

Prayer To Know the Love of Christ

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[0 : 0 0] let's turn then to that passage that we read the second one of those passages in Paul's letter to Ephesians in chapter 3 and think about the words that we read there from verse 14 down to 19 page 1176 Ephesians chapter 3 and once again I'm going to ask you please to keep your Bibles open because I'm going to be referring to the passage from time to time as one of those passages you need to have in front of you in order to appreciate the progress and the structure in which Paul is explaining what he's doing and that's on verse 14 for this reason he says I bow my knees before the father from whom every fatherhood 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 that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God here we have Paul at prayer it's not the first time that he has prayed in this letter and it's certainly not the only time that he prays throughout all his letters in fact his prayer is his letters are full of accounts of him praying for people who were being converted and who had been converted and for the progress of the gospel wherever he knew it to take place and here once again you're finding him praying and not only does it we think of prayer very often as something private and there is a place for private individual prayer that's what Jesus meant when he said that when you pray go into your room and shut the door so nobody hears what you say because that's what prayer is it's a private conversation between you and God have you ever prayed

I'm sure most of us probably if you're brought up in a Christian home in any case you would be brought up to perhaps to say a prayer perhaps a grace we thank you for this food or perhaps a child would be taught to say now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep if I should die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take and many of us have taught our children there's absolutely nothing wrong with teaching our children to say these prayers but as you've matured beyond saying children's prayers have you learned to come have you ever come personally to God and to ask him to show you what he's really like or to ask him to open up your heart to reveal himself and to make himself known to you because that's when praying takes on a different complexion altogether than the simple child's prayer that's when praying is actually launching out into areas that we've never launched out on before and we're actually daring to approach God in a way that we've never before approached him and I want to ask this evening do you pray if you're a follower of Jesus Christ if you know him to be your personal savior then of course you will be a person who has prayed but I want to ask this evening have you ever even prayed if you don't know Jesus well the first prayer may be something like this

Lord I don't even know how to pray I don't know where to begin to pray I don't know how to possibly put words together that might even constitute a real prayer how what kind of words do you use when all of a sudden you're faced with the knowledge that you're not speaking to your best friend or your mom or your dad or your sister or whatever but you're actually going to open your mouth and you're going to speak to the creator of the heavens and the earth now that's a different ball game altogether isn't it that's a different order of magnitude altogether when we're speaking to God how do you speak to God and how do you know that when you open your mouth God is going to have the time to listen to you or why should what why should you believe that God is going to listen to you after all we're only a little tiny speck in the universe and the reason that why we dare to believe that God will listen to us this evening is because he has created us and he has made us the people that we are with all the dignity and the uniqueness I know that we have gone wrong in many ways and at our hearts the Bible tells us are fallen and sinful every one of us and yet God in his mercy has invited us to come to him and I would ask you this evening I would dare you this evening to

make a priority of getting to know God in prayer and it's as you do so that you discover a world that is new one which you've never discovered before a world in which God has made himself known to us in the pages of the Bible and God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus Christ his son but coming to know him is coming to speak to him and coming to open up your heart to him so I want us to think about prayer this evening because that's exactly the context in which the apostle Paul is telling us not only this is not a private prayer well it may be it may have started off that way but it becomes public when he writes down exactly and he tells the people what he is praying for and why he is praying on their behalf and he says I bow my knees before the father from whom every family or who from whom every fatherhood in heaven or on earth is named that according to his riches and glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inward being

I want us to notice first of all who the apostle prays to he prays to the father who is from whom every fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named that's the first thing I want to dwell on for a few moments just to set the record say to make sure we're absolutely clear of what we're talking about when we're talking about praying is not simply thinking good thoughts it's not simply what many people call meditation some there are some people for whom meditation is simply letting their mind go blank in order to have some kind of peaceful feeling in order to get through the day or to find some kind rest or relief to the stresses and all that kind of thing that's not what prayer is at all in fact I'm not sure if there really is very much value in that kind of mind exercise I would far rather spend five minutes praying because I know that when I pray I come to God who hears me and God listened to the apostle Paul knew that God listened to him but the apostle knew also to whom he was praying he was praying to the father the bible makes clear to us that God is one and yet God is three father son and holy spirit now I'm not expecting us to fully understand what the trinity is the trinity is God being three father son and spirit and by praying to the father the apostle is not suggesting that somehow the father is way up there and the son and the spirit are somewhere in the middle that's not the bible's teaching at all but that father son and spirit are equal in power and glory and that everything that's true about the father is true about the son and it's true about about the spirit they are equal in power and glory and yet when you go back to the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus when his disciples came to him and said to him Lord teach us to pray his prayer to them and I'm sure many of us know it off by heart was the Lord's prayer and the Lord's prayer begins our father in heaven hallowed be your name our father in heaven in fact uh in in many occasions on the sermon on the mount in Matthew chapter 6 Jesus refers to praying to the father and he also discloses to us the nature of the father and he says he says this um so that you're um truly I say to you when you pray go to your room shut the door and pray to your father who's in secret and your father who sees in secret will reward you now why do I believe tonight that the translation of this passage in verse 14 should be from whom every fatherhood in heaven in order for the apostle to draw our attention to the fact that when we pray to the father we are praying to the ultimate father the ultimate father in other words he wants us to think when we pray think father and it's important to try to take a step back and to try to understand the bible's concept of a father not perhaps our concept of a father because our perception of a father is modeled on what our father has been and that's not a very safe model is it there are some people who have been brought up by a loving caring stable home and with a loving caring father but unfortunately sadly that's not the case in every respect in every person there are many instances where nobody knows what a father is like because the father has died or because the father has gone or because the father has been a distortion of everything that a father is so if you're going to start from your experience of what a father was well it could be a good one but it might not be and that's why it's not safe to start from your experience of what a father is because your experience may have been the kind of stereotypical experience of the father who comes in at six o'clock at night and he's tired he slouches himself on the couch he demands everything from his wife and the she has to make the tea for him and he's kind of exists for the rest of the evening in a half-waked half asleep mode and then he loses his temper and he shouts and he is because he's responsible for all kinds of unreasonable behavior now i know that that's a very stereotypical image but it's not too far from the truth in some respects it might even be worse than that some people's experience of a father is everything a father shouldn't be is the very opposite of what a father should be as fathers we often get it wrong but i'm talking about the kind of person who grows up in terror of his father or with a very distorted view now as far as the bible is concerned that is the opposite of what a father was because in the in the culture in which Jesus grew up in the Jewish culture of Palestine the father was first and foremost

a provider and a protector of his family that's the image so so that when jesus spoke about a father and coming to your heavenly father the people to whom he spoke knew exactly what he meant by that and they were instantly filled with a sense of safety and security knowing that they came from that they were going to their heavenly father look at what he says in chapter 7 i'm reading from massie's gospel chapter 7 and i'm quite sure that this is what it was in paul's mind as he spoke about him praying to the father ask says jesus and it will be given to you seek and you will find for everyone who asks receives and the one who seeks find or now this is what he says in verse 9 which one of you if his son asks him for bread will give him a stone or if he asks for a fish will give him a serpent if you then though you are evil know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him in other words the father on earth was the person who gave to you and cared for you and loved you and was would give his life for you and who spent time with you and who and who and who wanted you to have the very best in this world and he was never cruel and never unstable and never unpredictable he was there for his family and he would he would do anything for them and that's the way that god is that's why god we can approach god in the certainty that god wants what is best for us you see if you start thinking about god from you from the point of view of your perspective then you'll think about god in terms of the image that has been created in your mind where did that come from let me ask you a question tonight if you think about god what do you think about i guess if i asked that to 20 different people i'd get 20 different answers depending on the image of god or the perception of god that has been created in your mind what i'm saying is this make sure that the image of god that is in your mind comes from the right place and not from the kind of cynical books that some people read and not from the cynical tele programs that we watch the kind of programs that laugh at the bible and laugh at god and laugh at religion and the problem with that is that it forms a distorted picture within our minds of what god is let's make sure tonight that when we think about god seriously and i hope that tonight we're all serious about what we're doing here that

[14:50] we're there's having quite a real longing to know what god is and who god is but make sure that you go to the right place and and for many people they take their information and their information is completely distorted it's completely it's turned upside down no says paul i am praying to the father from whom every fatherhood in heaven because god defines fatherhood now we'll see in a few moments time that the same is true when it comes to love love is a is a concept it's an idea that we that we can't do without in this world it's something that as humans we find absolutely essential to our stable makeup and yet it varies there's such a diversity in our in our thinking on love what is love can you define love well what i'm saying tonight is that just as fatherhood must be defined by god so love must also be defined by god himself and and and i can tell you tonight that as soon as you get these definitions correct you're onto something that is the most marvelous truth in all the world the thing is tonight we haven't even begun to understand god are you did you read that passage with me and did you get the feeling that that you're on this or that you're on the edge of a vast vast universe which you don't know i often think of how god at the very beginning of time before adam and eve fell how he took adam and eve and he showed them he must have showed them in some way the greatness of the world the vastness and the beauty and the grandeur of the world and god said go and multiply and replenish the earth and go and go and go and fill the earth and explore it and enjoy it it's yours and you make sure that you that you make the most of what i have given you can you imagine how they would have thought at that moment of just the dawn of everything can you imagine how how eager they must have been to fulfill what god told them to do well i think the same is true for for tonight that here is us standing on the vast on the edge of a vast domain a vast universe that can that can be explored as we listen to god's word and as we listen to paul praying for for um things that that perhaps we never even thought about before now he prays for two things for one end result i want us to just very briefly look he prays for power first of all let's read it again verse 16 that according to the riches of god's glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inward being so that christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the stints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of christ that surpasses knowledge so there's two things here he wants us to pray for he wants to pray for power so that christ may dwell in your inward being in other words the object of paul's prayer lies not on the outside not what they wear on the outside but what they are on the inside now here are these people and they're just at the very edge of of being christians they've just come to faith in jesus and they need to grow in their understanding of what the christian life is all about they need to

be protected from all the dangers that they're in the things that surround them all the temptations that surround them they're vulnerable people they don't have a huge amount of knowledge they only have the knowledge that jesus is the son of god he came into the world and he died for sinners like themselves and he has by his peculiar power he's changed them and he's given them a new beginning and a new heart they don't know much about the kind of things that we know through the new testament and so they're vulnerable people so what does paul pray for he prays for a particular kind of power and the power results in christ dwelling in their hearts in their inward being in other words paul's aiming at what they are on the inside i suppose it's a bit like if you compare what something is on the inside to what something is on the outside it's a bit like the seminary at the moment most of us as a congregation as a congregation you'll know what i'm talking about you'll the visitors will excuse me uh the seminary is a building that we have where the gallic congregation meets and the deacon's court have decided to renovate the seminary the start of the work started last monday and that work is progressing at a rate of knots and anyone who was in the seminary last sunday you would not recognize what it's become in the space of two or three days what's more is you walk past the seminary you wouldn't know anything was going on from the outside everything looks the same but it's only when you get on the inside that you see that something turbulent is happening the whole place apart from the pews have been has been ripped to bits because work is going on necessary renovation work every building at some point needs to be renovated and this is what the deacons court have decided quite rightly so but it's meant upheaval a massive upheaval within the building now you walk past it you don't know anything's happening everything looks the same until you go inside that's what paul is aiming at here in his prayer he's talking about he's praying for the christians in ephesus what they are from the inside and that's where our need is isn't it when it comes to god it's not what we are on the outside it's what we are on the inside that's where we've been changed but what paul is saying is that's where god continues to change a person who's become a christian hasn't just changed once but our work has been begun in that person's life where god continues to change so that look look at what he says so that christ may dwell in your hearts now someone may say well surely if these people were christians that christ is already dwelling within their hearts surely that's what it means to be a christian that christ dwells that person has come to faith in jesus that person come to know him and jesus has come to indwell that person well that's true in a sense in a very real sense in the immediate sense that is absolutely true but there's another sense in which jesus is let me explain what i mean the word dwell in the greek language has two different meanings so there's two different words there's a weak word and there's a strong word there's a weak word dwell which means a temporary residence i have two daughters who are students one in glasgow and one in dundee and they are both in temporary residence so if you ask them well where do you live well it's a kind of difficult question because they live in their place of temporary residence which is dundee and glasgow but in actual fact that's not really where they live it's a kind of a weak idea isn't it you're not really living there but the stronger word is the word which means to dwell permanently and where you and i live at the moment is probably more i can't i do dwell permanently now take it like this here you take a young couple who get married and they buy their first house and they decide to buy a house that needs renovation they don't decide to buy a house in which they can walk in immediately because they want to make it the way that they want it eventually so they see a house and they see that it's in a bit of a mess and there's paint and there's wallpaper and there's carpets that the first thing they want to do is to throw out altogether and they they but they still decide to buy the house because they have determined in their own hearts that they're going to change it to such an extent that eventually it's going to be the kind of house that they love to dwell in so the first thing they do is they decide to perhaps live in one room and as they live in one room there's another room that's empty and there's horrible silver paint or black paint or gold paint on the wall and the paint is flaking and the wallpaper is flaking and the carpet's all worn and tatty and so they get to work and slowly day after day they rip out the old stuff the stuff that they didn't like and then they put the new stuff down and when the new stuff is down they move into that room and then there's a kitchen where the sink is leaking and where there's a burst pipe and where all the the units need to be changed because the doors are falling off and it's 50 years old and and it's horrible and they need to rewire the place and they need to re-plumb the place i think you know what i mean i don't need to go on all night you know exactly what i mean about this don't you and gradually bit by bit the young couple day by day they make that house into a place where they are

going to dwell and as they do so they fill the house with themselves as they change it and that's what god's purpose is for his people to change from the inside and as he does so there's no question that he would ever leave yet he continues to make it a dwelling place for himself by transforming us and by throwing out all the things that are not acceptable to him all the rubbish all the old stuff the stuff that we were stuck to in the past the stuff that made that we lived for in the past and yet god as he come and worked in us he's he's he's persuaded us these things are not important anymore and what we need to replace them is of things that have lasting value that's the way he he works in the person who is a christian a person who is following him so that is what it means in verse 17 so that christ may dwell in your hearts through faith but then the second one is this that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend now listen to this verse 18 that we strength to comprehend that with all the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of what he tells us verse 19 to know the love listen to this the love of christ that surpasses knowledge the love of christ that surpasses knowledge now let me go back to what i said about fatherhood before just the same problem isn't it but when you take your definition of i must ask you tonight what love is some of you are very positive if you've got a positive experience of love then you'll then you'll then you'll then you'll have a comfortable uh definition of what love is you'll be okay with it but many people have a horrendous experience then they've grown to be cynical about love last person who said he loved me left me three weeks later i grew up in a family where i expected and when i should have had love instead of love i had cruelty and abuse you tell a person who's been abused as a child you start talking to that person about love and that person won't know he'll that person's likely to be to be cynical sarcastic about love and what's more that person's likely to grow up to live with a cynical perception of what love is so you can't take your definition from the world around us you can't take it from movies you can't take it from romantic novels that you read you can't take it from songs that people have written because that's all their own experiences and love changes doesn't it we live in a world where you can love somebody one day and then love another person the next day what kind of love is that i ask you what kind of love is that that betrays and that lies and that cheats well whatever kind of love it is it's not the love you find in the bible but what's more where god's love goes way beyond anything that you'll find in the in this world is that god's love rests upon the very last people that you would ever expect him to love that's why i read in paul's letter to the romans in chapter five and paul was never able he was never able to get his head round the love of god he says this god shows listen to this god shows his love for us in this that while we were still sinners christ died for us that's what that's what blows his mind that's what he can't get his head round why god should love people who were so evil and wicked and rebellious against him the whole world was a world that was seething with self-centeredness and with lies and with corruption and yet it was into that world that jesus came in order to die to give his life so that these very same people would be saved and rescued and so that god would bring them to himself now if you can explain that to me i certainly can't and what i can't explain i don't even have to go further than myself to try to understand why does god love me and this is what paul is getting at this is what the this is what he's praying for so that you and what he says to the ephesians he says to storn away tonight the people who love jesus and follow him that he that that we should comprehend his love for us he's not praying that we should love him more although we do want to love him more he's praying first and foremost that we may understand more and grasp more the extent the extraordinary unthinkable extent of his love for us when you think about it tonight you sit there i stand here and i'm saying and i'm thinking god as he looks at me he's thrilled i find that hard to believe i confess to you i really find that hard to believe because as soon as i begin to think about god i think about all the bad stuff in me i think about all the ways in which i have brought shame upon jesus all the ways in which i have failed as a christian the ways in which i have allowed evil thoughts to come into my mind the ways in which i've spoken to people over the years and said things that were unkind things that i regret and how poorly i have lived my christian life even as a minister don't ever think that a minister is way up there by by for example a minister is on the same level he's faced with the same problems and the same temptations as everyone else and when i think when i look at my own life and then i think of god's love for me i find it difficult to grasp why in the world should god love me that's what paul prays for that we should grasp why no we'll not we'll never grasp why that's out of bounds we don't know why the love of god is a mystery but grasp it by accepting it and living in that love now there are some people that say well you know you go to on too much you can go on too much about the love of god and we need to emphasize the

anger and the wrath of god we need to emphasize the holiness of god now i've no doubt but that god as we as he's revealed to us in the bible we need to come to terms with god as he is in his holiness and his justice in his truth no question whatsoever but what i said about love exactly the same thing holds when we think about god's anger and his wrath when we talk about anger we usually think about our experience of someone we know who has been angry or some outburst that we are so angry to us is is very much associated with our own outbursts of anger which is sinful but when we come to the to the nature of god including his righteous anger we must always have a balanced perspective of who god is and always take our image of god from what is in the bible itself and not from our own ideas or what we read or what we see around us besides you know someone can learn to cope with anger you say take for example and i know i've gone out beyond my time please forgive me say for example a child who is constantly told by his parent that he is bad you're bad everything he does parents down on him they're a ton of bricks say he's learned to live with that you know the chance you know what's going to happen the chances are that child is going to get used to it and the day is going to come when that child is going to say well i'm bad that's tough get over it that's not the answer is it and that's not god's answer either the fact is that deep down in our hearts we know that we have gone astray from god i don't believe there's anyone in this room that needs to be told that we need to be reminded of it by all means but i think we know it just like the woman at samaria she knew that she had gone wrong just like the woman in john chapter eight that was taken in adultery she knew that she had gone wrong she didn't need the pharisees to tell her just like zacchaeus in luke chapter 19 he knew that he was somebody who was gone astray he knew it but it wasn't the reminder of the anger of god that saved these people it was the indescribable love which jesus showed these people he came to them and he accepted them and he drew them to himself so that they became followers of him and as they did so he began that work of clearing out the rubbish and forgiving and cleansing and washing them began that work in his own love well that's what paul prays for that he that we that christ may dwell in your hearts and that you may we may come to comprehend with all

[35 : 10] the saints what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth and to know the love of christ that surpasses knowledge you know that's a contradiction in terms isn't it how can you know something that surpasses knowledge well paul uses it deliberately just to show just in the same way as beforehand he said that he was less than the least of the saints in order for effect to show something to to make a statement that was now let me just one more thing verse 19 that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of god didn't you get don't you get the impression as we read this passage that god there's no half measures with god there's no part time or part payments with god god means business with us and with god is all or nothing it's full or empty it's one way or the other we either have him or we don't and paul's prayer here in verse 19 is that ultimately the ultimate objective for every one of us is to live our lives in fullness it's easy enough for us to give part of our lives to god if you knew tonight that god just wanted a portion of your life i think most of us would be happy to give that to him that's not what god wants from us at all he wants all everything he wants us heart and soul every part of our being nothing held back and he wants to fill us with himself so that we may be filled with all the fullness of god god is fullness and when you think about it can't be anything else god can't divide himself into little bits god is god and he is fullness he's everything and he wants to come and he wants to dwell within our hearts and he wants us to experience his grace and his goodness and his presence and his leading and his guiding and his truth and he wants to give us everything he hasn't held anything back from us why are we holding stuff back from him why are we so cautious about living for him why are we so cautious about trying to cling on to the old things and not giving him everything that we are that's what he's that's what paul prayed for and that's what we need to strive for and pray for ourselves that we may be filled with all the fullness of god i remember hearing a story once and about someone who had a van and he used to drive this van with a needle in the red i'm sure maybe there's some of us who do that this evening i hope not because the most dangerous way is the most daft way to have a car unless we really can't afford and even if you you can't afford it still anyway i guess there's some people who do that who drive with a very minimum of fuel in their car anyway i remember hearing about this person i actually lived many years ago not so far from here i'm not going to say anything else just in case you recognize who i'm talking about it was actually a distant relative he lived on the west side and his van stopped one day and couldn't start the engine and somebody went out to help him looked in the engine checked it out everything seemed to be okay and he said to him he said when did you put fuel in the van and he said well i put a bottle in

this morning some of us live like that don't we

that's about it that's what we give to the lord that's the way we think we can live our lives just with a bottle needle as long as it's just above empty then we're okay paul's prayer was that we would be full drive with a needle at the other end and experience god in his fullness his grace with all that god is for us and to us we haven't even begun yet to experience and to know god as he is i hope that we grow in that experience i hope i do and i hope that as i read the bible and as i come to terms with more and more of it that i will grow in my understanding of the greatness the magnificence of god who loved me and gave himself for me let's pray our father in heaven we pray that your word will speak to us this evening we pray that you will fill our hearts with your reality and with your power and that we may go home this evening with our minds drawn to you in your greatness in jesus name amen