

Ephesians 3:7-21 <sup>7</sup> Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. <sup>8</sup> Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, <sup>9</sup> and to make everyone see<sup>[a]</sup> what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; <sup>10</sup> so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. <sup>11</sup> This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, <sup>12</sup> in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. <sup>13</sup> I pray therefore that you may not lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory. <sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, <sup>17</sup> and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. <sup>18</sup> I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

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THE EXPRESSION: "THE HEART OF THE MATTER" IMPLIES WHAT IS CENTRAL AND MOST IMPORTANT. THE APOSTLE PAUL, IN TODAY'S READING FROM EPHESIANS, SPEAKS ABOUT WHAT HE BELIEVES THOSE CHRISTIANS, AND INDEED ALL CHRISTIANS, NEED THE MOST.

PAUL SPEAKS TO BOTH THE CHURCH AND INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS ABOUT THE SAVIOR'S PRESENCE IN AND AMONG THEM. HIS LETTER OPENS BY PRAISING GOD FOR THE SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS CHRISTIANS RECEIVE THROUGH JESUS.

HE REMINDS THOSE AMONG HIS READERS WHO HAD BEEN PAGANS THAT GOD'S AMAZING GRACE IN CHRIST WAS NOT ONLY FOR THE JEWS, BUT FOR ALL PEOPLES.

PAUL ALSO SAYS HIS IMPRISONMENT SHOULD NOT BE A CAUSE FOR DESPAIR, SINCE HE IS SPREADING THE GOSPEL. HE SEES HIS TIME IN PRISON AS A BLESSING TO THEM AND OTHERS, AS HE WITNESSES TO HIS FAITH IN CHRIST.

HE THEN TURNS TO THE EARNESTNESS OF HIS PRAYERS FOR THE CHURCH, WHICH IS CONVEYED BY MENTIONING HE KNEELS TO MAKE THOSE PRAYERS.

TRADITIONALLY, THE JEWISH PEOPLE STOOD WHEN THEY PRAYED. KNEELING WAS A SIGN OF DEEP NEED OR EMOTION, AN ACT TO SHOW GOD SINCERITY OF PRAYER AND TO BEG FOR HELP.

PAUL PRAYS NOT SIMPLY FOR UNITY AMONG THEM, BUT THAT JESUS WILL EQUIP EACH OF THEM WITH THE THINGS THEY NEED THE MOST.

BUT NOTICE, WHILE THE WORLD IS OBSESSED WITH OUTWARD THINGS LIKE: RACE, NATIONALITY, GENDER, AND OTHER PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES, AS WELL AS WHAT WE WEAR, WHERE WE LIVE, OUR MATERIAL WEALTH, AND SO FORTH- THE APOSTLE DOES NOT FOCUS ON ANY OF THOSE THINGS.

INSTEAD PAUL DRAWS ATTENTION TO HIS PRAYER FOR WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT-OUR INNER BEING. THEREFORE, HE WISHES CHRISTIANS TO PROSPER IN THEIR FAITH.

AND YET, THE PROSPERITY PAUL DESIRES THEM TO BE BLESSED WITH IS NOT SAFETY, FINANCIAL SECURITY, OR OTHER MORE WORLDLY MEASUREMENTS OF PROSPERITY.

INSTEAD, THE APOSTLE PRAYS THEY MAY BE MADE STRONGER AND MORE CAPABLE BY THE HOLY SPIRIT'S POWER. HIS DESIRE IS FOR GOD TO STRENGTHEN EACH OF FROM THE INSIDE-OUT.

HE EARNESTLY PRAYS FOR CHRISTIANS TO HAVE SUCH FAITH IN THE LORD JESUS THAT HE DWELLS IN THEIR HEARTS, RATHER THAN MERELY VISITS FROM TIME TO TIME.

THE NEW LIVING TRANSLATION OF VERSE 17 PUTS IT THIS WAY:

“AND I PRAY THAT CHRIST WILL BE MORE AND MORE AT HOME IN YOUR HEARTS AS YOU TRUST HIM. AND MAY YOUR ROOTS GO DOWN DEEP INTO THE SOIL OF GOD’S MARVELOUS LOVE.”

THE HEART, AS IT IS UNDERSTOOD IN THE BIBLE, IS THE CENTER OF ONE’S PERSONALITY, WHICH MEANS IT IS THE GATEWAY TO THOUGHTS, WORDS, AND ACTIONS.

THEREFORE, FOR JESUS TO DWELL IN OUR HEARTS, MEANS FOR US TO WELCOME HIM HOME SO HE WILL SETTLE DOWN AND LIVE WITH US.

HIS VISION IS THAT THE LORD JESUS WILL NOT ONLY BE WELCOMED HOME BY US BUT WILL BE PERMITTED TO MAKE HIMSELF COMFORTABLE WITHIN US.

A MAN NAMED ROBERT MUNGER WROTE ABOUT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF PAUL’S WORDS ABOUT CHRIST’S INDWELLING- IN A BOOKLET HE WROTE ENTITLED, “MY HEART. CHRIST’S HOME.”

IN IT HE PICTURES THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AS A HOME. JESUS ENTERS IT AND GOES FROM ROOM TO ROOM OBSERVING ALL THAT IS THERE. HE IMAGINES THAT: JESUS ENTERS THE ROOMS OF THE HOME AND LOOKS AT WHAT IS FOUND IN EACH ONE.

HE ENTERS THE LIBRARY, WHICH IS THE MIND; THE KITCHEN AND DINING ROOMS, IN WHICH ARE FOUND OUR APPETITE, OR OUR DESIRES.

JESUS GOES INTO THE LIVING ROOM, WHICH IS THE PLACE OF COMPANIONSHIP AND COMFORT; AND THE OFFICE OR WORKSHOP, WHICH PRODUCES MANY OF OUR ACTIONS.

IN EACH ROOM JESUS LOOKS AROUND, EVEN IN THE CLOSETS. IN THESE PLACES, HE FINDS, AND BEGINS TO THROW OUT THE TRASH.

HE DISCARDS WHAT ARE SINFUL OR UNHELPFUL THINGS LIKE: THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, DESIRES, AS WELL AS MATERIALISM, AND WORLDLY ACTIVITIES, ETC.

IN THE PLACE OF WHAT IS REMOVED JESUS PLANTS- SEEDS OF LOVE, HUMILITY, FAITH, PERSEVERANCE, PATIENCE, PEACE, KINDNESS, AND MANY OTHER WORTHY ATTRIBUTES.

UNFORTUNATELY, AS WE WELL KNOW, CLEANING IS SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE REPEATED OFTEN, SINCE- CLUTTER, DIRT, DUST, AND TRASH ACCUMULATES OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

THE REMEDY FOR THIS IS FOUND IN THE NEXT PART OF THE PRAYER, WHICH IS FOR CHRISTIANS TO HAVE THE CLEANSING POWER OF GOD’S LOVE.

HE PRAYS THEY WILL BE ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN GOD’S LOVE. THIS WARRANTS SOME FURTHER THOUGHT.

PAUL DOES NOT PRAY FOR BETTER RELIGIOUS DOCTRINE OR CEREMONY, INSTEAD HE PRAYS FOR WHAT WILL REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF CHRISTIANS--LOVE.

SPECIFICALLY, IT IS GOD’S LOVE, WHICH IS THE RESOURCE THAT IS NEEDED MOST FOR GROWTH AND STABILITY IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

THE LOVE WE BOTH RECEIVE AND GIVE BACK TO GOD IS WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN HOW WELL WE KEEP OUR HOUSE IN ORDER, AND HOW WELL WELCOME JESUS WITHIN US.

IT IS WHERE WE DRAW OUR ABILITY TO LOVE OTHERS AS OURSELVES.

THE PROBLEM THAT ARISES WHEN WE ARE NOT SUSTAINED AND GUIDED BY GOD’S LOVE HAS BEEN VISIBLY MANIFESTED THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES.

IT IS FOUND IN CHRISTIAN PARTICIPATION IN SINS LIKE: PERSECUTION, SLAVERY, OPPRESSION, GREED, HATRED, AND OTHER INDIVIDUAL OR COMMUNAL SINS.

SO LISTEN TO HOW AN MODERN BIBLE TRANSLATION RECORDS EPHESIANS 3:17:

“THEN CHRIST WILL LIVE IN YOU THROUGH FAITH. I ALSO PRAY THAT LOVE MAY BE THE GROUND INTO WHICH YOU SINK YOUR ROOTS AND ON WHICH YOU HAVE YOUR FOUNDATION.”

ROOTS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MOST PLANTS. ROOTS PROVIDE STABILITY AND NOURISHMENT.

WITH ALL BUT A FEW EXCEPTIONS TREES AND OTHER PLANTS WITH ROOTS GROWING DEEPLY- GROW BETTER AND LARGER, AND THEY ARE BETTER ABLE TO WITHSTAND ADVERSE FORCES FROM WITHOUT.

CONVERSELY, WHEN THE ROOTS OF A PLANT ARE MORE SHALLOW OR GO BAD THE PLANT IS NOT LIKELY TO SURVIVE FOR VERY LONG, AT LEAST NOT WITHOUT SOME PERSISTENT AND TENDER CARE.

HERE IS A STORY ABOUT ONE TREE THAT SURVIVED BECAUSE OF THAT KIND OF CARE. ANOTHER PREACHER TELLS A STORY ABOUT PLANTING A TREE WHERE HE AND HIS FAMILY LIVED IN TEXAS.

THE WEATHER WAS VERY HOT AND DRY AND THE SOIL MOSTLY CLAY. CONSEQUENTLY THE TREE DID NOT DO AS WELL AS EXPECTED. MANY OF ITS LEAVES TURNED YELLOW AND FELL OFF.

THE MAN, HOWEVER DID NOT GIVE UP ON IT, BUT HE AND HIS WIFE KEPT POURING WATER AT THE BASE OF THE TREE.

HE WROTE: “WE GAVE THE TREE PLENTY OF LOVE, BUT THE TREE IS ON A HILL, SET IN RED CLAY, WITH HARD TEXAS SOIL BELOW- THAT RESISTS WATER.

OUR LOVE DOESN’T PENETRATE DEEPLY ENOUGH TO KEEP MOST OF THE LEAVES FROM TURNING YELLOW AND FALLING OFF. BUT EVENTUALLY, THE TREE WILL BECOME ROOTED AND GROUNDED DEEP ENOUGH THAT IT WILL PROSPER.”

THIS IS SOME THING LIKE WHAT PAUL HAD IN MIND IN HIS PRAYER. IT WAS THAT THE EPHESIANS, AND SURELY ALL CHRISTIANS, WOULD HAVE DEEP AND GROWING ROOTS IN THE LOVE OF GOD.

WE MAY IMAGINE THAT THE LORD IS POURING HIS LOVE WITHIN US, LIKE THE COUPLE POURED WATER OVER THE ROOTS OF THEIR TREE.

THIS FLOW FROM GOD TO US IS WHAT WILL HELP US GROW IN CHRIST. THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE PRESENCE OF JESUS WITHIN IS WHAT WILL HELP US BE MORE AND MORE ESTABLISHED IN GOD’S LOVE AND BEAR ITS FRUIT.

SOMEONE ELSE ENVISIONED HOW THESE DEEP ROOTS IN GOD’S LOVE ARE CONNECTED TO THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT RECORDED IN GALATIANS 5:22-23.

“JOY IS LOVE SINGING, PEACE IS LOVE RESTING. PATIENCE IS LOVE ENDURING, KINDNESS IS LOVE’S TOUCH.

GOODNESS IS LOVE’S CHARACTER, FAITHFULNESS IS LOVE’S HABIT, GENTLENESS IS LOVE’S HUMILITY, SELF CONTROL IS LOVE HOLDING THE REINS.”

THESE ARE WAYS IN WHICH GOD’S LOVE COMES TO LIGHT IN THE LIVES OF CHRISTIANS WHEN WE ARE LIVING IN ITS SOIL.

CONSIDER THE OPPOSITE OF THIS. THINK ABOUT PLANTS WITH ROOTS NOT PLACED IN SOIL. THOSE PLANTS LIVE IN THE WATER AND FLOAT FROM PLACE TO PLACE AS THE WIND AND CURRENT DIRECT.

PAUL PRAYS FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE THE KIND OF PLANTS WITH ROOTS IN SOIL, SO THAT THEY CANNOT BE DRAWN FROM THE LOVE OF GOD BECAUSE THAT LOVE IS THE FOUNDATION OF THEIR LIVES.

THIS IDEA RELATES TO PAUL’S WORDS IN ROMANS 8:38-39 WHERE HE WROTE:

“FOR I AM CONVINCED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NEITHER ANGELS NOR DEMONS NEITHER THE PRESENT NOR THE FUTURE, NOR ANY POWERS, NEITHER HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANYTHING ELSE IN ALL CREATION, WILL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.”

THIS LEADS US TO HIS FURTHER SUPPLICATION TO GOD THAT THOSE WITHIN WHOM JESUS DWELLS WILL BE ABLE TO FULLY EMBRACE AND WELCOME GOD'S LOVE.

HE DESIRES FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE EMBRACED BY THE VASTNESS OF THIS LOVE, WRITING:

"I PRAY YOU MAY HAVE THE POWER TO COMPREHEND... WHAT IS THE BREADTH AND LENGTH AND HEIGHT, AND DEPTH, AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST THAT SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE, SO YOU MAY BE FILLED WITH THE FULLNESS OF GOD."

THE BREADTH OF GOD'S LOVE MEANS ITS VASTNESS. THIS LOVE IS WIDE ENOUGH TO EMBRACE ALL THE EARTH AND THOSE ON IT.

THE LENGTH OF GOD'S LOVE REFERS TO TIME. IT IS ETERNAL AND THUS IT CANNOT BE MEASURED. HIS LOVE WILL NEVER END NOR BE DIMINISHED.

THE HEIGHT OF GOD'S LOVE REFERS TO ITS GREATNESS. GOD'S LOVE REACHES FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH AND FROM EARTH TO HEAVEN.

THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE IS ITS SERIOUSNESS AND INTENSITY. LOVE CAUSED GOD IN JESUS TO STOOP DOWN TO BECOME ONE OF US, AND TO DIE FOR OUR SAKES.

IT IS DRAWN INTO OUR HEARTS AND THUS OUR LIVES IN A WAY THAT CANNOT BE EXPLAINED BY REASON, BUT ONLY EXPERIENCED THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST.

THE GOAL OF THIS PRAYER, HOWEVER IS NOT JUST FOR THE SAKE OF THE BELIEVER.

THE PURPOSE OF US BEING ROOTED AND GROUND IN GOD'S LOVE IS SO WE WILL BE SO FILLED WITH IT WE MUST SHARE THIS LOVE WITH OTHERS.

TO USE A DIFFERENT METAPHOR, THE APOSTLE'S HOPE WAS THAT WE WILL BE SO FILLED WITH GOD'S LOVE THAT IT OVERFLOWS FROM US INTO THE WORLD AROUND US.

IMAGINE A CONTAINER YOU ARE FILLING WITH WATER WHICH YOU DO NOT TURN OFF QUICK ENOUGH, AND IT OVERFLOWS THE BRIM AND POURS OUT INTO THE SINK OR ONTO THE GROUND.

PAUL'S PRAYER IS THAT GOD'S LOVE WILL BE CONTINUALLY FLOWING WITHIN US, SO THAT IT SPILLS OUT TO BLESS OTHERS.

THIS IS WHERE WE RELY ON GRACE, BECAUSE WE CANNOT FILL OURSELVES WITH GOD'S LOVE, BUT RATHER CAN ONLY WELCOME IT LIKE WE WELCOME JESUS LIVING WITHIN US.

THE POINT OF PAUL'S PRAYER IS TO MAKE US AWARE OF WHAT GOD IS DOING SO THAT WE ARE MORE OPEN TO HIS LOVE AND PRESENCE.

LET US PRAY: GRACIOUS GOD, WE THANK FOR YOUR GRACE AND LOVE. WE PRAY FOR THE RENEWAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT TO GROUND US IN YOUR LOVE, AND ENABLE US TO DRINK OF IT SO WE WILL BE FILLED WITH YOUR LOVE TO OVERFLOWING.

THANK YOU THAT AS BELIEVERS CHRIST DWELLS WITHIN OUR HEARTS THROUGH FAITH. STRENGTHEN US SO OUR LIVES WILL BE MORE FIRMLY ESTABLISHED IN YOUR LOVE.

WHEN THE PAST WON'T LET GO, HELP US TO LOVE. WHEN THE WORLD SHOUTS HATE, HELP US TO LOVE. WHEN THE ENEMY TAUNTS WITH LIES AND SURROUNDS WITH DARKNESS, HELP US TO LOVE. WHEN A RELATIONSHIP FEELS BROKEN OR WE'RE BETRAYED OR REJECTED, HELP US TO LOVE.

LORD, HELP US TO KEEP ON LOVING: EVEN WHEN IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE, EVEN WHEN IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE. AND EVEN WHEN OTHERS THINK WE ARE FOOLISH OR WEAK TO KEEP ON LOVING AS CHRIST'S LOVES US.

MAY OUR LIVES BE FILLED WITH YOUR GOODNESS, POWER, AND ESPECIALLY YOUR LOVE- THAT WE WILL WELCOME JESUS HOME IN OUR HEARTS, MINDS, AND SOULS. IN HIS NAME WE PRAY. AMEN

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