



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Ephesians 3: 14-21

Ephesians

"Paul's Priestly Prayer"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Book of Ephesians. He concludes it with a prayer for the Ephesians and a doxology. We had a guest, I guess you could say, for the early service, Andy Myatt, who is a young man who's grown up in our church. I think many of you know Andy. He is now at Texas A&M and has just finished his junior year, and he is in the Corps there, and has just received his boots. And so, because he's also a chaplain in the Corps, I invited him to give the prayer this morning, and he did, did a very good job. I guess it is appropriate to do that in this section of Scripture because this is Paul's prayer. He did a good job and it's always great to see a young man like that, particularly one who's grown up in our church, and has grown up with a spiritual interest and developed in his interest and is now ministering to many others, many of his peers. That's what Paul prays about, really; that's what he desires for us, to grow up more and more into the fullness of God and to His perfection, and to His life.

Well, this is the prayer that Paul prays beginning with verse 14. And you'll notice he begins, "For this reason." I bring that to your attention because that's how chapter 3 begins, and we commented on this last week. He begins the chapter, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ, for sake of you Gentiles," and then he breaks off his thought. Evidently the word Gentiles causes him to digress a bit, and he decides that having explained the blessings that have been given through the Gentiles and then being brought into union with the Jews in the blessings of salvation, he wants to return to that subject, develop it more fully, and he does so by developing the mystery of Christ. The Jews and the Gentiles are equals in the church and salvation. Having done that, he then begins verse 14 with that same expression, "For

this reason." So, evidently, he was going to pray in verse 1, and then broke off that prayer, and now he resumes it. He picks it up in verse 14.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 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; and 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, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

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. Amen.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our time of study together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do count it a privilege to be able to come together this morning and open the Word of God and study the rich truth that Paul has given to us, that You, through the Holy Spirit have given to us through the apostle Paul. We get a glimpse into his mind and his thoughts and into that which he considered important, that which he desired of the Ephesians and what was his desire for the church of his day and down through the ages; what is Your desire. Put it simply, we become more and more like Christ. We experience His life in our life and we reflect that life in the world when we pray that that would be the work of the Spirit within us and that You would move that work forward this morning as we study together. We recognize that You do that in large part through our time of study together, through the time that we spend in the Word of God, and we grow as we see Christ. We are transformed from glory to glory by means of the Spirit, His agency. He causes us to become more and more like Your Son. Cause us, Father, to desire that, to see the importance of being like Christ. May that become uppermost in our thinking and in our desires. We know it is foremost in Yours, and so we pray that You would accomplish that in us, in the church, You might be glorified. And in our lives, as we move through this world, we might bring glory to You, we might reflect Your love for us, Your grace, Your kindness, and all of the ways in which You have blessed us. And so, we pray that You would bless us to that end this morning, that

You would teach us that You would build us up in the faith. Paul encourages them, or he prays that they would be able to understand the truth of which he speaks, understand the things of God.

And we pray for that. We pray that You would help us to think, to think critically and to think deeply, to use our minds, and we commit that to You. Stimulate us, Father, and we pray that You would stimulate us this morning, but throughout the week, give us a desire to study and to read and to know Your word, to fellowship with one another, to pray for one another. We are a people with great needs, Father. We are people that need Your spiritual strengthening, strengthening in the inner man. We are a people who have material needs as well, Father. We live in a material world and we are tied to this world in the physical sense. And so we pray that You would meet those needs, that You would bless, some are in more dire need than others, and we pray for them, for the sick. We pray that You would give healing. We pray for Margaret Dietrich and pray that You'd continue to give her recovery. We pray for Betty Mae, that You would give her recovery as she is progressing in that. We think of others, Jack Moore. We pray that You'd give him relief from pain and resolution to the distress that he's in. So many others, Father, whose names are listed that we can't go over, but You know their needs and we pray that You'd bless them, encourage them, and heal them.

We pray for others who are discouraged, and pray that You might give encouragement. The things we study this morning are a great encouragement, and so we pray that You would use them in the lives of those who are in emotional distress. Bless us Lord, with Your truth, and we pray that You would bless us not only at this hour, but in the time when we meet again this evening. May it be a time of rich fellowship. May it be a time of instruction and of worship. We pray that You would bless our time as we come together again to consider our Lord's death and His resurrection, the fact that He lives and He lives for us, seated at Your right hand, and the day is coming when He will stand up from that throne and come again into this world to conquer and to bring His kingdom, and to bring His reward.

So, may we live for that day, Father, not live for the moment, but look forward to the day when He will return. May that hope that we have have its sanctifying work in our lives, and may we live lives that are pleasing both now and forever to Your glory. We pray these things in the name of our Savior. It's in His name. Amen.

[Message] During the Reformation, one of the great doctrines that was recovered for the church was the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It is the teaching of the New Testament. Peter describes Christians as a holy priesthood. John writes that Christ has made us to be a kingdom of priests. As priests, our entire lives are sacrifices to God. Paul encourages us to present our bodies, a living and holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God. That is our acceptable service to Him. And within that, our prayers are offerings to God. It's through prayer that we have direct access to God, to His sanctuary and to the throne of grace. Our priesthood is a great privilege, and we can tell a lot about ourselves by the way we conduct our priesthood, by our prayers, by the frequency of our prayers and their content. Our prayers reflect what is on our minds. It reflects our anxieties, it reflects our concerns, and they reflect what is important to us.

And so, at the end of Ephesians chapter 3, we get a glimpse into the heart of the apostle as he exercises his priestly service for the Ephesians and he prays for them. It is one of the most beautiful and frequently quoted prayers of Scripture and it tells us what was important to Paul. This is the prayer that he didn't pray in verse 1 when he broke off his thought to develop more completely the blessings that have been given to the Gentiles in what he calls the mystery of Christ. One of the last things that he said in that digression on the mystery is that due to Christ, as a result of our salvation, as part of the blessings that we have in Him, we now have boldness and confident access to the Father. We have open access to Him in prayer.

And so, in verse 14, he uses his access. He comes to his delayed prayer and he writes, "For this reason." That is, because of the spiritual blessings that he has described in chapter 2, those of reconciliation, those of the church as God's household, as God's temple. Because of their position, he says, I bow my knees before the Father. He prays for them. He prays for all of the church, and this is a prayer that applies to us as much as it did to the Ephesians. Prays that they, that we would progress in the great truths that He has unfolded, that we would make progress in the Christian faith.

His description of prayer is unusual. Bowing the knees. I say that's unusual. It doesn't appear unusual to us because we're used to that posture of prayer, but it was unusual for Paul's day. Men generally, in that day, stood when they prayed. Kneeling was a sign of submission. It was a sign of reverence. And because it was unusual, it

was also a sign of earnestness in one's prayer, and Paul does give an earnest prayer here for the Ephesians. He bows his knees. We can just imagine the apostle doing that. He is in prison. He is chained to a Roman guard, and yet, he got down on his knees in his cell and made intercession for these people. In fact, he must have done that often because he frequently prayed for the churches. They were constantly on his mind, and so this might have been a very normal scene in the Roman prison in which Paul was being held.

For the Ephesian, he prays essentially three things. He prays that they would be strengthened, and he prays that they would be strengthened in the inner man so that Christ would dwell more completely in their lives, have more dominion in their lives, control in their lives. He prays that they would have more of love, and he prays that they would have more of the fullness of God.

He doesn't pray that they would be full of worldly riches. He doesn't pray that they would enjoy physical health or have the world's respect or the world's power. The Lord didn't pray that way either when He prayed for His disciples in His high priestly prayer in John 17. In both cases in our Lord's prayer and Paul's prayer here, the prayer is for spiritual blessings. It's for spiritual growth. It's for the knowledge of God.

And so, Paul bows before God. He bows in solemnity, but he also bows with familiarity. His prayer is made to the Father. That's a very important point to begin with. It's a point that we must always begin with, I think, when we are discussing prayer. The only prayer that is genuine is prayer that can be directed to God as Father, and God can only be addressed as Father by those who have been reconciled to God by the children of wrath who have become children of God, and become children of God through the blood of Christ. Only they have the right to approach God as Father, because only believers in Jesus Christ are members of God's family, and so only they have the privileges of that family, the privileges of access to God as their father.

So, Paul speaks to God as his Father, and he describes the family of which we are members in verse 15. It has its name from God, he says. It exists and it is called the family of God because of God, by His grace. God, he says, is the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Now, that's the translation of the New American Standard Bible. It's a possible translation. In fact, for the most part, that's a preferable way to translate that Greek construction. If it is translated that way, then it would be understood, this expression, "Every family in heaven," would be understood as a reference to angelic families in heaven.

But that seems unlikely since Paul, in this section of Scripture, these chapters in Ephesians, has not been stressing families, but the single family, the one family, the one household of God that is made up of Jews and Gentiles. And so, it's probably better to translate this as the Authorized Version does, as the King James Version does, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. And if that is the correct way to take this, as I do take it, then we should understand this to be a reference to the church, both in heaven and on earth. The one family of God that is separated only by death. And so, Paul's point would be that because God has made this family, that He has put His name upon it, that it is the family of God. It is His family, and so we can trust Him as our Father. We can come to Him as our Father to supply our every need.

We are in His family because He has made us people who are members of His family, and so He is to be trusted. He's not some remote deity. The ancient world was filled with deities, filled with temples and gods and goddesses, but they were not deities that were near to the people. Of course, they were no gods at all. But in the minds of the people, they were a reality. And yet, they did not approach those gods with intimacy, with love, with affection. They were distant. They were austere.

That's not the way we find the apostles approaching God. They approach Him with great solemnity on their knees. But as their Father, as one who has a loving concern for them. And so, they come not to a remote, distant deity, but one who is near, one who is close to them, and so, they can approach Him with boldness and with confidence. And Paul does. And the first thing that He prays is in verse 16, that the Ephesians would be given strength, spiritual strength, strength in the inner man. When we think of being strengthened, we naturally think of being strengthened physically. And Paul may intend an analogy here, a comparison here between the physical and the spiritual, just as the weak and the sick need strength so that they can be active and they can be productive and enjoy the good things of this life. So too, we

need spiritual strength, inward empowerment to be productive and to enjoy all of the blessings of God.

That all comes from God. This is not the kind of strength that we can produce within ourselves, that is self-generated. It comes from God. That's why Paul is praying that God would supply it. Strengthening is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is through His Spirit in the inner man, he says. This is what we can call the work of sanctification, the work by which God changes us through the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit applies God's power to our hearts, to our minds in our inner life, to our thoughts, our will, our affection. And He changes us.

Paul asks that this would be given in no small measure. In fact, as we look at this prayer, Paul doesn't pray for small things. He prays for large things because God is the God of large gifts. And so, he prays for a lot of power, power that be given according to the riches of His glory. Not out of His riches, but according to them, in proportion to them, on a scale with them.

And since they are inexhaustible riches, it is a very great power that he is asking for. Infinite power. Power that is capable of changing us, taking hard hearts, wills that are directed toward self, breaking self-will and making it a kind of will that desires to be pleasing to God and serve others. That's the kind of power that is available, and that's the kind of power that Paul is praying for, power that changes us, enlivens us, empowers us for any task that we might face, and any challenge that we might face as we look to Him.

Paul speaks of this process of sanctification elsewhere. In fact, he speaks of it in a number of places. But in one passage that I think is particularly parallel to this, we see in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 16, many of the same ideas. Paul writes: "Therefore we do not lose heart. But though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." It's a constant process of change. Physically, we are on the decline. Even the best of us gradually are dying and we're wasting away when we're young. We don't think of it that way. We're growing stronger and bigger. And with many, that growth is very rapid and they don't seem to be growing weaker; they seem to be growing stronger and they are. But then there will come that time in their physical development when it begins to change. And instead of going up, ascending physically, they begin to decline and look in the mirror, and they begin to

notice that there are some grey hairs on their head, as some of you have told me that I have, and they will probably increase.

And so it is. We come to that point when we begin to decline. Paul says that is what we are doing. We are decaying. We are wasting away, and that can be very discouraging. Begin to feel it in our joints. Begin to feel it in our back. We begin to feel the pains of this decaying process that we are undergoing, but there is no reason to lose heart, Paul says. Because at the same time, while we are in decline, while we are decaying, we are in the inner man, being renewed, given life, empowered so that we can enjoy Christ, so we can be full of Christ.

That's what Paul prays for in verse 17, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, meaning that we may enjoy more and more of His life in this life. This word, to dwell, it's a rare word. I think Paul uses it only three times in his epistles. It has the idea of permanent settlement, not a casual visit, not a temporary visit, but a permanent settlement. The place of His settlement is the heart, the place of our thoughts, the place of our will, and our emotions. It is in the heart that we make the decisions of life. It is from the heart that we set our course in life.

As Proverbs chapter 4 and verse 23 states, from it, from the heart flow the springs of life. As a man thinks in his heart, so he is. And so, Paul is praying that their hearts would have a larger capacity for more of Christ's life, that He would increasingly have dominion and control over their lives, that His thoughts would become their thoughts, that His desires would become their desires, that His power would increasingly become their power, His life become their life more and more.

That should be the prayer of each of us. The prayer that each of us has for ourselves individually, but that we have for one another as well. Remember, Paul is praying for a church, and he's praying that this would be the characteristic of that church in Ephesus. Christ would dwell within it, and that place of Christ within the church would be seen in that city and throughout the world. Christ have increasing influence in them, and we should be praying that He has increasing influence in us, in us as an assembly, but in us personally in our lives.

Well, that should be both our desire and our experience. But it doesn't just happen. It's not a mechanical process in which we are passive. It's from the Spirit. It is of God. It cannot happen within us unless God desires to do it, and God takes the initiative and produces that power within us, that life-changing power that causes

Christ to dwell more fully within us. But, recognizing it comes from God, it also occurs through faith.

What that means is we grow in proportion to our response to the Spirit's prompting, in proportion to His guidance, in proportion to the time that we spend in reading the Scriptures, in proportion to our obedience to what we read, in proportion to the use that we take of the ordinances that He has given to the church, and the fellowship that we have with the saints. It occurs through faith, and faith means obedience, implies obedience.

If we take a casual attitude toward the Christian life, growth will be small. The Holy Spirit gives us the riches of God's grace through the various means that He has supplied us with. But we appropriate that grace. We appropriate that power and that blessing. We receive that as we take them into the inner man through faith and through obedience. As we do, we grow. Christ becomes increasingly dominant in our lives.

But not only that. We also increase in love. Love also flows from faith and that too is Paul's prayer, that they would be rooted and grounded in love. So that, as he will say, they will know the love of Christ. Love is the great Christian virtue. It is the mark of the Christian. And so, Paul prays that they will be well-established in it, rooted and grounded in it, he says. To make his point, he mixes his metaphors here between images of agriculture and architecture. We are to be like a tree that puts its roots down deep into the soil of love. We are to be like a building with its walls, established on the firm foundation of love. And so, there is in both of these figures the idea of firmness, of stability. As a tree puts its roots down and out in the soil, it's firm. A building will be only as stable as the foundation on which it is built. And in the Christian's life and in the Christian church, love is the cause of that stability.

Apart from it, Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 13, "I am nothing," he says. "We are nothing without love." And so Paul is putting an emphasis upon that as he addresses this church at Ephesus. And remember, he's writing to a racially and culturally mixed church, a church of both Jews and Gentiles. Predominantly, a Gentile church, but a church that evidently had Jews in it as well. And so, for them to be God's household, to be God's holy temple, to be a unified structure, love must reach across those barriers.

There were barriers there. Remember, these Jews and Gentiles, as Paul describes them in Ephesians chapter 2, were alienated from one another. They had deep differences. The Jew looked upon the Gentile with contempt and the Gentile upon the Jew with contempt. And so, for those barriers to be breached, there must be love that reaches across them.

Now, that's true of any church. It cannot function with indifference among its membership, indifference toward one another. It certainly can't function when there is jealousy there, and disputes. There must be love for one another that overcomes all kinds of differences. Even if we were a homogenous church, all of the same social and racial class, all of that, same in every way outwardly, we're still different inwardly. None of us have the same personalities. None of us have the same temperament. Those personalities can clash. And yet, for the church to function properly, with unity as he will go on to stress in chapter 4, there must be this aspect of love, and it must dominate. Love is essential.

Paul emphasizes that here in the Greek text because he puts that word, love, first. Literally, it reads, in love, being rooted and grounded. We see that elsewhere in his writings. Paul writes a great deal about love. And when he does, he puts stress upon it. In the fruit of the Spirit, for example, he first lists love. It's important to notice as you look at that passage in Galatians 5:22 that Paul doesn't describe the fruits of the Spirit. He doesn't put it in the plural. It is the fruit, singular, of the Spirit, and the point of that is that all of those virtues go together. They can't be separated.

Paul may have had in mind a cluster of grapes. They all hang together, those virtues do. If there is no love, which is the first of the virtues that he mentions, then there cannot be joy, there cannot be peace, patience, kindness, and all the others. They all hang together so that there is no fruit of the Spirit, there is no virtue, no life of virtue without love. We are to have a life of love. That's Paul's prayer.

So, he prays for them that they be strong so that Christ may be dominant in their lives, and that they may be active in love. And then in verse 18, he moves from our love to Christ's love, from a life of love to a knowledge of love. He prays that they might comprehend with all of the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and depth. You'll notice that Paul doesn't say what it is that we are to comprehend, what these dimensions refer to, and different opinions have been made on Paul's meaning. Perhaps he is pointing back to the unsearchable riches of Christ in

verse 8, or to the mystery that Paul explains in the first half of that chapter. Perhaps he's speaking of the manifold wisdom of God in verse 10. These are suggestions that have been made.

None of these, however, is included in Paul's prayer, which is one reason why Charles Hodge, the great Princeton theologian of the 19th century objects to each of those suggestions. And since the immediate context is one of love, and Paul goes on in verse 19 to speak of knowing the love of Christ, Hodge and others have felt that it's best to understand Paul as referring to the love of Christ here, that this is a description of its love, the vastness of the scope of God's love. That's how the New International Version translates the passage, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

He describes it in a four-dimensional way which has suggested to some commentators a reference to the temple, back in chapter 2 and verse 21 and 22 where the church is described as a holy temple, a dwelling of God in the Spirit. And I think there's some merit to that because to go back to comments we've made earlier in verse 1, Paul was about to pray in regard to those great truths that he has explained before he digresses to the mystery. And so, he may still have in mind what he has been speaking of. I have in mind the church, because the love of Christ is seen in the vastness of the church. In which case, Paul is praying that they would be able to comprehend the greatness of Christ's love toward them, that they would be able to understand the dimensions of His love, as it is seen in the church. That's where God's great love and grace is displayed, among the people that He has redeemed.

It has been said that our chief defect as Christians is that we fail to realize Christ's love to us. Realizing what Christ has done for us, understanding the love of God is for us, a great source of joy in the Christian life and of great activity in the Christian life. Understanding its vastness, its breadth, and length, and depth, and height is an antidote to worry, to anxiety, and it's a stimulus to boldness and activity. It's important to note that Paul wants us to comprehend it. He wants us to grasp these truths. He wants us to grasp it with our minds, which is a reminder that the Christian faith demands thought. It demands understanding.

If I could put it in this way, Christianity is a thinking man's religion. It demands thought. It doesn't take a great deal of thought to bow toward the East so many times a day, to dress a certain way, to eat certain food, to fall into a habit of life.

That's not what Christianity is about. We have our ordinances. We have certain ceremonies, of course, but principally, that is not what Christianity is. It is a life of faith, which demands a life of thought. That's what Paul is seeking here. That is certainly what is suggested by this word, comprehend.

We need to take that to heart, because we live in a day that is feelings-oriented, in a day of passive thought. That's what people engage in when they watch television. Passive thought. They receive the impressions from the television, but they don't think through what they're receiving. It's passive, and that leads to laziness of thought. We live in a day in which we are entertainment-oriented, and none of that is good for the Christian because the Christian faith demands thought. It demands thinking. As I say, that's what is suggested here by this word, comprehend. It has the meaning of, to seize, or to lay hold of. Paul wants us to be able to seize. He wants us to be able to grasp a truth, and to use our minds, and to think through the implications of the great truths that we have in the Christian faith, to understand doctrine, to understand its implications and its applications.

Now, to some, that might sound like a prescription for the destruction of the devotional life. And yet, really the opposite is the case. The truth is: doctrine is the way to devotion when properly understood and properly used, properly responded to. David Martyn Lloyd Jones makes the comment: "We agree that the practical is most important, but the men who have accomplished most in this world have always been theologically minded. A man who rushes into activity without studying theory is finally seen to be a fool. Think of a man who desires to begin to play with atomic power without knowing something about it." That's true. Or, think of investing your life's savings with an investor who doesn't know economics, or how the stock market works, has no training in business or finance. He invests according to intuition. I don't think you'd be likely to give your money to that individual. Or, imagine putting your life in the hands of a surgeon who has never studied anatomy, hasn't studied medicine, whose incisions are guided by his feelings. But he's very sincere. You're not going to give your life into that kind of an individual. We expect professionals to have a good, thorough knowledge, deep knowledge, a deep understanding of their discipline.

Why would we expect anything less of ourselves and the Christian life, which is far more important than finances or physical health. That's what's really important.

It's what was important to Paul, and so he prays that we would be strengthened in our minds, that we would be strong in our understanding. That should be our prayer for one another, that we become strong, mentally, and be able to think through the great doctrines of the faith, that we comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love as seen in the church, comprehend its breadth, that is broad enough to include all kinds of people, a world of people. Not just the Jew, but the Greek as well, the barbarian, the Scythian, bond and free, as Paul tells the Colossians. The kind of people you would not expect to be included in God's redemption and His plan of salvation. It includes all kinds of people.

Paul says that in more than once place. John says it. He saw that in heaven, and records it in Revelation chapter 5 and verse 9, that Christ purchased for God with His blood, some out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. That is the world of which Christ is the Savior. He describes it again in chapter 7 of the Book of Revelation. He writes of seeing a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation in all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne, clothed in white. The love of Christ includes all kinds of people, and vast numbers of them. A great multitude that no one could count, he says.

Christ's love is broad, and it is long. It goes back into eternity. It has no beginning. It is everlasting. That is how God speaks to Israel in Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 3. He says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." That's electing love. It doesn't begin in time. It didn't suddenly come into being. It isn't caused by us. In fact, it isn't caused by any object of which God sets His love. It is self-caused, and it has no beginning. It is eternal.

And so, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you can know that Christ knew you before time began, that He loved you personally, delighted in you personally, cared for you from the foundation of the earth, that your name has been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. God's love is eternal. Through all eternity, He had you, specifically, in mind, and everlasting love doesn't vary. It doesn't change. It's completely reliable. Jesus Christ, as the author of Hebrews says, is the same yesterday and today and forever. We are not the same. We change for the better, and sometimes for the worst. We fail Him, but He never fails us. He never forsakes us. Even when we turn our backs on Him and we sin against Him, His love remains. It doesn't remain, but remain a little weaker. It's

constant. It's infinite, and it doesn't change. It remains the same. It is everlasting and it will not allow even our sin to pluck us out of His hand. It is love that is long and it is, he says, deep, deep enough to reach down to the vilest of sinners. And that's what the church is made of.

We are the building blocks of the church. Or rather, of the temple that God has constructed. And yet, we are defective stones. We are sinners, all of us. But, by the grace of God, we have been forgiven. We have been justified, declared righteous, treated as righteous in His sight, clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and it is Christ who has accomplished all of that for us. He died for sinners. He died to save sinners, and He has accomplished that great work.

The reason He's done that is because He loves us. His love is that deep. Deep enough to reach down to such as us and it did so, and He did so gladly. Enduring the cross, despising the shame of it, the author of Hebrews says, for the joy set before Him. Going to the cross, because of the great reward that He would gain in gaining a people for His father and people for Himself. For the joy set before Him, He came to the depths of this world and the cross. So, it is a deep love, but it's also a high love, high enough to exalt us to heaven where we have been seated in the heavenlies, and which we now enjoy, from which we now enjoy the life of heaven, a supply of God.

Paul wants us to comprehend this with all the saints. In other words, we learn as a community. We study individually, of course. We read individually. We pray individually. But in Paul's thought, we learn also as a community. The church is a body. It's being built together. And in part, we learn, and as we think together, study together, use our gifts together, but also as we love, as we act in love, we learn love in large part by acting in love. Paul's desire was that they, that we comprehend Christ's love, God's love for us, that we might grasp it. But that is not the end of it because there's something further. That we might comprehend it so that we might experience it. That's the meaning of this word, to know, in verse 19. There, Paul writes, "And to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge."

Charles Hodge calls that experimental knowledge, which is an old fashioned word which simply means personal knowledge, knowledge of personal experiences. And so it's knowledge of our experience as well as knowledge of our mind. And so he prays for that, prays that they know the love of Christ.

Now, we can never know that either with our minds or in our experience fully and completely as he says, surpasses knowledge. But we can know something of it. As we live by faith, and as we live in fellowship with our Lord and with one another. But only something of it. The vastness of it, the fact that it surpasses knowledge reminds us that this is something we will never fully grasp in this life. And, in fact, will spend eternity exploring it and experiencing the love of God.

But, we can know something of it, and that is what we are to be doing in the present and this knowledge of experience, as well as the mind. It leads to something more. And in his final request, Paul prays that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. It's a way of saying you become more and more like Christ. This word, fullness, is used by Paul in Colossians in chapter 1 and verse 19 where he says that God's fullness dwells in Christ, meaning His perfection dwells in Christ, His attributes dwell in Christ. That's the sense here. Paul prays that we would have God's fullness. That is, that we would be filled up to His fullness, His attributes, His love in particular would become increasing in our life, that the life of Christ would increasingly fill our lives.

So there's a connection in all of this, in the aspects or the different parts of Paul's prayer, our comprehension of Christ's love leads to an experience of that love, which in turn leads to the transformation of our lives. And the goal of that transformation is Christ's likeness, being fullness to the fullness of God. It's perfection.

That's the ideal, the perfection of the saint. We can't attain to that in this life, but we are to desire it. We are to strive for it. Paul prayed for it, and that's what we're to pray for. And as the Lord's attributes are poured into us, poured into our limited capacity, our capacity then increases, and we exhibit more and more of the Lord's love and the Lord's life. That was Paul's prayer, and really, it's a magnificent prayer, a prayer for perfection which concludes with a doxology which is equally magnificent, a doxology which not only gives praise to God, but also encouragement to us.

He writes in verse 20, "Now to Him who is able to do exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory." In other words, Paul gives glory to the God whose capacity to answer our requests far exceeds our ability to make requests. Often, we limit our prayers by what we think is possible for God to do. We pray as finite beings. That's what we

are. We're limited in our knowledge. We're limited in our understanding of ourselves, and we're very limited. Our limitations are even flawed with sin.

But God is not limited. He is infinite. He is perfect and pure. There are no limitations on what He can do. He is able to do exceeding, abundantly. Or, as it can be translated, super-abundantly above all that we ask or even imagine. We cannot ask too much of God. We sometimes think that. You sometimes hear people say that and kind of bemoan the fact that I'm always asking. I ask too much. We're being selfish. Now, we can pray selfish prayers and God's not going to answer those prayers. And perhaps we need to praise Him more and thank Him more, but we really can't ask too much of God. In fact, I think it was Spurgeon that suggested that to do that, to say we ask too much is to really insult God. It is to insult His goodness. It's to insult His ability, His wealth.

God has infinite riches, and He enjoys giving good things to his people, and He wants us to ask Him for them. You remember the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15, how he went to the far country and squandered his wealth. When he finally came to his senses, he decided to return to his father and ask him to make him a servant in his household. Better to be a servant in his father's household than to eat the food of swine. And so he sets back home. His father's looking for him. Sees him coming. And when he returned, his father rushes to him, runs to him, and doesn't even give him an opportunity to ask his question. He embraces his son. He puts the best robe on him, puts a ring on his hand, and gives him a banquet. His son was going to ask if he could be a servant, and the father, before he even asks the question, made the question, the father gave him more than he had imagined.

That's God. That's a parable about God. He is so full of goodness and love for His people that He won't allow our failures, our lack of perspective, our defective theology, keep Him from His great blessings. God delights in blessing us, and He blesses us in ways that we aren't even aware of. And so, to Him, Paul gives praise in verse 21. "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

This is what we were created for, to give glory to God. And through the ages and through all eternity, we will do that. We will bring glory to God as we, the redeemed, exhibit His immeasurable wisdom and love that brought us into existence as His church, as His redeemed people.

We will bring glory to Him in the most unusual ways, in ways we don't even understand. We read this prayer and we think about it, and then we might wonder, well, why don't I get the things I request? If He's going to do exceeding, abundantly beyond all that I ask or think, I ask for things that I never see an answer to. Well, perhaps I could put it this way: often times, we ask God to give us a stone, and He gives us bread. We ask Him for a serpent and he gives us an egg. In other words, we ask for the wrong things and He doesn't give us the wrong things. He doesn't give us bad requests. They seem good to us, but then we don't have the perspective that we need. We don't see things as clearly as we ought, but He does. He sees things perfectly, and He gives us what is for our best and denies us what is to our detriment. And He brings glory to us, to Himself through us in that way. It may be that the best thing for us at the present time is not to have the things we most desire.

And it's things that may seem very good. It seemed very good to the apostle Paul that the thorn in his flesh be removed, but it was not for his best. And so, that God's grace would be manifested in him in a special way, God denied the request for something better. So that really, Paul got what he wanted. He just got it in a different way. And so it is with us. That doesn't hold back His goodness from us. He gives it to us in ways that we hadn't thought of, beyond our imagination, and He is bringing glory to Himself in the church in that way, and that's to be our great goal, to glorify Him in this place, in the way we live individually, and the way we live together.

With that, Paul ends the first half of the Book of Ephesians with doxology, preceded by a prayer for inner strength, that we might experience more of Christ, that we might know more of love, that we might know more of the fullness of God, be more like Christ. And God is able to do all of that. He is able to change us. He's able to bless us, to do exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think to do. Super-abundantly beyond anything we can imagine. That was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, and so, since it is an inspired prayer, we should ask ourselves: is it the prayer that we pray for ourselves, for one another? A man's prayers reveal what is important to him, and this should be important to us. Spiritual growth, the knowledge of God, the knowledge of Christ, intellectual knowledge, knowledge of the mind, and knowledge of experience. That's what God desires to give His people. He desires fellowship with us. He desires us to come to Him, to know Him, and to enjoy Him.

And like a father who lavishes blessings on his prodigal son, He lavishes blessings upon us. He promises to bless us as a Father.

Is God your Father? You can only approach Him and ask for the family blessings if He is, and He is only your Father if you have believed in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. That's how we enter into His family. He is the door. He is the way. We enter into His family through faith in the Son of God. That's how we are qualified. That's how we are made fit to approach Him, through faith in Christ, whose blood, the apostle John tells us, releases us from our sins, whose death in our place removes our guilt and satisfies God's justice toward our sins. In that way, we are purified, and we are made fit for God's presence.

And so, if you realize that you are a sinner, if you realize that you are in need of a savior, the savior is Jesus Christ. Look to Him, turn to Him, trust in Him. And in so doing, come to know the forgiveness of your sins, life everlasting, and enjoy your access to God. That you can have with confidence and boldness. May God give all of us the realization of our boldness and confident access to Him, and may we enjoy it. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious God and heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great truths that Paul has set forth in this passage. We thank You for the strength that comes from You, the empowerment in the inner man we have through the Spirit. Increase our faith that we might know more of that, know more of Christ, that He might dwell more completely within us. We know that He's in us. He's taken up His residence within us. You have taken up Your residence within us in the Holy Spirit. We have been sealed with that Spirit. And yet, we ask to know more of Christ and experience more of Him and have Him have more dominion over us, that we might live lives that are pleasing, live lives that in this brief span of time that we have on this earth. May we enjoy our fellowship with You and be of good service for You to Your people, and to this world. May we be lights in the midst of a dark place, and may we shine brightly. We pray that You would enable us to do that. Give us the desire to do that. Often times, Father, we confess we don't have the desire for those things. We desire what the world offers. Convict us of that. Show us the short-sightedness of that, the foolishness of that. Turn our hearts to You and give us Your – perspective. Make Christ's thoughts our thought's, His desires our desires and His life our life. We

pray these things in his name, thanking You for the grace that sent him into the world
for the grace that we have. Amen.