get that!**

- A. I may never ascend to the level of a Wo Ming Dao – a Richard Wurmbrand – Corrie Ten Boom
- B. But I'm determined to head towards that – I want to respond to this prayer

- 1). I am crying out to the Spirit to bring me to this place

##### **2. To show you this is an ever-increasing awareness**

- A. Listen to the words of Paul – who knew Christ as well as anybody

**Php 3:10 (ESV)** that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

- 1). I still have so much more I want to experience – so much more I want to know about him

- 2). Why share his sufferings – when we suffer for him in anyway – he honors that with His presence

**Php 3:13 (ESV)** Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,

- 1). Love like this cannot be fully comprehended – but to taste this goodness is to want more

- a). We have a tendency to so lock on to it – we press on – straining towards it

- b). To taste it is to want it more than anything else

**Question:** Is knowing this love of Christ the goal of our Christianity?

- A. I don't ask that to make you feel guilty – I just don't want you to settle for to little

- 1). To have a Christianity that never comes close to the ultimate goal

- 2). I pray all these studies is placing a cry in your heart – God I want that

**Transition:** So we've seen that the highest attainment of Christianity is knowing this love of Christ

- A. We've seen this is not just a theological concept – this is experiencing and actual person

- B. We've seen this is a love we are always pressing on towards – always growing in

- C. Next we want to see who this is available too

## **II. COMPREHENDING WITH ALL THE SAINTS**

**Eph 3:18–19 (ESV)** 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...

It's important we look at some words here

### **Who this love is for**

#### **1. Saint's = Separated ones. Holy ones**

- A. It is a term used in the NT for all believers

- 1). So the knowledge of this kind of love is available to a very limited audience

- a). Only those who have believed in Jesus Christ

- b). Only those who are obedient to Jesus Christ – He is dwelling at home in their hearts

**Thought:** Here we have one of those great Biblical separations between believer and unbeliever

- A. Of course there is one is going to heaven the other to hell

- B. But there is also this knowledge we know that the unbeliever can't – why? They lack the Holy Spirit

**1 Cor 2:14 (NKJV)** But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- 1). It takes having the Spirit in us to understand the word given to us

He has to interpret it from a merely human to a spiritual understanding

- 2). It takes being strengthened in the inner man to understand this – to desire this

- C. So the world will never know anything about this love
  - Let me add the carnal Christian will know nothing about this love
    - 1). This is deep truth taught experienced in the heart where Christ is at home

**Transition:** I think we need to correct some misunderstandings about the word Saint

## 2. Our Catholic neighbors have a completely different understanding

- A. The Catholic church teaches only certain people are saints – those that are canonized
  - 1). These are people who are very exceptional – very unusual
- B. You may see some Catholics with the plastic statues on their dashboard
  - 1). I have one of Gilles in my car but whatever
- C. But the Scripture tells us all true believers are saints
 

**Rom 1:7 (NIV)** To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

  - 1). He wasn't talking to a few extr-credit individuals
    - a). He was speaking to all who believe in Christ
      - And set themselves apart from the world, its sin, to follow him

**Point:** If you are a true believer this morning – this love is for you

- A. It's not just for the Saint in the Catholic sense
- B. It's not just for people like missionaries who have give up everything to follow Christ
  - 1). It's not just for the Pastor whose job is to be in the Scriptures
  - 2). It's for everybody who knows Christ – those who work in the secular work force
    - a). Its easy to make excuses – I don't have the time to linger over this truth to enjoy it
    - b). Paul is writing to the believers in Ephesus – many who were slaves
      - 1a). Talk about busy – their masters didn't care about needing a break
        - They didn't get vacation days – sick days – they worked until they dropped
- B. This is something for all saints – regardless their position – their busyness
  - 1). Many Pastors know nothing of this – they don't want it – don't cry out for it
    - a). They teach about the love of Christ and know nothing about it personally
  - 2). There are those in full time jobs – who do know this experience
    - a). It is an open invitation for every saint – every child of God

**Transition:** Well fine then. How do I begin to understand this great love

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## III. THE WAY TO THIS KNOWLEDGE

**Eph 3:17–19 (ESV)** 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.

### 1. That is interesting to me – that you may have strength to comprehend...

- A. That stands out to me – this idea of needing strength to comprehend...
  - 1). He as already prayed we would be strengthened by the Spirit in his inner man
    - Now he repeats the request for strength - now to comprehend the love of God

**Thought:** What is happening here?

- A. We've seen we needed strength in the inner man to bear the weight of all that God is offering us here
  - 1). Now Paul says it is the same with the love of God
- B. We treat the thought of God's love so lightly don't we
  - 1). But Paul is saying it is something powerful – weighty - dynamic

- 2). This is Almighty God coming to you – manifesting himself to you – in you
  - a). This is the God who manifested himself when Solomon dedicated the temple  
The glory of God was so powerful the priest could not stand up
  - b). This is the God that Moses sees just the after glory as he passes by  
His face was so radiant he had to put a veil on because he’s freaking people out

**Point:** Paul says this kind of love is so full of power so glorious you need to be strengthened to comprehend it  
And strengthen to experience it

- A. This is overwhelming love that you read about in biographies – so great you feel you can’t endure it
- B. This is humbling love – life altering love – never seeing anything the same kind of love
  - 1). This is love that makes you feel so secure you can face anything kind of love

**Question:** But where does this start? How do I get there

- A. It is a work of the Spirit – why we must start crying out to him
  - 1). Asking him to put a desire in our heart to know this kind of love
  - 2). Asking him to start sinking our roots down into this love of Christ for us
- B. Why is it important that those roots begin to sink into this love
  - 1). We will taste the goodness of God’s love – start to experience it
    - a). Even the slightest taste – we cause us to want more – we can’t settle for less

## 2. This kind of love appears ridiculous to those who are only theological

- A. The take it by faith gang – who feel that anything emotional is the slippery slope
  - a). They’ve been so afraid of this kind of love – never tasted it – don’t know how good it is
    - a). Because they’ve never tasted it they don’t long for it
- B. But when you’ve tasted it – once those roots have gone down and drawn up the sweetness
  - 1). You can’t live without this

**Thought:** I don’t want that cold kind of Christianity that only remains in the mind

- A. I want a theological Christianity – theology as accurate as possible
  - 1). But I want my theology to lead me to Christ and his love
  - 2). I want my theology to tell me how much I’m loved
    - a). But then I want to experience that love that will touch my emotions - subjective
- B. This is why a studied theologian can be useless in the Christian body
  - 1). He can write books that talk about God but there seems to be no God in them
    - a). You feel like this is a man who has never experienced Him personally
    - b). He writes about the love of God so dispassionately

**Thought:** But before I’m too hard on the theologian – the problem could also be us

- A. We can read books about the love of God – hear a sermon on it – be bored to death
  - 1). Why? Because you aren’t rooted and grounded in the love of God
    - a). You haven’t experienced it – you don’t know how good it is  
So you have no desire for it – it is foreign to your experience

**Thought 1:** If this is you this morning – don’t panic AND don’t settle

- A. God is saying to you through Ephesians – You can have this – it is for all saints
- B. As I’ve been saying all along – start right where you are - cry out to God
  - 1). Ask him to cause you to want to experience this
  - 2). Ask him to make you hunger for it – to desire it so greatly you’ll do whatever it takes

**Transition:** Let me close with one last quick thought

## 3. How great is our salvation

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- A. Most religion is between man and a distant deity – an impersonal deity
    - 1). A deity you'd better please then hope he's going to be merciful
  - B. But Christianity couldn't be more intimate
    - 1). God draws us to himself – takes up residence in us – writes about how much we are loved
    - 2). Then encourages us to know this love that is so great – so weighty
      - a). We need to be strengthened to be able to handle it
      - b). I've said it so many times – Christianity is so amazing to me
        - 1a). I love being able to wake up every morning - first thought is God  
Good morning Father. Good morning Jesus. Good morning Holy Spirit  
Thank you for this day. Thank you for what you're going to do.  
Thank you for loving me.
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## CONCLUSION

- 1. I love this prayer of Paul – as I study it – it is changing my life**
  - A. I pray it is changing yours too! Changing your desires! Your direction.
  - B. Again – like Glenda in the Wizard of OZ said – it is always best to start at the beginning
    - 1). Where do you start – daily asking the Spirit to work this into your life