

“Knowing the Unknowable”

Ephesians 3.17b – 19

INTRO:

We have been praying with the Apostle Paul in **Ephesians 3:14 -21**. Paul taught us about the arsenal of spiritual truth in the first three chapters of this epistle. Now in this prayer the Apostle is trying to equip us with the spiritual strength we need to put this arsenal of spiritual truth to work in our lives.

Paul prayed first of all that we might be strengthened with might in the inner person. Being strengthened in our inner beings is ours through a growing and expanding relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, the Apostle prayed that Christ might dwell in our hearts by faith. We discovered this mean more than coming to dwell in us, but rather to change us from the inside out. Today we will consider his second request in **vs. 17b-19**. Here is a literal translation.

“In love, having been rooted and grounded, in order that you might be extra strong to grasp together with all the saints, what is the breath, and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.”

We will start by looking at the foundation and then consider God’s revelation.

I. The Foundation (v. 17b)

II. The Revelation (v. 18-19)

I. The Foundation (v. 17b)

A. ***“In order that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”*** (Ephesians 3:17–19). The first words in **vs. 18** are key to a proper understanding of this second request that Paul makes for us, his readers. The Greek word translated ***“may be able”*** means to ***“be strong enough”*** to do something.

1. So, to accomplish the second part of Paul's request for us requires that we have a special kind of spiritual strength or enablement. If we are to grasp the unknowable, we must have a supernatural kind of strength.

2. Where does this strength come from? It comes from the strengthening in the inner person and the foundation that Paul prays for us to have here in **vs. 17b**.

B. So, Paul writes in the second part of **vs. 17**, ***“having been rooted and grounded in love.”*** The grammar suggests that these are both realities that should be permanent in our lives. The first reality is that we should have been rooted in love.

1. The picture is of a tree. There are several implications from this picturesque word. First, roots speak of stability. Roots reach out and take hold of the earth so the tree can grow up and reach for the sky. Roots are what give a tree its tremendous strength and stability. Paul says that having been rooted in love, we might be stable – strong enough to withstand storms of life.

2. Roots are also the source of nourishment for the tree. The moisture, minerals, and other materials that the tree needs are all drawn from the soil through the roots. So, we also must draw the sustenance for our spiritual life from our roots in His love. This is not all together different from our Lord's exhortation in **John 15** to abide in Him!

3. The picture of the tree and its roots also speaks of life and growth. Did you ever cut a tree down and look at its growth rings? It is a record of the kind of year that tree had. If the ring is large, the year was good and the tree enjoyed great growth. If the ring is thin, the year was hard and the tree grew little. If God were to display the growth rings of our spiritual life, would they not be similar? Sometimes we grew rapidly and sometime slowly, if at all. But there must be growth, if there is life! May **Psalm 1:3** be a picture of our lives.

"He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper."

C. Not only are we rooted in His love, we are also **"grounded."** The first picture is of a tree, the second of a building.

1. The foundation provides the structural integrity of the superstructure. In Ohio, the parsonage that we lived had problems with the foundation, the doors sagged. God's love is the structural integrity of our lives.

2. The foundation is also the strength upon which we build our lives. Paul tells us here that we need to be founded on His love. Not warm fuzzy gushy love, but the love expressed in our Lord's willingness to die for us! In fact, the words, "in love" are in the emphatic position. But what love is this that we are rooted and grounded in?

II. The Revelation (v. 18-19)

A. We need this rooting and grounding in the Lord's love so that we will be strong enough to grasp the knowledge that the Lord wants us to possess. What is this tremendous revelation that the Lord wants us to have? He wants us to understand the infinite dimensions of Christ's love. So, let us explore the unknowable. Let us consider a little of the dimensions of our Lord Christ's love for us.

B. The breadth of His love may encompass the expanse of His love to all the saints. Do you remember **Revelation 5:9-12**?

“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth.’ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!’”

Clearly, the breadth of Christ's love is far beyond our ability to comprehend. This is where the Old Testament Jew failed. They thought that God's love only included Jewish people. They did not comprehend the truth that in Christ God loves Gentiles and Jews, bond and free.

C. The length of His love probably refers to the endless character of His love. Consider when Christ's love for us began. **(Ephesians 1:4)**

“Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.”

Before the world was formed, He loved us. In time His love was expressed in that He died for us and saved us. **(Romans 5:8)**

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

D. The depth of His love is seen in the depths to which He was willing to go to save us! This of course brings us to that tremendous statement of divine condescension in **Philippians 2:5-8.**

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

He was willing to give up everything that was rightfully His to die for us and to save us from our sin.

E. Finally we come to the height of his love. I think that height is summed up in John's divine editorial comment in **John 13:1**

“Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”

To what heights will His love bring us?

This is just a partial understanding of the vastness of our Lord's love for us. Is this God's love for you? Do you know this love in salvation? Do you want to know? The way to know is found in a hymn written by a 12th century monk named **Bernard of Clairvaux**. He wrote:

*Jesus the very thought of Thee
with sweetness fills my breast
But sweeter far Thy face to see
And in Thy presence rest*

*But what to those who find? Ah this
Nor tongue or pen can show
The love of Jesus what it is
None but His loved ones know.*