

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 3:14-19 - Growing in God's Love

When we began our study through Ephesians I mentioned that book is really divided into 2 sections: chapters 1-3 and 4-6. Chapters 1-3 are indicatives, chapters 4-6 are the imperatives. Indicatives are a type of verb in Greek and are simply truths about the Christian faith that we are called to understand and believe.

Imperatives are commands that we are called to keep usually based on the indicatives. We'll see that a lot of Chapter 4-6 are commands that we are to live out as followers of Jesus.

What that means is this morning we're coming to the end of the first section. And really what Paul is doing is wrapping up the whole section on Indicatives and he does it in an amazing way. Our section this morning is really a prayer that ends in a doxology. A doxology is a song of praise to God for who he is and what he's done.

Now, before we begin, let me just say that sometimes Paul's sections are hard to follow. He's famous for run-on sentences And it can be a little confusing. But if you can drill down to the main issue it's not too difficult to navigate.

Most of you guys know there's a phase that most three year olds go through. And it's usually asking one question that can drive us a little batty sometimes. What's the question they ask? "Why?"

I'm going to the store. Why? To get milk. Why? Because we're out of milk. Why? Because we drank it all. Why? Because we ate it with cereal. Why? You get the idea.

Well, Paul here is at the end of 3 chapters of amazing truths about God and then he says he prays. Why? So that. Why? So that. Why? So that. And he gives us more and more reasons but at the end of it all he says what we need to know more than anything is the immense love that God has for us. Watch the chain - he uses the phrase "so that" or "that" over and over. **Read 14-19**

Ultimately what Paul wants for us is to have an bigger grasp of just how much God loves us.

That's the big picture this morning: we need to continually pray that we would understand God's immense love for us more and more.

1) True theology always magnifies God's love.

I just want to make a brief comment on the phrase that begins this section: "for this reason." Paul says "for this reason" is why I'm about to pray that you know God's love more. What's the reason? What's the information that came before? Well, he said this in **Vs. 1. Read**

You know how sometimes you're about to make a point and then you take a little rabbit trail and then come back to your main point? That actually happens to the Bible authors as well.

Paul was actually going to talk about how he prays they would know the love of God, but he gets sidetracked on the mystery of God's purpose for the Gentiles. Almost like he can't help himself from talking about the amazing work of God through Jesus bringing Jews and Gentiles together as one in Christ. So he got a little sidetracked.

So the "for this reason" in **Verse 14** is actually talking about all of what he's talked about in Chapters 1 and 2 and I think the early part of 3. For for all these reasons we need to understand the love of God.

What has Paul talked about?

How the Father has blessed us with spiritual blessings in Christ.

How we were chosen by God in love.

We have forgiveness and grace.

We've received the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation.

We've received an inheritance we don't deserve from a God who is over ever creature.
We got all this despite being dead in sin and following Satan.
God saved us by his grace and raised us from the dead.
Every good work we do God prepared beforehand.
Gentiles who were utterly destitute are brought in to the family of God.
We are now the Temple of God.
Our salvation is a testimony to spiritual rulers and authorities of how wise and amazing God is.

That's a really quick summary of what we've spent several months working through. Those are amazing truths and promises that we have in the gospel.

And what Paul says is that for all those reason I'm praying that you will know the amazing love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

Because of all these amazing truths we need to have as a foundation the personal understanding of the love God has for us.

Maybe put it a different way: there are a lot of people who have a lot theology in their head but they have no real evidence of delighting in the fact that God loves them.

It's like spiritual autism. They know truths and they know they're right - and maybe they are right - but they don't actually delight in the fact that God loves them and has blessed them immensely. There's no connection between these theological truths and any genuine emotion.

You know the parable that Jesus mentions of the man who finds a treasure in a field and in his joy goes and sells all that he has to buy the field?

Imagine Data from Star Trek going and buying the field. No emotion, no joy, no comprehension that the reason he has the field is because his Heavenly Father gave it to him. Just stone faced and analytical.

That's how many Christians are with the precious truths of what God has done for us in Christ. Which is why we need to pray to understand the amazing love God has for us.

All theology - listen - all theology should kindle our understanding of God's love for us. It should be like another little log on the fire of understanding just how amazing God is to us. It's not just data, it's not just gee-whiz information.

Everything we learn about God is another amazing way in which he's revealed himself to us. Everything we learn about what he's done is another way in which we see how his perfectly wise plan is coming together. Every thing we learn about what he'll do in the future is another step to seeing him face to face in fullness of joy.

And all of that should lead us to conclude how much God loves us.

2) We ask the Father to help us know his love. **Read 14-16**

So Paul says bows his knees. He probably did this literally. He probably prayed in a prostrate position as an act of humility. We don't have to do that - the Bible describes a lot of ways people pray:

Lying down, looking up, silently, out loud, scripted, off the cuff, on knees, in the belly of a great fish - all kinds of ways.

But here Paul bows in humility to the Father. Most of the NT prayers are directed to the Father. We serve one God in three persons - Father, Son and Spirit. We don't worship 3 gods. We worship 1 God who exists eternally in 3 persons. It's a mystery, but that's what the Bible teaches: the Triune Godhead.

And most often in the NT we see that the prayers of the saints are directed to the Father. We can pray to the Son, we can pray to the Spirit, or to God in general. But usually we see prayer to the Father.

But Paul adds a twist here. He says he prays to the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. **Read 15-16**

What does that mean? Are there families in heaven? What's he getting at? Well, remember from last week we saw that in the wisdom of God he brought Jew and Gentile together. That was hidden for ages. But when Jesus came God brought us together and he did this to show his wisdom to rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. **Read 10-11**

So remember we talked about this last week: our union in Christ - to a great extent - is to show God's amazing wisdom to spiritual beings. Spiritual rulers and authorities that we can't even see - these are angelic-type beings, spiritual beings. There's a cosmic spiritual plan that God had in bringing Jews and Gentiles together into one new man that we can't even fathom. We're part of a bigger thing going on.

And so what Paul does is pray directly to the Father who is over everyone. Every spiritual being everywhere. If we were in the south: Over all y'all.

He is the Father over every family - or really, every category of created being - whether on heaven or on earth. Spiritual beings don't have families - at least not that we know of. The word of families is more the idea of types of beings.

In nature you have the dog family, the bear family, the bird family. Well, you have human families, and you have spiritual families. Not relations, just groups.

So God is Father over all of them and Paul goes directly to the Father - that's the kind of amazing access we have - Paul goes directly to the Father in humility so that we might understand these things better.

Since all beings derive our existence from God, and we have access to God, we go directly to him to help us understand just how much he loves us and cares for us.

Side note before we move on: this is important. I think we often forget that it was God who opened our eyes to know him and love him in the first place, and we need to remember that to know God's love more requires him to give us that ability.

Psalm 119:18: Open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things from your law.

We read these things, but we need God to inform our mind.

Remember when the guy came up to Jesus and asked him to heal his son if Jesus could? And Jesus says all things are possible for the one who believes - like, "Hey buddy the problem here is you, not me -you just don't believe." You remember what he asked Jesus? "Help my what?" Unbelief. He realized if he was going to have more faith Jesus had to give it to him.

I think there's a similar thing going on here. The way we grow in understanding God's love for us, is to ask him to help us understand his love for us. To take these amazing truths and sink them into our hearts and rejoice in them. I think that's a thing that God has to do. Obviously we read these truths and study these truths.

But I think we need to be diligent to pray to God to ask him to give us strength to understand them in a way that we know god loves us and we delight in that love.

So theology always magnifies God's love.
We pray to the Father to know that love.

3) The Spirit and Son are needed to help us comprehend God's love. Read 16-17

Almost every kid who grows up in church knows: Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me, yes, Jesus loves me. Yes Jesus loves me, the Bible tells me so.

That's basic to the gospel message. As basic as **John 3:16**: For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son so that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

On the one hand the love of God is the very basic gospel message. It's the simple truth we believe and trust to save us.

On the other hand it's so deep and amazing, that to understand its depths we need the whole Trinune Godhead to strengthen us to grasp it.

We hear that Jesus died for our sins because he loved us, but it's these other truths that take some work to comprehend.

The Spirit has to strengthen us to take in the magnitude of God's love. All these truths we've been seeing for months - I'm sure there's some you've been wrestling with. Maybe it's predestination, maybe it's the work of God in the Gentiles, maybe it's that we were utterly dead in sin and followed Satan before we were saved. It could be many things. But the only we we can really hang on to these truths and love them and rejoice in them and understand how they're an expression of God's love is if he strengthens us.

My little son likes helping around the house and occasionally he wants to help lift a box or big object. There's no way he can do it on my his own, so I have to lean over and basically help him do all the work so he can accomplish it. That's kind of of Paul is praying for here.

"God, your Spirit has to strengthen us so that we can even handle these truths." And not only does that Spirit strengthen us, but Jesus needs to dwell ever more in our hearts. **Read 17**

So this sounds weird at first, because doesn't Jesus already dwell in the hearts of believers? Of course he does. The moment we're saved he comes and lives in us.

But the idea here is that the longer we're believers the more he fills us and strengthens us to know God's love. Paul kind of talked about that back at the end of chapter 2 when he said we're the Temple of God, but we're also growing. **Read 21-22**

That's the idea here. We are filled with Christ, but the container is ever expanding as Jesus fills us more and more.

And interestingly, remember the man asking Jesus to help his unbelief? Notice what Paul says in **Vs. 17. Read** Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. If we want more Christ, we need more faith. Where do we get more faith? Asking God for it.

I remember being a young Christian and not really knowing how to grow in my understanding of God's love for me. My pastor would talk about Jesus dying for me and forgiving me. And how I just needed to know God loved me more. And I just kind of nodded along. And it's true of course, that the pinnacle of God's love is the sacrifice of his Son.

And we have to grow in our understanding of that particular aspect. But demonstrates his love in a variety of ways that often seem unimportant, but the older I get are a blessing.

Just one example: I think God promising to give us resurrection bodies is a massive example of love. As I get older and see peoples' bodies breaking down, my body breaking down, sickness, illness, death - I think one of the greatest acts of God's love will be our resurrection bodies.

No more pain anymore. I seem to hurt my back once a year. And there are times when I simply rejoice that I don't even feel my back. I was incredibly sick on Monday, just writhing in pain for 24 hours. There is going to be a stretch of time - 42 million years from now - where I won't even remember what that pain felt like. Because I'll be in a resurrected body. No pain, no crying, no sorrow or Excedrin. No vomiting or ice packs. Just incorruptible bodies enjoying to the face of God in all his glory.

God isn't going to remove our bodies, in love he's going to give us better ones so that we can more fully enjoy who he is and what he will give us for all eternity. That concept is something God has to reveal to us through knowing him and his word. Not too many teenagers are concerned about being pain free in a resurrection body. But many older saints are. And we hope for it by faith.

To do that, we need the work of the Spirit and Son.

So theology always magnifies God's love.
We pray to the Father to know that love.
We need the work of the Spirit and Son.

4) The prayer is that we know the enormity of God's love. Read 17b-19

Big things require big foundations. Bridges, skyscrapers, towers, dams - the way they work is to have a massive foundation below them.

That's how it is to understand the great truths of God. We have to be grounded in the massive foundation of the love of God. That's Paul's prayer here. That God would give us the ability to understand the dimensional magnitude of God's love.

Do you know what the highest mountain in the world is measured from base to summit? It's not Everest. It's actually Mt. Kea in Hawaii. From base - which is miles below the ocean, to summit which is 13,800 feet above sea level is actually higher than Everest. But it's difficult for us to grasp that because we can't see the whole thing. We can see renderings, we can see comparisons, we can understand the math.

But to grasp it is something completely different. Imagine seeing an airplane overhead. A 747 on the way to New York. It's 6 miles up. And there's a rock that just shoots straight upward to it. That's the height of this mountain. It's really beyond comprehension for us.

That's how God's love is. We just get a little more, a little more, a little more day by day through the help of God. And God can help us understand his love more.

We don't take in theology just to be bigger nerds. We do it so we understand the love God has for us and we rejoice in that love.

Pray