

The Dimensions of Christ's Love

In our text, the Apostle resumes his concern originally taken up in 3:1—that of conveying his prayerful concern for them, in light of the grand truths he taught them in chapters 1 and 2. He is concerned that their knowledge not be merely doctrinal, but also experiential.

Ephesians 3:14-19

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family_t in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Bible commentators speak of Paul here “taking us up the rungs of a spiritual ladder,” or “climbing the stairs of spiritual experience” or “climbing the mountain of Christian experience.” The Apostle is certainly saying to the Ephesians that God is calling them to a deep, meaningful relationship with Himself.

Due to the grammatical structure in the original text (three clauses beginning with the word for “in order that”), it appears that Paul prays for three primary realities in their spiritual lives:

1. Strengthening of the inner being (vv.16,17).

This strengthening comes from receiving Christ through faith as a permanent resident in our hearts. This is the most important thing about us. (Cf. Pr. 4:23 and Mk. 7:20-23)

2. Grasping and knowing Christ's love (vv.18,19a).

Paul says that we must contemplate the multi-dimensional love of Christ, but also “know” it personally and experientially. John Stott describes Paul's four dimensions this way: “...the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind..., 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven.” More importantly, we must know this love of Christ for us personally, for that alone will enable us to face the ethical challenges of Ephesians 4-6 that follow in Paul's letter.

3. Being filled with all the fullness of God. (v.19b).

This is the most amazing statement of all. Paul uses language here that is very similar to the language he uses to describe the “fullness” that is in Christ Himself (cf. Col. 1:19; 2:3, 9). We are to enjoy a similar fullness. Not that we become deity, but rather that we enjoy the fullness of God filling us to full measure. When we are full of Him, we can be content in every trial, in every affliction, in every circumstance.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the Apostle so urgent (“I bow my knees...”) about his prayer in vv. 16-19?

2. What difference does it make to a Christian when she knows that Christ is dwelling in her heart?

3. Describe each of the four dimensions of Christ's love and why each of them is important to know personally by experience.

4. Describe a moment in your life when you think you experienced something like what the Apostle meant by being "filled with all the fullness of God."

5. Why should Christians aspire to deep spiritual experience with God?

6. How can we all deepen our experience with God?

Going Deeper

1. What do you need to do with your schedule in order to properly to "Take Time to be Holy?"

2. Why is this difficult for you?