

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

May God Strengthen Us To See!
Ephesians 3:14-21

Keywords: Gospel, Prayer, Spiritual Maturity, Plan of God, Love of Christ, Power of God

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. Ephesians 3:14-21.
- B. Two weeks of weakness. It is the bane of the American way of life.
 - 1. It is hard to get our minds around it and when we start to it seems that we begin to find ways to rationalize it to not mean what it means.
 - 2. How do we begin to grasp that God's grace is such that it places us in positions of weakness?
 - 3. How do we finally believe that the gospel we believe and preach is both viewed as foolishness and weakness to the people of this age?
 - 4. How do we finally begin to model in our lives a cruciform life that portrays weakness so that the power of God is made known?
 - 5. The message from the pulpits across this land of ours more often than not pushes triumphalism.
 - a. If we will yield to the Holy Spirit then He will work amazing things in our lives. No more sickness. No more shame. No more cancer. No more sin.
 - b. We buy book after book on how we can find joy, purpose or happiness in this life.
 - c. We become slaves to our situation. We have a job promotion, we are ecstatic and we are crushed when we are passed over.
 - d. We do not want to be seen as weak in the things and ways that this age says are shameful.
 - 6. But the message of the gospel is that in Jesus Christ we become aliens and strangers to this age. We are forbidden to love this world/age and the things that belong to it. We are commanded to not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewing of our mind.

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7. We are commanded to reckon ourselves as dead in Christ and also alive and raised with Him in the heavenly places.
 8. We are commanded to not put our treasures here on this earth where thieves and rust will destroy them; rather we are to make our treasure in heaven where we will enjoy forever.
 9. We are to put of the things that belong to this age such as immorality, impurity, greed, and anger. Nor should malice and slander and abusive speech be named among us.
 10. We are commanded to forgive one another in the same manner we were forgiven by Jesus Christ. We are expected to show preference for one another rather than merely our own desires and passions.
 11. Humility is our walking path. Grace is our model. Hope is our guiding light. Love is our duty.
 12. A cruciform life that is contrary to everything this world loves and holds dear. A life that separates both mother and father, brother and sister as each lay hold of a different lord and master.
 13. A cruciform life that tells us that we cannot love anything or anyone more than we love Jesus or we cannot be His disciple.
- C. So how do we do this?
1. We can't, at least on our own.
 2. But until each of us learns this we will keep trying. We will keep buying the next book that comes down to us claiming to tell us how to get it all together. How to be able to confidently share the gospel. How to have victory today, here and now.
 3. But if you are beginning to grasp that after that next book or conference is done that you will still be in the same place, then you may find that this sermon will be singularly helpful to you.
- D. In vs 1 Paul began to introduce a prayer that he had made a habit of praying for these people. But this led to a rabbit trail to press home our inherent weakness for the glory of God.
1. Now he picks it up again and this time finishes it.
 2. And the prayer is in light of what he has taught them up to this point.

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3. It is a critical place for the prayer because it bridges the two main sections of the letter. From the heavy theology of the first half to the application of that theology in the second half.
4. The prayer is broken into three sections.
 - a. Praise toward God the Father (14-15).
 - b. Request that believers might experience and grasp Christ's love (16-19).
 - c. A benediction of praise to God's power and ability (20-21).
5. This is not the first prayer in this letter. The first was in 1:15 where Paul prayed that we would know the power of God. From there he showed us that power in how He brought two very different groups together into one new humanity and how in Paul's weakness the power of God is made known.
6. This prayer is for us to see and experience the power and to apply the vastness of Christ's love for us.
7. The prayer is logically built and one cannot experience the goal until each step has been met.
 - (1) There are four, key verbs which direct the flow of his prayer to its goal—the exceedingly abundant work of God in our lives..
 - (a) The first is—to be strengthened (vs. 16).
 - (b) The second is—to dwell, settle down (vs. 17).
 - (c) The third is—to apprehend, comprehend (vs. 18).
 - (d) The fourth is—to know, especially in an experiential way, of spiritual things (vs. 19).
 - (2) Three *hina* clauses found in verses sixteen, eighteen (actually 17), and nineteen denoting clear goals which are logically and necessarily built upon each other.

II. Praise toward God the Father (14-15).

- A. Paul bows before not just God but before the Father.
 1. He models what he taught in 3:12 that because we are in Christ we have confident access to the Father in heaven.

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2. **Do you believe this when you pray. Are you even vaguely conscious that as you bow your head to pray that you are now in His presence? That you are face-to-face with your Creator and God?**
 3. **Is it possible that for many here who may struggle to pray that it is because they fail to believe this most basic of truths?**
- B. His Father is in another way the Father of all (15).
1. Here we get what theologians call the Fatherhood of God.
 2. In what way do all families derive their names? What is meant here?
 - a. It is nothing less than a statement of the divine sovereignty and lordship over all things that exist.
 - b. He is the one who created mankind. He is therefore the Father of all. The problem is not with that statement, the problem is that mankind as a whole reject this and resist this to their damnation.
 - c. But notice also that he is the father of all the families in heaven as well. This speaks to all heavenly/spiritual creatures as well. Both angels and powers and principalities and rulers.
 - d. In other words ‘all things’ in heaven and earth ordered under God’s ultimate authority. Every grouping in any sense in heaven and on earth is under the sovereign lordship of God, since God is the one who creates and names them.
 - e. It is to be an encouragement in praying to the Father for the author to remind his readers that the one to whom Paul prays is the one who exercises dominion over the evil powers who rule the present fallen age, as well as over all humanity on earth.
 - f. **So do you?**

III. Request that believers might experience and grasp Christ’s love (16-19).

- A. First Step–To Be Strengthened (16)
1. Where does this strength come from?
 - a. It comes from God meaning this is something we cannot cause to happen in ourselves.
 - (1) **Do you believe this?**

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- (2) If you are one who does not pray or you only pray that you might get the idols of your heart then you probably don't believe this.
- (3) That God has so ordered reality that all that we need, truly need, comes from Him alone.
- b. It is "according to the riches of His glory." Paul is saying to them that they are unbelievably rich in God. Something we have seen over and over in these first three chapters.
 - (1) We have every spiritual blessing in Christ.
 - (2) 3:8 Paul said that part of preaching the gospel message is speaking of the unfathomable riches of Christ to those who are dead in their sins.
 - (a) We are to preach of the riches of God's glory.
 - (b) We are to tell people that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us—why? To show the riches of God's love.
 - (c) We are to tell the people not so much what we must do for God; rather, what God has already done for us!

2. Where? In the Inner Man.

- a. Paul's focus is not upon the Ephesian believer's external needs, nor the improvement of their sinful flesh; rather it is upon the inner man.
 - (1) Yet to listen to the prayers of some the outer man is all that matters.
 - (2) Paul is asking for power, but it is a power that operates in weakness. And often that weakness will be the external things of our lives.
 - (3) Why? Because our bodies belong to this age. They will pass away. They will break down. They will betray us.
 - (4) It is only in eternity, at the resurrection, that our bodies shall be made right and eternal.
- b. We struggle with emotional imbalance, frustration, mental and spiritual strain.

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- c. Bottom line, the inner man is the real you. That which has been redeemed.
 - (1) This is the eternal part.
 - (2) 2 Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.
 - (a) Paul was undergoing great persecution of his body.
 - (b) But he was not broken, for although the outer, physical man was being destroyed, the real Paul, the inner man, was being renewed each day.
- 3. How? Through the Spirit.
 - a. The health and strength and development of the inner man is not a task that you can do, but is wholly dependant upon the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - (1) No wonder Paul says to not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.
 - (2) Elsewhere he says, “walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh (outer man).”
 - (3) He commands us to not quench the Spirit and to not grieve the Spirit.
 - b. Notice that little word “in.”
 - (1) The idea then that Paul is praying for is that it is through the Spirit of God that this strength is brought into the inner man, building him up, renewing him, and giving him the strength to press on.
 - (2) The Spirit; therefore, is not merely increasing your strength, but is pouring His strength into your inner man.
 - (a) This is important.
 - (b) If you are in the habit of quenching and grieving the Spirit, then you cut of this flow of this God-given source if vitality.
 - i) Your inner man suffers and grows weak.

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- ii) And you never experience this power operating in you that Paul is praying for.
- iii) **Why? Could it not be because you default at the most basic level?**
 - a) This is why you are called to holiness, this is why you are commanded to put away sinful things and put on godly attitudes and actions.
 - b) It is not just because if you do that you look good.
 - c) It is because it put you into the first step of having the fulness of God's power flow through you.
- c. The unlimited power of God is gathered together on our behalf, yet we approach life as if we were an army equipped with spiritual popguns.
 - (1) Beloved, too often we never get to enjoy the renewing, rejuvenating work of the Spirit for one simple reason. He is too busy doing His work of convicting us of sin that we are holding onto.
 - (2) If your inner man is weak, how do you expect to fight the desires of your flesh? How will you ever fight the schemes of Satan or the world?
- B. Second Step—The Indwelling of Jesus Christ.
 - 1. The abode.
 - a. Paul's desire is that in each Christian Christ would dwell in their heart. "Heart" is equivalent, in this context, to "the inner man."
 - b. The word "dwell" speaks of a settled residence.
 - (1) This is actually two words: kata and oikeo.
 - (a) *oikeo* means to dwell or live at home. *kata* is a preposition that literally means "down."
 - (b) It may be translated thusly, "The Christ may finally settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts."

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- (2) Paul is simply saying that as the Spirit strengthens you in your inner man that your heart becomes a settled dwelling-place for Jesus.
 - (a) Until you are consistently being strengthened by the Spirit this cannot happen.
 - (b) Until you start to have your inner man strengthened with God's power, you will be powerless.
- (3) Some of you know what it feels like to be called a friend, but never treated as such.
 - (a) Imagine what it would feel like to live in a home where your presence is never acknowledged.
 - (b) That, unfortunately, is what it is for Christ in many lives.
- c. Through faith.
 - (1) Just as the inner man is strengthened "through the Spirit" so too Jesus Christ settles down in our heart "through faith."
 - (2) This is not the faith unto to salvation, but the faith that is to control your life, your actions, your thoughts, and your desires.
- d. Resulting in mature love.
 - (1) The result of Christ's dwelling in the believer's hearts was that he would be "rooted and grounded in love." He apparently is using two metaphors, a tree and a building.
 - (2) You know beloved, this is a cycle.
 - (a) The Spirit strengthens the inner man.
 - (b) As the inner man is strengthened, Christ begins to be at home in us.
 - (c) As Christ begins to be at home in us, we become more rooted and more grounded in love, which in turn causes us to even more obey Him. And the process then continues.
- e. In summation, therefore, what Paul is praying for is for God to graciously fill the believer with the Spirit, Who in turn will cause

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Christ to reside in his heart. The abiding presence of Christ in the believer's heart results in a foundation of love.

- f. For many this would be sufficient for their Christian walk, but for Paul it is merely the halfway point!

C. Third Step—Comprehend the Love of Christ

1. A corporate goal.

- a. Once Christ is dwelling in the hearts of the Ephesian believers they then are rooted in this love.
 - (1) Their eyes, their spiritual eyes, would be opened so that they would be able grasp that very love.
 - (2) The term "all saints" shows that this spiritual condition is available to all believers.
 - (3) It again removes the sense of a private relationship with Christ.

2. An expansive goal.

- a. The goal was a massive one. He wanted them to have comprehension of Christ's love.
 - (1) This word, "comprehend," is probably best translated "apprehend."
 - (2) It is to grasp something. To fully and totally understand it.
- b. This means vastly more than an intellectual, or philosophical, or theological apprehension of Christ.
 - (1) Beloved, you can have all that, but never experience this type of understanding.
 - (2) That is the whole idea of this passage. This understanding, this knowledge is a spiritual knowledge that can only be given to a person who is strengthened by the Spirit and where Christ is unrestricted in His access.
- c. It means to mentally grasp some idea or truth. This goes beyond, then, comprehension and involves understanding the implications of the truth.
- d. The terms "breadth and length and height and depth" all serve to expand upon the idea of apprehension.

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- e. Comprehension while ever increasing, can never be inclusive or exhaustive.
 - f. Paul uses these terms to express the utter vastness of Christ's love (cf. vs. 19) and the need to apprehend its implications.
3. Oh how Christians fail to see the unsearchable, unfathomable beauty of Christ's love! But Paul is still not content upon the believer apprehending Christ's love, he wants them to fully experience that love as well!
4. Knowing the unknowable.
- a. In verse nineteen Paul expands upon the believer's relationship to Christ's love. He wants them "to know the love of Christ"
 - b. The Greek word for "know" is *ginosko*. This word goes beyond mental apprehension and involves experience as well.
5. **Have you experienced this comprehension of Christ's love?**
- D. This leads to the goal, the fullness of God.
- 1. The climax of the prayer is now reached, the ultimate and final request. Paul is portrayed as praying that God would grant all his previous petitions so that the church might effectively realize its identity as the temple of God in Christ, the place where God's fullness dwells on earth (Gombis, Dissertation, 111).
 - 2. It is the idea that we are truly the temple of God, we are that new humanity. And as we together begin to comprehend and experience the love of Christ we become a fitting dwelling place for God in the face of this world and its powers.

IV. Conclusion: A benediction of praise to God's power and ability (20-21).

- A. We can't do any of this. It is beyond our ability and frankly beyond our comprehension. It is always and ever a work of God.
- B. But he is "able" (*dunamai*) to go way, way beyond what we could ever expect in accordance to His power (*dunamis*).
- C. It is a glimpse into eternity and how God, through His divine power, is working all things toward an end that is beyond our comprehension. The best we can do is to comprehend the fullness and vastness of Christ's love for us who deserved no love.
- D. We tend to ask small things to God, things that are conformed to this age and this time. Here we are invited to ask big things of God, not for our comfort but for His glory.

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- E. Example, no angel and no person could ever have imagined the Cross being the place of divine love and justice.
- F. No one could have imagined that Jew and Gentile would be made in a new humanity in Christ and to become the very temple of God.
- G. And so as well go on with our lives and new generations replace us, let us go on with the hope of our calling, a grasp of His love for us, and a confidence in His power.

Community Group Questions

- **Start out by simply asking each person what stood out to them and why?**
- **I bolded several questions I posed to the church in the sermon. Go over them in the discussion.**