

Grasping the Love of Christ

Ephesians 3:14-21(NIV)

A Prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians - A Basic Context

- Ephesus was an ancient Greek city which later became a major Roman city that is now part of the western edge of modern day Turkey.
- Ephesians written in 60-62 AD while Paul was in prison awaiting trial. Ephesians is 1 of 4 “prison epistles” written by Paul while in prison in Rome awaiting trial.
- Paul was neither addressing a false teaching nor confronting opposition, but rather was writing a letter that was likely meant to be delivered to the church in Ephesus to be distributed to many churches in Asia Minor - which is where Ephesus was located
- The epistle is broken into two sections:
 - Chapters 1-3 are the doctrine/theology about God's salvation for us, his church, through Christ from before the foundation of the world and the display of His love and grace for His church in Jesus Christ.
 - Chapters 4-6 are about the practical application and instruction on how to live as God's people
- Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (and for us) found in chapter 3:14-21 comes at the end of a distinct part of his letter where there is a transition from the explanation of God's saving Grace and His love for us to more of an instructional tone in his letter

Main Text:

- We'll focus specifically on grasping the love of Christ and how that frees us from condemnation allowing us to live in all the fullness of God
 - In Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, we'll take a closer look at the second part of Verse 18: "...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ"...

(Paradox within Paul's Prayer)

→ Before looking specifically at Verse 18, there is a paradox within this prayer that needs to be looked at that will give us a better understanding of its meaning

Paradox: a statement that is seemingly untrue or contradictory yet is not.

Paul says starting in Verse 17:

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ **may have power**, together with all the Lord's holy people, **to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ**, ¹⁹ and to know **this love that surpasses knowledge**"...

How can we grasp the love of Christ yet know that this love surpasses knowledge?

- It doesn't seem possible to know the unknowable.
- Paul is not telling us that Christ's love cannot be known, but rather Christ's love will always exceed our capability to fully understand it.
- It's the concept of incomplete knowledge.
- **Example:** I know a lot about technology and can do tons of things with technology to make my life more efficient, more simple and more comfortable. But I will never have complete knowledge of technology because the capability of technology continues to expand and there is an infinite amount I can't know
- So it is with our human understanding of the love of Christ. We can perceive it, experience it, ponder it, treasure it, feel it and continue to increase our knowledge of it, but we will never fully and completely know all there is to know about the love Christ has for us. ***That is the difference between "grasp" and "complete knowledge"***

→ What Paul tells us about the love of Christ

Ephesians 3:18b "...to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ"...

Paul is framing the love of Christ in four dimensions:

1. Width
2. Length
3. Height
4. Depth

John 3:16 can track Ephesians 3:18b:

1. How wide the love of Christ is

- a. Greek word is *platos* - breadth. Used in most translations.
- b. The breadth can refer to the extent of God's love for all people in every nation for all of time through the sacrifice of His son, Jesus.
- c. The breadth of God's love for us through Christ can be seen in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world"...*

2. How long the love of Christ is

- a. Greek word is *mēkos* - length
- b. The length can refer to the continuity of God's love from everlasting to everlasting in Jesus' willingness to pay the price for our sins.
- c. The length of God's love for us through Christ can be seen in John 3:16: *"...that He gave His only begotten Son"...*

3. How high the love of Christ is

- a. Greek word is *hypsos* - height.
- b. The Greek word refers to the exalted position of Christ - the Heavenly realm to which He was lifted up. We too as believers will be "lifted up" when we are glorified through Christ, thus showing another dimension of Christ's love.
- c. The height of God's love for us through Christ can be seen in John 3:16: *"...but have eternal life."*

4. How deep the love of Christ is

- a. Greek word is *bathos* - depth
- b. The depth shows His love in reaching down and saving those who are lost and dead in the depths of sin and misery - no matter who they are or what they've done. Acceptance of Jesus allows salvation for anyone who believes.
- c. The depth of God's love for us through Christ can be seen in John 3:16: *"..that whoever believes in Him shall not perish"...*

→ Being filled with all the fullness of God

Verse 19b: "—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

- So what is the fullness of God and what is the way to obtain it?
 - God is the Supreme Being of the entire universe and everything that exists. By His very nature God is the definition of fullness.
- The fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ.
 - Because of Christ's perfect sacrifice (an extreme display of God's love) we have access to God and all His fullness. **We have all of who God is because of Christ.**
 - **Colossians 1:15-20 says:** "¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have **all his fullness dwell in him**, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."
- We have Jesus Christ in us as believers through the Spirit.
 - **Romans 8:9 says:** "⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the **Spirit of God** lives in you. And if anyone does not have the **Spirit of Christ**, they do not belong to Christ."
 - Same title for the same Spirit - all the same God.
 - Greek word for God in "Spirit of God" here is theos referring to the deity of God as the true God. Theos most common word used for God in Greek New Testament
 - The Greek word for Christ here is Christos referring to the anointing of Jesus as the son of God
- If God is by definition fullness, and Jesus has the fullness of God in him and we have Jesus in us, then by simple deduction we have the fullness of God in us through Christ's perfect love in willingly going to the Cross for our sins.

→ Examination of how failing to grasp the love of Christ leaves us feeling condemned and how we can miss the Grace that we have through Christ

→ The chief reason I believe we fail to grasp the Love of Christ is we fail to have faith and trust in God's sovereignty

A. We must wrestle with the sovereignty of God to truly understand the depth of God's love for us.

B. Sovereignty of God simply defined: God has authority of everything in this universe; God is a Holy God above all and is incapable of sinning; God can do nothing wrong because He is perfect.

→ Common questions arising from dealing with God's Sovereignty:

- If God chooses not to exercise control over any given situation, is it because He is not sovereign?
- Is it because He got caught off guard?
- Is it because He had evil intentions for us?
- **Has God done something wrong by not choosing to exercise control over ANY situation?**

→ In order for God to be God by definition, the answer HAS TO BE NO to each of those questions. He has never done anything wrong - nor can He.

→ While we have faith in these very truths of God (that Christ's love for us is immeasurable and surpasses knowledge, that God is a good, Holy God, He is sovereign and can do no wrong) , we fail to completely trust in Him. And when we fail to grasp the love of Christ, we pay a hefty price for it.

→ Faith and trust are two separate things - yet go hand in hand in our relationship with Christ.

- **Faith** is a noun. It is something we have or do not have - with varying degrees in between.
- **Hebrews 11:1:** "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."
- Faith would say: "We are confident our salvation lies solely in the hope of the resurrection and death of Jesus Christ. We are assured of our confidence in that salvation through the unseen Holy Spirit living in us."

- **Trust** is a verb (can be a noun & adjective - but verb is most common form in English). It is an action. It's something we "do."
- Trust is the manifesting of our faith in actions and thoughts.
- **Faith says "He can do it."**
- **Trust says "He will do it."**

→ **Two examples how failing to grasp the love of Christ (because we do not have faith in and trust for his perfect love) leaves us with feelings of condemnation and the negative emotions that go with it:**

1. Fear

We know God loves us, but we have a subconscious fear that He is going to let something bad happen to us.

- Can bad things happen to us? Sure, it's a guarantee that this life **will** bring pain, suffering and misery at one point or another.
 - The heart of our Fear is that what God allows to come into my life will be more than I can bear and that God cannot or will not see us through it. We fail to trust that God is who He says He is.
 - The fear of the Lord is NOT the same as the "spirit of fear" mentioned in 2 Timothy 1:7. The fear of the Lord is a complete acknowledgement of and respect for all that God is.***
 - We must ask ourselves has God done something wrong by allowing whatever it is into my life? **The answer is NO!**
- So why do we allow Fear to dominate us?
 - That is a question you must ponder and let the Lord reveal to you.
 - We all have different reasons we lack faith and do not trust God.

We can have a fear that He is going to take something away from us or punish us.

- We know the Scripture tells us Jesus Christ has already paid the price for ALL of our sins and that Christ bore the wrath of God in our place. Sadly, on some level our Fear, worry and anxiety says otherwise.
- These are words we wouldn't speak to God - we don't trust him, yet our actions speak them for us.**

- c. There is a time for God to punish us, and when He does we have to look at the sovereignty of God. If He punishes us, has He done anything wrong? **No!**
- d. And if He punishes us, will it be with bad intent - as we imply with our Fear, anxiety or worry? **No!** God is incapable of doing that.
- e. God's punishment is **always** His way of showing His love for us when we are doing something that is not good for us or is hurting others. He **always** uses punishment to **draw us closer to Him** and to grow our character. **Always.**
- f. *God's punishment to us is NOT the same punishment that Christ bore on our behalf. Any punishment we receive from God is temporary in nature and is confined to this life. The punishment Christ bore on our behalf is the eternal punishment for our sins that would leave us separated eternally from God.*
- g. **1 John 4:18:** "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love."
- h. Fear arises from us not grasping the Love of Christ and not having faith in God's sovereignty and trusting that His love is perfect.

2. False Guilt vs. True Guilt (Godly Sorrow)

- a. Scripture says that we are all guilty before God - Romans 3:10-18
- b. But as far as "feeling guilt" - there are two types of guilt. One is True Guilt. Another is False Guilt.
- c. Guilt in and of itself isn't inherently bad, it's a reality of our fallen world. We were not created to experience guilt. We only experience guilt as a result of the fall.
- d. Our False Guilt plays a **MAJOR** part in a turbulent relationship with God.

→ One fundamental difference between True Guilt and False Guilt is it's origin:

False Guilt - originates from at least two places - satan and our consciences

False Guilt coming from satan:

- We know that in scripture satan is referred to as "the accuser"
- Satan is capable and does accuse us in our own minds
- Now what would satan be accusing us of?

- He brings up our past sins and failures in an effort to shift attention from the forgiveness we have in Christ and keep us mired down in past mistakes
- Satan uses our past mistakes against us by saying: “God surely can’t forgive you for doing this again”

False Guilt coming from our own consciences:

- When our False Guilt originates from ourselves, we take on the mentality that we are on permanent probation before God.
 - Every slip up we have is magnified. We are **overly** disappointed with ourselves.
- We allow the convicting feeling we have of committing sin linger after we've repented of it which turns into False Guilt.
- Sometimes we feel guilt for things which aren't wrong:
 - Not being able to serve or help

False Guilt leads to:

- Depression
- Anger
- Despair
- Fear
- Alienation from God (most significant impact!)
- We believe somehow our actions or behavior somehow do anything for us before the Lord
- We think that if we live saintly lives and are good enough, we'll earn God's acceptance
- False Guilt leads us down a path of works to earn God's favor

True Guilt - originates from the very words of God in scripture.

- **2 Corinthians 7:10:** "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death."
- Godly Sorrow is what True Guilt is, and it leads to:
 - A humbling of the heart
 - Repentance
 - Reconciliation with God
 - Bringing about Godly change
- True Guilt ALWAYS points us back to Christ and the Gospel.

→ True Guilt (Godly Sorrow) is the conviction the Lord allows us to have so that we may repent of our sins and then rejoice in the undeserved Grace of God.

→ False Guilt is the result of the enemy and our own consciences.

- It leaves us feeling condemned before the Lord.
- It causes us not to grasp the love Christ has for us which was shown on the Cross.
- It changes our relationship with God to one of works rather than Grace.

→ We must remember to not dismiss True Guilt as False Guilt. We feel conviction for good reasons.

→ Our guilt should be measured by the results - do they bring us closer to Christ or hide us from Christ?

→ **SUMMARY:**

- Grasping the love of Christ is seeing the great lengths to which God showed His love for us through Christ - and us not deserving it.
- We must take into account the sovereignty of God and gauge where our faith is and where our trust lies when grasping the love of Christ.
- If we cannot grasp a perfect picture of love displayed in Christ, we allow Fear and False Guilt to creep in and leave us feeling condemned - missing the
- The width and length and height and depth of the love of Christ has been revealed to us from God through the willing sacrifice of Jesus to pay for sins that we deserved the punishment for. Our works, efforts or actions play no part in our redemption. Our response is one of obedience and worship for the amazing love of Christ.

Applying the Word

→ To apply what grasping the love of Christ is, here are two statements we can use to measure if we truly are understanding the width, length, height and depth of Christ's love:

1. God cannot love you any more than He already does

- That is evidenced by the willing sacrifice of Jesus to pay for our sins **once and for all - not every time we sin**

- If God can love you more than He already does, then what needs to be done to receive more of His love?
- Is there something you can do to make Him love you more?
- Do your actions, deeds and thoughts make Him go, "Wow, you're so amazing. I'm going to increase My love for you"? *It's silly to even think that.*

2. God cannot love you any less than He already does

- This is the one that challenges us the most. Why?
 - Every human relationship we have is based on how we act towards each other. When we offend someone, we don't sit there and just wait for the relationship to fix itself.
 - When we offend another, we have to be proactive to try to restore the relationship. That means something we need to do something (A/K/A an action) to help repair and restore that relationship
 - Underlying our desire to restore that relationship is the hidden belief that somehow that person thinks less of us than they did previously
- We bring the reality of having to do something to repair a relationship into our relationship with God.
 - When we've sinned, we should immediately be convicted (or feel True Guilt) since we have sinned against Him and let Him down. However, hidden somewhere inside us (due to our broken, fallen earthly relationships) is the misbelief that somehow He loves us less because of our sinful actions.
 - Evidence for this is shown:
 - When we allow our sins to separate us from our relationship with Christ.
 - False Guilt takes hold of us and we entertain how bad we are or what a failure we are, and it places a wedge between us and Christ
 - We lose regular fellowship with Christ through prayer and reading His word because we feel guilty we don't do it as often as we should.
 - We self-condemn, and by so doing make the statement that God has to love us less.

→ The truth is the exact opposite of our belief He loves us less when we sin against Him

- He knew we were going to sin repeatedly.
- In the great realm of eternity, God had a plan of complete redemption from ALL OF OUR SINS through Jesus Christ.
- Jesus Christ displayed his immeasurable love for us in willfully going to the Cross to pay for sins He did not commit.
- Jesus Christ was victorious on the Cross over sin and death and therefore became the perfect offering to the Father on our behalf.
- This displays Christ's perfect love for us which cannot change - otherwise it's not perfect. His love increase or decrease for us based on anything we do.

→ If we truly grasp this and apply that knowledge to our relationship with Christ, we won't turn away in Fear and False Guilt when we fall short before Him. We will repent of our sin and be restored to Christ. Then we can receive His love which comes by Grace alone, through Faith alone in Christ alone.

Benediction:

Romans 8:34-35 & 37-39

"34 Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"

"37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."