

Knowing You're Loved

Part 2

Ephesians 3:14-19

David Sunday

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May the God of hope fill us with joy and peace as we open His Word to Ephesians 3. During a period of three weeks, we're looking at the theme of "Knowing You're Loved." I think this is something that can be a great encouragement to parents and something we long for for our children—that they would know that they are loved with an everlasting love. I want these sermons to be like a lozenge that we put under our tongue and let it sweetly distill and soothe the irritated tissues of unbelief that keep us from really trusting, rejoicing and resting in God's love for us.

Last week we looked at 2 Thessalonians 3:5 which says, "*May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.*" We've been praying that for ourselves and for our church. I've also heard that a number of you are memorizing this verse.

I want to tell a story of how God did that in the life of D.L. Moody, someone whom God mightily used for the advancement of the gospel in Chicagoland and around the world. The Moody Church in downtown Chicago is celebrating their 150th anniversary this weekend and we rejoice in what God has done through that church. We join our hearts together as believers in the Chicagoland area, praying for God's ongoing blessing on the ministry of The Moody Church. Part of the faithfulness and power of the ministry of Moody and Moody Bible Institute are because of what God did in the life of D.L. Moody. I'm going to read an excerpt from the biography that Lyle Dorsett wrote of Moody.

As Dwight Moody walked the streets of New York, seeking funds for rebuilding the religious facilities of Chicago after the Great Chicago Fire, he admitted, "My heart was not in the work of begging. I could not appeal. I was crying all the time that God would fill me with His Spirit." Moody was so burned out that nothing else really mattered. He said, "It did not seem as if there was any unction resting on my ministry." He had endured almost four months of intense, spiritual agony. "God seemed to be just showing me myself. I found I was ambitious. I was not preaching for Christ; I was preaching for ambition. I found everything in my heart that ought not to be there. For four months a wrestling went on in me. I was a miserable man."

'But suddenly after four months the anointing came. Moody said, "It came upon me as I was walking in the streets of New York." The Holy Spirit came upon Moody in great force while he was walking down Wall Street. All of a sudden nothing was important except to be alone with the Lord. He went as fast as he could to the residence of a New York friend and he asked for a room to pray in.

Here's what Moody said about that day:

"Ah, what a day! I cannot describe it. I seldom refer to it. It is almost too sacred an experience to name. Paul had an experience in which he never spoke for 14 years. I can only say God revealed Himself to me and I had such an experience of His love that I had to ask Him to stay His hand."

Would you join me in praying that God would be revealing Himself in our lives together as a church? Let's pray that God will direct our hearts into the love of God and that we will experience His love in such a way that we too might need to ask Him to stay His hand.

Father, we are seeking You—the living God—and to know You is to experience You. We are not asking for an experience per se but we want to go beyond a rational acquaintance with the truth of Your love. We want to know Your love in such a way that it refreshes, energizes and enables us to persevere amidst hardship, that it emboldens us to tell of You to others and fills us with such sweetness that Your love through us becomes a force of healing and encouragement and strength and salvation in other people's lives. Lord, there's not enough of Your love in our hearts. There's not enough of Your love in our homes. There's not enough of Your love in our community. We pray; take us deeper into Your love and into the steadfastness of Christ. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ephesians 3:14-19 is our text and a wonderful prayer of the Apostle Paul. I'm going to do something that I've never done before in preaching and I may never do it again. I'm going to preach the same outline that I did last week in 2 Thessalonians 3:5. I want you to see the same four observations from a different text of the Apostle Paul. I want you to see how the logic of the Apostle Paul is consistent, that the same observations we made about 2 Thessalonians 3:5 can be made about Ephesians 3:14-19. Let's read the text and then we'll look at those four, simple observations from a new text. Hear God's Word:

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Can He do this for us? Verses 20-21 go on to say, *“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.”*

1. Paul is praying here for something that God would do for us, not that we would do something for Him.

Look at that prayer and name one command, one imperative, one thing that God is asking Christians to do through the Apostle Paul here. Can you find one? There are none. This is all about Paul asking God to do something upon our hearts. He's praying to the Father Who has sovereign authority from Whom every family on earth gets its name, the One Who gives every human being His identity. He's praying, *“that according to the riches of his glory he may grant [something]”*—that God would do something.

On this Mothers' Day, I want mothers to be encouraged by this phrase, *“...according to the riches of his glory...”* I want you to be encouraged that the success of your motherhood doesn't rest on you; it rests on God working through you. Your limited resources are not the measure of your influence or the measure of your success. The riches of God's glory are actively being invested in your parenting as you exercise your role as a mom in faith and prayer. Realize there are glorious riches available to you through faith and you can draw upon those riches in prayer that God would—out of those riches—do a work in your life and in the lives of your children that is impossible for you to accomplish on your own.

2. Knowing God's love in a way that refreshes and energizes does not come naturally.

Knowing God's love doesn't just happen. It's not something that you can conjure up. Knowing God's love in a way that refreshes and energizes does not come naturally. That's why Paul is praying and why we pray for that which we cannot obtain ourselves. We realize the lack of it in ourselves and we seek it from the hand of a glorious, rich, gracious God.

What Paul is asking here in verse 16 is that we would be strengthened. We need *“...to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...”* Who is Paul praying to in this prayer? He is praying to the Father for the strengthening of His spirit (verse 17) *“so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...”* So we have the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We have a Triune God and Paul is praying for the workings of the Triune God in the lives of God's people.

I want to stop and ask, “Do you believe in a Triune God? Do you believe in God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and do you operate in your Christian life in a

relationship of communion with the Father, with the Son and with the Holy Spirit? Do you believe in the Holy Spirit? Do you live in conscious, explicit, desperate, reliance on the Holy Spirit—more than just an idea? Are you engaging your mind and heart in prayer for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life or has He become for you what Francis Chan calls Him—the Forgotten God?”

Paul is very earnest in his eager desires for the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He introduces us in these verses to a very sweet ministry of the Holy Spirit. I want you to get excited about this ministry of the Holy Spirit because Paul introduces to us here to a ministry of the Holy Spirit that can enable you to get out of bed in the morning with joy, confidence, hope and power to face a new day, a new week. It's what my friend, Mike Bulmore, calls “the heart-strengthening ministry of the Holy Spirit.”

Ephesians 3:16 says, “...*may [He] grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being...*” —the heart-strengthening ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is something that God wants you to be relying on in your life. It's something He wants you to be receiving with thanksgiving and to be excited about—the Holy Spirit's ministry is available to you day-by-day, week-by-week.

The Holy Spirit is actively at work to strengthen your heart to do two things: “...*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...*” (verse 17); and that you “...*may have strength to comprehend with all the saints...the love of Christ...*” (verses 18-19). That's the heart-strengthening ministry of the Holy Spirit. He strengthens your heart so that Christ would dwell in your hearts through faith.

You might say, “I thought Christ already dwelled in my heart.” He does; He dwells in the hearts of all believers. There's a strong word that's being used here, a word that speaks of permanent residence. It's a word that speaks of settling down and making yourself at home. This happens in the Christians' life by degrees. Christ comes to indwell us but throughout our lives as the Spirit strengthens us, He becomes more and more at home in us as we become more and more formed into His character and likeness.

God says that the Holy Spirit is actively at work in arranging this residency of Christ in our hearts so that He becomes at home in us and we become more accustomed to His presence. We enjoy His indwelling presence in our lives in a way that starts to really encourage us. We derive strength from knowing that He indwells us. As we recognize His indwelling in our lives, we become increasingly at home with Him and more and more like Him. Our hearts become more and more consciously Christ's home. Paul says we need the Spirit to strengthen us for that reality to take shape in our lives.

Secondly, we need the Spirit to give us strength to comprehend the love of Christ (verse 18). That's not going to happen apart from the heart-strengthening ministry of the Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 says that "*...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*"

God is pouring His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit but there's a problem here. Our hearts are not strong enough to contain it because His love is so potent, so mighty, so spiritually radioactive that we cannot contain this love without a divine strengthening of our hearts. It's like taking a hot coal and dropping it into a little, plastic bag. That bag is going to melt because it just can't contain something that hot. Or it is like feeding a baby red meat who is not strong enough to be nourished that way yet. You just can't do that.

We're kind of like prisoners coming out of a concentration camp. We've been eating a little bit of mush daily and we're malnourished. We can't handle a big meal yet; our appetite needs to be strengthened; our capacity needs to be enlarged. Our hearts need powerful reinforcement from the Holy Spirit in order to digest the wonderful experience of knowing that we're loved by God. Paul prayed for this heart-strengthening ministry because he knows it's not going to come naturally.

I think this is a wonderful encouragement to mothers: to know that such a ministry is available to you and your children, to know that He is able to strengthen your heart and strengthen the hearts of your children so that they can know this love of Christ that transforms them.

For those of you who are not mothers but wish they were, to those for whom Mother's Day is a difficult holiday because of painful loss and unsatisfied longings, disappointed expectations—it's good to know there's a heart-strengthening ministry of the Holy Spirit available to you today in your disappointment and your grief and your loss. He's able to strengthen your heart even on a day like this to know that you are loved in a way that brings you comfort and peace.

3. There are pitfalls and obstacles in the way.

Last week we saw that sins get in the way and we start thinking about our own performance instead of Christ's performance. Situations of adversity and hardship can cause us to doubt His love for us. Then Satan himself hates us and doesn't want us to believe that we're loved by God. Last week we learned there are pitfalls and obstacles in the way to knowing the love of Christ.

This week, there is a different obstacle in the way and we find it in verse 19: “...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...” There’s the obstacle; this isn’t something you can just figure out intellectually. We like to get our minds around something and get it all figured out, then move on. Knowing the love of Christ does not work that way. We often stop short, just thinking about it a little bit and understanding it minimally. We think, “That’s it; He loves me.” It’s not really making much of a difference the way it’s meant to because we can’t get our minds around this. This is an obstacle; this isn’t an intellectual problem. This is a spiritual thing that needs to happen in our lives.

When I was a baby, I’m sure I knew intuitively that my parents loved me. I don’t remember telling them when I was three months old, “I love you, Mom and Dad,” but I instinctively knew. I cried and they provided food. Then as I grew and became a little boy, I began to understand the word “love.” As I continued to grow through adolescence, my understanding of the love of my parents continued to grow and it often grew through trials, hardships and struggles. Even then I couldn’t fully grasp it.

I remember the week I graduated from high school in 1988, I was playing the piano in our church youth group and my dad came over by the piano. He just started telling me how much he loved me and here I was graduating from high school already. He was saying, “Wow! Look at the time. You’ve grown up.” I had never seen my dad cry before but he started weeping right there by the piano bench. Seeing his heart showed me new dimensions of his love but I still didn’t get it.

Then we had babies; then I became a father. One of my sweetest experiences as a parent of young children was when they started telling us, “I love you, Mom. I love you, Dad.” It’s a wonderful thing to hear them starting to recognize what love is. Now we have one daughter in college; our son will be graduating from high school in a couple of weeks and Ruth won’t be far behind. I can find myself breaking into tears in the most awkward, inopportune times. Sometimes I can start crying and I’m not even sure what it is that is going on. It’s this love—love that surpasses knowledge.

I used to think it was funny when older men would start talking and you could tell they couldn’t get the words out because they were going to cry. That happens to me now. Suffering and hardship and difficulty and life and seasons and growth—you start to understand this love that is so beyond yourself that you can’t describe it. You just can’t intellectualize it. I’m not saying there is nothing intellectual about this but it can’t be limited to that.

One of the obstacles about the deep, deep love of Jesus is that we interpret His love by our own love. That’s always a mistake because our love is up and down. We love something today

and hate it tomorrow. Our love can be moderate when it should be red-hot and it can be excessive when it should be in moderation. Our love often requires the object of our love to be pleasing and delightful and lovely. We have a hard time loving that which is not lovely. Our love decays, it's frail and fickle but that's not the way Christ's love is to us.

The love of Christ is at the heart of His nature. God is love; Christ is God so Christ is love. His love is able to love the unlovely. It never goes up and down. It endures; it does not decay. Nothing can tempt Christ to grow cold in His love for us. When He sets His love upon us, He doesn't do it because we're lovely; He determines to love us and He continues to love us. By His love, He makes us the lovely people God created us to be until we finally stand in His glorious presence, conformed to His image and we finally reach the alchemy of human existence which is to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge (Ephesians 3:19). We're filled with all the fullness of God and this is the destiny of God's children—to stand in His presence and know we are loved with a love that cannot ever be diminished or decay, a love that will endure forever.

So much of our sadness stems from thinking that Christ's love is like our own; it's not. It surpasses knowledge.

4. **God wants you to know that you are loved.**

This prayer is here to encourage us that God is able to give us the ability to comprehend that which is humanly incomprehensible. The English Standard Version (ESV) Study Bible says, "To know what surpasses knowledge is the sublime privilege of the Christian." This is the highest experience a human being can have—"*...to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...*"—to experience it. We know from this passage that God wants us to experience it because verse 17 says we have been "*...rooted and grounded in love...*"

We have a botanical image and an architectural image coming together here. Love is the soil in which we've been planted by God. In that soil by the strength of His Spirit, we grow into maturity. We can't make any growth or progress in the Christian life outside that soil. You can never think too much of God's love for you in Christ. You can never overdose on this truth. Never. You transplant yourself out of that love and you think, "I'm just going to work really hard at becoming a holier person and be more obedient. I'll deal with the love stuff later." You're not going to make any progress; you will just keep getting thwarted. You are rooted in the soil of God's love and that's how you grow up into maturity in Christ. Don't tell me you want to serve a God you don't believe loves you. You've got to know that He loves you before you want to become more and more obedient and like Him. It's His love that moves and sanctifies you.

Then being grounded or established in love is the architectural image and the foundation on which we are built. God built us on that foundation. He wants us to know that we're loved.

I love verse 18. We see here that this love is for "...*all the saints...*" I think that's important because I don't think we can grow in our knowledge of God's love unless we're doing it in fellowship with the saints, unless we want to share that experience together with one another and we want that love to spread and overflow into our communities, to reach the broken and the lost and the poor and the needy and our neighbors who don't know this love of Christ. It's for all the saints and it's a love that's as shoreless and endless as eternity is infinitely vast in its dimensions.

Paul is out of words to describe it in verse 18: "...*the breadth and length and height and depth...*" of the love of Christ.

- **Breadth** speaks of what the love of Christ is able to cover. How far can His love spread? If there's a boundary beyond which Christ's love is not able to spread and cover, then we are lost because sin spreads and covers us like leprosy. Praise God that the love of Christ is an ocean vast of blessing. There is no boundary over which His love cannot cross for those who trust in Him.
 - The **length** of Christ's love refers to how far His love can reach. Not only does sin spread like leprosy, it can carry us far, far away like the woman in Honduras who was carried away by Hurricane Mitch. She stepped out into that current and soon she found herself way, way out in the Caribbean Sea with no way back. That's what sin does to us; we step into the drift of sin and we find ourselves far from home. We don't know how to find our way back but the love of Christ is long enough to reach us. His arm is not shortened that He cannot save (Isaiah 59:1). If I take the wings of the morning and dwell on the outer-most parts of the sea, even there His hand shall lead me and His right hand shall hold me (Psalm 139:9-10).
 - The **height** of His love refers to the fact that there are enemies that are taller than we are, like Goliath was to David (1 Samuel 17); like the Anakim who dwelt in the Promised Land and before whom the Israelites were trembling (Deuteronomy 1-2; Joshua 14); like the principalities and powers of this present evil-age that threaten us (Ephesians 6:12). His love is higher than all that. His love is higher than Heaven itself and that's good news because if it's up to me to figure out how I'm going to get there, I'm never going to reach it. I can't find a way to ascend to Heaven on my own. But the love of Christ is high enough and He becomes for me a ladder sent from Heaven down to earth. His Spirit carries me. He is the way into the heavenly places.
 - His love has a **depth**; it's deeper than all my despair; deeper than all my doubt; deeper than all my sorrow; deeper than my worst affliction. There is no pit so deep that Christ's love is not deeper still.

How broad, how long, how high, how deep is the love of Christ; it surpasses knowledge. John Stott says, "The love of Christ is broad enough to encompass all mankind, long enough to

last for all eternity, deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner, high enough to exalt him to heaven.” God wants you to know this love. To know the Father is to know the Son and to know the Son is to know the Father.

Father, for this dear flock, for every mother in this church, for everyone who is mourning today, for everyone who is troubled in spirit, for everyone who feels at a distance from You, for everyone who is running far from You, I pray that Your Spirit would strengthen each one. I pray that for our elders and staff, for our deacons. I pray, Lord, that You would strengthen us in our inner being to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Do that for every member of this church, Father, so when we go into this community, we will be sweeter, kinder people; more tender-hearted. Take away the hard edges, Lord. Work in the hearts of parents whose relationship with their children has become filled with tension; where harshness is the dominant note instead of tenderhearted care. God, work off those hard edges. Melt the iciness of our hearts where worship has just become routine and drudgery.

Oh, pour out Your love afresh that we would sing a fountain of praise to our God with a new song in our mouths. Thank You that we can know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge because of Your Holy Spirit Who is alive and indwelling us and working for us. Holy Spirit, we praise You for Your heart-strengthening ministry today. Father, we praise You for the depths of Your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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