

Ephesians 3:18-21: Exceeding

Introduction

After beginning the prayer and going through some of its contents last time we are going to take a look at the closing prayer for the saints in Ephesus. If we'll be given the opportunity to explore God's love for us together in all dimensions and then this passage will ask us to realize what exists beyond God's affectionate (ἀγάπη, agape) love for us. His love exceeds our expectations. Agape can be translated affectionate love, or benevolent love.

Outline of Passage

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.

Paul's sentence structure here continues on from verse 17 and he is excited to invite the saints to have a personal, intimate knowledge of God's love. But that love is to be had with all of the saints! The rooting is something we all have, but the calling we have together is to explore the boundaries of God's love. There's just one problem: God's love is infinite in quality because of His nature. Of course this isn't a problem, but it presents us with a paradoxical scenario where our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite. Paul goes so far as to list three dimensional qualities and duplicates one for emphasis. The breadth and length characterize the extent to which God would go in His love for us. God's love is infinitely high and it is infinitely deep.

Paul then repeats the concept of knowledge and taking grasp of the concept of God's love through the work of Christ. Except he again reminds us that it is infinite and beyond our simple comprehension. Surpassing is the Greek word hyperballō (hū-per-bā'l-lō) which means to throw beyond or past something. Thus whatever knowledge that we could have of Christ's love, through the cross or otherwise, His love surpasses that and extends beyond the distance we can know.

How do we deal with this individually?

How do we deal with this as the body of Christ?

How can I know the Love of God & Christ better?

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,

Exceedingly abundant - The Greek structure of the sentence here is actually a series of words that are emphatic through redundancy. The word-for-word translation is "over, beyond (hyper) out of (ek) exceeding (perissos) above (hyper) all that we ask...."

Power - Strength, power, ability that is reflective of our new nature in Christ and shows the divine power of God acting on and in men. Dynamis (δύναμις) is the Greek word from which the English word dynamite is derived. Don't reverse the process and try to put dynamite into God's power.

What do we do with this verse?

Given the nature of the verse it would be easy to take it and run with it with the attitude that we should just ask for extreme things because God can exceed what we can ask for. Paul's recommendation in this verse seems to be that we recognize God's power, and *not* that we attempt to wrangle our desires out of God through asking just the right thing. Given that we don't want to see this in a manipulative sense, what other alternatives do we have for application and appropriation?

God is omniscient, which means that He knows all things. God is also omnipresent, and omnipotent which means He's everywhere and all powerful. This should give us peace to know that the God of the universe has a knowledge of what is, what was, what will be, and even knows all that could have been. He intervenes ahead of time and puts things in motion that will answer our prayers before we could even know that we would need to pray them.

The fact that the power of God works in us to change us and empower us should cause us to be humbly grateful in our service of Him. He is empowering us as believers to live out His life, and to do His good works (Eph. 2:10). This is a daily, moment-by-moment lifestyle enabling power.

How does verse 20 affect the way you think about prayer? What kind of answers should you expect from God?

From a big picture perspective what does verse 20 do to your view of things in this world?

The secular world has 'the butterfly effect' within the chaos theory but the believer has a sustaining, sovereign, God who causes things of momentous importance. Which takes greater faith? To believe in a God who can orchestrate the miraculous and supernatural, or in random, freakish events happening because of cause and effect on a cosmological scale?

to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

in the church - ekklesia, the Greek word used for the church is the gathering of people. Sometimes used to describe an organized meeting, and sometimes used in a general sense for those who fall under that grouping like all of the Christians around the globe.

All the generations - following from verse 15, the generations reflect the families that have been saved by the work of Christ.