



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

TRANSCRIPT

Ephesians 3:14-21

“Paul’s Prayer for the Power of Knowledge”

[Audio begins] For the Scripture reading this morning I want you to turn with me to one of Paul’s prayers in the Letter to the Ephesians. So will you turn with me to the 3rd chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians and will you listen as I read beginning with the 14th verse of chapter 3. In many of our editions of the English New Testament verse 13 is given a place which indicates that the editors of the text regarded verse 13 as part of Paul’s prayer. I think it’s understandable, but at the same time I do think that verse 13 really belongs with verses 1 through 12 and is something of the conclusion of that section. In other words, after having said what he said in verses 1 through 12 Paul says, “Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” And now with verse 14 he turns to his prayer in the light of what has been said we will point out previously in chapter 2 verses 19 through 22, interrupted by this somewhat parenthetical section of chapter 3 verse 1 through 13,

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May

be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; (now this reference is somewhat indefinite as you can see. One might ask Paul if he were to stop here, well the breadth, length, height of what Paul? The following clause probably explains what Paul is speaking about) And to know the love of Christ, (and so we are to regard the breadth, the length, the depth, and height as a reference to his love. There are other ways of interpreting it and I would not want to be dogmatic at this point, but I do think that is what Paul means. So what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height? Paul would have us to comprehend, but he would also wish us) to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus (now you can see I am modifying our text at this point in order to harmonize with what is, in my opinion, the reading of our better Greek manuscripts. And so we are to take this then as) Unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] We’re thankful Lord that we’re able to gather again to listen to the Scriptures, respond to their teaching through the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us. And we pray as we consider in a moment a section from the Scriptures that the Spirit may teach us and may we be strengthened in our inner man in order that we may be able to comprehend the love of Christ, to know his deep indwelling within us, and also that we may be filled unto all the fullness of God. We know Lord that these things that the apostle requests for the Ephesians are things that Thou dost desire for us and we pray that through Thy grace we may be enabled to attain to them, not for our glory or for our own enjoyment, but in order that the purposes of our God may be accomplished through us as

instrumentalities. For we know from this very portion of Scripture that Thou hast a purpose of the ages, which Thou art carrying out.

And so Lord we pray that Thou wilt accomplish Thy purposes through us to Thy glory. Give us Lord a deep sense of the majesty of our God, of Thy holiness, of Thy justice, of Thy mercy, of Thine incomprehensibility by human understanding. And of all of the attributes that make Thee out to be what Thou art the eternal God. And so Lord, as we think of spiritual things, may our thoughts be directed by Thee to Thy glory. We know from this very portion of the Word that there is a power that worketh in us and may it have its free course within us today. Again Lord, we pray for the country in which we live. We pray for the leadership of it. We pray that Thou wilt guide and direct us in the days in which we live. We pray for our president. We pray for those that are in authority with him, not only on the national level, but on other levels of our society. We pray that Thy purposes may be accomplished through them and in them.

We pray particularly today for the entire church of Jesus Christ and ask Lord that the whole body, united to our Lord by his saving work, may sense this power that works in us, may respond to it, and may grow unto, as Paul says, the perfect man. May each one of us find our place within that body, minister the gifts that Thou hast in grace given. That each one, each joint, each part of the body may have its part in the edification of itself in love. We commit to Thee each one present this morning to Thee and know Lord that there are many here who have concerns, and questions, and anxieties, which they have committed to Thee. We pray oh God that Thou wilt minister to them.

For some who may be here who do not have these anxieties but nevertheless should feel a deeper sense of need of Thee we pray oh God that Thou wilt convict and bring to that place. And Lord if there should be some here, who have not yet come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way, though they may have heard the gospel many times, may this be the day when they respond to him. Bless the ministry of the Word. May it

accomplish all of these ends if it should please Thee, our sovereign God. We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] All students of the Epistle to the Ephesians recognize that the prayer of chapter 3 is the second of Paul’s prayers in this letter. The first one had as its primary aim that God would give to the Ephesians the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, and thus it was a prayer for divine revelation. Now if we were speaking theologically we would not say revelation, which has been finally given to us, but we would say illumination, and I think that the apostle is asking for this. That is, he asking for illumination on the part of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who have believed in Jesus Christ concerning the things that he has done. In the 3rd chapter his prayer is not so much for revelation or illumination. It is for the realization of the truth that has been revealed since the apostle has given us the first prayer.

And the truth that he has set forth in chapter 2 is the truth of the union of Jew and Gentile in the one body the church. It is an amazing thing to comprehend it, because you see in ages past, as he says in the 11th verse of the 2nd chapter the Gentiles were called “uncircumcision” by that which is called circumcision in the flesh made with hands. They were without the Messiah. They were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. They were strangers from the covenants of promise. They had no hope and they were without God in the world. But since the Messiah has come and has accomplished in his blood the new covenant, and since the provisions of that covenant contained blessing for Gentiles, Israel to be the agent of that blessing, “now in Christ Jesus we who are Gentiles, who were far off have been made nigh by the blood of Christ.”

Now Paul expounds that. He points out that these two great entities, Jews on the one hand, the nations on the other, are now one in the one body which is the church. And in the latter part of chapter 2, verses 19 and following he says, “Now therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and of the

household of God and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple, spiritual temple, in the Lord.” Now a temple is the place where sacrifices and worship are offered to God, and so consequently the church, the living organism of the body of believers, is a temple and in that temple there should be offered up the sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving and in that temple there should be carried on the true worship which is ours by virtue of Jesus Christ’s work. And he adds in the 22nd verse of the 2nd verse, “In whom ye also are builded together for inhabitation of God through the Spirit.” And so Gentiles who formerly were far off are now nigh through Jesus Christ. Not only nigh, but by virtue of the progress of the revelation of God, his redemptive program, we now have not only become members of the commonwealth, fellowship, having fellowship with the saints but we have actually been made something uniquely new, a holy temple in the Lord, and God has come to dwell in our hearts individually as well as collectively by the Spirit.

Now I think that at this point Paul intended to pray the prayer that he prays in the latter part of this chapter. You will note that verse 1 begins precisely the same as verse 14. He says, “For which cause” and in the Greek text, you know I am very happy to notice a number of you are bringing your Greek texts. And I understand that there are from six to ten taking the Advanced Greek course and not surprisingly, some of our young people have turned out to be excellent Greek students. Some of the young people surprisingly seem to have a little more knack at it than some of the older ones. And this is very astounding to me of course, that some of the ladies seem to manifest an understanding of Greek that surpasses the men.

Now I don’t know how to explain that in the light of the Bible, [Laughter] but nevertheless I understand that it is happening, and this is causing a tremendous metamorphosis in my thinking. It’s upsetting me terribly, [Laughter] but it’s happening and it’s delightful to know that a number of you are reading the Greek text. And so if

you’re looking at your Greek text, and I hope you are, you’ll notice that the expression which begins verse 1 is the same as the expression which begins verse 14, “For this cause” or “For which cause, I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ” and I think what he intended to do was this, “For this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” But Paul was a human person and in his writings you can notice his humanity, for when he said, “this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles” well that little prepositional phrase diverted him and so he digressed into an explanation of his relationship to the propagation and to the promulgation of this great truth of the oneness of Gentile and Jew in the body of Christ. And so in verses 2 through 13 he expounds the significance of this particular age in which we are living and how through the redemptive program of God Jew and Gentile now are fellow heirs of the same body, partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.

I’ve said to my students at the seminary that it is a Pauline disease to be diverted by certain expressions, and if you will examine Paul’s style I think you will concur that that is true. He has the habit of being led astray by certain things that he says. Now I’m glad that he was led astray because often the things that he tells us when he is led astray are some of the great truths of the Word. No one would question but that this parenthesis of verses 2 through 13 is one of the great sections of Paul’s letters. And in it he gives us, in a sense, God’s parenthetical dealing with the Gentiles in this age. And I think it’s rather striking that he should set forth God’s parenthetical dealing with us during this age while Israel is being disciplined by God in a parenthesis, in the literary sense.

But we want to look at the prayer and the purpose of this prayer is very simple. He has set forth for us a tremendous spiritual truth that Jews and Gentiles are now united in one body, that we have become the habitation of God in the Spirit. Now Paul would like for us to realize this in our experience, because you see while it is a wonderful thing for us to know these truths it is even more significant that we should also realize them in

our lives. And so this prayer is not a prayer for revelation, it is a prayer for the realization of the truth that he has just set forth. He will then in the 4th chapter exhort us to walk worthy of the calling wherewith we have been called. And I think that if I were to put this all together I would say that what Paul wants us to know is this; it is important to know the truth and it is important to exhibit the truth, as he will exhort us in the chapters that follow. But in order to exhibit the truth we must know that truth in experience. And that is the purpose of his prayer, that the truth may become a reality to us. The truth that we know with our heads; that has been revealed to us by the Spirit may be known in our hearts in order that we may exhibit it in our lives. And so this prayer is a key step in the attainment of the objectives of God in our lives, according to Paul.

It is made up of three parts. There is first, an opening introduction, which I’m going to call homiletically preparation, the posture for prayer. It is then made up of a body of petitions, which set forth Paul’s purposes in the prayer. And finally, it concludes with a doxology or praise, and a praise or doxology in which the power for the fulfillment of the prayer is explicitly given.

Now let’s look first at the posture for prayer. “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I do not think that we are justified in saying that the only way to pray is to get down upon our knees. It seems obvious from the things that are said in the word of God that it is perfectly alright for us to pray in all types of posture. It would seem to me if you were an odd or peculiar kind of person if you want to go out into your play room and hang by your feet from the ceiling and pray with your head down and your feet up, well God would probably answer that prayer. I think he would answer it with a smile, but nevertheless [Laughter] he would probably answer that prayer. But it is interesting that in the Bible this idea of prayer is associated with the idea of bowing, and it seems obvious to me that to get down upon your knees suggests humility and earnest entreaty. Some of you may never have gotten down upon your knees except once when you asked your wife to marry you. But that was a posture of humility and

earnest entreaty. At least I hope it was. And it seems to me that this is the primary thing that Paul wants to suggest to us by the fact that he bows his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is suggesting that when we come to God it is proper to come in a sense of humility and it is proper to come in the sense of dependence upon him. It is proper to assume outwardly that which suggests earnest entreaty of a superior. So, in Paul’s language I think this suggests the kind of posture that he himself often took when he prayed. And so I’m never embarrassed when someone gets down on their knees to pray to God. I think this is the proper way to do it. But I don’t think we should legalistically set it forth as the only way.

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father.” Now this is Paul’s lesson in, or from, the Lord’s prayer. You remember that Jesus said, “Our Father which art in heaven.” Now that seems so common to us in the 20th Century because we’ve heard it repeated for generations in our protestant churches in the United States. It has become part of the ritual of many of them. I grew up in a church in which we repeated the Lord’s prayer every Sunday morning. Now I did not, I was not there mentally a lot of the times, but I was there physically. And I was repeating the prayer. When I was a child I did not understand what I was saying. I can remember that I, when the minister said, “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name” I thought he was saying “how”, h-o-w, will be Thy name. And I thought that was strange language, but that’s the way I repeated it for years, “How will be Thy name.” And I repeated it with a little bit of wonderment about what in the world that could mean, [Laughter] until finally, one day I looked at the Bible. And I discovered that he was pronouncing “hallowed.” Now you of course would not think anything strange about that because most of the men that I listened to were southerners and so what should you expect, [Laughter] but to not recognize the word. Well I didn’t recognize the word, but we repeated it. Sunday after Sunday, the Lord’s prayer.

Now we think this is, it’s so common to us that we do not realize that this is the only time, up to this time, that anyone ever addressed God as his own Father. Now isn’t that a striking thing? When Jewish people heard Jesus Christ pray, “Our Father which art in heaven” they would’ve said immediately, “Now wait a minute, can we really say that? Can we really say ‘our Father?’” There are a few passages in the Old Testament that refer to God as the Father of Israel, but for someone to pray to his Father in heaven, that is absolutely unique. And our Lord brought us that uniqueness in prayer. It was something that would have startled his contemporaries. Here is man who speaks of God as his Father, and invites us to also address God as our Father. Now Paul learned his lesson well. “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father” and he says “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” because he is the Father, there is no other Father but him. And when we come to him of course, we should come in the sense of the little stanza, “Thou art coming to a King, large petitions with thee bring, for his grace and power are such, none can ever ask too much.” “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

This could be rendered “every family” and some commentators have debated that as their interpretation of this phrase, “of whom every family in heaven and earth is named.” If that is true then the apostle would be thinking perhaps of the family of Israel, the family of the church, the family of the angels, the family of the hierarchies, the families of the hierarchies of the angels, but that seems strange since the thing that he has been speaking about has been this union of Jew and Gentile in one body. And he has not been speaking about many different entities, but he has been speaking about this one entity. So I am inclined to think that the rendering of our Authorized Version is correct. Now, we don’t have time to justify this from the Greek text of course, but I think it can be justified in this case. And so I render it “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”

In other words, he is speaking about this one body of our Lord Jesus, composed of Jew and Gentiles, which makes up the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, and I hope you won’t be mad at me for making a few personal applications at this point. But if there is such a thing as the whole family, and there is not such a thing as different little families of God scattered out all over the surface of the earth and in heaven, I think then we are not justified at all in speaking in a denominational fashion. Now I’m not attacking denominations, oh yes I am really. [Laughter] As a matter of fact, I’m attacking the very foundation of denominationalism, but I want to do it doctrinally. I don’t want to do it as a personal kind of attack. I surely do not have any thing in mind against any one personally.

What I’m really trying to say is something doctrinally. If it is true that there is just one family, if it is true that there is just one body, if it is true that there is just one church, then it seems to me out of harmony with that doctrine to speak of the Baptist church as over against another church, the Presbyterian church as over against another church, the Anglican church as over against another church. In other words, it seems to me thoroughly contrary to the spirit of the New Testament to say, “I belong to a certain church” in distinction from the body of Christ. It seems to me thoroughly in harmony with Scripture that we should say that we are members of the body of Christ, we are members of the church. It seems to me also thoroughly contrary for us to say, “Now I’m a member of Believers Chapel Church.” Well that surely is contrary to the feeling of the elders. When they established this work they conceived of this building as not a church at all, but this as a place where a portion of the church of Jesus Christ might meet. And that’s why we called it Believers Chapel. In other words, it is a meeting place in which believers gather, members of the body of Jesus Christ. And so when Paul says “of the whole family” I think that anything that practically denies that would not be held in sympathy by the Apostle Paul. I think therefore that when a person speaks about “our churches” and he means by that our particular brand of churches, he’s out of harmony

with Paul. If he were to speak about our family in the sense of our family, that is, our denomination, he’s not in keeping with the spirit of Paul. Paul’s vision was broad enough to include all who have believed in Jesus Christ and they belong in that one body of Jesus Christ. Now then, I’m through with that. I’m going to leave it, I think. [Laughter]

I want you to notice one other thing. The apostle says, “of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.” Harry Ironside, who has written a commentary on most of the books of the Bible, has said, “If Saint Paul were a soul sleeper,” that is if he believed that when we died our soul fell asleep and we did not really go into the presence of the Lord but were later revived for a final judgment, “If Saint Paul were a soul sleeper he would’ve said, ‘of whom the whole family in the grave and on earth is named’ but he says, ‘of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named’ in token of the fact that the other part of the family which has preceded us in to the life beyond this life, they are in heaven with our Lord.” Now that I think is biblical doctrine, for “to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.”

But let’s come to Paul’s petitions now, for these express his purposes in prayer. By the way, just a word of practical advise. Christians often wonder, “What should I pray when I get down on my knees?” I used to remember when I used to think that way myself, “Now what shall I pray? I’m told by preachers to pray and so here I am on my knees, what shall I say?” And after I’ve uttered a few personal petitions, like bless my wife, bless my family, provide for my needs, I’m through. What shall I pray? A long time ago someone suggested to me, “Well what better prayers could you pray than prayer patterned after the prayers of the apostles in the New Testament?” And so the petitions of the apostles are often on my lips, because I don’t have to say, “Is this the will of God?” Many of my petitions, before I utter them, if they’re personal I have to say, “Now is this in accord with the will of God?” And those that I think may be I go ahead and offer. And some I’m not sure about I offer them too. Those that I think are outside of those will then I try to keep from offering them. But ones that I know I can pray always with the

assurance that they are prayers in the will of God, are the prayers of the apostles. And I must confess that many times I have been upon my knees praying Ephesians chapter 3, verse 16 through verse 19, Ephesians chapter 1, and the other prayers of the Apostle Paul and the others that are recorded in Scripture.

And this one I think is a wonderful prayer because it sets for us this desire that we realize this great spiritual truth that he’s been speaking about. And I think that we can divide Paul’s petitions into three parts. You would expect a preacher to think that. Now in the English text of our translation, verses 16 through 19, there are four “that’s.” But in the Greek text the structure is such that the “that” of verse 16 and the second “that” of verse 17, not the first “that,” and the “that” of verse 19 are precisely the same construction in the Greek. They are what we would call *benna* clauses with the subjunctive. Now therefore, I think it is most likely that the apostle in these three petitions is giving us the heart of his prayer.

And the first one is a prayer for empowerment. He says, “that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man in order that Christ” or so that Christ, “may dwell in your hearts by faith.” That’s the first petition. In other words, it is a prayer for empowerment that we might realize the indwelling of Jesus Christ in our hearts by faith. That seems a strange petition. Are we not taught in the Bible that when we believe in Jesus Christ he comes to dwell in our hearts? Should we pray for something that is already a fact of our experience? Should we really pray, “Oh God empower me so that Jesus Christ may dwell in my heart” when in his Bible, in his Word, he has told me that if I have believed in Jesus Christ not only is Jesus Christ dwelling in my heart but he Holy Spirit is dwelling there and the Father as well.

Now why should I pray this? It has been pointed out by many Bible interpreters that the word that Paul uses for dwelling in verse 17 is not the common word for dwelling. The common word for dwelling is the Greek word *oiketo*, but this is an

intensive word. It is the word *katoiketo*, which means in some contexts to be a permanent dweller. If for example, you had come to Dallas for the Bill Gothard meetings and you were making as your pad Holiday Inn, it could not be said that you were *katoiketo-ing* in Dallas. You were sojourning here. You were *paroiketo-ing* here in Dallas, but you were not *katoiketo-ing* here in Dallas. To be a *katoiketo* dweller in Dallas one must be a permanent resident. And throughout the New Testament this is the general sense of the word. It means more than to dwell. It means to dwell deeply. It means to have your roots down deeply. It means to experience to the fullness of its idea, residence. And so commentators have thought that perhaps that’s Paul’s sense. What he is really praying then is not that we might be empowered by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may take up his residence in our hearts, but rather that Christ may so reside in our hearts that we know in experience the depth of his indwelling. I am inclined to think that is something of what Paul must have in mind. And so he is really praying that Jesus Christ may dominate in our lives. That Jesus Christ may control our lives. That Jesus Christ may have the full access to all parts of our lives. That he may be a permanent resident there and have the fullness of access that belongs to him by virtue of his atoning work. And so I would pray, “Oh Jesus Christ grow Thou in me, in all things else recede. My heart be daily nearer Thee, from sin be daily free,” by his permanent indwelling and by his deep indwelling, by giving him the access to all parts of my heart and life. That I think is Paul’s first petition. He wants us to so know this; the fact that we are the habitation of God in the Spirit that our Lord’s deep indwelling within us may be a personal experience.

May I ask you a question? Do you really know much about this? Is this something strange to you? Or is it the breath of your daily experience that Jesus Christ may dwell in my heart by faith. Now I don’t think that Paul put “by faith” in order to weaken this expression. I think really he put “by faith” in order to strengthen it, because after all the only way that we know the things of God is by faith. The most beautiful

object might be in the apartment or in the dwelling of a blind man, and he be not sensible of its presence. If he is made aware of its nearness he could have no delight in its beauty. Christ dwells in us by faith because it is by faith that we comprehend what his indwelling really means. It is by faith that we perceive his presence. It is by faith that we understand his excellence, his glory. It’s by faith we appropriate and reciprocate the manifestations of his presence within us. In other words, it is by trust in what God has said in his Word, by the reckoning upon these facts as truths. It’s just as simple as that. If God has said it, it is true. And by faith I rely upon it and come to the experience of it. So the first petition then for Paul is the prayer for empowerment.

The next is a petition for enablement. He says in verse 18, “that ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.” Commentators and students of Ephesians 3 have puzzled a great deal over what Paul meant by length, height, breadth, depth. Dimensions belong to a building. And so it has been thought that perhaps Paul is praying that we might understand the temple, that is, the church that has been constructed by the saving work of Christ. Well that is a possible interpretation. Others have thought that since the immediately preceding context is an unfolding of the eternal purpose of God, he mentions that in verse 11, “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” that Paul must mean that “ye being rooted and grounded and rooted in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth the length the depth and height of the eternal purpose of God.” But it’s not Paul’s custom to give us nouns without defining them and this surely would be that. We have to look around in the context there half a dozen things in the context we might point to and say, “Well Paul’s talking about that. He’s talking about mercy to the Gentiles. He’s talking about redemption. He’s talking about the great plan of God from eternity to eternity, parts or the whole of it.”

I’m inclined to think that what Paul really is referring to is stated in the clause that follows and that the distinction in these words is not so much in the objects as if he’s talking about the program of God and then the love of Christ. But rather he’s talking about comprehending and then knowing, for you see it is one thing to comprehend with our minds. It is another thing to know in experience. And again if you’re a Greek student you, as you look at the second word “to know” you discover that it is not the common word for knowledge that means inherent knowledge. But it’s the word for knowledge that is acquired through experience. It really is the term that means to come to know. And hence, when Paul says, “and to know the love of Christ” he’s not saying the same thing as comprehending. And so what he would like for us to do is not only to know and comprehend the love of Christ, but also to have some feel of it, some experience of it in our lives. That is what he’s talking about. And he thinks of the greatness of the love of Christ in such a way that he can speak of it as “the breadth and the length and the height and the depth.” And he can speak of it in the figure of a giant building, for that is what the love of Christ is. And so I think the second clause explains the sense of the first, giving us the genitives that go with those dimensions. And so I think that what he means is that we should be able to comprehend with our minds with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height of the love of Christ but also to know it in experience.

Now then, if that is what Paul means then we have another interesting thing. He says that we should be rooted and grounded in love in order to be able to comprehend the love of Christ. Now isn’t that strange that you should be rooted and grounded in love in order to understand love? What does Paul mean? Well he’s talking about great spiritual truths. He’s saying that if the Ephesians saints are going to grow in the knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ they must have some experience of love as well.

In fact, one student has said, “The apostle means that the Ephesian saints would grow in the knowledge of that love by growing into the likeness of that love. Blessed are

the pure in heart for they shall see God. The truths of God are by them spiritually discerned.” The commentator goes on to say, “There is a deep philosophy in this matter. Men cannot understand each other except so far as they have the radical elements of the same experiences in themselves.” If I say to you, “I was cold this morning in my car” you know what I’m speaking about because you have been cold. If I should say to you, “Now I’m getting warmer” then you understand because I hope you’re getting warmer too. You have had that experience.

So people who have similar experiences are able to understand the experiences that are similar to them. People of dissimilar tempers often do not understand each other. Scholars do not understand ordinary people because they often are not ordinary people. Ordinary people do not understand scholars because if they are ordinary people they may not be scholars. A common man does not understand a man of high refinement. A man who has no culture at all has a very difficult time understanding a man of deep culture. And a man of culture has a difficult time understanding a man who does not have any culture. A man who is a moody kind of man does not understand a man who is constantly stable. The person who is up one day and down the next has a difficult time understanding the fellow who seems to walk on the same plane all the time, like I do.
[Laughter]

Now, I’m very moody. One day I’m up, the next day I’m down. Fortunately, God’s word abides the same and I rely on that, but I am up one day and down the next, and so it’s difficult for me to understand a person who moves on one plane of life. A man who is not a poetic genius can never understand a poet. A man who has no sense of the arts has a difficult time understanding a person who does. And a man who does has a difficult time understanding the others. There are some of you in the audience who love what you call, quote, good, unquote, music. Now I love “good music” as well, but my kind of music might not be your kind of music. Now I don’t dislike opera, but I must confess that I’m thrilled a little more by Pete Fountain than most of the operas I listen to.

[Laughter] And Al Hurt does something for me that some of the operas have never done. I admit that occasionally the operas affect me also, but not always in the way in which I am supposed to be affected [Laughter] and so I don’t have complete understanding and appreciation of others who appreciate what they call good music. That I’m sure is my failing. A person who is in one moment in the height of sentimental ecstasy, next in the moment, next in the depths of despair, well I sympathize with that kind of person.

Now then, Paul says, “ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all the saints the length, breadth, depth and height, and to know the love of Christ.” So as we experience the love of God and in measure carry out the love of God implanted in our hearts we thus are prepared to grow further in the appreciation of the love of Jesus Christ. And so it’s not surprising that he should say, “that ye being rooted and grounded in love might come to know the love of Christ,” for what he would like for us to do is to become a person of similar temperament, and thus come to understand the love of God for us.

Now isn’t it interesting too that he says “to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge.” That seems strange. Why should he tell us to know the love of Christ which we cannot know? Well, I think we can illustrate this by a simple illustration. We may know exactly how many gallons of water are in a cistern. We may know exactly how many gallons of water are in a reservoir, but who can know the extent of a spring, which comes from the deep rocks of the substrata of the earth? But yet we know the spring. We just don’t know its depths. Who does not know his wife? But who knows his wife completely? Who does not know her husband? But who knows her husband completely? That’s so obvious. It’s possible for us to know a person, but not really to know them completely. Even after thirty years of marriage we still hear people saying, “I don’t understand you.” And just usually in that tone of voice too. “I don’t understand you. I’m completely puzzled by you. I’ve only lived with you for forty years, but I’m puzzled.” But if someone would say, “Do you know him?” “Know him? He’s my

husband” or “She’s my wife.” You might even say “He’s my wife” in the day in which we’re living, [Laughter] but I hope that is not true among us. In other words, it is possible to know something that is ultimately unknowable. And so we can know the love of Christ but we can also recognize that it is unknowable.

Now Paul’s third prayer is a prayer for the achievement of likeness to God, “that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.” Now Paul is speaking very practically in this section, so I do not think that we should render that “filled with all the fullness of God.” Positionally we have been filled with all the fullness of God because in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily he says in Colossians, “and ye are filled full in him.” We possess within ourselves the fullness of the Godhead bodily because we possess Jesus Christ in the Spirit. And since we possess him in the Spirit we possess all the fullness of God. That is our position, but our practice is far from it. And as long as we are in the flesh we shall never be filled practically with all the fullness of God. You will never be able to look at me and see all the fullness of God. The Greek preposition may be rendered “unto” and I think that is the way it should be rendered here. What Paul is praying is that your filling, your fullness, may be directed toward the fullness of God and grow toward that, but it will never comprehend that completely in experience in this life. And so his prayer is for the achievement of a likeness to God which cannot be fully realized as long as we are in the flesh, but that is to be our aim.

Now I don’t think there is ever a bolder request made than Paul’s request in these verses. Is it all an idle dream? Is it possible, really, for me to be empowered in such a way that I experience the deep indwelling of Jesus Christ? Is it possible for me to be so enabled that I may comprehend with my mind and know in experience the surpassing love of Jesus Christ and that I might be filled unto the fullness of God? Well I think that everyone who reads this prayer would be saying the same thing that I’m saying right now, “Is this possible of attainment? Perhaps in some friend, but not in me.”

And so the apostle concludes with his doxology, which is “praise for the accomplishment of the power of realization through the indwelling power of God.” He says, verse 20, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think unto him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all ages world without end.” Now I’m going to put this in the way in which I think Paul would have expounded it. I want you to notice the sevenfold measure of his power. He says, “Now unto him that is able to do what we ask,” one. “Unto him that is able to do all that we ask,” two. “Unto him that is able to do what we think,” three. “Unto him that is able to do all that we think,” four. “Unto him that is able to above all that we ask or think,” five. “Unto him that is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think,” six. “And unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Is it possible of attainment? “Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” how? Why, “according to the power that worketh in us.”

Now I’ve been talking on sanctification to our theology class and I tried to point out to them that sanctification is the work that God carries on within us and carries on completely and will accomplish in our lives. There is no question whatsoever about it. We shall be sanctified. And I pointed out to them that if we resist the work of the Spirit of God he will overcome our resistance and sanctify us in spite of it, because I believe in the irresistible grace of God in the believer’s life as well as in the saving work to bring us into that life. The grace of God is invincible in overcoming our objections and bringing us to love God so that we might be converted and it is invincible in our lives as Christians and will bring us to conformity to Jesus Christ.

Now the proof of that is very simple. For when our Lord comes we shall be caught up to meet him in the air. We shall be changed. We shall be made like him. Our old nature shall be eradicated at that time. We’re going to be given a body like Jesus Christ. He’s going to accomplish his sanctifying work. And there is a power at work constantly in the Christian to do that. And that’s why we may look at a Christian and say,

“We have the right to see a difference in your life,” because if you’re saved the work of God is going on in your life. There is a power right there at work.

So then, is there actually power to accomplish this? Yes, it is the power of God. And Paul expresses thanks to God for it. He says, “To him that is able to do all of this, be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever.”

Now I don’t have time to expound those last few clauses. I think it’s sufficient for us to say that Paul expresses a deep thanksgiving for the assurance of the working of God in our hearts to accomplish this great prayer. And so I have in my own heart now a sense of what God is doing, what he is continually doing, what he will continually do until he brings it to accomplishment. And the subject of my prayer is going to be the prayer of the apostle and appreciation of what is going on in my life. What a tremendous thing to know that this great petition is being carried out by God in our lives. May he help us to appreciate it. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for the sanctifying ministry which Thou art engaged in, in all of our lives, the lives of those who have believed in Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for it. We look forward to the accomplishment of all Thy purposes. May we know his deep indwelling. May we know his love, which cannot be known. May we be fill...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]