

“A Prayer for the Church” (Part Two)
Ephesians 3:14-19
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Introduction:

1. Have you ever climbed a mountain? As a boy in Ohio, I never saw one! However, when I moved to New York, I experienced my first mountains. I think I’ll never forget my first trip to Lake Placid. When I saw the Adirondacks, I thought, “Now I know why they held the Winter Olympics here!” A few years later, I took our youth group on a climb of some of the Presidential Peaks on the Appalachian Trail. It was a tremendous experience. But then last summer, Sharon and I saw the Rockies. It does something to you to see peak after majestic peak!
2. When you climb a mountain, you find out something about yourself and the mountain; namely, how big it is and how little you are. But when you reach the summit, you say, “It was worth the effort!” The passage before us is one of the mountains of the Scriptures. There is a sense in which every preacher who loves the Lord and his Word says to himself, “I don’t want to touch it. It makes me see my own inadequacy. Perhaps we should just all sit, admire, meditate and worship.”
3. However, deeply aware of my own limitations, will you come with me and look and gaze and joyfully ponder at what the Lord the Spirit has inspired for our benefit. As we survey this holy ground, we will be learning more of how to prayer for one another in this local church. The apostle has already prayed in his first request that the church might be strengthened by an increasing measure of Christ’s indwelling and the Spirit’s power in the inner person of the heart. Building on that, his second request asks for strength to grasp and to know Christ’s love.

Exposition:

- I. A blessed truth about every Christian—he/she has been rooted and established in love.
 - A. In whose love have we been rooted and established—God’s or ours?
 1. Most commentators, that I have read and reread, assert without proof, that this is our love. Now I surely agree that love is one of the chief principles of the Christian religion. See 1 Cor 13; 1 Jn 3-4; Gal 5:6.
 2. However, a couple of reasons make this common interpretation untenable. First, I know of nowhere in the Scriptures where our love for God and/or others is said to root and establish us. Second, Paul presents this as something that has occurred that stabilizes the saint in a continual way. The participle used is in the perfect tense, probably in an extensive sense. “The force of the perfect tense is simply that it describes an event that, completed in the past... has results in the present time...” The extensive sense emphasizes “the completed action of a past action or process from which a present state emerges.” [Wallace, pp. 573,577] Here the completed action is that God loved us.
Example: Many times in the New Testament Scriptures you read the phrase, “It is written.” Usually, the verb is in the perfect tense. The Scriptures were written in the past, but they continue to speak to us with God’s authority.
 - B. How has God’s love rooted and established us?
 1. The reception of God’s love is one of the basic changes that occur at the time of salvation. By the Spirit we receive God’s redeeming love for us in Christ. Rm 5:5; Col 3:12; 1 Th 1:4; 2 Th 2:13; 1 Jn 3:1 [Each example has a perfect tense verb.]

2. At the moment of salvation, God pours out his love into our hearts. This love immediately “roots and establishes” the follower of Christ.

Illustration: When a tree is first planted, it is held in position by stakes. God’s love holds us in position!

a. To express his thought, Paul uses two different “metaphors (one botanical, the other architectural), both of which emphasize depth as opposed to superficiality... Thus Paul likens them first to a well-rooted tree, and then to a well-built house. In both cases the unseen cause of their stability will be the same: love.” [Stott]

b. Love, God’s redeeming love for us in Christ, “is the source of the Christian’s strength and the firm foundation on which the Christian’s life is established...” [Morris] As a tree that is deeply rooted draws nourishment from the soil, so God’s love flows into us to give us spiritual vigor. As a tall building stands firm on its deep foundation, so we stand securely on God’s love. Rm 8:35,39

II. A blessing needed—“that you may be strong enough”

A. As we have already seen, the Christian is richly blessed. Though this is true, we are also weak.

1. As the apostle says in another place, “we have this treasure in jars of clay...” (2 Cor 4:7). We are caught between two points. We have redemption through Christ’s blood on a spiritual level (Eph 1:7), yet we look forward to the redemption of our bodies (Rm 8:23) on a physical level. We are “called saints” (Rom 1:7; etc.), but we must perfect “holiness out of reverence for God” (2 Cor 7:1). We have been given “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Pt 1:3), yet we must perfect our faith and make our calling and election sure (2 Pt 1:5-11). We are also temporal and limited, and infinite, eternal love comes to us!

Illustration: Have you ever built a dam across a little creek? As the water slowly builds behind it, you might build another down stream to contain the water in another place. At first, the weak second dam is able to control the water trickling toward it. But what if someone suddenly breaks the larger, first dam? The second dam will be swept away by the sudden torrent!

2. Aware of this need, the apostle Paul prays for strength for his fellow believers. Though God’s love has been given to us in Christ, our sense and experience of that love may be small. The problem is not in regard to God’s love, for that is rich and abundant. But the problem concerns our weakness. Why do we not walk in the assurance of God’s love, as we should? It is because we are not strong enough in ourselves to grasp or to understand experientially what is ours.

B. Areas in which we need to become strong enough.

1. We need to be able to come with a joyful humility. Mt 11:25-26

2. We need to be able to come with a personal focus on Christ. Gal 2:15-20

3. We need to be able to come with a deep confidence. Heb 10:19-22

Point: Unless we receive strength in these three ways, we will surely miscarry in our conception of knowing Christ’s love. Either we will become involved in disputes with God, or we will become too intellectual or too legalistic or we will become too filled with guilt or fear to approach the Holy One.

Apply: We are all weak. We can safely admit our weakness. Where do you sense a significant weakness? Do you have a joyful humility, or are you involved in an ongoing dispute with the Lord? Do you focus on Christ or on how much you know or what rules you keep? Are you confident that God deeply loves you or are you filled with shame and unbelief?

III. A blessed result—to grasp and to know the love of Christ

A. Paul uses two infinitives to complete the meaning of the verb “may be strong enough”. First, he wants us to be strong enough to grasp.

1. Paul piles up a series of dimensional nouns (width, length, height and depth), each of which is probably intended to magnify the greatness of Christ’s love. There is no need to try to discern various ways in which Christ’s love is wide or long or high or deep. This is emotional language! He is caught up in his prayer! Therefore, I do not think we need to find any more at this point than an increasing awareness of the magnitude of Christ’s love.

Illustration: It’s like Paul is showing us one of his favorite trails through the woods. He runs here and there, excited and trying to lead us into his pleasure.

2. Note carefully that though this is emotional language, it is framed in such a way that demands careful, extensive thinking! He wants us to “seize” or “lay hold of” the truth of Christ’s love. “Christians are expected to use the brains God has given them and to think through the implications of the great central truths to which they are committed.” [Morris]

3. We should not miss that this prayer concerns the whole church—“with all the saints”. As God gives strength to each saint to grasp the greatness of Christ’s love, a synergy develops between them so that they mutually strengthen one another.

Point: This is one reason that you need to be in some kind of a small group meeting (such as a Sunday School class, a home Bible Study or prayer meeting), so that you can share in the spiritual experience of other Christians.

B. Paul also wants us to be strong enough “to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge.” He has already used this word “surpassing” in reference to God’s power and grace (1:19; 2:7), and now he applies it to God’s love.

1. At this point, Paul basically bankrupts human language, and relies on either a paradox or an oxymoron to get his point across. How can we know something that surpasses knowledge?

2. It seems clear that he prays that God would give his chosen people some proper appreciation of his unlimited love for them. Though we cannot know this extensively, God is able to help us know it truly.

Conclusion: The practical point for is this. What do we grasp and know of Christ’s love for us—that love that surpasses knowledge?

[1] You may have entered this room away from God and a stranger to his love. You’ve probably been wondering what we’re talking about! If that is so, then at least you’re in a good place. We have many people here that would be willing to tell you more about God’s amazing love. Why continue in your sorrow, loneliness or perhaps even despair, when God offers you the infinite resource of his love in Christ?

[2] Even if you know the Lord, you may have known far too little of his amazing love for you? Return to your Lord today, and you may leave singing, “Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, should die for me?”