

A Prayer for the Redeemed

Ephesians

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 3:14-19

Preached on: Sunday, March 8, 2015

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road

Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Today's passage is a phenomenal, incredible piece of God's word and I can honestly tell you that if the only thing that God had ever done for me in life was to give me life enough to physically touch this passage with my finger, I would have grace poured out upon me that was far beyond all imagination that was so much more than anything that I could have ever thought or asked. For us to be able to look at this passage today and for me to have the privilege of opening it before you is just incalculably, exceedingly, abundantly beyond all that anyone could ask or think. We have come to Ephesians 3. I invite you to turn there with me and we are about to dive into the depths of infinity and have it wash our minds and wash our thinking and purify our motives in a way that will focus our Christian life in a way that is going to be a rich encouragement to you.

We've come to the end of the first half of Ephesians and this is a pivotal passage that we come to here this morning. We've seen Paul in the first 2 chapters praise God for his work of salvation and he has swept us through such marvelous themes as we've looked at the reality that God chose us as Christians, he has adopted us into his family, he redeemed us, he sealed us with his Spirit. Even though we were once dead in our trespasses and sins, God has made us alive together in Christ. He has raised us up into the heavenly places with him and that's all been a work of his grace. It has all been an act of grace because "salvation is by grace through faith, not of ourselves, not as a result of works lest anyone should boast." What God has done in salvation is he has made a people to be at peace with him. Those of us who once were rebels, who once were lost in sin, who were dead in trespasses, who were under the domination of the devil, those people like us, God has brought into relationship with himself through the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and he has established a spiritual body called the church where Jews and Gentiles can be brought together into one on equal standing in a way that even the Old Testament prophets had not seen or anticipated.

So there is this rich, marvelous aspect. These are multifaceted wonders about salvation that Paul has been sweeping through in the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, all grace poured out on sinners like us and now, Paul, having said all of those wonderful things, turns to prayer. He has explained the peace that Christ bought for his people with his death on the cross and he is about to move in, in the last half of the book, he's about to move into the implications of salvation on our daily lives but before he does that, before he goes from

the doctrine to the practice of the Christian life, there is a bridge and this bridge is his intercession on behalf of the saints of God. And what we see here is Paul praying not only for his readers, but as we read this, we see that he is praying for all the saints. The prayer that Paul has here in Ephesians 3, he was praying for you and me as well because he brought in the whole scope of God's people into the realm of his selfless prayer and he brings us to themes of infinity, of grace in the fullness of God, which simply transcend all human understanding.

So with those little words of introduction, Ephesians 3:14 is our text for this morning down through verse 19. Paul says this,

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

How shall we approach this great prayer? Well, let me just point out a couple of little structural things for you. There are 3 real petitions that Paul makes in this prayer that are marked by the English word "that." I just want you to get familiar with the very basic structure of the passage before we really dive into it. Paul is bowing his knees and he's bowing his knees because he is about to pray and he asks, first of all, he bows his knees and he asks, verse 16, "that He would grant you." That's his first aspect. He wants God to grant to God's people to be strengthened in the inner man. In verse 17, he says, "that," there in the last half of the verse he says, I pray, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth." And at the end of verse 19, he says, "that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." In the original language, those 3 clauses mark out the purpose of Paul's prayer: that he would grant you power, that you would understand God's love, that you would be filled up to all of the fullness of God. That's the basic structure of the passage and that's how we're going to try to approach it here this morning.

Beloved, I want you to have a sense of expectation as you hear what is about to come as we unfold these things because what we have here takes us to depths unknown. This is no ordinary discussion of human words that is in front of us, this is an apostle praying under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This is the word of God inspired and recorded for us in inerrant fashion and Paul is praying that God would exercise his power to do a work in his people that would accomplish eternal purposes through them and so what we have here is a vast, magnificent, godly prayer that is expressing the purposes of God for his church, for his people, for us and this is what God has in mind for his people. So let's look at it with a sense of great anticipation that the Lord is going to open up to us this morning things that we have never seen in his word before and strike us with a sense of

awe and wonder and gratitude so that we go out of this place much different than what we came in today.

Paul says as he opens this prayer, he says, "For this reason," verse 14, "I bow my knees before the Father." The posture of kneeling expresses humility and it expresses earnestness. This is no casual prayer by someone slumped at their desks trying to get through 5 minutes of quiet time so that they can check the box off. Paul has had his mind engaged with these great themes of salvation through the first 3 chapters of this letter. He has poured his heart into this as the Spirit of God was influencing him in what he recorded for the people of God. And so now, having said all of these things, having been overwhelmed by the greatness of God's salvation, he turns to prayer. You see, God had a purpose in salvation. God has purposes in the lives of his people. God has a purpose in your life and Paul is praying, understanding all of these things, having explained them in a way that had never been explained in the course of human history before, Paul is so mindful of this and he is so engaged with it that he says, "O God, in keeping with the revelation that you have just given through my hand, I now pray that you would take your power and use it to accomplish the purpose that you have revealed." So this is the heart of an apostle deeply engaged with the purposes of God, deeply engaged with the future of the church of God, praying to see the purposes of God extended. The themes of this are sacred. They are sanctified. They are set apart. This is no ordinary human discourse that we see before us. The veil has been pulled back and we are seeing deeply into the purposes of God with what he is about to pray.

Now, why is he praying? What is it that he is praying about? Well, let me just kind of stitch this together for you in things that we've already seen in our prior exposition of the passage. Go back to chapter 2, verse 22. This is the connection that Paul is making as you'll see in just a moment. Paul, in chapter 2, verse 19, is summing things up and he says, "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and you are of God's household." You are in a privileged position as a Christian. You belong to God's household. You are fellow citizens with the saints. Verse 21, "in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord." Watch this in verse 22, "in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." Now, let's focus on that verse for just a moment. Just for a moment, focus on what he said there in verse 22. He uses a present tense. He expresses an ongoing action. He says, "You as Christians, you as the people of God, you are now being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." In other words, he's saying, "God is doing a work in you so that he would establish a dwelling place where his name could be made known." And this is an ongoing work, it's not a past tense that God did this, it's not that God made you into this dwelling, that's not what he says there in verse 22. He says, "You are being built into this dwelling of God," and so there is an ongoing work of God that is at work here and you are a part of that as the people of God, he says to his readers.

Now, watch this and focus on that word "dwelling," you're being made into a dwelling of God. This is what God is doing amongst his people. So, in chapter 3, verse 1, he says, "For this reason." He says, "For this reason, because you are being built into a dwelling of God in the Spirit, I, Paul," and then as we've seen for the past few weeks, he goes on a

digression and he talks more about the work that God has done in reconciling Jews and Gentiles into one body in the church and he expands on that and he talks about his apostleship and we've gone through all of that. But notice there in verse 1 that he says, "For this reason, I, Paul." He was just about to pray and then his mind went off on a tangent so maybe that will help you be a little bit more sympathetic with me when I go off on tangents. I say, "Well, you know, sure, this is what people who teach God's word do, they go off on tangents and then they come back to their main point eventually." That's what the Apostle Paul did.

He says, "For this reason, I, Paul," now watch in verse 14, chapter 3, verse 14, as we pick it up and you can see that he's going back and picking up his train of thought because he opens verse 14 with the exact same words. He says, "For this reason I." So there is this connection between chapter 3, verse 14, with chapter 3, verse 1 going back to chapter 2, verse 22. So he says, "You're being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit and for this reason, because this ongoing work of God is taking place, I, Paul now pray." That's what's happening here in the overall flow of the passage. There is an ongoing work. He's picking up his train of thought now. He is done with his digression, verses 2 to 13, and now he's getting down to the serious business of prayer.

Now, when we pray often, you know, our prayers are pretty meager. I understand that. Our minds get distracted and we don't pay much attention and sometimes we are saying words without really engaging the thought. We are not here to talk about that today. Just by way of contrast, I want to set this up. When Paul is praying, his praying here in this passage is much different than that which often characterizes our own inadequate prayers in our private time before God. Paul here is not distracted. He is focused like a laser on what is in front of his mind. He is not just meandering through a prayer list. He is an apostle. He is writing under the inspiration of God. God himself is giving Paul the words to say in this prayer in a way that completely separates it from the way that you and I pray. So as we come and we say Paul is praying here, understand that we are entering into a holy realm where God is bringing us beyond the veil into a sacred place where God's purposes for his own people is being expressed through the language of the Apostle Paul and his prayers.

So this is very holy ground and so what is he saying? What is he about to pray about? Well, he says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father," and here's where I want you to see the connection with the end of chapter 2. His prayer is that God, in verse 16, "would grant us to be strengthened with power." Verse 17, look at this, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." What I want you to see is, we'll come back to this verse but that word for "dwelling" shows that Paul is picking up his prayer and connecting it with what he said at the end of chapter 2. So you're being built up into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit and now he says, "I'm praying that Christ would dwell in your hearts by faith." So this is the connection. This is all wound together. These are not random thoughts that are disjointed and put together. There is an obvious flow to the thought of this epistle that we now have the privilege of entering into. So Paul is praying in connection with that building of God of his people into a dwelling place for himself.

So what Paul is saying here is he is praying in order to advance the divine purpose that he just revealed at the end of chapter 2. He wants his readers to enter into the fullness of God's intentions for their salvation. In other words, beloved, and as you see, he prays for all of the saints here. What is here, what is present in front of you is a twofold wonder of what God is doing in your life if you are a Christian. First of all, you are seeing the purpose of God in your salvation being laid out before you in plain language and you are simultaneously seeing the prayer of an apostle that that purpose of God in your salvation would be accomplished. So we are getting down to the very brass tacks, if you will. We're getting to the very core of what God wants to accomplish and what he appointed for you in your salvation. We are finding this laid out for us and simultaneously seeing that 2,000 years ago, an apostle to the Gentiles, the apostle to the Gentiles, was praying not only for the people at that time but for all the saints which includes those of us today that are Christians. We are seeing the fruit of and the reality of an apostle who prayed even for the whole Church of God and for those of us that are Christians therefore we are under the umbrella of this prayer as well.

This is so magnificent. This is so high and lofty and what we are going to do is we're going to look at those 3 aspects of Paul's petition so that we can aspire after the goal for which Christ saved us. Christ didn't save you so that you could have a happy life. It wasn't that superficial. Christ didn't save you so that you could have physical healing in all of your sicknesses. That's just so earthbound. It's so superficial. Those kinds of emphases are things that you don't even have to be saved to want. So it couldn't be that salvation was about something superficial and earthbound because Scripture says repeatedly that this world is passing away and so we need to condition our minds, we need to think, maybe some of you for the first time, that the purposes of salvation go far beyond what you see happening around you and your physical circumstances and enter into the realm in which God himself is operating and the purposes which God himself wants to accomplish. I think it's really exciting to be able to do that and have laid out for us in God's word a clear explanation in the context of a prayer what it is that God intends to do for us as believers.

The challenge to that is that you and I are weak. We are earthbound. We are driven by what we see. We are plagued by sin and temptation and we are very, very weak. These things transcend human thought and yet all we've got is our human minds to try to grasp them with. So that is why the first aspect of Paul's prayer is, first of all, if you're taking notes, it's for the provision of strength. The provision of strength. Paul is first going to pray that we would be strengthened so that we could grasp these things that are in front of us.

Look at verse 14 with me again. Paul says, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father." The Father. Jesus told us to pray in this way, "Our Father, who is in heaven." The Old Testament saints, they didn't pray this way but now in the New Testament, we can because God has adopted us into his family and it's appropriate for us as Christians to address the head of our family as our Father. So to speak to God as our Father is to recognize his authority, to recognize his love, to recognize his concern. When we pray to God, we are not trying to badger him or cajole him into doing something and to take an

interest in us that he otherwise wouldn't have. He is already thoroughly engaged with us because he is working out purposes in our lives. He is doing things for his glory and for the glory of his Son and so he is already thoroughly engaged. We are not trying to wake him up. We are not trying to knock and get his attention as if he were distracted away from us. No, we speak to him as a Father who knows the circumstances before we ask and therefore we are appealing to him in furtherance of the purposes that he has already revealed.

Paul makes this more apparent as he goes on in verse 15. He's stating the ground of his appeal to the Father, how is it that he can pray, on what basis does he ask God to respond to his prayer. Verse 15, "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." Now, there is a complicated realm of interpretation; there is a lot of debate about exactly what this verse means. Basically, what Paul is saying here is: as I pray to God the Father, I am praying to the one who is the source of life. He is the source of all physical life because he created man and placed him in the garden. He is the source of all spiritual life. Salvation comes from the mind and the purpose of God which he established before all eternity and everyone who is saved, a Christian who is alive on earth or those who have graduated into heaven, whether they are on earth or in heaven, they derive their name as Christian from the prior purposes of God. So the point of this is, that Paul says, "I'm praying to the Father from whom Christians derive their spiritual name and therefore God has reason to hear this prayer and to respond to it." Paul is only tapping into the prior purposes of God when he prays. He's praying consistently with what God has done. God has given birth to a spiritual family and now Paul is praying that, "God, in furtherance of your own purposes, I ask you to do the following."

So there is an intelligent appeal to God in what Paul says. Paul's prayer, beloved, is perfectly aligned with the purposes of God in salvation and so there is every expectation that God will answer this prayer. There is every reason to believe. This is not a fleshly, carnal request for something earthbound. Paul is asking God simply to perfect what he has already begun. What is it that he has begun? You're being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. He started that. The work isn't yet finished and so Paul prays, "God, I want you to further that purpose that I was just speaking about at the end of chapter 2."

Now, what does he pray? Verse 16 and 17, he says, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." We'll stop there. This is a prayer for provision of strength. He wants God, he is praying that God would grant strength to the inner man of Christians and provide power to their hearts. He is asking God to work on the affections and the convictions and the motivations of Christians so that Christ could comfortably dwell there. You understand implicitly why that prayer is necessary because you yourself even as a Christian, are a bundle of contradictions. You can pray and you can be earnest in prayer and then you can get up and 5 minutes later be sharp and impolite with your spouse. You can be committed one day and cold and indifferent the next. You can have the word of God in front of you and sometimes you

don't even care whether you pick it up and read it or not. Your spiritual life is weak compared to the greatness of the calling that we have as Christians. So you understand why a prayer for strength is necessary because if you think about it at all, if you're at all in tune with your own heart as a Christian, you realize that you are weak, that you are inconsistent, that you are not all that you could be, should be or would be. So Paul, mindful of that human condition is praying for God to grant power.

Now, notice this, notice that twice he uses terms that refer to the inner part of our being, to that unseen, immaterial part, our inner man. He says there in verse 16, it says that there "would be power in the inner man." Verse 17, "so that Christ would dwell in your hearts." So Paul is praying about something that goes to the very core of who we are, that which defines the way that we think and our motivations and the things that animate us, the things that we care about. Paul is praying for God to do a work down there, deep in there, as he asks God to grant strength. So he's praying that knowing the weakness of Christians because of the remaining sin that is within them, knowing that Christians are assaulted by, and tempted by, and distracted by the world, the flesh and the devil, realizing that we live in an alien environment that is all construed, that is lined up against all the purposes of God, everything that we see around us is lined up against the success of God's word, Paul says, "God, I pray that you would strengthen them so that your purposes would be carried forth."

Look at it there again in verse 16 with me. There is so much here and I had to decide between preaching one message or 10. I decided to treat it all in one sweeping message like this. Notice how he prays. Notice the depth of this. It is so impressive. He says, "I pray that God would grant to you," and so he's interceding. He's not praying for himself, he's interceding for his readers and for all the saints. And what does he pray? What is he appealing to? What does he want God to draw upon as he asks for this prayer for power? He says, "I pray that God would grant to you according to the riches of His glory." How great is God's glory? It's infinite. It cannot be measured. There is no containing it. Heaven and earth are not big enough to contain the glory of God. Heaven and earth are not great enough to contain the storehouses of the riches of what it means for him to be a holy, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, eternal, immutable, unchanging God. And Paul says, "So God, according to the great riches of all that you are, I pray that you would draw upon the infinite storehouses of your glory to respond to this prayer that I am now about to make before you."

So this is no meager prayer that God would help us through our day or help us feel better in our sickness, Paul is calling upon the infinite wealth of God to advance his eternal purpose in his people. And what does he pray? Look there at verse 16, "according to the riches of that glory, God, I pray that you would strengthen them with power through your spirit in the inner man." He's giving a report of how he prays and he's praying that the Spirit would do a work in your hearts that would further the purposes of God. The word "dwell" here, he says in verse 17, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith," it's a word for dwelling that goes far beyond somebody coming into your house for a day and staying overnight and then moving on to another place. We could use the word "dwell" in that sense, in that temporary sense, but that's not what this word means here.

This word "dwell, that Christ would dwell in your hearts through faith," has the picture of a Master settling into his home and is distinct from a stranger who is just passing through. He's praying that our inner man, that our hearts, would be so ordered and so aligned that Jesus Christ himself could dwell there in comfort because what he finds is fitting with the surroundings that his holiness would require. He's saying that, "I want your heart to be a place where Christ can comfortably come and settle into." It's a picture, then, of an inner man that has settled convictions, settled motivations, that is totally enraptured with the glory of Christ in such a way that there are not competing forces that would distract you from your affections for Christ. Stated differently: Paul is praying that the Spirit of God would stabilize your spiritual life so that Christ would be best able to manifest his dominion and control in us, that our lives would be a display of his glory without the distractions of sin sullyng the image of Christ within us.

Harry Ironside, the former pastor of Chicago's Moody Church in the past century, in speaking of this passage and addressing why prayer along these lines would be necessary said this and I quote, "Do you sometimes feel your limitations? Your weakness? Your lack of intensity of purpose? Your powerlessness when it comes to living for God and witnessing for him? Do you feel as though you might as well give up for the little that you accomplish? Do you say, 'If only I had more strength, how different it might be'? Listen, the excellency of the power is of God, not of us and the Holy Spirit who dwells within us is ready to work in and through us to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So what we see here in this passage is a wonderfully encouraging recognition on the pages of Scripture of our inadequacy, of our inconsistency and the fact, mark this, that God has made provision for that weakness that can be drawn upon and that God, while being aware of that weakness, has made provision to overcome it so that his eternal purpose in your salvation would be fully accomplished. You see, it's not just that when Christ died on the cross and you received him by faith, that it wiped away your prior sins and now you're on your own and you've got to figure this out on your own, Christ died for us. Christ rose for us in a furtherance of a comprehensive eternal purpose of God that includes our weakness as Christians in this life. So part of God's purpose in salvation was to provide for that so that your weakness would be overcome by the power of his Spirit in a way that would certify and ensure that what he wanted done in your life would be accomplished. And Paul is praying that God would act in accordance with that, that God would further that, that God would do what he has already done, he would continue what he had started, you might say, and thus by imparting power to us, give us a capacity to live a better Christian life than we could ever dream of doing in our own strength. There is supernatural force at work here.

One way for you to think about your Christian life is to recognize that your life as a Christian has been given to you so that it would be a platform on which the Lord Jesus Christ displays himself. It's not about your earthly ambitions, be it in relationships or vocation or anything like that. That's not why God has given life and given spiritual life to you. The surpassing overarching purpose that you have been saved for is that God has taken you out of the world, placed you into his family so that you would be a dwelling place of Christ, that you would be a realm, an area in the sphere of life that God has given

to you, that you would be a realm in which Christ is displayed. That is the high, lofty purpose of what it means to be a Christian. Now, watch this. Watch this: when we are weak in doctrine, we weaken the display of the glory of Christ. When we fall into sin or when we fail to trust him in our times of adversity, we dishonor our calling as Christians. Your life, your inner man is meant to be a place where Christ is comfortably exercising his dominion and control over who you are and it is not our place, it is a betrayal of our calling to diminish that, to hide that, to suppress that through doubt and sin and indifference and mediocrity. We have been called to so much more than that.

Now, the very encouraging thing about this passage is that you are aware, if you're a sensitive Christian at all, you're aware that your life falls short. What's encouraging is that Paul saw that too and Paul, who is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, indicates that God saw that too. God is aware of that and rather than condemn us and set us aside and cast us aside now as unworthy which he would never do, instead what we see is that God has made provision for your weakness that you could appropriate so that you can grow, so that you can move beyond that sin and weakness and distrust and become a place that you can grow and aspire after, being a place where in your inner man, there is a settled confidence and understanding and trust in the purposes of God that are an appropriate platform on which Christ can display himself.

Beloved, if this passage means anything to us as Christians, it means this: we don't have to live mediocre spiritual lives. You're not condemned to live in the midst of your past failures. What God has done and part of what this passage brings to our mind is to realize that there is a provision according to the riches of the glory of God through the Spirit who indwells you, to sanctify you and to change you so that your life would be what it was supposed to be as that which displays a settled love and confidence in the one who redeemed you. That should be the heart desire of every true Christian that more than anything else, whether it's in riches or in poverty, whether it's in sickness or in health, that God would look at me and see my life being a display of his glory no matter what the external trappings of it might be. Paul in his prayer shows that that's the purpose, that Christ could dwell there like a Master comfortable in his own home. That's why he asks God to strengthen us.

Now, that's great but it gets, if I could say this, it gets even better as we go on through this passage. What is the key to you having a strong inner man? What is the key that would produce and promote and fuel your confidence in God? What is the key that would so shape your affections that you gladly submit to Christ? That you bubble over with love for him? That you are so captured by him that you're mindful of the fact that he is the most important person in your life, that you love him more than life itself and that the world can pass away so long as you have Christ? What's the key to having an inner man anchored like that? Well, this passage teaches us and brings us to our second point. We spoke about the provision of power, point 2 now: the perception of love. The perception of love and this is a showstopper. This brings us to our knees. This will have us responding in reverence and adoration of Christ as we see what Paul says here.

The perception of love. Paul has asked that God would grant power to us and strengthen us in our inner man so that where we are weak with temptation or struggles, that God would strengthen us right at that point, that we would grow and mature and change and leave behind that which would make Christ, as it were, uncomfortable. But he moves beyond that provision of power now and gets to the core of what will establish that strength in the inner man. Look at verse 17 with me. He says, "I pray that you be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." That's what we just looked at. "And that," here's his second petition. The word "that" here is marking out another aspect of his prayer. He says, "I pray that God would strengthen you with power and I pray that," what's about to follow, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." Paul points to the love of Christ as that which you must understand and perceive if you are going to grow in the Christian life.

I don't really hesitate to suggest that in your own experience if you reflected on your own Christian life, you would see how true this is. When you are tempted to distrust God because of the way that life is unfolding, what is that other than a questioning the love of God for his purposes in your life? When you're tempted to get discouraged, what is that except an indication that somehow you've lost sight of the surpassing greatness of the love of God on a Christian? When you're just indifferent, when you're spiritually mediocre, what is that except a failure to respond to the high love of God on your life? And while your speaker today can identify with all of those emotions by personal first-hand experience and all those pock marks on my own spiritual life, what we need to see is that it doesn't have to be that way and we shouldn't accept that as being an ongoing condition of our Christianity. This passage here shows us what will transform us so that we grow and leave that kind of junk behind and become a better platform for the display of the glory of Christ. An untrusting, doubtful, uncommitted, spiritual person is not a worthy platform for the display of the glory of Christ and so if that's us, if that's you and me, then we should say, "I want to leave this behind but I need to be shown the way forward. I need to know what it is that helps me leave that behind in such a decisive way." Here it is. Right here in this passage.

Paul moves beyond the element of power to pray that his readers would grow in the understanding of Christ's love and what he does here in verse 17, is he mixes his metaphors here which I can understand. I love to do that myself. Paul is mixing metaphors when he says, "that you would be rooted and grounded in love." Look at verse 17, "you being rooted and grounded in love." It's a picture of you being rooted like a tree with deep roots by streams of water; that your inner man, that your conscious thoughts of God would draw upon the wealth of his love, the greatness of his love, and that would serve to nourish your spiritual life with a sense of appreciation and wonder and honor and adoration to the God who has loved you so. So he gives this picture that you would be rooted in, that your spiritual life would find its sustenance, it's spiritual vitamins in the love of God, just like a tree draws upon water through its roots. The word for "grounded in love," is more of an architectural rather than an agricultural term. It pictures a firm foundation. It's a picture of something built on rock, on something stable, that is able to

support the weight of the structure that is upon it. So drawing like a tree draws on water for nourishment, and then going to a different metaphor saying that there would be a firm foundation upon which the entirety of your spiritual life could be based. Whether in praise or in sorrow, whether in good health or in bad health, whether as a young Christian who just turned 14 or as an older person on your deathbed, at all points in between, that there would be at that aspect of your life a resting upon, a settling upon, a reliance upon this foundation that will support you through it all. Rooted in love. Grounded in love.

What does this tell us? I have to think through the way I preach in response to this. What Paul is saying here in very simple, direct terms, if you have any desire whatsoever, if you have any aspirations of growing as a Christian, this passage points you to this realm of spiritual revelation as the area in which you need to think on, meditate upon, grasp and think deeply about. We are so easily distracted by the theological controversies of the day. We are so easily distracted by what we see in news reports. We are so easily distracted by what we see even Christians saying on social media. And we're drawn to that and that and we are drawn away from so many different things and you just bounce like a pinball on all kinds of different controversies and things and thought. Beloved, beloved, this passage gives clarity to help you understand where it is that you find an ongoing source for your spiritual growth. Do you want to be, I ask this sincerely, you don't have to respond physically or verbally but I ask this sincerely of you, as the pastor of this church I ask you: do you want to grow spiritually? Is that important to you? Is it a priority to you? Are you dissatisfied with your spiritual life and long to be more of what God would have you to be? We can't just assume that. Some people, it's really just not that important. They don't even think about that as a priority and so I ask you whether it is to crystallize and focus it in your mind.

Here's what Paul is saying: after giving the whole sweep of salvation in the first 3 chapters and talking about the areas that provoke theological controversy and the doctrines of election and depravity and all of those things, all of those things which are deeply important and which we clearly stand for as a church without apology, but after that whole discussion has been laid to rest in the word of God and what Paul has said, having said all of that, he says, "Now, let me pray for you and pray that you would be strengthened to understand where it is that you go to anchor your mind so that you would grow spiritually." And where he takes us is to the love of Christ. It's the love of Christ, beloved, that will sustain your soul. It's the love of Christ that is the fountain for your Christian growth. This is where you come to drink again and again, to reassure your heart in the midst of doubt, to strengthen it when your heart is weak, you come back to the love of Christ because, beloved, if you deeply understand the love of Christ, you will not have any problem submitting to him. It will be a natural reflex response. "Well, of course I do what Christ calls me to do. Of course I trust him in this because I have seen a glimpse of how great his love is. Of course I submit. And of course my spiritual affections are drawn to him and committed to him and loyal to him because I see his love." That's where your affections grow and mature.

We're going to look at something in a moment to help explain this but as you settle your mind in this realm, beloved, what happens is the thought of betraying the love of Christ

becomes unthinkable. Unthinkable. It so settles your convictions that you say, "I could never consciously betray that. I would die before I would betray my loyalty and allegiance to Christ," because you're so rooted and grounded in his love and you're so captivated by the majesty and the glory of his love that doing anything inconsistent with his loving purpose to your life becomes utterly unthinkable.

How should we think about the love of Christ? Well, look, we're not talking about something sentimental. We are not talking about feelings that you have that are transitory. We're not talking about something that's whipped up by mood lighting and soft music and a theater-like experience. That has nothing to do with it. It is a cheap, artificial substitute that actually detracts us from the real thing and sing and praise choruses 100 times over and over until you're whipped up into an emotional frenzy that is no different than what a secular artist can produce in his own concerts, that's not it so let's not confuse it with that.

Here's what you should think about the love of God and the love of Christ. I'm going to take you to 3 passages and I want you to turn to them and see them as I read them and touch them with your fingers. John 3:16. When you think about the love of God, you should think about it instantly, always in connection with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for your salvation. John 3:16, I know that you know it. That's okay. I still want you to see it with your physical eyes and put your finger on it. John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." What frames your thought about the love of God? What frames it is that God gave. God, this was no sentimental emotion, a wish of well-being upon you, God gave his Son so that you would not perish but have eternal life. At the heart of the incarnation, at the heart of sending Christ, at the heart of the cross, was God's desire for you to have eternal life and his complete unwillingness that you would perish. You say, "But I was a rebel. I was a sinner. I was lost. I didn't even look for this." Exactly. Exactly the point. God, before time began, loved you in that way and said, "I would have you have eternal life." The thought of that should overwhelm you in worship. It should so humble your heart and you say, "Here's how I understand the love of God, he looked on me in my sin and sent a Savior to deliver me from it so that I would not perish but have eternal life." That's the starting point of where you think about the love of God.

Look over at Romans 5:8. How can we think lightly of a God like this? How can we treat superficially a God with love like this? Romans 5:6, the sinless, eternal Son of God, verse 6, "While we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die." What does it say? "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." What kind of sacrificial love is this? What kind of seeking the good of the object of your love is displayed here? While you were yet a sinner, while you were dead in trespasses and sins, Christ had given a sacrifice that would one day prove to be unto your salvation. When you rejected him, his love had already established the purpose of your salvation and not simply changing ledgers like an accountant might, but at the cost of his own life blood. That's the demonstration. That is the mark of the love of God for you. Christ on a cross pouring out his life blood and, as it

were, praying for those in front of him at the cross but in the same way interceding for all of us sinners who believe in him, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." The blackness of your sin and the darkness of your mind and in your rebellion against him, while you were yet an enemy, God manifested and demonstrated his love and Christ died for you. One will hardly die for a righteous man, Christ died for you when you wear a sinner and rescued you from what your sins deserved.

One more, 1 John 4, back beyond the book of Hebrews if you're still getting acquainted with the structure of your Bible, beyond the letters of Peter. 1 John 4. You see the consistency of the way that Scripture expresses the love of God and what it points us to that we would understand and grasp this and root our affections around it. 1 John 4:9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." That he would be the sacrifice that turned away the wrath of God from us. That's how much God loved us. That's how great, how infinite. How boundless is the love of God for sinners? So much so that Christ took on human flesh so that he himself could intercede for you.

You see, you should not think sentimentally. You should not measure God's love by your present circumstances because those things change. Here is an unalterable manifestation of the love of God. Whenever you think, Christian, whenever you think about the love of God, you should be thinking this: the love of God means that Christ came and suffered on a cross to save me from my sin. You should never allow anything to be a wedge between connecting those 2 thoughts together. God manifested his love by what Christ did for you on the cross.

Now, does that sound maybe a little too familiar? Does that sound overly familiar to you? Well, if it seems too familiar, you need to think again. Go back to Ephesians because there is more in that truth than we can possibly begin to understand. Go back to Ephesians 3. First of all, we should humble ourselves in thinking that we have mastered and obtained our Ph.D. in understanding the love of God. We should repent if we think that we understand this fully because we don't. How do I know that you don't fully understand it? It's because Paul had to pray that you would be given power in order to understand it better. Paul says, look at what he says there in verse 18, "I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, that you would be able to comprehend." You see, we need to humble ourselves before this and realize that we are prone to dismiss it, we are prone to think superficially, that we don't take it as seriously as we ought.

And so Paul is praying here and notice, I want you to see it again, as he prays for his readers, "I pray that you would be able to comprehend with all the saints," the saints simply being a true Christian. If you're a true Christian here today, Paul's prayer encompasses you as well. He prayed, going forward, he prayed, as it were, prophetically as well and says, "I pray that you'd be able to comprehend this, that you would be able to grasp it." What is it, Paul? What is it that you're so earnestly bowing the knee before the Father that we would understand? He says, "I want you to understand the breadth and the length and the height and the depth." Of what? He doesn't really say in that verse, does

he? And some people go off thinking that, "Well, he's talking about this or that." He is talking about the love of Christ. That's what he's talking about. How did he end verse 17? He said, "I want you to be grounded in love." In verse 18, "I want you to be able to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth." Then what does he say in verse 19? "I want you to know the love of Christ." When he's talking about the breadth and length and height and depth, it's framed by love. It's book ends. On the front end of this discussion of breadth, length, height and depth, love. On the back-end, the love of Christ. He wants us to understand how great and how broad the love of Christ is. That's what is occupying his thinking here. So what he's saying here, this fourfold expression expresses the incomprehensible dimensions of the love of Christ. The love of Christ shown at the cross. This is the soil in which your spiritual life can flourish.

Now watch this, here's one way for you to think about this and to think through it and to get your spiritual roots into the water of the love of Christ so that it would nourish you to firmly establish the foundation of your spiritual life. How broad was the love of Christ? It was so broad that any sinner in the course of time could come to him for grace. His love is so broad that it encompasses every language and tongue throughout all the world. This is a Gospel for the world. Any sinner in any place can be saved through this great love of Christ displayed on the cross. How long is his love? It's so long that he conceived of your redemption in eternity past before the world began and he has intentions of love set upon you that will stretch into eternity future for the ages upon the unfolding ages of eternity. You will be the ongoing recipient of the boundless love of Christ in addition to what we get to enjoy and experience here in this life. It's so long that it stretches from eternity to eternity. That's how long it is. So broad that it covers anyone who would come. How high is his love for you, Christian? So high that it takes you into the heavenly places in Christ and makes your life something that suddenly totally transcends this world. How deep is his love? So deep that it washes away your darkest sin which you would be ashamed for men to know about. It's broad. It's long. It's high. It's deep.

And beloved, one of those thoughts goes beyond your capacity of human comprehension. You can't understand eternity past. You can't understand eternity future. You have no concept of sinners throughout the world responding to Christ. You have no idea of the glories of heaven. You are overwhelmed at the remembrance of your worst sin. And what Paul is saying is that all of that comes together, that all of that is a multicolored aspect of the grandeur of the love of Christ for sinners of which you have been made a partaker by faith in Christ. So if one of those thoughts is more than we can comprehend, how much more when they are combined? God poured out immeasurable love on you when the innocent Lamb of God suffered on the cross as a sacrifice to satisfy the demands of divine justice against you.

Can I say this? I've been speaking as to Christians but if you're not a Christian, if you know that you have not been born again, you know nothing about what we're talking about, let me just give you a clear and loving invitation from Christ himself. He offers himself to you now as your Savior. If you would receive Christ now, you would enter into all of the bounty of this love that we have been describing. All of these infinite riches can be yours in Christ if you would simply turn from your sin and embrace him and say,

"Lord, I believe that death was for me too. I receive you as King. I receive you as my Savior. I set aside all of my life. I set everything behind me. Lord, I will give you the unqualified devotion of my allegiance forever and I will never go back." If you would receive Christ like that, Christ will have you. Christ will bring you into his kingdom and you can enjoy these boundless mercies as well. Will you receive him as your Lord and King?

You young people, I say it in love, examine yourselves. Don't pretend to be a partaker of this love and this great Christ if you tolerate sin in your private life at home. Just examine yourself, I ask you, because when you have truly received Christ, it transforms you into someone new and so we don't play games with this. He loves us with a boundless love but he doesn't trifle in his mercy and he won't accept those who trifle in it and name it with their lips but never embrace it in their hearts in a way that transforms their lives.

Now, having said that, coming back to you Christians, do you understand that God did not love you for your good behavior? You didn't attain a standard of goodness and God said, "That's it, I'll let you in now." You were never good enough for this. You are not good enough for this now, neither am I. God loved you in Christ solely because he is a loving God. It's who he is by nature and the more deeply we grasp his sacrificial love, the more our inner man is captivated by it, the more it shapes our affections, the more that we are strong, the more that we are able to be a platform on which his glory is displayed in our lives. When you're captivated by this love, everything else on earth pales by comparison. When you're captivated by this love, you would leave earth in a moment in order to be in the presence of the one who loved you and gave himself up for you. Nothing would hold you back. There is nothing on this earth that you would exchange for the immediate presence of Christ and no threat can intimidate you away from it. No deception can distract you away because you're anchored, you're rooted, you're grounded. "How could I ever betray with my allegiances? How could I ever walk away from the one who loved me like that? Though he slay me, I'll still trust in him because even if he slew me, I would never abandon my allegiance to the cross of Christ."

That's where you find strength. That's where we grow. It transforms our deepest character and that leads us to our final point this morning. All of this leads us to a fuller experience of God. Verse 19 as we close, "to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that," here's the third aspect of his prayer, "that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." This is the climax of his petition. "I want you to be filled up to all the fullness of God." When you are inwardly persuaded of the boundless love of Christ for your soul, the presence and power of God saturate your inner man so that you mature spiritually and become what he saved you to be. Paul is praying here, stay with me here, there's going to be some repetition and, for lack of a better word, cadence to what I'm about to say. Paul prays here that God would exercise the fullness of his power so that the fullness of God's purpose would be accomplished in the fullness of our lives, to the fullest extent, according to the fullness of God's character, throughout the fullness of life and eternity. I'll say it again: Paul is praying here that God would exercise the fullness of his unlimited power so that the fullness of God's eternal purpose would be accomplished in fullness in your life, to the fullest extent possible, according to the fullness of God's holy character,

throughout the fullness of life and eternity. That you would be filled up with the fullness of God. You say, "Well, what does that mean?" I have no idea. This is incomprehensible. We can understand this truly but we cannot understand it wholly. We cannot understand it exhaustively. Paul is praying that the eternal purpose of God would be fully completed in your life forever. It's all so lofty.

Beloved, God's purpose in your sanctification, God's purpose in saving you, is infinite in its implications. It's beyond human effort and understanding. You can never attain this on your own. You can't do this on your own. You can't. You can't. And so, therefore, Paul prays that the Spirit of God would intervene and intercede and accomplish that which God has appointed for your sanctification that you could never do on your own and the Spirit of God comes to our aid in our weakness to help accomplish the fullness of God's purpose and take us beyond the realm of human merit, beyond the realm of human accomplishment, beyond the realm of human ability and display the magnificent, saving power and grace of God in our lives.

Paul prays that the Holy Spirit would transform us because we cannot do this on our own and that prayer lays down a challenge before us. This life of strength, this life of love, is what the Christian life is supposed to be. We're supposed to be growing in this and ever manifesting it more and the Holy Spirit is able to change us in that direction. Listen to me, this is my final word: this lofty realm of power, love and the fullness of God, beloved, listen to me, listen to me, listen to me, this is not the realm of the lukewarm uncommitted Christian. This is the heart of one who has been transfixed by the greatness of the love of Christ as it was supremely manifested on the cross of Calvary. I want to know more of that life, don't you?

Let's pray.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever," and we as God's people say, "Amen."

You've been listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church. For more information about our ministry including Pastor Don's blog and our location and service times, please visit us at truthcommunitychurch.com. You will also find Don's sermon library where you can download free messages on many biblical passages and topics. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.