

The New Minister's Prayer for the New Congregation sermonaudio.com
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Bible Text: Ephesians 3:16-19
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We turn in sacred scripture to Ephesians 3. Ephesians 3 the text is verses 16 through 19. We will first read the chapter in its entirety. A few notes before we carry out the scripture reading, three things, three comments. First, the main theme of the book of Ephesians is the church as the body of Christ. That theme carries through in each chapter, the church as the body of Christ. We'll touch on that in the sermon. Second, as you may know, in many of Paul's letters, if not all of them, the letter is divided into two parts. The first part, sometimes referred to as the doctrinal part or the indicative part where Paul gives an explanation of who God is for his people, what God has done for his people and what God is doing; and the second part which explains now or which gives the imperative, which now gives the exhortations for God's people, in light of who you are, be who you are. And here in the book of Ephesians it's the same thing. In chapter 3, we come to the end of the first section, so it's leading up to the second section, it's the end of that first section. And then the third comment, notice verse 1, Ephesians 3:1, "For this cause I Paul." In chapter 2, he speaks of what the church is as made-up of Jews and Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles, although very different yet are one body. The middle wall of partition has been taken away and Jews and Gentiles are one body and now he says, "For this cause." And then in the first half of chapter 3, I think the best way to understand it is that there is a tangent, Paul goes off into a little bit of a tangent explaining his calling to the ministry. And then notice verse 14, chapter 3, verse 14, "For this cause," and I believe the best way to understand that is that in verse 14 he picks up where he was going to go in verse 1, but he went off on a tangent. So as we read chapter 3, bear that in mind.

Chapter 3, verse 1.

1 For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, 2 If ye have heard of the dispensation [the stewardship] of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: 3 How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4 Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 5 Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; 6 That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: 7 Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual

working of his power. 8 Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; 9 And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: 10 To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11 According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: 12 In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. 13 Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory [Paul was in prison when he wrote this letter]. 14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. 20 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, 21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

So far we read God's holy word.

The text is verses 16 through 19.

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, before we delve into the details of this text, there are three things that I think we should notice together right away, three points to observe by way of introduction. First of all, what we should notice is that this is a prayer obviously, and one thing we should notice about these kinds of prayers in scripture is this: if this is something that the apostle, the inspired apostle is praying, then this is something that we need otherwise he wouldn't be praying for it. The apostle is praying that the saints in Ephesus might know the vastness of Jesus' love for them. And what that emphasizes is that this is our deep need, and we can't really emphasize that enough. In our everyday lives in both the big moments and the small moments, the hard moments and the easy moments, we need to know the love of Jesus Christ for us. How vital for God's people that they know Jesus' love for them and that they know it well because there are many difficulties in this earthly valley of tears.

A second thing we should notice is that this is an inspired prayer, and that it is an inspired prayer tells us that this is also God's will for us. The Holy Spirit moved the apostle to pray this because this is the Holy Spirit's will for the church of Jesus Christ. This is God's purpose that we might be very intimately acquainted with the beauties and the perfections of Jesus' love for us. And in one way or another, God will cause his people to know his love for them. That's really what life is about, over and over again seeing God's faithfulness and seeing God's love for us from one point of view and now again from another point of view.

Now a third thing, a slightly different thing that we should notice about this passage is that there is a difference here between the Apostle Paul and the context in which he writes to the Ephesians and the context here in Grace Protestant Reformed Church that we have tonight. And that difference between Paul and us is this: Paul knew the saints at Ephesus intimately. On his third missionary journey, Paul spent around three years ministering to the saints at Ephesus. That was a long time. Paul knew the saints at Ephesus intimately. In fact, we read that when he departed from them, the elders met him, and they wept with him because they weren't sure they were going to see him again.

Paul knew them well. I, on the other hand, have only begun to get to know this congregation. That's a significant difference. Nevertheless, one thing that I do know about this congregation, Grace Protestant Reformed Church, is this: this church is a hurting church. Among many other things that could be said about Grace Protestant Reformed Church, that she is a Reformed Church, that she is a true church, that she is a faithful church, that she is a loving church. What can also be said is this: she is also a hurting church. There's really no other way to put it. This is a church that has been betrayed, and I want to say that publicly as the new pastor because I think that's helpful. We don't have to dwell on that, but I think it's helpful to recognize and acknowledge that iso that as we go forward, we understand a man vested with authority, given a high office in the church, highly esteemed and trusted among us, took advantage of you and deceived you and betrayed your trust. And what I as your new pastor need to appreciate is that that's true not just for the specific individual victims of sexual abuse, that's true for the congregation as a whole, and every member in the congregation. The congregation as a whole was taken advantage of and your trust was betrayed by one whose calling was to protect you. And that's devastating. That's devastating.

Now different people are going to react in different ways, but whatever the case may be, the result of such a thing is that this church is a hurting church. That's a reality. Besides that reality, this church has also experienced other very painful sorrows in the last year that make it a hurting church. Multiple deaths in the last year, I think five in the last 12 months. I had five funerals in my nine years in Randolfe. One of those was the death of a faithful elder. The whole congregation is touched by these things. And besides that there are many other sorrows this church is experiencing that any other church of Jesus Christ could and is experiencing, individuals whose spouses have left them and they are very lonely, or their spouses have been oppressive and acted very wickedly towards them. You have parents who are deeply concerned about their children. They see children that are

struggling, maybe they have wayward children, or they see children that are struggling and they want to help but they don't know how to help. The children have gone through a lot. Maybe there are those who desire children, but God hasn't given them children at this time. Maybe there are some whose children are about to go off to college, move away, and although you know that the Lord has worked a love for him in their hearts, you still have a concern for them and you love them. There are denominational concerns, a controversy people still talk about. There are serious battles against sin, just to want to mention one, the statistics on pornography are staggering. I can't say it with absolute certainty yet with this congregation, but there are these kinds of struggles taking place in this congregation, too. The question is probably how great of a problem is it? It's a reality. Look at the culture around us. See the evil of the culture around us. You read in scripture Satan is walking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, and you can see that in the culture around us. It's the world we live in and it causes hurt and sorrow. Some of us have bodily infirmities, others have struggles and sorrows of the mind and the soul, and all of us as God's children feel very keenly at times that this world is a valley of tears.

My point here is, we can say without shame, but with humility, this church is a hurting church. As we heard last week's Sunday with Reverend Mattman, this church is not a clean place. The church is a hospital ward where the sick come and find healing in the mercies of Jesus. And what I want to do, both this afternoon and going forward, is to emphasize to you the love of your Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the apostle's inspired prayer for the saints whom he loves. This is the need God's people have. This is God's purpose and will for his people, and this we may also say, is my commission towards this congregation, that you might know the gospel, the good news of your Savior, Jesus Christ, that you might know the love of God towards you, that you might know the vastness, the utter vastness of the love of your Savior, Jesus Christ for you. And that as you travel through this earthly wilderness and as we travel through this valley of tears together, we might together always stand in awe of the breadth and the length and the depth and the height, and that we might, indeed, know, we might know and experience the love of Jesus Christ which passes knowledge. And of course, in all of it through that experience, through that knowledge, we might exalt and glorify the name of our God, and that also knowing that love of God, we will be propelled and motivated to live that life of holiness and sanctification, and thankfulness that we are called to live as God's set apart people. And that's my prayer for this congregation as we take up our work together, and that's my prayer as I take up my work in your midst. That's why we look at this passage this afternoon.

So we look at this text, verses 16 through 19, we take as our theme "The New Minister's Prayer for the New Congregation." We look at that theme under three points. First, a prayer to know the love of God, that's the main focus. Second, a prayer for the spiritual strength that is needed, that's what is needed to know the love of God. And then third, ultimately this is a prayer that God's glory be magnified, that's where the apostle ends in the text.

So as we look at this passage, I want to jump immediately to verse 18 and the beginning of verse 19. That's really the heart, the center of Paul's prayer. Paul prays there in verse 18 and it will be profitable to have our scriptures open this afternoon as you'll hear me say that many times, that that's a good thing, we're going to look at scripture. Paul prays that the saints at Ephesus in verse 18 "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." Now, when Paul writes that, I don't think that Paul has in mind specific idea or a specific thought with each one of those terms that he uses, the breadth and the length and the depth and the height. I don't think he has something in mind with each one of those things like you could measure the love of God with a tape measure in this direction, in this direction. It's a figure. But I do think we can use those four words to break down and to study the love of God, and that's what I want to do here in the first point of the sermon, using those four words to see how vast Jesus' love for us is.

So first of all, there is the word breadth. There's the breadth of Jesus' love. That's the first word. And the word breadth refers to width. Jesus' love is a very wide love, and we can understand that in two senses. First of all, Jesus' love is very wide because Jesus' love extends not just to a particular ethnic group, not just to a particular nation, but Jesus' love extends to all ranks and all ethnicities of mankind. That really is one of the things that Paul is emphasizing here in the book of Ephesians, especially in chapter 2. That's where Paul is coming from. Paul is emphasizing Jesus' love is not just for the Jew, but also for the Gentile. That middle wall of partition has been removed. The mystery of God is that there's a salvation for the world and he's revealed it now in the latter times to his apostles and prophets. That's what he says. Jesus' love has no ethnic limitation or boundary, no borders when it comes to skin color or language. That's how wide Jesus' love is.

And then second, when we think about the breadth of Jesus' love, we can also think about that in regards to Jesus' love for individual people, including you and me. Jesus' love for you, child of God, is so broad, so wide that there is no part of you that Jesus does not concern himself with. He loves you, your body, and he loves you, your soul. He purchased your body and soul for you on the cross or not for you, he purchased your body and soul on the cross. There's nothing about your make-up in all that you are that's not important to Jesus. He takes thought for everything that concerns you. What are you anxious about? What are your fears? Where do you feel yourself weak and vulnerable? Maybe it's parenting. Maybe it's work. Where does your heart ache? Where do you have disappointments? All of it is a concern to your Jesus. All that you can think about, all you can worry about in life, Jesus takes thought for it all. You're worried about your children growing up without a father in the home? Jesus takes thought for that. You're worried about the financial obligations you have for the support of your family? Jesus is taking thought for that. Everything you could possibly worry about, Jesus takes thought for it all. Your calling is simply to trust and to obey and enjoy and then honor that love by trusting it and obeying the Lord and what he commands. That's the breadth of Jesus' love.

Second, there's the word length. There's the length of Jesus' love and the word length perhaps makes us think about time and about duration, how long something is. And the wonder of Jesus' love is that Jesus' love is an everlasting love. That's really where the

book of Ephesians begins. Chapter 1, verse 3 and 4 and 5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." Already in eternity past before the foundation of the world, before God created time, God elected you and he elected you in his love. Here you are a creature in time living and working from day to day, week to week. We have such a short time here on this earth and yet God loves us with an unconditional love from before time began. That's why he elected us. And when we are discouraged, congregation, we can remember our election and remember what that actually means. God loved us before we did any good or evil. He loved us simply because he loved us. That's what God says in the book of Deuteronomy 7. Why did the Lord love you? Not because you were greater than any nation. You were the least of all nations. But he loved you because he loved you. That's basically what it says. He bound you to himself in cords of love because he breathed after you. That's the idea and nothing will change that love of God for you.

In addition to that, God's love is without interruption. The beauty is that there is never a moment that Jesus is not loving you. Think of that. The God of creation, the one who sits on the throne in heaven having the earth as his footstool, he is always having thoughts of love towards you. You're sleeping last night in your bed oblivious to everything, and the Lord God has thoughts of love towards you. You're busy at work focused on the task at hand, and God has thoughts of love towards you. Throughout all of history, we read that in the scripture throughout the Old Testament history, God has thoughts of love towards his people. From the beginning of the Bible all the way through to the end of the Bible, that's what scripture records, God's love for his people. Indeed, what does scripture say? "God commended his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." God knows, he already knows everything about you. He knows everything about you and yet your God loves you and Jesus loves you. He loves you without interruption. And just as Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forevermore, so his love for us will be the same to all eternity. That's the length of Jesus' love.

Then third, there's the depth of Jesus' love. There's the breadth, there's the length, and now there's the depth of Jesus' love. And when I think of the depth of Jesus' love, I think of Jesus' descent into hell. So deep is his love that he who is God, exalted on the throne, before whom the angels cover their faces with their wings and cry out, "Holy, holy, holy," he came so low that he took upon himself the form of a man, the form of a servant, and became like unto us in all things except sin. And not only that, but not only did he become flesh like us, and not only was he our brother and our friend, but he came as our head and our mediator, born not only under the law but born under the curse of the law for our sakes. And then not only that, but under the law, he lived a perfectly righteous life in amid the midst of a world of filth and iniquity. He lived a life walking through the valley of tears that's full of death and sorrow. And he didn't have to but he chose to. And he did it perfectly, denying himself for us. And then so deep as his love that not only did he do that, but he offered himself up as a sacrifice on the cross and he died the wretched and accursed death of the cross, experiencing those three hours of darkness so that he was moved to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," enduring the horrors of hell, suffering the wrath of his Father that we might be saved.

That's the depth of Jesus' love. As Jesus himself says, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." And then so deep is Jesus' love that not only did he do that, but even now in time for each one of us, his children, he barges into the kingdom of darkness and he goes down into the deepest dungeon of that castle of darkness, and he breaks the chains that are holding us captive and he takes us out of that dungeon, out of that kingdom and he translates us into the kingdom of light. And so deep is Jesus' love that even today although even now as God's children we sin every day and our old man still lusts for sin, yet he still loves us and continues to save us to the uttermost. He himself is the one who works that repentance in us, causing us to turn away from our sin and turn into the right way. He strengthens us in the inner man by his Holy Spirit that we might turn into the right way and that we might enjoy his smile of love upon us once again.

That's the depth of Jesus' love and then finally, fourth, there's the height of Jesus' love, and we can think of the height of Jesus' love this way: not only did Jesus descend into the depths of hell, but Jesus has also ascended into the heights of heavenly glory. And he did that for us. That's why he did it. He did it for us. And the height of Jesus' love is not only that he's ascended into heaven for our sakes, but that he even raises us up to dwell in heavenly places with him. That's Ephesians 2. Already now we have fellowship with the Father. You close your eyes and you fold your hands, children, and you are in heaven with your God in prayer. And such is the height of Jesus' love that one day he will see to it that we be with him in glory with body and soul. And he guarantees us that nothing, nothing, either death nor life, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, any other created thing shall be able to separate us from his love.

That's Jesus' great love for you, beloved. Jesus loves you so much that right now on his throne in heaven, he's working all things together for your sakes to serve your spiritual well-being. We don't understand that. That's too great for us. In our in our human pride, we're tempted to scoff sometimes at the thought, but that's where we have to humble ourselves and recognize that all of these things that he does, that too is part of the vastness of his love for us because his love is not a human love. His love is a love rooted in perfect wisdom, exercised with infinite power, and it has an eternal glory in view. His ways are higher than our ways. Jesus so loves you, beloved, that he will never leave you nor forsake you. He will never betray your trust. He will never take advantage of you. He will never deceive you. His love will never fail. His love is a love that bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. His love is like the love of a father towards his child who delights to see his children happy and wants them to be happy. That's why God moves the apostle to make this prayer. God wants his people to know his love for them. His love is like the love of a husband towards his wife who delights to give her all that he is and all that he can to serve her well-being to make her spiritually happy as the bridegroom does for his bride, and he bedecks her with spiritual jewels. We sang of that.

This is Jesus' great love for you and Paul's prayer is that we and all the saints, all God's people might know that love, that we might know it, that we might understand just a little bit more deeply how truly blessed we are, so that in the midst of all the soils and tribulations of this life we might be able to live in the awareness of Jesus' love for us, that we might so know Jesus' love that that knowledge controls our words and it controls our actions and it controls our attitudes. Whether we're watching TV, whether we're hanging out with friends, I know the love of Jesus and that's what shapes the way that I live throughout the six days, all seven days of the week. I know his love and I live for his glory.

Congregation, you have such a great salvation. You are blessed of God. This is a hurting church, but you are blessed of God. Your sins are forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ. You have the hope of glory. You have grace that meets you for each day. Jesus goes with you all the way. He will be with you until the end of the world. Do you ever have that, beloved, where you look at your life and what God has done in making you a Christian? You're a Christian. I had that confession of faith a few weeks ago. So you're a believer, you're a Christian, and the only explanation is God's grace. God has worked this in me. Have you ever looked at that and looked at the blessings God has given you, the Reformed heritage, a church, family, brothers and sisters in the Lord? You see the children standing in front of church singing at the Christmas program perhaps, or you look ahead to an eternity of joy seeing your Savior face to face in glory and you say, you look at all these things, and you say, "How blessed am I? I am blessed simply to be part of this, what I don't deserve in any way."

I've had that multiple times over the last few weeks, to be part of the Randolph congregation for nine years among God's people and experience the blessings that I enjoyed with them. Had to say multiple times, "How blessed am I? How blessed am I?" And as a minister in that special work in calling to serve God's people and be in that privileged position, how blessed am I? And now to look forward to new experiences with you and new blessings, sharing in new blessings and experiences. Simply to be part of the church of Jesus Christ, part of the body, seeing Jew and Gentile together, we're all praising the Lord. How blessed am I? And what stands behind all of that? What stands behind all of that is this unconditional love of Jesus Christ and Paul says, "I pray that you might know how great that love of Jesus Christ for you truly is."

And beloved, that's my prayer for you, so that all your days, in your good days and in the hard days, you might be able to say and remember how deep the Father's love, how vast, beyond all measure. And what is love? Well, love is ultimately that bond of fellowship and friendship between God and his people in which God draws his people unto himself and binds them unto himself in an unconditional covenant of grace. In a sense we could say that covenant bond God has established with us in Christ is love wherein he is our God and we are his people and he is our friend, sovereign, and we are his friend's servants and there's a bond of love. There's friendship. There's fellowship so that you know you are the friend of God, the Maker of heaven and earth who is glorious in unspeakable attributes. And you know you are his child. You know your identity in Jesus Christ. Paul says, "I pray that you might know that reality, that you might know that

friendship of God and you might know how vast the love of God for you is in that friendship." It was that love that moved God to establish that friendship, and it's that love of God that maintains that friendship, and it's that love of God that will preserve that friendship until he realizes that friendship in glory. He moved, he was moved to establish that friendship, so much so he gave up his only begotten Son to die the shameful accursed death of the cross. Paul says, "I pray that you might know that love." And beloved, that's my prayer for you.

But now we might ask how or what is needed, what is needed for us to know the length and the breadth and the length and the depth and the height of the love of Jesus Christ. Well, we can look back at verses 16 and 17 because the apostle answers that question in verses 16 and 17. Verse 16 reads as follows, "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory," that means according to his glorious riches. God has riches and they are glorious. They're in heavenly glory, and they're glorious, "according to his glorious riches. I pray that God would grant you to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." And the question, the connection between verse 16 and verse 18, which we just looked at is this: Paul wants the saints to know the greatness of Jesus' love for them, and in order for them to know that love, they need to be spiritually strengthened. They need to be strengthened with might by Jesus' Spirit in the inner man. That's verse 16.

Now our inner man we can understand as our new man, the life of Jesus Christ worked in us by his Holy Spirit at the time of regeneration. That new man needs to be strengthened. That new man needs to grow. We need to grow from spiritual infancy and spiritual immaturity to spiritual adulthood. Paul wants us to know not just that God loves us but Paul wants us to know the vastness of it and to know it intimately, to know it in detail, to look at it from this point of view and this point of view and that point of view. And that takes maturity to think deeply about God's love and we only scratched the surface of it, but it takes spiritual strength. Our minds need to be strengthened. Our wills need to be strengthened. All our faculties need to be strengthened. We need spiritual power and that's given to us by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit. That's verse 16.

In verse 17, Paul continues in the prayer. He says, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," and that first part of verse 17, really the way I see it, it just expands on verse 16, it kind of repeats, kind of repeats the idea in verse 16: Christ dwells in our hearts by his Holy Spirit and he dwells in our hearts through faith, and it's when Christ by his Spirit is dwelling in our hearts, that we then have power. Christ is our strength and the more Christ dwells in us, and the more our faculties are under his rule, the more we can understand and know the love of Christ.

That's the first part of verse 17, and then the second half of verse 17 adds something more, "that ye, being rooted and grounded in love," and then verses 18 and 19, we looked already at that. But notice that second half of verse 17, "that ye being rooted and grounded in love." Now what does that mean? That might be a little difficult to pin down. Well, to understand this language, we need to remember the context. In the context in this letter to the Ephesians, Paul is emphasizing who God's people are as the body of Jesus Christ. One body, many members but one body. Many members, Jews and Gentiles, yet

one body. And so the best explanation is this, that when Paul speaks here of being rooted and grounded in love, Paul has in mind the love that is enjoyed in the midst of the church, in the midst of that body, the body of Jesus Christ, the communion of the saints. Paul has in mind the love of God as that love of God is enjoyed in the church as God's people love each other, are loved by each other, enjoy God's love together, and love God together and live out in that love together, and dwell in unity with each other.

Now to prove that that's what Paul is talking about, you can see where Paul goes in the very next chapter, chapter 4, verses 1 and 2 and 3, Paul goes back to this idea. "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And so the point there is this: keep the unity in the church among the saints. Live in peace. Live in love. Be rooted and grounded in that love you enjoy in the body. Living together in a spirit of unity.

And so the idea is this, going back to the text verses 16 through 19, the logic of Paul's prayer is this. Verse 16, Paul prays that these saints might be strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Why? So that they might be able by the power of the Holy Spirit to live faithfully in the body in the midst of the communion of the saints as Jews and Gentiles together. Why does he pray that? Because living faithfully and uprightly in the midst of the church is how they are going to be rooted and grounded in love. They are going to experience the love of God in the midst of the church and in their own exercise of love towards one another. As you exercise love towards another one another, you will come to understand more and more the vastness of Christ's love for you. It's in that way, living in the midst of the body of Christ, that you will be able to comprehend more and more the love of Christ towards you.

Now, all of what I've just said implies something very important. What Paul is teaching here and he really teaches it throughout the letter, is this: you can't really live successfully as Christians and you can't grow in your experience and appreciation of Christ's love for you, except as you live in the midst of the church and in the way of exercising love yourselves, ourselves in the communion of the saints. Again, it's only in the way of living in the communion of the saints, exercising true love towards one another, that we make progress in learning and appreciating Christ's great love for us. That's how God designed it, being rooted and grounded in love in the church, you may, you will be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and the length and the depth and the height and know the love of Christ. And what does it all depend on? It depends on the spiritual strengthening of the Holy Spirit.

So that's where the prayer starts. "May the Lord Grant you according to his glorious riches to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." Congregation, that's also my prayer for you, that you might be spiritually strengthened, that in the way of that spiritual strengthening living in the midst of the church, enjoying the communion of the saints, you might grow in your understanding of Christ's love for you. And so the question now is: what does all of this mean for me as your new pastor? If you are going

to know the love of Jesus Christ, and that's my prayer for you, if you are going to know the love of Christ, you need to be spiritually strengthened and in the way of living in love in the midst of the church you will come to know more deeply that love of Christ. So what does that mean for me as your pastor? Oh, I see a few things. First, it means that in my ministry and in my preaching, I preach the word. I preach the word because it's by that word that the Spirit strengthens his people. I need to preach the word and I need to preach the word in such a way that, as John the Baptist put it, I decrease and Christ increases. And it is through the preaching of that word, having Christ speak to his church, that Christ reveals to you his love for you, and what he has done for you and who he is for you. And through the preaching, Christ strengthens you, and through the catechism instruction, the word is brought, set from your youngest years as the people of God you come to know more and more the love of your Savior for you.

So bring the word. Second, it means for me that in my own interactions with you and truly, in my own personal and private life, I myself know this love of Jesus, certainly, but I reflect this love of Jesus. That's what a minister is, a servant. We heard it this morning. I'm called to reflect and represent Christ. That's the seriousness of the office is. I am called to show you that Christ cares. Christ sees you. That Christ protect. That Christ is jealous over his people. And that Christ does justly. To show you that Christ is genuine. That he's real. He's real. He's genuine. He's not fake. He doesn't care about the show you can put on. He doesn't care about the presentation or the outward appearance. He cares about your heart. He cares about how you are doing. And ultimately, I'm called to point you to Christ. That's what it means for me.

And then third, I also see here the calling to emphasize the communion of the saints. That's part of the emphasis of this entire passage. You can't have solo Christianity. You can't have solo Christians who aren't living as members of the body. Only in the church where true love is exercised, where you are present and you come to see and realize, it's only where you are there and you are present that you come to see and realize the goodness and the greatness of Christ's love for you. Again, that's how God has designed it and I think in our day and age and in the culture we live in, that's a real challenge for us. We need to live in communion, enjoy the Bible studies, enjoy the fellowship after church in your own homes and families, enjoy the time around the kitchen table. It's not about going through the motions. It's not an appearance for your children either. It's about being in God's word really, genuinely. Enjoy that communion. That's where the love of Christ will flourish, otherwise our love is soon going to grow cold and then you begin to walk sinful lives. You forget the love of Christ. Why go to church? Why do this? Why do that? Why obey when I'm forgetting the love of Christ. And my prayer for you is that the Lord would use me at his disposal that you might more and more know and understand the love of Jesus Christ.

Well, now we should ask the question why? Really the first point of the sermon was what, knowing the love of Christ. The second point of the sermon, how, how do we know the love of Christ, by being spiritually strengthened. Now the third point of the sermon, why? Why is this the apostle's prayer? What's at the heart of this prayer? I know I said verse 18 and verse 19, that's really at the center of the prayer, but even underneath that

what's the motivation, ultimate motivation behind this prayer? It's the glory of God. You see, ultimately, this prayer is not a man-centered prayer. Ultimately, it's not about you, it's not about me. It's about God. This is a God-centered prayer. This is a God-centered sermon.

That's the last part of verse 19, "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge," and now this, "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." Now what does that mean? That means this, that God and his glory and his beauty and his grace might so fill you and fill everything you do, and everything you say, and everything you think, so that not only are you comforted but even in the enjoyment of being comforted you might showcase the power and the beauty and the glory of God. Of your gracious God in all aspects of your life and with all your being, you know God's love. You know God's love. And that means I trust him. That means I submit to what his word tells me to do, forsaking my own wisdom, leaning not into my own understanding, but acknowledging him, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Because I know his love, I can do that and it's a blessing to do that, a joy to do that. You know God's love and you hope in him, you look to him, you pray only to him because you know his love. You serve him and then you love each other. You dwell in peace with each other. You are with all lowliness and meekness and long-suffering. You forbear one another in love. And you reflect the glory of God.

So the church is beautiful. So the church becomes a beautiful thing and then God says, even as we sang it, "The church he loveth well". She is nothing of herself, but he makes her beautiful. He causes her to know his love. And then even in causing her to know his love, he endows her with these beauties, these spiritual graces, and he makes her that bride without spot or wrinkle. And then he says, again, "The church he loveth well." You are so filled with all the fullness of God, it's that it's so obvious that this right here is the work of God and the work of God alone. And the result is that the power of God and the glory of God is magnified in the body and through the body. The glory of the head, right, through the body. Jesus Christ the head because it's all of God.

That's Paul's prayer for the saints in Ephesus and that's my prayer for this congregation, that this might be a church so full of God and his glory and his beauty and his communicable attributes, so full of Jesus Christ in your hearts and in your lives and the Spirit of Christ in your communion and in your fellowship and in your attitude, that we all say together, "This is the work of the Lord. Such unity in such diversity, such love, how blessed am I? Blessed be God who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places." What grace of God truly, what love of God to deal so graciously with sinners such as we are. To him be the glory.

And now one more thought in ending, this is where the apostle ends the chapter too. We pray this prayer, the apostle prays this prayer, I pray this prayer, we pray this prayer together, and then the apostle says, "He is able. Now unto him that is able to do these things, to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask." Paul is asking for this God, "above all that he can ask, or that we can even think, according to the power that

worketh in us." And then he says again, "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for thy word. It is so good and it is so right it captures what lives in our hearts, and we pray that thou wouldst by thy Spirit write this prayer on our hearts. We pray, Father, that we might together know the love of Jesus in our marriages, in our homes and families, as brothers and sisters in the Lord, and also as pastor and as congregation together, that we might together walk with thee in the covenant of love that thou hast established, and in knowing thy love, magnify and glorify thee for unto thee alone belongs the glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.