

Ephesians 3 vs 14-21

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[0 : 0 0] I'm going to have a scripture reading before I get to the sermon from Psalm 35, because I think it has some of the same ideas as our sermon passage this morning.

Psalm 35 repeats this word, the steadfast love of God. And so I want to read verses 5 through 9.

I'm sorry, it's Psalm 36, though, because I was looking at Psalm 35. I was like, that doesn't say the steadfast love of the Lord. It's Psalm 36. We read verses 5 through 9, talking about God's steadfast love, praising him for that, and hopefully setting our hearts on it so that we're more prepared for God's love in Ephesians 3.

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens. Your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God.

Your judgments are like the great deep. Man and beast you save, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God.

[1 : 1 0] The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the fountain of life. In your light do we see light. Well, I wonder if we were to ask everyone in the church this morning what they think their church needs.

How many different opinions do you think we would get? And I don't just mean in Bells Hill Baptist. I mean in every gospel preaching, Bible teaching church in Scotland.

Everyone who's there this morning will ask them, what does your church need? I think we'd get as many opinions as there are people. I know we'd get lots of different opinions because I know even in my own heart when I ask, what does the church need?

I run from one solution to another. Do we need to train Christians with more doctrine? Do we need to equip our youth with more apologetics and more Christian ethics?

[2 : 1 4] Maybe we need more energy and time spent doing evangelism in our communities. Or maybe we need more money so that we can hire staff to do that. Maybe we need to sing more modern songs and have a funnier pastor than Joe to make our services more relevant to the youth in our community.

You see, there's lots of different priorities that we could emphasize. And I'm not saying any of these are necessarily bad, but which one, if you had to pick, which one do we need? Well, thankfully, God has an opinion and he shared it with us in the Bible.

Our sermon is Ephesians 3, verses 14 through 21. This is Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians church in this letter. He had a prayer in Ephesians 1 and now we have the second prayer in Ephesians 3, 14 through 21.

And this teaches us what the church needs. So go ahead and keep all of those opinions that you have about what you think the church needs, but then allow them to be corrected today by what God says the church needs.

Let me read Ephesians 3, 14 through 21 out loud. For this reason, I bow my knees before the father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

[3 : 44] That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

That you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us.

To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen. This is God's word. Let me pray for him to bless it.

Father, you already demonstrated the greatness of your power for us in Jesus's life, death, resurrection, and then ascension to your right hand. So Father, it's only because you're gracious and generous that we ask for you to be powerful among us again.

We've seen you've already been powerful for us in what Christ did, but even this morning we want more power. We need power and strength to comprehend the truths here and not to be bored by it, not to be distracted.

[4 : 59] So Father, focus our minds now. Don't let me be the only one participating now, but that we'd all be working together to humble ourselves under your word and be encouraged by it and corrected by it.

Father, please, you are able to do that. We trust that now. We ask for you to do it in Jesus's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. In the prayer that we've just read here, Paul has come to a climax of his doctrinal teaching in this letter.

Paul has given almost no commands in these first three chapters. So there's actually only one time that Paul's given any command in those first three chapters that you've worked through as a church, and it's in chapter 2, verse 11.

And all he's commanding them is to remember what their lives were like before Christ. So that's the only command that's come. Instead of telling us what to do, Paul has loaded these first three chapters with what God has done.

Paul's informing and declaring. He's saying, this is who you are and what you have only because of what God has done for you in Christ Jesus. That's what the first three chapters are just loaded with doctrine.

[6 : 06] And so right after our prayer, our section in chapter 4, verse 1, Paul begins urging the Ephesians to walk in a worthy manner. So that's when the commands start coming.

That's why we can think of this prayer as the peak of Paul's doctrinal teaching. Before he tells the church what to do, he prays for the church. He asks for what they need so that she's able to respond to what God has done for her.

Here's, I think, a simple way to think about it. You can split Ephesians into two halves. Chapters 1 through 3 teach us what God has done. Chapters 4 through 6 teach us what we should do.

So our passage stands right between these two halves. And it's a prayer for God to give the church that he is building in chapters 1 through 3 what she needs in order to cooperate with those building plans in chapters 4 through 6.

And the prayer is not disconnected from that teaching. It's not that he wasn't thinking about that. This prayer is actually the very heart of Ephesians. It stands between those two halves.

[7 : 15] And it's the bridge between doctrine into transformed lives. So this is the very heart of how Christians move from doctrine in our Bibles to a transformed life in our week.

This is what the church needs. And our passage starts in verse 14 with these words. For this reason. So Paul means that he just said something before this that's compelling him to pray for these specific things.

So to be good students of God's word, we should say, for what reason? What's this coming from? What did you believe that drove you to pray for these things for us? Well, the short answer is chapter 2, verse 22.

That verse says, In Christ, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

So if you remember from that sermon, this is teaching that God's taking Jews and Gentiles and building them into one new community, the church. This reconciliation of all different peoples in Jesus, that's a major doctrinal point from the book of Ephesians.

[8 : 24] And it's why Paul addresses God in our passage as the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. Paul is praying to the God who created Jews and Gentiles.

And in Christ Jesus, he's uniting them into one new family. That's the reason that Paul starts to pray. When he says, for this reason, that's the reason. In fact, he almost starts the prayer back in chapter 3, verse 1.

You see how that one starts? Just like our passage. He says, for this reason. But then he takes a brief detour and gives us even more doctrine. And then finally, when he gets to verse 14, he says it again.

So he's been driven by this love for what God has done. And finally, in verse 14, he gets to this prayer and says, for this reason. He's saying, since God is graciously building a church of different people, that causes me to pray something for you, his building materials.

So what does the church need? What does she need before she's given commands? Well, there's three steps in Paul's prayer here. It's three separate but related things that the church needs.

[9 : 33] First, we need more spiritual strength. So that we can have more knowledge of Christ's love. So that we can give more glory to God.

More spiritual strength. More knowledge of Christ's love. And then more glory to God. So I just want to show you these three steps individually, starting with the first one.

The first thing that the church needs before she's urged to obey is more spiritual strength. She needs a lot more spiritual strength. That's Paul's first request.

That's in verse 16. And then the first half of verse 17. The first thing I want you to notice just looking at these is that everything Paul requests here are things that Christians already have.

He's not asking for new things. He's asking for more of the old things. Look, first he wants us to be strengthened with power. Well, back in Ephesians 1:19, we're taught that those who believe already have the immeasurable greatness of God's power working among us.

[10 : 40] We already have that power. Paul also wants that power to come through the Holy Spirit in our inner being. Well, again, Ephesians 1:13 says that we already received the Holy Spirit the moment we believed in Jesus' gospel.

In verse 17, Paul asks for Christ to dwell on our hearts. Well, isn't that exactly what caused him to pray this in the first place? Ephesians 2:22 says you're being built together as a dwelling place for God.

And then finally, Paul asks for Christ to come into our hearts through faith. Well, Ephesians 2:8 says that it's faith that saved us. It's a gift that God gave us to make us a Christian in the first place.

Everything that Paul's asking for here, we already have that. So the point is that the church needs more of Ephesians 1-3 before she gets Ephesians 4-6.

We need our Father in Heaven to give us more of what we already have in Christ. So what are the things that we need more of from God? I think in a word, it's spiritual strength.

[11 : 50] In verse 16, he asks that God may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being. That's where I'm getting the idea of needing strength.

The idea of strength or power is repeated throughout this prayer. We have both of them here. Then it's mentioned in verse 18. And then twice in verse 20. Strength and power.

Paul doesn't want the Ephesians to be a weak, immature, feeble church. Paul has a mature goal for this church. And in order to get them there, they need more of God's power working among them.

And in fact, they need a lot more power, right? Isn't that what he says in verse 16? How much power does he ask for? It's according to the riches of his glory.

Paul's praying, Father, to the degree that you are loaded with glory, unlimited glory. To that degree, fill this church with power. Let them be empowered to that same degree.

[12 : 50] Because the second step of his prayer will require more strength than any human organization could ever muster. What's coming is going to require more strength than any government.

Any government. But it's not physical strength, is it? It's not even emotional or psychological strength. It's not a strength that any human strategies for fitness or health can improve.

No dieting or training or talking to a counselor or hearing a motivational speech can give what Paul is asking for. It's not just that God gives more of that kind of natural strength than other means.

It's an entirely different strength that he gives. It's a supernatural one. That's why he asks God to send this power through his spirit in our inner being. You can't even have this power if you don't have the Holy Spirit dwelling inside of you.

Since God has placed a different person in our inner being when we believe the gospel. Since the third person of the Trinity is in us, God can send that power seamlessly to us. But the point is that it's our inner being.

[14 : 03] When Paul talks about our inner being, he means it in contrast with our outer being. A really good example is from 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16. Paul wrote, Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Because this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. That's what Paul means when he says inner and outer being. Well, this strength that we need is spiritual.

It's a strength that the world cannot appreciate or even see. It's a strength that can't be used on earthly problems. It's a strength that does not improve my material circumstances.

A spiritually strong inner being lives a life that's devoted to Christ regardless of the outer self and what's happening there.

This is where Paul goes in the first half of verse 17. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Remember, we already have faith. We're already a dwelling place for Christ.

[15 : 14] But Paul wants more of that. He wants us to continue exercising faith. A life of faith so that Christ would possess more and more and more of our hearts.

Let him rule over every part of it. Every affection set on Christ. That is spiritual strength. Paul, in prison, separated from his friends, suffering from his thorn in the flesh, and raising up his faltering voice to sing a hymn to Christ.

That is spiritual strength. Spiritual strength has less to do with taking back our country for Jesus and more to do with taking back my every thought to obey Christ.

That's spiritual strength. And that is what Paul is asking for a lot more of. Now, before we take the next step just to see why Paul wants that, why does Paul ask for that for this church, let's ask ourselves again, why do you think we need that strength?

Where do you feel weak in the Christian life? Where do you see church's feebleness? Where would spiritual strength on the scale of his infinite glory best be spent?

[16 : 30] Who needs that? Where do we need that? And again, I think answers probably come pretty easily. I would naturally say we need to read our Bibles more. Just make us more disciplined. We need to evangelize more.

We need to stand up against immorality in our culture more. And those are big obstacles that would require immense strength. And they're things that are worth overcoming, but that's not what Paul thinks we need strength in for.

That's jumping ahead to Ephesians 4 through 6. Paul wants us strengthened for something from Ephesians 1 through 3. We naturally think, if we get that power, think of what we could do.

But Paul thinks, if we get that power, think of what God has done. That's why the second step in this prayer is that we need more knowledge of Christ's love.

The greatest and most important burden that the church has to bear is the magnitude of our Savior's love for us.

[17 : 38] The church needs a lot more spiritual strength so that we can have more knowledge of Christ's love. Paul starts this second step of his prayer in the second half of verse 17.

Here's what he says. That you, being rooted and grounded in love. That's a description of the church, isn't it? Those who have believed the gospel are like a tree whose roots have been planted in the dark, rich soil of Christ's love.

Those who have trusted the doctrine of Christ's death are like a temple whose foundations are laid on the bedrock of indestructible love. But it's not enough for you to be simply rooted and grounded in it.

Paul's not content with a church who can only sing, How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed? That grace must appear much, much sweeter this hour than it did in that hour.

It's a weak Christian who thinks that the Holy Spirit and faith in the gospel are only for unbelievers' conversion and that their maturity comes chiefly by their own efforts. It's an immature church who wants to skip the doctrine of Ephesians 1-3 so that they can busy themselves with the commands of Ephesians 4-6.

[18 : 56] So Paul continues in verse 18, That you may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.

Here's the purpose of all that strength he requested. Paul wants God to give us more spiritual strength so that we'll be strong enough to comprehend more of Christ's love for us.

There's some debate about whether Paul is talking about Christ's love in verse 18 or something else because he simply uses measurement terms, right? He doesn't tell us what he's actually measuring there.

Did you see that? It just says breadth and length and height and depth. However, remember what made Paul pray this prayer. In Ephesians 2-22, It was the Holy Spirit building us into a dwelling place for God.

He's picturing a house of God made up of different people. And a house is something with measurements and dimensions, isn't it? Houses have breadth and length and height and depth.

[20 : 00] So when he says in verse 17 that we are rooted and grounded in love, he's picturing the foundation of the house. That means the church is only composed of people who've believed and are continuing to believe the gospel.

But a mature church, a strong church, is one that is strong enough to comprehend that Christ's love is not just the foundation. That is not where it stops.

Christ's love is everything and everywhere. Paul's saying, having been founded in this love, a house built on that foundation, I want you to be strong enough to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love.

The whole house is Christ's love. So brothers and sisters, Christ's love is bigger than our weak hearts can handle.

And it will always be. Listen to some of the descriptions of his love in Ephesians 1-3. His love is deeper than we can grasp. In our hearts, there are depths of sin that we have never confessed to any other living being.

[21 : 14] There are canyons of sin in our hearts that we've never even seen the bottom of. We are spiritually foul, miles and miles deep.

We have wicked motives, evil thoughts, shameful secrets, and without God's intervening grace, that's all we would be forever. But Ephesians 2, 4-5 shows that the depths of our sin were no match for the depths of Christ's love.

It says that God made us alive with Christ because of his great love for us even when we were dead in our trespasses, when we were down in the canyons of our sin.

His great love reached down and met us there. We have no sins that are too deep for the forgiveness of Christ's love. There is height to Christ's love, too.

Are we strong enough to comprehend the height of Christ's love? His love, according to Ephesians 2, verse 6, raised us up to his throne and seated us with him there at his Father's right hand.

[22 : 24] There's no audience, no audience that would shame Christ to be seen with us. His love for us raises us to the heavens without shame where all the world and all the angels and all the demons can see Christ with his filthy bride washed white in his blood.

forever. He wants us there. Christ doesn't make excuses for us. He's not embarrassed by us. Like we saw from Psalm 36, his steadfast love extends to the heavens.

There's length to Christ's love. Ephesians 1, 4-5 says that his love chose us before time began. And Ephesians 2, 7 says that he will be showing us his kindness in the coming ages.

Christ's love for his people does not run out. We don't weary his love. There's no honeymoon stage for Christ's love. And his love has breadth.

It reaches across the racial lines of Jews and Gentiles. It grabs people from every different social distinction that we've invented and unites them together in Christ's love.

[23 : 39] And then it fills them up until they overflow with love for one another. The love of Christ is so big and so heavy that Paul just gives up in verse 19.

He says, you know what? No. Just when you think you've reached the summit of Christ's love, you got to the length and you saw the end of it, you realize there's another summit farther out. Almost farther than I can see beyond my comprehension.

The first half of verse 19 says it, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. We will never be strong enough to comprehend and the limits of Christ's love for his people because there are no limits to Christ's love for his people.

And Paul closes verse 19 with the reason that we need to know more of Christ's love. It says, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. That's Paul's description of a mature church, filled with all the fullness of God.

We may have lots of different pictures of a mature church in our minds, but if this is not front and center, it's not a mature church. If this is not first, then it doesn't matter.

[24 : 57] Size doesn't matter. Wealth doesn't matter. Busy ministries don't matter. Bold evangelism doesn't matter. Verses memorized don't matter. Doctrines studied don't matter.

Missionaries supported don't matter. A church filled with all the fullness of God. Is simply this. People who are overwhelmed by the weight of Christ's love for them.

All those other good things I just mentioned come out of that. But a mature church that keeps this front and center is Christ's love is too heavy for me. God, give me strength to know a little bit more of that love.

I get knocked down by it and then I get back up and ask for more strength. Let me have it again. Now Paul's prayer can and it will be answered.

He knows it. That's why he praises God with the closing of his prayer. And the way how he praises God teaches us why this prayer can and will be answered.

[25 : 59] This is the third and final step of his prayer. It's the completion of what the church needs. More glory to God. Verse 20 shows why this prayer can be answered.

Look at that with me. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us. Because of who Paul is praying to this prayer can be answered.

We can actually be strengthened spiritually. We can actually spend that strength on knowing more of Christ's love. And that's because we pray to the God who is able.

That can also be translated as the God who is powerful enough. The God who hears our prayers is powerful enough to do far more than all that we ask or think.

And Paul proves it. He says it's according to the power at work within us. What God has already done for us in Jesus was far more abundant than all that we could ask or think.

[26 : 58] Wasn't it? We know that he's capable of it because we've seen it by faith. He raised Christ from the dead and in mercy raised us with him. When you when death has been defeated.

I mean true eternal life. What power can we even imagine greater than that? No power exists that can resist this God.

And so there's nothing we ask for that is beyond his ability to give. Certainly God can answer this prayer. He is able. But remember Paul's praising God here.

prayer. He's not only certain that God can do it. He believes God will do it. Somehow Paul knows that God wants to do this for the church. What about Paul's prayer makes him confident that it will be answered?

Verse 21 answers that question. to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

[28 : 09] Amen. God will strengthen his church to comprehend the love of Christ because that is how he has chosen to glorify himself for eternity.

This verse should amaze us. You know we can understand a prayer that closes like this. To him be glory in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

Amen. And that makes sense because we know that Christ was the greatest display of God's glory in history. Christ was righteous and obedient and humble and he was everything that we are not wasn't he?

It's glorious but it's also expected that God will receive glory from Christ forever and ever but there's something scandalous and unexpected here. How dare Paul end a prayer like this unless this is what God sees it too.

This is how God sees it. Paul says now to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. Of all the things that God has done in history the church is where he is displaying his glory.

[29 : 19] God bound the untarnishable glory of his name to the church. So now if the church fails to be what God wants her to be his glory will be mocked and he won't let that happen.

The church exists for the glory of God and she will be matured for the glory of God. Paul knows that God's powerful enough to answer this prayer and he knows that God wants to answer this prayer.

This is what the church needs according to God. That's why Paul closes with this praise. Ultimately the end the third and final step is the church needs God to be glorified forever and forever.

Now let's review these three steps of Paul's prayer just because I want it to solidify the flow of his thoughts for us so that we can feel that flow in our own thoughts too. Since the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are building all different peoples into a church for God's glory, Paul's driven to pray for the church.

First, he requests immense spiritual strength. Second, he requests that the strength would be spent on knowing more of Christ's love. And third, when that brings the church to maturity, filling her with all the fullness of God, he asks that it would bring God the glory he deserves.

[30 : 48] There are a lot of different ways this prayer can apply to our lives. I just want to offer one general way and then three brief specific ways. I first want us to remember where this prayer sits in the whole book of Ephesians.

Remember, it's right after the doctrine and right before the commands. And which direction is it pointing? It's pointing back to the doctrine, isn't it?

for this reason, back to this. I want them to know this stuff. Here's the lesson for us. Let's seek more of Christ's love for us before we seek more of our love for Christ.

That speaks to all of us. There are usually two kinds of Christians, those who like to love God with their strength and those who like to love God with their minds. us. But this prayer is pushing both of us.

So if you are immensely practical and you want to show your love for Christ in what you do, I just want you to stop for a moment and consider if you have the right order.

[31 : 54] Are you first growing in your knowledge of Christ's love for you before you are busying yourself with your love for Christ? Is our heart's first desire to be stronger so that we can bear a heavier load of Christ's love for us?

This means a few things. Let's not regard doctrine as something for just the intellectual types. Ephesians 1 through 3 is not really for me. Let's not skip over that just so that we can get to the commands of Ephesians 4 through 6.

In fact, the only way that we'll ever be strong enough for everything that's going to be asked of us in Ephesians 4 through 6 is if we are first filled with all the fullness of Christ's love for us.

Now, the second kind of Christian loves doctrine. People like me who went to seminary and all the people I met there love thinking about these things. This is great stuff.

We love talking about big words like predestination and imputation but this prayer is also pushing that kind of Christian. If you like to know things about God like that, I just want you to reflect on where Paul wants this doctrine to go.

[33 : 05] What part of us needs strengthened to receive the doctrines of Christ's love? It's not our minds. It was our hearts, wasn't it? Isn't that what he said? That Christ would dwell in your hearts.

Our mind is only the door that lets doctrine in but our hearts are what needs strengthened to bear the weight of Christ's love.

So here's a test. If you like Ephesians 1 through 3 and you feel like Ephesians 4 through 6 is just guidance for immature people then you don't really grasp Ephesians 1 through 3. At least you don't grasp it with the right part of you.

Let's not allow these doctrines to clog our minds but leave our hearts bored and our actions unchanged. All of us, both kinds of people need daily to comprehend more of Christ's love in the cross before we express more of our love for him in our lives.

If we're anxious let it be for the maturity of the church. Not just briefly but specifically here are three more things. Let's reflect on Christ's love for other Christians.

[34 : 12] I certainly need to know more of Christ's love for me but I also need to know more of Christ's love for you. So much of the letter to the Ephesians is about God uniting us to each other.

The church is built up into Jesus only as she is built into one another. The church the church's love for one another is how our love for Jesus takes on flesh.

But in order for us to truly love other sinners, people who are offending us, sinning against us but saved by grace, we need to comprehend with all the saints the greatness of Christ's love for all the saints.

We need to see that Christ's love is deep enough for our brothers and sisters' sins too. That he has also raised them without shame to his right hand.

We even need to be concerned that they comprehend more of his love, our conversations with each other. Paul's going to say in just a moment, speak the truth and love to one another. Why? Because I want you to know that Christ loves you.

[35 : 14] More of my conversations filled with the words of Christ. When I'm praying, not just praying for me to know more of this, but praying for you, I want all of Christ's saints to know more of his love.

Christ's love is too big for just me. It's for us. Second, let's pray more for spiritual priorities. Let Paul's prayer be an example to us. In order to be mature, the church needs to need spiritual power, doesn't she?

We need to focus more attention on what God is doing in our inner selves, not our outer selves, not our circumstances. Overcoming our boredom and apathy with the gospel requires supernatural strength to the degree of his glorious power.

But a small struggling church who's overwhelmed by Christ's love for her is a magnificent display of God's glory. glory. So let's pray more for that.

Third and finally, if you're not yet a Christian, doesn't this passage draw you in? Don't you want that kind of love?

[36 : 25] Don't you want God to be as committed to loving you as he is to his own glory? Isn't that what you've spent your whole life pursuing? Listen, there's only one kind of person this love is for.

It's for sinners. It's for people who could never ever earn this kind of love. If you want to be rooted and grounded in love, then you must trust that he died on the cross for your sins.

Once you've done that, he will build you into his church and you will spend eternity searching the unlimited boundaries of our Savior's love for us. Won't you do that today?

Let me close us with prayer. Father, I just want to follow Paul's example here.

I want to ask you to strengthen us right now. The reason if our hearts are unmoved right now is because we have weak hearts. Strengthen our hearts.

[37 : 38] Make them strong enough to stand up and withstand the waves of Christ's love for us so that we can feel that weight and be transformed by it.

Father, don't let doctrine get clogged up in our minds and not come down into our hearts and remind us that we were dead in our trespasses and sins that we walked in. slaves of Satan and fulfilling the passions of our flesh, but you being rich in mercy because of the great love with which you loved us even when we were dead in our sins made us alive with Christ.

We've been saved by grace. Father, fill our hearts with that. Father, you alone can do that. There's no way we can strengthen our inner selves to bear that weight.

Please do that through the Holy Spirit that you've given us. We ask for that in Jesus' name. Amen.