

Ephesians

Week Seven: A Mind-Blowing Love Experiencing the Power of God & Love of Christ

Problem & Solution: (for leaders)

**We fail to grasp and experience the magnitude of Christ's love for us and we fail to realize that we need His Spirit to enable us to do so. As a result, we don't move toward spiritual maturity. – Christian maturity comes primarily from a growing Spirit-empowered understanding of God's love for us in Christ. The simple fact that God loves us is the most important truth in the world. We will never grow beyond, nor fully comprehend, this truth.*

Introduction:

If you tell a young Christian one piece of advice about how to grow in a spiritual maturity, what would you say?

The Biblical Text:

Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul's Prayer to the Father

*3:14 begins with the phrase "for this reason." How does the prayer relate to what comes earlier in the letter? [*You might point out the "for this reason" in 3:1. In chapter 2 Paul explains the gospel to them. In 3:1 he was beginning his prayer but then wanted to talk about his ministry. Now he is praying that they would experience what he has proclaimed to them.*]

*What does Paul pray for? How would you summarize the main themes of his prayer?

*One of the central themes in this prayer is the love of Christ. How is the love of God revealed in Paul's description of the gospel in chapters one to three?

*How are maturity and an experiential knowledge of God's love related? [*It appears what Paul is saying is that maturity can be seen in love. Growing Christians have a growing understanding of God's love for them and consequently that love is shown through them. This is why Paul can say, "Christ's love compels us." (2 Cor 5:14-15) To be mature isn't necessarily accomplishing great feats or being able to argue difficult doctrinal points, but primarily seems to be the result of experiencing the magnitude of his grace.*]

*What does Paul want us to understand about what is essential to becoming mature in the faith?

*In light of Paul's conclusion in v.20-21, what difference would it make in your life if you really grasped that God's ability to give exceeds our capacity for asking or even imagining? Does this fact add any additional insight into his love for us?

Conclusion:

*Describe the things you are tempted to put your faith in, thinking they will bring spiritual maturity. Why would you say they seem so attractive in pursuing growth and transformation?

*How does one grow in understanding and experiencing the magnitude of Christ's love for them?

*Compare the content of Paul's prayers to your own prayers. How are they similar? How are they different? If they are different, why do you think this is the case?

*What steps can you take to incorporate Paul's prayer (and other prayers in the Bible) in your prayer life? (*see the section in Going Deeper from D.A. Carson's book A Call to Spiritual Reformation.*)

*Split into pairs and pray Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 for one another.

G o i n g D e e p e r

Further Examination of the prayer:

*What do you observed about the structure of Paul's prayer? How many requests does Paul have? [This question will lead to the next one as people wrestle with the interpretative possibilities. There are probably 2 different requests. 1) Strengthened to live out the Christian life (vv.16-17a) and 2) strengthened to know the immeasurable and maturing love of Christ (vv.17b-19) Other commentators see one request (strengthen with power through Spirit), followed by several results. There are at least a couple of interpretive options for verse 17. Interpreters are divided. Is "that Christ my dwell in your hearts" the result ("so that") of verse 16 or is it re-stating verse 16: "that you may be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner beings"?

The later makes more sense. Being empowered by the Holy Spirit is equivalent to having Christ dwell in your heart, giving you power to live a godly life. If someone disagrees, it's not huge as long as they're not seeing a two staged version of God's rule (e.g., first you get the Holy Spirit, then maybe you get Christ to come into your heart. You can't have one without the other.)

The same could be said about 17b-19a and 19b. The latter could be seen as a result or another way of saying something similar (e.g., to comprehend Christ's mind-boggling love is to be filled with him.)

*How does strengthening with the Spirit relate to indwelling Christ? [see above]

Praying Paul's Prayers (an excerpt from *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* by D.A. Carson):

*How shall we reform our praying?

Surely the best answer is to turn again to the prayers of the Bible. If every part of our lives is to be renewed and reformed by the Word of God, how much more should that be so of our praying? If our generation does not cast up many prayer warriors whose habits in prayer accurately reflect the standards of Scripture, it is all the more urgent that we return to the primary source. Then we shall learn afresh what to pray for, what arguments to use, what themes on which to focus, what passion is seemly, how these prayers fit into a larger Christian vision, how to maintain the centrality of God himself in our praying (Carson, 182).

Just as a human being cannot enjoy normal maturation and develop into a mature person without the structure of disciplined love in the home, so also a Christian who does not grow in the experience of the love of God in Christ does not grow to full maturity. That is what Paul presupposes in his prayer. He prays that Christians might have power to grasp the limitless dimensions of the love of God, so that they will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God...

It takes nothing less than the power of God to enable us to grasp the love of Christ. Part of our deep "me-ism" is manifested in such independence that we do not really want to get so close to God that we feel dependent upon him, swamped by his love. Just as in a marriage a spouse may flee relationships that are too intimate, judging them to be a kind of invasion of privacy when in reality such a reaction is a sign of intense immaturity and selfishness, so also in the spiritual arena: when we are drawn a little closer to the living God, many of us want to back off and stake out our own turf. We want to experience power so that we can be in control; Paul prays for power so that we will be controlled by God himself. Our deep and pathetic self-centeredness is precisely why it takes the power of God to transform us, if we are to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge and grow to the maturity the Scriptures hold out before us (Carson, 196-197).