

Unfathomable Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 January 2025

Preacher: Gil Balch

[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com.

Ephesians 3, 14. 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, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have the 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.

This is the Word of God. Comedian Brian Regan's famous bit about Pop-Tarts is hilarious.

Regan makes the observation that there are actually instructions on a box of Pop-Tarts. Could there be a simpler food, he asks, yet there's actually instructions of how to prepare Pop-Tarts.

And he asks, if there weren't directions, what would people do? Would they just stand there with this little foil packaging asking, how do I get this goodness in me? As amusing as that is, I wonder if we think about God's love in that way.

[1 : 43] Let me explain. It can't be that hard. God loves us. He said he loves us. We believe it. That saddles it, right? But we may have a simplistic view of the love of God.

And so for many believers, God's love can remain intellectual. We stand there wondering, how do I get his love into my heart? We know that God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

We know that God is love. But somehow we still miss something about his love, about knowing his love. Do you doubt? Do you doubt the Lord loves you?

Or are you not really surprised to hear that God loves you? Do you want to know God's love more? In this small bit of text, Paul is praying. It's mostly a prayer.

It's a surprising prayer. And it's a prayer for his original audience. It's a prayer for us. It's a prayer for me. It's a prayer for you to personally know God's love for you.

[2 : 53] The Lord wants us to taste and see God's goodness and love for us. Now, Ephesians, briefly, is broken up into two distinct sections.

The first half of Ephesians is heavy with theology. Paul writes about the nature of salvation, the church, union with Christ, and so much more.

And then the second half gives more imperatives, more moral implications of the Christian faith, sort of a now what. In light of all these theological truths, now how do we live?

But what's remarkable is that the first three chapters is not all dry theology either. It's full of prayer and praise. These doctrines stir up Paul's affections, so much so that he can't help but bursting into praise.

And here, near the end of this first section, this first theological break of the book, this first half, Paul is again bursting at the seams, eager to pray, and is eager for us to know something of utmost importance about the heart of God.

[4 : 03] Paul wants us to get something about God's heart as he makes this transition. And in many ways, Paul's tone is emphatic. It's meant to keep us from making these doctrines mere head knowledge.

So the main point of this sermon is rooted in God's experiential love. So the main point is, savor the gift of God's love for you, which is Christ himself.

Savor the gift of God's love for you, which is Christ himself. I believe that many Christians may have too low a view of God's love.

Either it's reduced to a sentimental feeling, where God may simply overlook our sin, or our view of God's love as too weak, not strong enough to embrace someone such as ourselves, as wicked as

we are.

Whatever the case may be, savor the gift of God's love for you, which is Christ himself. There are four kind of divisions to the text we just read.

[5 : 18] First, he lets us know who he's praying to, this address. And then there's three requests that he's having in this prayer. And that's our roadmap. That's where we're going.

But first, point one, he is addressing the Father. Point one, addressing the Father. Point one, Paul's picking up on the prayer that he started back in verse 1, chapter 3, verse 1.

And then after 13 verses of digression, he finally picks back up his original train of thought in verse 14. And he starts to pray.

And we know that it's the same train of thought because he uses the same words. For this reason, he begins. It's good for us to remember, for what reason?

Why is Paul moved to pray? Well, in many ways, it's all of chapters 1 and 2 that's filling in with hope. Especially the fact that the Gentiles now have a seat at God's table.

[6 : 22] That's you and me, by the way. We're the Gentiles. We're the outsiders. And this is what Paul is celebrating. That we can be made right with God.

That's worth celebrating. And as Paul begins to pray, there's a simple beauty in his address. Look there in verse 14.

He's bowing, bow my knees before the Father. He's bowing before the Father. I think this should remind us of how Jesus also taught his disciples to begin a prayer.

Jesus said, he taught his disciples to say, our Father who art in heaven. This is how God wants to be addressed. Both as a loving, intimate Father and the one to whom we bow.

We can make our address to the Father of all who no doubt hears the prayers of the lowliest of saints. Back in verse 8, if you look up just a few verses, Paul says, he's the least of all of God's saints.

[7 : 31] And yet, even he can call God his Father. So he hears the prayers of the least of all the saints. He will deal with you as a father, a loving father, treats a child.

He's also our master. He's not your buddy who follows you around wherever you go. Or even a divine butler who just gives you good stuff.

We bow before him. He is the mighty king of all. He bought us with a high price and he owns us. To him we bow.

This is an act of humility whereby we recognize our place before him, bowing low. And so, that's the solid foundation upon which we should begin any prayer.

We want to remember both of these things. The high and mighty heavenly one who is also a tender father. So from here, Paul builds a progression of prayer.

[8 : 39] But first, Paul goes cosmic. There's a funny little phrase that he uses. He says, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

Now, the smart guys have debated that term. But it's an interesting play on words. The word family and the word father are derived from the same word.

They're almost identical. It's almost as if he's saying the fatherhood of all those in heaven and earth. And it might even be rendered the whole family. Nevertheless, there is a family of God that's descended from the same father.

He's not saying that every living human is a child of God. That's not what's quite in view here. Instead, Paul is emphasizing God's overwhelming authority over every heavenly being.

And all those who have on earth and who go before us. Who are now in heaven. And to that point, there aren't separate Christian families that exist across the world or in heaven.

[9 : 51] We are one family, one body, including the family of heaven. So whether believers are separated by geography, distance, culture, or even death.

They are part of the one true large family of God. Believing ones that are separated by death aren't lost from your spiritual family.

You may feel the loss in your physical family. But you're still part of the family of God. And just as Adam named all of the animals when they were brought before him, he had dominion over all the animals.

They were in his hands. So too does God our Father have dominion over every creature in heaven and earth that is named. That's what it says. So that's the setup as Paul begins to pray.

And as Paul prays, it should be our prayer as well. Point two, pray to be strengthened by God's power.

[11:03] Pray to be strengthened by God's power. Paul is now beginning his request. And this prayer is like a progression.

Or as John Stott said, it's like a staircase whereby we climb higher and higher into the Lord's aspiration for us. Paul's praying, but through this prayer, God's revealing his own heart to us. God's showing us what he wants us to know about him. So if it's a staircase that we're going up in prayer, the first step that we arrive at is a prayer for strength.

So if you remember way back in chapter 1, or if you go back and review, Paul begins the book with a prayer. And in chapter 1, verse 19, Paul prays that the readers would have an awareness of God's power that is available to them.

But here in our verses, Paul's actually praying for that power to be manifested in their lives. So he's saying there is a power, but now he's praying, oh, that you would be empowered.

[12:17] Look down there at verse 16. Grant that you would be strengthened with power. God's power is not something that is to be kept to himself.

The Lord is all-powerful, but it's not merely potential energy. It's kinetic power. There is movement in his power. He's not hoarding it or saving it up.

God will strengthen you with his power. And notice the agent of the strengthening. How does he do it? Who will do it? Who will do it? It's through his spirit. The third person of the Godhead.

God himself will strengthen you. He will do it. And I love that Paul is not asking for physical strengthening or healing of bodies or military success or power even above another person or even supernatural gifts.

The place that God wants you to be strengthened is in the inner self, your heart. Just think.

[13:26] That's the place where God wants you to be strengthened the most. Your heart. If God wants our hearts strengthened, then we've got to assume that our hearts are weak.

The Lord doesn't give us what we don't need. The Lord wants to help you see your weakness and strengthen you. It may feel painful to see our weaknesses, but it's not to expose you.

It's to heal you. 2 Corinthians 12, 9, Paul again addresses. He says, but he said to me, the Lord said to me, my grace is sufficient for you.

My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly in my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Do you need strength today? When your physical body is wasting away, God wants to strengthen your heart. When your spouse is not who they once were, God wants to strengthen your heart.

[14:36] When you're overwhelmed and hopeless, God wants to strengthen your heart. When life isn't turning out how you expect it, the Lord wants to strengthen your heart.

It's our inner selves. It's our heart that needs continual renewal. So we should not see these weaknesses as failures, but the places where God wants to show his strength in you.

It's humbling because it doesn't make us look good. It makes him look good. 2 Corinthians again, this time in chapter 4, Paul says, So we do not lose heart.

Where you're weak, don't lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. Day by day renewal.

In the 19th century, George Mueller was a well-known man of prayer and faith. He established many orphanages and eventually cared for some say nearly 10,000 orphans throughout his life.

[15:49] He's also known for receiving remarkable answers to his prayers. Mueller raised today's equivalent of somewhere around \$100 million for orphans.

But his practice was not to go to people, to ask people for money. Instead, he would ask the Lord directly for provision and the Lord would just bring it in.

But even this man of faith recognized that something was missing from his life. He needed to be daily renewed with God's strength on the inside through the spirit. Of this realization, Mueller said, and we have it for you on the screen.

He said, I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was to have my soul happy in the Lord.

The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord or how I might glorify the Lord, but how I might get my soul into a happy state and how my inner man might be nourished.

[16:53] Before this time, my practice had been to give myself to prayer. And after having dressed in the morning, Now I saw the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God and to meditation upon it.

And that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed. And that thus, while meditating, my heart might be brought into experiential communion with the Lord.

He needed to be renewed day by day. Making himself happy in the Lord. That's the strength that the Lord wants to grant us.

He wants to give you power in your inner man, in your inner self, in your heart. And because of the riches of God's glory that he says down here, Paul is absolutely confident that he can and will answer this prayer.

There's nothing that causes God to be incapable of answering this prayer to give you strength. So Paul says to be, prays for us to be strengthened with power.

[18:05] Point three, we should pray to understand Christ's love. Pray to understand Christ's love. As we take a step higher into these glorious requests, we gain more clarity on the progression that Paul is making.

Paul already prayed that he would strengthen us, but now he gives more substance to this request. It's not a general strength that he's praying for, ultimately. Specifically, it's strength to know God's love.

His love. What do you think people, most people think about God? What do your unbelieving friends and neighbors think about him?

What's he like? What do you think about him? What's the character of God? Well, a recent Pew Research study found that nearly all adults who say they believe in God say they think that God loves all people regardless of their faults.

At least in America, people generally think that God is loving. That seems to be a wonderful thing because he is loving. But I wonder if it's not so much that people have a high view of God and a right understanding of his love, but that maybe many of us actually have a low view of sin and ultimately a low view of God.

[19:42] D.A. Carson helpfully said, we have it on the screen, in generations when almost everyone believed in the justice of God, people sometimes found it difficult to believe in the love of God.

He's talking about previous generations. Preaching of the love of God came as wonderful good news. Nowadays, if you tell people that God loves them, they're unlikely to be surprised.

Of course God loves me. He's like that, isn't he? Besides, why shouldn't he love me? I'm kind of cute. Or at least as nice as the next person.

I'm okay. You're okay. God loves you and me. The fact is that it is staggering that God would love us.

It is shocking news. If we were to remember the horrors of what Paul had described in the previous chapters in Ephesians, we would be amazed to learn that God takes any notice of us at all.

[20:46] Remember, we were dead in our sins. Enemies of God. Children of wrath. Running, as it were, straight to hell.

Slaves in the passions of our flesh and unable to do anything about it. But God, in advance, decided to save us, not because of any good in us, but because of his love and mercy.

Not only that, he adopted us into his family. We were outsiders, but he gave us a seat at the table. Us. He showers us with gifts and gives us a hope and a purpose in life.

We should be shocked at this unfathomable love. Now look there in the second half of verse 17.

The Lord wants us rooted and grounded in his love. Now this is not a call for us to grow in our love for him, as important as that is.

[21:49] It's a greater revealing of how we're to be strengthened in our inner being in God's love. And to help us grasp this love of God, Paul uses two metaphors. He's using an agricultural metaphor and one from construction.

And both of these are linked to the Old Testament and the teaching of Jesus. John Stott again helps us when he said, Love is the soil in which believers are rooted and will grow.

And the foundation upon which they are built. If you look back through scripture, there's a lot of great agricultural metaphors in the Bible.

John 15. Jesus is the vine. We're the branches. We get our sustenance from him by abiding in him. Psalm 1.

The wise man meditates on God's word. It's like a tree planted by streams of water. In the parable of the four soils in Matthew 13, you remember the quality of the soil.

[22 : 54] It matters. It's what we build our lives on. And Jesus said we produce fruit when our lives are built or planted in good soil. So here the Lord says we're to let our roots, our lives, grow down into the soil of God's love for us.

Draw nourishment from God loving us. We're to be like sturdy oaks that have deep roots and can therefore withstand the adverse effects of harsh weather.

When we know God's love for us, we can withstand trials. We may bear the scars of hardship like a beat-up tree, but ultimately with strong roots in God's love, we can withstand the storms of life.

God's love is also the foundation upon which we build our lives. This construction metaphor. It's a solid base.

At the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he sums up his teaching by asking where we're going to build our lives. We are building on something. Our roots are drawing nourishment from somewhere, and the Lord wants us building on his love.

[24 : 01] Everything else is like sand. Eventually it's going to crumble. So Paul keeps going. He's building several phrases together to help us see the depths of God's love.

It's not small, weak love, but strong and deep. And so Paul's trying to express something about the love of God, metaphors, anything he can get his hands on, it seems.

And now he's using an illustration of dimensions. But instead of measurements of three dimensions in the space that we exist, like we think of height, width, and length, Paul lists four dimensions.

Commentators generally agree that this shouldn't be taken too literal, but it's a poetic way of emphasizing the deep love of Jesus. Look there in verse 18.

God wants us to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth. It's broad.

[25 : 09] It's broad enough to include all of mankind. Jews and Gentiles, which is a major theme in this letter. No people group is excluded from the love of God.

It's long. The length of it. Long enough to last from eternity past to eternity future. Love never ends, 1 Corinthians 13 tells us.

It's high. The height of God's love. It reaches to the highest heaven. And it's deep. There's no depth you can possibly reach in yourself that is beyond the grasp of God's love for you.

Are you low today? Are you feeling low? God's love reaches deeper, able to lift you to himself. So, why do we still have a hard time believing God's love for us?

There may be several reasons, but one of them may be a lack of understanding of the nature of infinite love. I think, to a degree, I think we don't have too much of a problem thinking about the infinite nature of God and other aspects.

[26 : 27] We know that he is infinitely perfect and holy in all of his ways. We don't wrestle with the fact that he's infinite in his might and power. We generally have no problems believing the expanse of his knowledge and wisdom.

But we don't apply the same principle to God's love. We think there's a limit to how much he can love us. And if you're a Christian, he loves you with an infinite love that cannot be diminished.

It does not end, and it cannot change. If you're a believer today, we just don't always feel his love. But that's kind of what Paul's getting at here.

He wants us to feel it too. Which is why in verse 19, he says that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. The Lord wants us to know his love for us.

But it goes beyond what we can know. In one sense, it's too great for us to understand fully. We will never plumb the depths of the love of God for us. But in another sense, I think Paul's talking about experience, actually.

[27 : 33] He wants us to experience the love of God. This is not mere intellectual knowledge. It's too great to understand. But it's also not a doctrine where A plus B equals C.

This is getting into the deep wells of God's heart. The Lord wants you to know something about his heart today. Indeed, God himself is dying to tell you something.

Today, the Lord wants to get one message across to you. If you're a Christian today, God loves you. And don't mishear me.

The Bible says that God is love. That's his nature. It's the core of his being. But that's not what he means here. It's not just that God is loving. God wants you to know that if you're in Christ, he loves you. And it's not in the sense, again, that we know that Pluto is cold.

[28 : 38] But in the sense that we know that the sun is hot when we step out on a sweltering hot day and we feel the sun's rays on our face in the same way the Lord loves you.

We want you to know that. We want to know the love of God. But we may still be unsure. Another reason might be because we're aware of our sin.

We know that we are undeserving of his love. Which is different from his holiness. He's holy, but that's apart from how we are.

But his love, we receive his love, but we know that we're sinners. And so the two don't seem to match up. In some ways, I think we need to know our sin more.

It's just like what John said. He came for hopeless people, and Bob wasn't hopeless enough. I'm not sure we realize our sin enough. Here's the thing.

[29 : 35] We are bigger sinners. You are a bigger sinner. I'm a bigger sinner than we realize. The measure that you hold yourself to versus the standard that God has is miles apart.

The situation is worse than you realize. When we try to comfort ourselves with thoughts that sin is not that bad, that our sin, it's just not, it's okay, I can manage it.

It's just not that bad. I'll repent. I can handle it. Or when we sweep it under the rug, just try to hide it. Or if we fill our lives with distractions to keep our consciences from bothering us, we will never experience the deep love of God.

So we need to keep returning to the severity of the sin against God. And so even though our sin is worse than we know it is, our Savior is far more loving than you can ever comprehend.

Hallelujah. His love reaches farther than you dare to hope. When we come face to face with who we are as sinners, lost and without hope, when we come face to face with that, we also want to come face to face with the loving Father.

[30 : 54] And we can repent of our sin, turn to Him in faith, turn to the loving Father, and receive His grace and love for you.

And His love is not just a bunch of talk either. He didn't just say He loves us, did He? Romans 5, 9, an important verse we have for you.

God shows or demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. This is not a call to clean yourself up before you come to God.

Come to God in faith and repentance. He will shower you with mercy and grace. For the joy that was set before Him, Jesus endured unfathomable suffering, rejection from the Father.

God's holy wrath was poured out. It just wasn't on the believer. It was poured out on Jesus. But that joy that Christ had, the joy that He had, was restored relationship with us.

[32 : 01] That's what He purchased. For the believer, He ransomed and redeemed us and give us a deep, abiding, and everlasting joy even in the face of trials.

But your roots go down into His love. Which brings us to point four. We should pray to be filled with God's fullness. Last point.

Pray to be filled with God's fullness. Finally, as we step up to the last step of this progression of Paul's prayer, we see the culmination of this request.

That we be filled with all the fullness of God. The Lord wants to fill each of us to a greater degree. Back in chapter 2, Paul says an important thing that we need to remember.

That the people of God are a new temple. We are the new temple. And this language of filling, that he says, also points back to the Old Testament.

[33 : 08] To the time when the Lord filled the temple, or the tabernacle, with smoke. Remember that? He filled the temple. So much so that the priests couldn't even go in and continue their work.

So even as the Lord filled the temple in the tabernacle, in the Old Covenant, God wants to fill the New Covenant people with His glory. He wants to fill us, as one author put it.

The request that Paul makes is to God, and it's for God. The request is to God, but it's for more of God.

And notice what Paul's prayer is for. Again, it's ultimately that the Lord wants to give us. It's what the Lord wants to give us. He wants to give us Himself. God is the gift.

The Lord is the treasure. The gift of love is the gift of God Himself, both on the cross and being in us. Oh, that we may be filled with the fullness of Christ.

[34 : 11] Yes, we know that this is something, though, that we can never fully attain. How could a finite being ever be filled with the fullness of an infinite God?

Could any person ever really say, yeah, I think that's all that God has to offer. I think I got it. I'm good. We want to grow daily in this reality. In fact, we will spend an eternity unfolding the fullness of who God is.

Let me give just two brief application points before we conclude. Two points that will help us grow in knowing and savoring God's love for us.

First, meditate on God's Word specifically on Christ's suffering. Meditate on God's Word specifically on Christ's suffering.

After our family spent a year at our denomination's Pastors College, we spent last year in Louisville, we moved back here in June, and we moved back into the same house.

[35 : 27] And before we moved in, we decided we were going to switch bedrooms. Everybody was going to switch bedrooms. We don't have a master bedroom, and some logistic things just made it seem wise to switch rooms.

But the room that we moved to, that I moved to, I hadn't spent a ton of time in that bedroom that I moved back to. I mean, I had, but I'd spent more time in other rooms.

But before we moved back, and as we were planning, I couldn't imagine what furniture pieces would fit against what wall. I wasn't as familiar with the dimensions. But after we moved in, and as I spent more time in that room, I could soon calculate how big that room is.

I got to know the space better. We had to do some shopping also for some pieces, and after I'd spent more time there, I had a pretty good idea of what's going to fit against what wall.

I could tell you with close accuracy what is the length and breadth of that wall. Now, the breadth of God is not something that can be measured.

[36 : 31] But if you want to get a sense of the vastness, the deep wells of God's love, step into the room with him. Spend time.

Wonder through the courtyards of the Psalms. Explore the halls of the Law and the Prophets. Abide in the living room of the Gospels, and feast in the kitchen of the Epistles.

God's word is where we get to know ourselves. The problem of sin, the problem of our sin, the mirror by which we see our problem, and the deep love of God.

It's where we get to know those things better. And it's on specifically meditating upon the sufferings of Jesus where we get to know how bad the situation is and how glorious the Savior really is.

It's in that same act of suffering where God shows unfathomable love. And even though his, even though his love is too great to understand fully, it's not as if we can't grasp anything of his love.

[37 : 41] We want to grow day by day. Day by day, you want to grow in this. The second application to grow in knowing and savoring God's love is to pursue personal holiness.

I want to pursue personal holiness. Remember, we're the new temple of God. We're the temple of God. It's where he dwells. And in the Old Testament, no unclean thing was to enter the temple.

Likewise, we must deal with our own sin and pursue godliness. The Lord would have us spiritually mature. In many ways, that's what being filled with the fullness is, to be mature.

So are there areas of your life where you may be harboring sin? Things that need to be confessed, repented of.

Come clean. Come to the light. The Lord is a glorious Savior, and he loves you. Come to the light and experience the grace of God, which is an overflow.

[38 : 45] The grace of God is an overflow of his love. And as the believer is strengthened with power by the Spirit and Christ dwelling in their hearts, God is no quiet roommate.

For the believer, he dwells in you to work in you, to clean out the garbage in your temple. He's moved by love and will purify his holy habitation.

One author speaks about how the Spirit of the Lord Jesus will himself systematically go from room to room in your life to clean and rearrange. The Lord is making you like himself.

Oh, the Lord loves you with an unfathomable love. So, savor the gift of God's love for you, which is Christ himself.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, you demonstrated your love for us on the cross.

[39 : 50] You told us about your great love. In some sense, we have an awareness of our own sin. But I pray that you would help us to see our sin rightly, but we want to take more looks at your cross.

We want to look at sin and we want to, but we don't want to stay there, Lord. We want to look to you. You are the heavenly Father, the one to whom we bow, the one who is tender and mercy, gentle and lowly.

And we need your mercy. We need your forgiveness. But I pray for each one of us, God, that we would know the love of God that surpasses knowledge, that we would experience that love.

And we would be filled every day, God. We would renew our hearts in this. Be filled again daily. Would you guide us and keep us in the love of God?

We ask in Christ's name. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com through the■.

[41 : 02] through the through the