

The Power for Redemptive Relationships

A Practical Ecclesiology

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Amen. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. We've been looking at the last several weeks at Ephesians 4:11 to 16 and been looking at a number of issues in that passage but we've been considering overall, we had departed from our study of James, we have a few weeks left in James that we hope to get back to soon, Lord willing, week after next, and we started off this year looking at the doctrine of the church and how we are to see the church of Jesus Christ, a practical ecclesiology is what we've been trying to formulate, that is, you know, what's the church to mean in our lives in a real living way.

So we've been looking at Ephesians, we looked at Ephesians 2:19 to 22 one week, and talked about the temple we're building, the temple we are called to build a temple for God to dwell in. This is an amazing just phenomenal thing that we are a part of. Then we saw how Ephesians 4 carries the same idea forward, that the church is something much more glorious than we tend to think it is. It is the most beautiful place on earth in God's sight. It is the most wonderful place to be working and serving together as we build something together that gives glory and honor to God and testimony to God in a visible way in this dark world. The brilliance of his plan of redemption is made visible in the community of the church, the relationships of the body of Christ. So we saw how we've been called to change the way we see it and we started looking at how do we actually become what he has called us to be, how do we see Jesus made known in our corporate relationships, and so we began looking at a number of things, of being expository listeners, learning to hear the word carefully; then to be, to have life-changing conversations, in other words to be speaking the truth to one another, and that this is how God has ordained for us to hear his word, his life-changing word is from the lips of our brothers and sisters in Christ as we share the truth with one another.

Then last week we began looking at redemptive relationships, speaking the truth in love, that is, that we are called to be a part of relationships. This is how we build the church. It's not just that we show up, that's important. It's not just that we join, that's important, but it's that we invest in relationships, in building relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we can't know everyone at the same level but we are to try to seek to form real life-changing relationships and to have a sense in which we know every one as best we can to some level, and some that we really know with intimacy and closeness,

and that God wills this to be the means by which he forms us into his temple for his glory to be made known. He forms us into the image of Jesus Christ that we as we relate to one another, as we learn to love one another, as we come alongside one another in the storms of life, assisting one another, loving one another, speaking the truth, that a lost world around us will see Jesus Christ visibly, somehow mysteriously in a way they see Christ. That's what he's talking about in Ephesians 4, that we grow up into the mature stature, the fullness of the stature that belongs to Christ corporately. That is a high calling and so the redemptive relationships that are a part of that are so essential, and last week we began looking at that and we looked at the first three points, the purpose of redemptive relationships, that our purpose in relating to one another is not just the enjoyment but is to actually help one another become more like Christ; that my job is to help you become like Christ as we relate, and my job is also to let you help me become like Christ, and you have those same two jobs, to help me and to let me help you become like Jesus. So we saw the pattern of redemptive relationships, that we are to be like our Father and imitate him and to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ, and we saw some things about the practice of redemptive relationships.

Today we come, the title of this message is actually the fourth point in last week's message but we're going to spend the entire time looking at it, it's "The Power for Redemptive Relationships." That's the title of the message, the power for redemptive relationships, that is, relationships, the challenge of actually living and working together in this difficult world, the fallen world with sin natures, fallen natures ourselves, relationships are difficult, relationships are messy, relationships can be burdensome, exhausting, painful, and so for us to really relate like we are called to, we need divine motivation and divine power and that's what we see this fourth point is about. The power for redemptive relationships and what we're going to see is that Paul had already prayed for this power previously in the letter and we are going to look this morning at Ephesians 3:14 to 19. We will read 14 to 21 as well. What we see here is that the Apostle Paul in this really magnificent prayer, many have called this the greatest and most beautiful passage in all of Scripture, the most sublime, this prayer that the Apostle Paul utters in Ephesians 3:14 to 21 is glorious. It celebrates the love of Christ, the infinite love of Jesus and so as we come to it, we need God's grace in understanding it and applying it. What we're going to see is that he was concerned in this prayer primarily about power; that they would be strengthened, that they would be empowered, that they would be enabled to do what God had called them to do, and so this is Paul praying for what we need ourselves, the power for redemptive relationships.

So let's read the passage together, Ephesians 3, beginning at verse 14.

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which

surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, we right now want to do exactly what the Apostle Paul did, when he contemplated the wonder of the things that he was going to share, it drove him to his knees and he prayed and asked that You would strengthen the Ephesians with power and we ask You, Lord, to strengthen us with power through Your Spirit in our inner man that we might truly begin to apprehend the wonder of Christ's love, that we might begin to know experientially the wonder of His love, and that His love might compel us and constrain us that we might no longer live for ourselves but for Him who loved us, and that we might move into relationships with more intentionality and consistency and joy because as we do we are loving our glorious Savior. And Father, we pray this in His name. Amen.

So the power for redemptive relationships. The apostle is making the point I think in the letter in general and in this particular passage in particular, that for us to really be all that we need to be, we need power from on high, and that that power is related to the love of the Lord Jesus Christ for you personally; that the real driver in the Christian life, the way God intends you, the way he intends you to be motivated to obedience, to service and to love, is for you to be living in a conscious awareness of and trust in his love for you. That's what motivates godliness. That is what is to motivate obedience that pleases the Lord. Obedience is an expression of our love for God which is always a response to his love for us. 1 John 4:19, that wonderful passage in 1 John 4 where he talks about that the glory of God's love when he calls us to love one another, "Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who loves not does not know God for God is love." That's what he says in verses 7 and 8, but then later in verse 19 he says, "We love because He first loved us." The reason that we're able to love one another is because we have been loved by God. His love has been shed abroad in our hearts and our response of the love that we receive from him is to love him back, and when we love him back, the way that we express our love to him is by loving his people. That's the only way that you can really express in a tangible way your love for Jesus Christ, is to love those who are precious to him.

You see this in a powerful way in Jesus' parable of the judgment, the sheep and the goats, in Matthew 25. Remember where the king divides the sheep and the goats and he says to the sheep who are on his right, "Because I was naked and you clothed Me, I was hungry and you fed Me, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was in prison and you visited Me, because of this you are blessed of My Father. Come and enter into the blessing. Because I was all these things and you did this to Me," and the righteous shall say, the sheep shall say, "Lord, when did we see You naked and clothe You? When did we see You hungry and feed You? When did we see You thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You

in prison and come and visit You?" And he will say, "To the extent that you did it to one of the least of My brothers, you did it unto Me." So if you want to love Jesus and express your love to Jesus Christ, you serve your brothers and sisters, his people, even the least of those, and in doing that you are loving Jesus; you are expressing to him and bringing joy to his heart. So when your heart is overflowing with the reality of his love for you and it's so full that you've got to express it, you serve others, love others. That's essentially what Paul is praying for. He is praying that they will come to have an experience of the love of God that will drive them into relationships with each other, and he knows that unless that happens, they're going to really flounder around. They need this, this overwhelming, soul-expanding knowledge of the love of Christ. That's what he's praying for in this passage.

So what I want us to do, we need that and we're going to see the connection in just a moment. I'm going to organize our thoughts around three points. You know, how do we experience this power? How do we lay hold of this power, the power of his love for us motivating us so that we become servants, so that we lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters? It's not a power over people. No, the power that we're looking for is a power to be like Jesus, the greatest, who was servant of all. So how do we lay hold of this? Well, I think in Paul's passage here, I want us to focus on three points this morning, three things that we need to do to lay hold of this love and this power, this motivation to redemptive relationships so that we will be committed to one another as we ought to be, and the first point is we need to pray for strength. This only comes through prayer. When Paul is, you know, he's teaching this letter of Ephesians, he's giving them wonderful doctrine but here it's as if he falls to his knees, he says, "For this reason I bow my knees," he falls to his knees and he prays. He's struck by how much the answer or this benefit is only going to come through prayer, and so we need to pray. One of the reasons that we don't love is because we don't pray for this kind of love. "You have not because you ask not."

In fact, you see this in the passage. It's really interesting the first clause, "For this reason I bow my knees," for this reason I bow my knees, I want to show you the connection to how he's actually praying for exactly what we're talking about in Ephesians 4:11 to 16. The introductory phrase, "For this reason," and when you read that as a good interpreter of Scripture, just a good interpreter of any kind of language, you look for, "For this reason," is kind of what he must have immediately said before this. He said something here in the verse ahead of time that apparently is driving this prayer. "For this reason I pray." Do you see? Well, what's interesting is when you look at the context a little more carefully, once you realize is Paul is actually saying exactly the same thing in verse 14 that he said in verse 1.

Look at verse 1, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--," and then you see that dash if you have a dash in your Bible, what Bible interpreters have noticed is that this is apparently what's called sometimes an anacoluthon, which is basically a time where you're talking along and what you say next doesn't follow from what you were saying right before. You take a side road. And sometimes we do that, I know I do that. Have you ever, don't you find yourself, you're

having a conversation and then suddenly you're like, "Well, I never got around to telling you what I was going to tell you and it's been 15 minutes we've been talking," because you took an anacoluthon and everybody went with you, and we don't know where we were. We never got that delivered. Sometimes what happens in our family is I think I told Patti something because I intended to, and I was about that close to telling her before I took a side road, and then she says, "You didn't tell me," and I'm like, "No, I did. I told you," because I thought I told her. Isn't that the same thing as telling? Anyway, it's not the same thing.

But you see here the beauty, the Bible is a human book. It is a completely divine book. Every word is breathed out by God but every word is a human word as well, and the Apostle Paul in his humanity, he has so much to say that he wants to say and as he starts down, he's just come from what he's been talking about in chapter 2, the amazing reality that the Gentiles and Jews are now one in Christ and that they have been brought near, Gentile, mostly Gentile believers in Ephesus have been brought near to God and are themselves a part of a spiritual temple that's being built into a dwelling for God. That's what he says in the last verses of chapter 2, and so then in chapter 3, verse 1, "For this reason," and I think he's about to say, "I bow my knees before the Father," but he says a little more before that. He's actually going to say, "For this reason I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles bow my knees before the Father." But when he says, "the apostle for the sake of you Gentiles," he's struck again with how amazing it is that God has called an apostle for the Gentiles and he takes a side road that is a beautiful and glorious side road about what God is doing in calling the Gentiles to himself, is even preaching to the principalities and powers, the spiritual forces of wickedness in heavenly places, God is condemning them and showing them his glory in the way he's calling people from every tribe and tongue and kindred to himself. And he wraps that up in verse 13 and then he says, "Oh yeah, what I was saying before. For this reason."

So why is he driven to pray? He's driven to pray because he's just said in chapter 2, verses 19 to 22, "you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." He knows these people. Now he knows all people, he would say this to anybody, but he especially knows the Ephesians because he spent three years ministering there. In fact, Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his commentary points out that the Ephesian church was probably the most doctrinally rich church in the history of the church. I mean, you've got to say that, you know, Grace Community Church out there in California is one of, up there in the top 10 probably. John Calvin's church, yeah, up there in the top 10. You know, Luther's church, yeah, etc., but the argument that having Paul for three years, man, that puts you up there, and so they had him and they had wonderful doctrine but he also knew them. He knew them personally.

The passage we read last week in Acts 20 talks about how he went from house to house. He knew the people. He wept over them. He loved them. He also knew their faults and

their flaws. That's part of the reason he was so burdened in, remember that meeting that we read last Sunday in our Scripture reading time in Acts 20? He's weeping over the Ephesians, concerned for them, and as he thinks about what God has called them to, he's driven to his knees. "This is too much for them, it's too much for us, Lord, that we who are conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity, each of us with our own struggles but similar yet different, all of the ugliness that has been a part of our hearts and still remains in our unredeemed flesh, those who have been born again still have a sin nature. When you think about now trying to put that together so that God who is holy, holy, holy would dwell there. That's impossible. Only God can do that." So he bows his knees before the Father and he prays. This is something he's saying, "We are completely powerless to do this."

Look at how he emphasizes this. I mentioned earlier we're talking about the power for redemptive relationships, look how much Paul puts emphasis on the very concept of power in this prayer. Verse 16, he prays, "that He would grant you," that the Father would grant you, "according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." Strengthened with power. Not just strengthened but he adds the adverbial phrase, "with power," and the word there is a word which means achieving power, ability. That's the "with power," with *dunamis*. The first word just means to be strengthened, to be enabled, to be equipped, but to be strengthened, to be enabled, to be equipped with power from God.

But that's not all he says. When he comes to verse 18 actually, this doesn't come as through as well in most of the English translations. When he says in verse 17, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able." May be able, that actually is a stronger word for strengthened in power. It's actually of the three words used in the New Testament emphasizing power, this is the most intense word. The word is *exischyo* and it's the strongest word to communicate power and strength and this particular form is intensified with a preposition on the front end of it, so it means to be empowered. I wish it was something like that in the translation so that you might, that you in verse 18, that you may be empowered to comprehend. You need power. There's no way you're gonna be able to comprehend the incomprehensible or to know the unknowable unless God empowers you.

Then he wraps it up, the wonderful benediction at the end in verses 20 and 21. After he's told them something, you've got, God must do this. We're trying to do something that is impossible unless God does it. Like the Psalmist said, if the Lord, unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. So if we can try to build a spiritual temple all we want, but unless the Lord builds it, we labor in vain who build it. So therefore we must pray. But look how he ends his prayer, this last part, "Now to Him who is able," again the word "*dunamis*," he's able, "to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us." So we must pray for this power and we need to pray and essentially we need to pray for the strength and the power to even begin to understand the wonder of the love of Christ. That's what he's saying. He's saying, "Listen, we're going into waters that are so deep, the immensity, the enormity of the

subject is so vast that we are hopeless and helpless unless God does something. So pray. Pray for strength."

That's the first point. Secondly, the second thing he encourages us to do is prepare your heart. Prepare your heart. We're looking particularly at the clause in verse 17, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and also that you being rooted and grounded in love." So verse 17 is our focus here, prepare your heart. After we pray for power and strength in the inner man, the desire is that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Now it's important for us to remember, Paul is writing to believers. This is not an evangelistic prayer. He's not praying that you will come to know Jesus and he will be in your heart. No, he's writing to people to whom he's already celebrated the fact that they are born again to a living hope, they are justified by his grace, trusting in Christ by faith alone. They're sealed in the Spirit. Chapters 1 and 2 and 3, he's celebrated all of this up to this point so when he says, "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith," he's talking about Christians. He's saying that, "What you guys need, Ephesian believers," what you and I, what we need as modern believers today, "is for Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith."

The idea comes out a little bit when you understand the word for "dwell" here is, again, a very strong word. It doesn't just mean to come in and stay for a little while, it means to take full residence in. It means to, it's a word which means to dwell with added with the preposition "down." It means "to settle down." That Christ would settle down in your heart through faith. You've gotta, your faith has gotta grow. Your trust in him as you grow in faith because the Christian life when you're born again, you are a baby. We talked about this a few weeks ago. You have to grow up and he's essentially saying the same thing here. "I'm praying that God will do this work in your life so that though Christ is already in you," and that's true, listen, Christ is already in every believer. Let me just mention that quickly. 2 Corinthians 13:5 where the Apostle Paul says, "Examine yourselves to see if you're in the household of faith." He goes on to say, "if you fail the test and Christ is not in you, unless you fail the test and Christ is not in you." Otherwise if you're a believer, Christ is in you. If you're not a believer, Christ is not in you. He's already in you if you're a believer. Romans 8:9, the Apostle Paul says, "If you don't have the Spirit of Christ, you are none of His." So if you have the Spirit of Christ, you are his, so if you are his, you have the Spirit of Christ. If you're a Christian, you truly repent and place your faith in Jesus, then you have Jesus already living in you, but Paul says though that is true, what you need, even though you already have Jesus living in you, is you need Jesus to take full residence in your heart, and so you need to prepare your heart for him to have full access and residence. That's what he's calling us to.

He's essentially saying that, I think he's giving us another angle at how we should look at our sanctification. Remember, sanctification is your growing, your growth in holiness. It's changing your behavior. It's putting off sinful practices like he's gonna talk about in the next chapter, chapter 4, "Put off the old man, put on the new man." It's changing your thinking, being renewed in the spirit of your mind. It's changing your affections. It's changing your habits. It's becoming more like Christ. But I think what he's doing here is giving us a wonderful, perhaps slightly new for some of us. I know it helped me in

thinking about this perspective on why we should be pursuing holiness, another reason why. I mean, we pursue holiness because we want to glorify God, of course, but I think he's saying here preparing your hearts for Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith, to take up full residence in your heart, he's saying the reason you want to purify your heart, the reason you want to put off sin and put on the new man is so that you can have more of the presence of Christ freely in your life; that you can experience communion with Jesus; that in reality our sins as believers hinders our communion with Christ and so we need to prepare our hearts for him to take up fuller residence in them.

The reason we work on our thinking and change our beliefs, remember our heart is the, remember thinking is part of our hearts, right? What we want is part of our hearts, our values and related to our desires is a part. Thinking, values, desires and choices, these are the things in our hearts. So the reason you want to change your thinking is because getting your thoughts aligned with Jesus enables you to commune with Jesus more clearly and sweetly. Getting your values right gives glory to Christ but it also enables you as you love what he loves, he takes up his residence among you. As you begin doing what he would do, you draw closer to him and commune with him and this is why obedience is such a part of love.

To obey God biblically is an expression of love. This is why Antinomianism and overemphasis on grace where there's not an appropriate level of emphasis on obedience are dangerous and unbiblical. The Christian is someone who is saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Yes, it's nothing we do. You're not saved because of your works but the one who is truly saved will begin to do good works on this side of salvation and the motivation for those good works is because we're loved by Christ completely. As sinners, he loves us completely and the joy of that, we love him back by obeying him. Obedience is motivated out of love. It's always been this way. In fact, it's amazing that we miss it.

Let me show you in Deuteronomy, I mean of all places, go to Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy really is an amazing book of love. I encourage if you haven't read it in a few years, read it sometime soon. It's the second giving of the law, the last book of the Torah. It contains the 10 Commandments just like Exodus does. It was given to the people of Israel right before they go into the land. Turn to chapter 10 and look at the connection between loving God and obeying God. Chapter 10, verse 12, "Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD'S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?" Loving God, loving him, walking in his ways and loving him and serving him is obeying him.

Chapter 11, verse 1, Deuteronomy 11:1, "You shall therefore love the LORD your God, and always keep His charge, His statutes, His ordinances, and His commandments." If you love him, you're gonna obey him. Chapter 11, verse 13, "It shall come about, if you listen obediently to my commandments which I am commanding you today, to love the LORD your God and to serve Him with all your heart and all your soul." Chapter 11,

verse 22, "For if you are careful to keep all this commandment which I am commanding you to do, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and hold fast to Him," You see, obedience is part of holding fast to him.

Do you see how that's connected to what we're talking about in Ephesians 3? You're preparing your heart for Jesus to come in and dwell. You're clinging to Christ. You're saying, "I want more of You, Jesus, as I obey You." Exactly what Paul, I mean Deuteronomy was telling us, Moses was telling us way back in the very beginning of the word of God. You see the same thing in chapter 13, verse 3, "you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him." It's also in chapter 19, verse 9; chapter 30, verse 16.

So Deuteronomy is amazingly a book about loving God. It's also about God's love for us. Wonderful passages also about how he, of all the nations of the earth, he loved the people of Israel, set his love upon them, and in response they're supposed to love him back and obey his commandments and, of course, they weren't able to do that yet because they didn't have the Spirit of God but the same that he lays out the blueprint, "This is how you walk with Me. You come to experience and really understand My love for you and then in response to that, you love Me back by obeying and by serving." That's the picture.

You can think of it like this. I mean, making room for Jesus in your heart. It's like sanctification in one way is a perpetual renovation project of your heart. I was talking to Ted's daughter, Miranda, a few weeks ago when she and Will were here. They bought a house in Columbia that they're renovating and it's really, I kinda catch up every time they come, "Hey, what's happening now?" And they're getting ready to do counter-tops in their kitchen and Will was saying they were tired of the plywood counter-tops that they have in their kitchen right now. Can you imagine that, plywood, right? So, yeah, you know, that's not something Miranda's gonna like for very long and they're trying, he's getting ready, they were getting ready to order them. Maybe they're already in. So they were getting ready to do that.

Well, they took a house that is dilapidated and they're fixing up bit by bit so that they can live there and then move into more and more parts of the house. That's a good picture of what we're doing in our sanctification. Jesus is already here but here he is in this mess, there's no place to sit down, so make a place for him to sit. Put off something and put on holiness. Change your thinking. Value what he values. And you are making a place for your Savior to sit with you and to commune with you and you're giving him fuller reign and the goal is that he'd be able to walk through the whole house anywhere he wants at any time. That's the heart of the believer. That should be your heart now, that you want to get there, and that's the work and he's gonna help you because he's gonna show you, he's gonna remind you, "Hey, this needs to be worked on right here," and he does that through letting us suffer, letting us have conflicts with people. He does that with putting us in a church with other people who have lots of problems just like we do and letting us run into each other and by doing that he's saying, "You've got a renovation project you need to be

working on and I've got a renovation project I need to be working on, and you too. We all need to be working." And that's the Savior loving us and creating more place for us.

Let me show you also in John 14, a beautiful picture of the same thing in John 14, verse 15. John 14:15, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Verse 21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." You see, as we are obeying him, there's more disclosure of Christ to us. But look on down to verse 23, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him.'" We will abide with him. So we should think of our sanctification, one of the ways we should think of it, the Bible has many different metaphors and pictures but this is a sanctified biblical word picture for us to use is making room, preparing your heart for Christ to dwell there, to settle down there, to make his abode.

So we're to pray for strength. We're to prepare our hearts. And thirdly back to Ephesians 3, we're to contemplate his love. We're to contemplate his love. That's what he's getting at in verses 18 and 19, that you "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Now it's interesting, we need to understand when he comes to this particular part of the prayer, this is where he uses that strongest word for power. Remember, "may be able" is actually the word "exischyo" which means "may be strengthened with," is the greatest word Paul could use in the Greek vocabulary to say, "to be empowered." So there's kind of a progression here, though. As we're praying for strength and we are preparing our hearts for Christ to dwell in us more and more and more, what he's saying now is we're gonna see him disclosing himself to us but we need to not just sit back and wait, we need to be actively pursuing that by contemplating his love.

The key to look at this word "comprehend" translated, all the translations translate it "comprehend, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ." I think both verses are talking about the love of Jesus but the first verb here, there are two parallel verbs, "to comprehend" and "to know." You see, "to comprehend" in verse 18, "to know" in verse 19. We're to comprehend the breadth, the length, the height and the depth, and then we're to seek to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. Both of these are actually almost oxymorons. He's saying in the verb "comprehend," it's tough to translate this one well in English. I think a better translation would be "apprehend," but the word means "to seize with the mind." It means "to grasp and to gain control of." So it pictures an intellectual process where you are grasping something with your mind and holding on to it. So it pictures an active effort of thinking, an intellectual process.

Now it's important because the love of Christ is something that's not just felt, the love of Christ begins with intellectual process. God actually always comes to the heart through the mind. I mean, that's his first and predominant way. He addresses the affections and the will, of course, as well, but his general approach is to speak to our minds first.

"Come, let us reason together." And so here we have the same thing. This word is more of this intellectual, he's basically saying we need to wrestle, to grasp the conceptual understanding of the love of Jesus. We need to intellectually open our minds and exert mental effort to probe the depths or the breadth and the length and the height and the depth of the love of Christ.

So he's saying you need to try to apprehend that which is incomprehensible and it will always be in the sense that it's infinite. We will never, as Ted said earlier, we'll never get tired of worshiping the Lord because we will always be seeing more of the wonder of who he is. We cannot process that. In fact, I think it's true we will be more in awe each successive moment than we were the moment before. There's a little bit of an analogy, well, there is an analogy in the way that we know anything in the world. So just think about knowledge in general. If you study something and, first of all, you know nothing about it, right? And then you begin to know something about it and you think you're an expert, right? Been there? So I had this happen with seminary students, they become an expert on theology and then even recent seminarians that way and young pastors are that way too, and sometimes even old pastors are that way. But anyway, we think we know something when we don't but a little bit of knowledge, you begin to, wow, a whole new world opens up but if you keep learning, what you learn is there, every time you're truly gaining knowledge, you are acquiring knowledge that you didn't have before, but the knowledge itself is leading to an awareness of so much more that you never knew you didn't know. Do you follow what I'm saying? That's true, isn't it? And it's like in everything. I mean, take a biochemist, just let them keep studying and they're gonna keep coming up with more unfathomable mysteries. Physics, that's what's happening in physics, happening in sciences all over the place. The more they know, the more they, I mean, if they're humble, they understand the more we don't know. You can do that looking at the smallest thing or you can look at the universe that way.

Well, if that's the way his creation is, how much more is he that way? The more you know and delight in and you truly know, laying hold of, and yet the more, the more there is. It's like you're going into the ocean and you're really getting wet and you're really experiencing the Pacific Ocean and it's wonderful and you never experienced it before and you're experiencing it and yet look how much, and the farther you go out, the more you realize how deep and wide and beyond your ability this is. And yet it doesn't lead to a sense of hopelessness and despair, it leads to a sense of growing incredible joy and delight because you are truly knowing the living God and he is an infinity of delight. That's what he's saying.

So he says you gotta have power from God to do that. Can't do it on our own. And what he says, he's saying is contemplate it. So let's think about this for a moment. We don't have time to do this in depth but the breadth of the love of Christ. He uses four adjectives here or nouns: breadth, length, height, depth. So almost, I think, saying that, you know, we live in three dimensions but this is four dimensional. But just to think about the breadth. So as you read the Bible, as you see, as you interact with each other, we're supposed to be always looking to make room for Jesus, we're supposed to always be trying to walk with Christ, always looking at him.

So one of the things that we see is as we, you hear somebody's testimony and you hear what they came out of, and you, experience that you haven't experienced and you can in that moment turn from that person in your heart, you're celebrating with them what God has done but in your heart you turn to Jesus and you say, "How wide is Your mercy. How broad is Your mercy." And that's the breadth of the love of Christ. He's saving people from every tongue and tribe and kindred from every kind of sinful bondage, every kind of background, every kind of miserable circumstance. He is saving people and bringing them to sing around his throne.

So contemplate that. Take time to contemplate that. Meditate on that, the length. I mean, contemplate this, you know, how long has he loved you? Think back to the moment that he found you. You were saved, and then you think back so often if you start thinking back, you've got to understand that he was loving you before you were ever loving him. He was predestining you to adoption. He was ordering the events of your life to bring you to the point that you would get saved. So he's loving you way before you were saved. So if you got saved at 25, he started loving you at 18? No, he was loving you from the moment you were born. In fact, he was loving you before that. According to Ephesians 1:4, he was predestining you and loving you from the foundation of the world. Jeremiah, I think it's chapter 31, says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love." God's love for you, Jesus' love for you reaches all the way back into eternity past and extends all the way to eternity future. He's the same yesterday, today and forever, and so there are times where we need to mentally labor at thinking about that. It's hard. That's hard work to think about these things but ask for God's help and power and strength in your inner man, your heart, "Expand the capacity of my heart to think about this," and let him expand you.

And the height and the depth. The height, think about how high he's taking you, how high he's taken you already from where you used to be. He's lifted you up. He's put you on a rock. Think about where you're gonna spend eternity, you're gonna be glorified with him, a joint heir with Christ. The depth of the love of Christ. Think about how low he came. And you meditate on these things and you drink it in and you celebrate it and in doing that, and you begin to love him more and your heart is moved.

I mean, isn't it wonderful, have you had those moments when you felt the love of God, the love of Christ so powerfully that you felt like you almost couldn't take it? He wants us, we're not to go by feelings and you're not gonna have that all the time, but when you have that, just let that be reminders, "He's loving me like this all the time and He wants me to be sharing this love, loving others, loving believers and loving lost people with His love."

So we're to contemplate his love by, first of all, this intellect, intellectual endeavor to deal with conceptual realities, but the second sub point here, not just to work hard at intellectually understanding with our minds, this second verb here, infinitive, "to know," in verse 19 and "to know the love of Christ," again it's a word about knowledge but here is the verb "to know" which speaks of an experiential knowledge. This word is more

about knowledge of one who has experienced it personally. It's not theoretical knowledge. Theoretical knowledge has value but he's saying we move beyond and this is what is to happen, as you contemplate and you meditate upon the length, I mean, the breadth and the length and the height and the depth, the goal is not just to stay there in the realm of the intellect, the goal is to experience it personally.

Isn't it wonderful that when you can move from, you know, if you're saved, you know God loves you, but there's a sense in which we all need to know that more than we do and there's a sense in which the Christian life is moving more and more from the theory of that, you've apprehended it, that his love, that his death on Calvary, that the cost that he paid was for you and he died for your sins and he bore your wrath and he was resurrected for your righteousness, and so you've received that at some level and yet there's a sense in which it still remains elusive for us, and what Paul is praying is he's saying, "Listen, I want you to know experientially. I want you to know with a greater level of experience that Jesus loves you. He loves you; that He died for you; that you are precious to Him." It's as if he wants us to almost like, you know, when, I remember hearing a joke about the man who married his wife and they got married and then like years later, some years later she's like, "Why don't you ever tell me you love me?" And he said, "I told you I loved you and if anything changes, I'll let you know." Well, you just want people to say I love you. That's human. That's a part of relationships.

So part of it, the Lord is saying, "You and I need to be knowing that Jesus is saying to you, 'I love you.'" And this will come as you seek him, as you prepare your heart for him, as you contemplate his love. As you move toward him and seeking him, and as you start loving him by serving others, this is going to become more real to you, and as it becomes more real to you, you're gonna become more and more powerful in doing his will; you're gonna become more and more obedient; you will know that the sin that so easily tempts us compared to more time in communion with Jesus, this is nothing. We mourn over the fact that we ever thought it was of any value. The more that we know experientially of the love of Jesus, the more we transform and the more, then, that we serve one another, and when this happens, this is when we start looking like Christ. More and more people loving Jesus like that and the body grows up into the image because we, then, are using our conversations, we're using our relationships to serve one another and to look like Christ.

That's what he's calling us to. That's building the temple and that's a part we can't miss. It's so easy to get distracted from this. This is why Jesus said, "Abide in My love," in John 15. I didn't read that verse but he says, "Abide in My love as I abide in My Father's love, and how you do that, keep My commandments, but you keep My commandments by focusing on My love for you, abiding in it, and doing it out of a desire to love Me back." So abide in his love.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the wonder of Your love for us. We confess that we find it hard to talk about these things, to measure these things. We agree with the

truthfulness and perfection of Your word. It is beyond us. We don't have the power and yet, Lord, we also agree that it is the most delightful thing in the world to be loved by God, to be loved by Christ, and to love God and to love Christ. So Lord, captivate our hearts and help us to help one another to keep looking to You. We're sheep, Lord, we forget and we're thankful that You are a gracious and compassionate Father who has compassion on us as a father has compassion on his children. Lord Jesus, we thank You that You are a good shepherd who understands that we're sheep and is committed to coming after us. Help us, Lord to love You with all that we are, with everything that we have, that You might be our all-in-all, that we might be filled up with the fullness of God and we pray this in Your name. Amen.