

The Riches of God's Glory - Part 4

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[0 : 00] So, we are moving our way through this prayer of the Apostle Paul, which is found in Ephesians 3-14-21.

! I don't get tired of reading it. I hope you don't, but I want to read the text again, starting with verse 14 of Ephesians chapter 3, where Paul writes, For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, saying I pray for you, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now, to him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

All right. So, there you have it again. A great passage. And clearly, Paul is saying to the Ephesian believers, I'm praying for you. I mentioned last week, what a word of encouragement that I'm sure was to the Ephesian believers, what a word of encouragement that would be to anyone who knew the Apostle Paul.

They have the Apostle Paul praying for you. And he said, I'm praying for you that God would grant you, grant you according to, in accordance with, the riches of his glory.

[2 : 12] And there are four things, of course, that we can identify, four petitions in the prayer. Let me name those again. To be strengthened with might. That's the first one. We've looked at that one already. To be rooted and grounded in love.

We covered that one last week. To know the love of Christ. And, you know, right off we might be thinking, well, I already know that, so why pray for that?

But I think you'll discover tonight that this is more than just simply loving him, or to know that he loves you. And then the fourth one, to be filled with all the fullness of God.

All right. So we've discussed the first two petitions. And they being to be strengthened with might. That's talking about spiritual strength in the inner man.

And then the second one being to be rooted and grounded in love. To be deeply rooted like an oak tree. And to be firmly founded like a tall tower, a strong tower with a strong foundation.

[3 : 17] Deeply rooted, firmly founded in love. Now, the theme of love carries on into this third petition. And it's not our love directed toward Christ, but his love for us.

The love of Christ. And so the third petition is, we can name it this way, the knowledge of the full measure of Christ's love. That's basically this third petition.

The knowledge of the full measure of Christ's love. And I say full measure, he doesn't use those words there. But when he says width, length, depth, and height, that's, in a sense, the full measure of the love of Christ.

So this is the third petition. To know the full measure of Christ's love. All right. Now, I would say to you that we're, at this point, really, we're kind of getting in over our heads.

And you may not sense that right now because we're not, you know, delved into that petition yet. But believe me, this is lofty stuff.

[4 : 24] And when we start talking about the knowledge or the full knowledge of the full measure of Christ's love. To comprehend fully the full measure of Christ's love.

We're getting in over our heads here. And that's what Paul's praying for. And, you know, again, we might be thinking, you know, well, okay, Pastor, I think I already know that.

I already know that Christ loves me. And, well, you should know that. And I think we all do know that. But it's more than what you're thinking this petition is, more than that.

Remember these petitions, and I've mentioned this, I guess, about every time we have been studying this particular block of scriptures. Remember, these petitions are progressive.

They're progressive. They build upon one another. Each one lays the foundation for the next. We've got to keep that in our minds. And that helps us understand that Paul, at this point, with this third petition, he's not digressing.

[5 : 33] He's not going back to some lesser thing. It's building upon the two that have come before it. And so it takes, here's the idea, it takes spiritual strength in the inner man to have your life root enough and grounded enough in love, in love in the way the Bible defines love.

And so this deep-rootedness and firm foundationness, which is not a word, or foundedness, how about that? That's probably not a word either.

But this being deeply rooted and being firmly founded is what enables us then to grasp our understanding, in our understanding the love of Christ for us.

Now, it all starts with God, though. It's not something we drum up in ourselves and discover in ourselves. It all starts with God. It's not even something that we study and discover here in God's Word.

This knowledge of the love of God, the full measure of the love of God, is something that starts with God. We love Him, yes, because He loves us first. And that's what 1 John 4, 19 says.

[6 : 50] We love Him because He first loved us. And so, from our vantage point, from our perspective, a kind of earthbound perspective, we do not really know anything about Christ's love for us until He loved us.

Or rather, until we love Him. He loved us first. Romans 5, 5, the love of God has been poured out, shed abroad in the old King James, but is poured out in or within our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

And so, His love for us has freed us then to love Him. When I love Him, I begin then to realize how much He loves me. And the more I love Him, the more I understand about His love for me.

And the more I understand about His love for me or the love of Christ for me, the more I love Him. See, it just continues to build. Now, all that to say that our knowledge or our understanding of the love of Christ is limited.

It's always limited. That knowledge of the love of Christ is limited. Now, sure, you know, we have those moments in life when we see or experience certain events and these things reveal and they highlight God's love toward us and then we say, See there?

[8 : 12] You know, God really does love me. I mean, haven't you had experiences like that? That it just becomes so evident to you that God loves you. God did this for me.

Or this happened this way. Or God answered this prayer. Or some special thing happens out of nowhere. Something we're not even expecting. You say, you know, God just really does love me. All right, now we have those kind of experiences, but as good as that is, what Paul is talking about and what Paul is praying for here in Ephesians 3 is much more than that.

A whole lot more than that. Paul is talking about a knowledge of the love of God, whether we ever have anything in this life that confirms it as we would evaluate the love of God.

What if bad things happen to you? What if, you know, you have a tough time in life? Does that mean God loves you any less? See, this is the kind of knowledge of God's love that is not attached to circumstances.

Not attached to any even clear evidences that God might graciously grant you. It's a knowledge of the love of God that you have that is given to you by God and you respond in love and then you know more of the love of God and you respond more in love and it just progresses and grows in that way.

[9 : 32] This is what Paul is praying for. Paul is talking about coming under, really kind of coming under the full weight and significance of the love of Christ. The full truth of it.

The full reality of it. And I say to you again, our knowledge, that kind of knowledge of the love of God is limited. It's limited in us. It doesn't mean it just stays limited or that it's at rock bottom.

Sometimes it is. But it's limited no matter how much that may grow. It is still limited because there's always more to know about the love of God. And so, you know, that's how Paul puts it.

He says it's the width and length and depth and height of his love. And we'll get to that part of the verse here in just a minute. Now, there is no mistaking when this happens, this experience, when it happens, when we suddenly are filled with the knowledge of God.

I read a book, oh, years ago, and I looked at my library to see if I still had it and I couldn't find it. I don't know if I loaned it out to somebody. I know you might be familiar with it.

[10:43] If you have any books on famous revivals in history. And this particular book was written by James A. Stewart. Not Jimmy Stewart, the actor. But James A. Stewart.

And it's entitled The Invasion of Wales by the Holy Spirit through Evan Roberts, if you've ever heard of it. Interesting book, small book. If you ever get a copy of it, it's interesting to read.

And according to Stewart, Evan Roberts was a key personality that was used by God in the great Welsh revivals of the early 1900s, real early, beginning of the 1900s.

And again, James A. Stewart, according to Stewart, Evan Roberts had an experience at one point, at the very beginning of when this revival broke out, an experience that marked really the turning point, he said, of the revival.

And whether he was right about that, I don't know. But this is what happened. One night, Evan Roberts stood to preach, and he was preaching before a fairly large crowd of people.

[11:48] And suddenly, as he testified later, the knowledge of the love of God just kind of fell upon him, came upon him. Suddenly, his eyes were just opened to the depth and height and width of the love of God.

And he fell down on the ground. Now, he wasn't slain in the spirit, okay? All right. But he just fell out on the ground, and everybody thought he was dead. But what had happened, he again later testified, was that he'd just been given an overwhelming realization of the depth of Christ's love.

Now, you know, we could stand here in judgment about that experience. But, you know, sometimes, and if you've experienced this, whether it's through just the reading of God's Word, or in a time of prayer, and maybe just reflection upon the Word of God, reflection upon your communion with God, and maybe just simply a reflection as you think back over your mind about how God saved you and all that was involved in your salvation that you understand from Scripture, you can just simply just be overcome by how much Christ loves you.

And couple that with the fact that you know and sense, maybe at an even deeper level, of how unworthy you are of God's love.

And maybe even in a time when you have been unfaithful to Him and have come to Him in confession, and yet God, you just sense His presence, and you realize just how faithful He is, even in our own unfaithfulness.

[13:35] And a lot of kinds of experiences like that. Now, I believe that we can be then overcome by a sudden realization of just how deep is the Father's love for us.

and that we could even have trouble composing ourselves. Because I don't think this happens publicly all the time.

But privately, I've experienced this myself. And so you just kind of can't even compose yourself because our emotions are so engaged at that point.

I'm not advocating emotionalism. It doesn't begin with emotion. We can work emotion up. But we are emotional beings. And when God reveals anything about Himself, and especially when He reveals, just opens our eyes to the depth of His love for us, that we can be overcome emotionally with that knowledge.

And so this is somewhat of what I believe Paul is praying for. I'm not praying that we would have emotional breakdowns. I don't mean that. Although those times can happen where we're just overcome.

[14:57] But he's praying, this is the petition, that we would have a full, I guess we could say fuller knowledge of the measure of God's love toward us.

And that's more, again, much more than just simply attaching the reality of His love to some great event that has taken place in your life. You know, some great blessing or some answer to prayer.

It's much more than that. All right, now, this petition, when you get thinking about it, this petition seems to include, especially when you get into the verbiage of the petition as it's printed for us in Scripture, this petition seems to include what we might even call some impossible objectives.

In fact, I think I can identify three of them. Three impossible objectives when it comes to the knowledge of Christ's love. And here's the first one. The petition seems to be calling for this to

happen, to attain something that is unattainable.

To attain the unattainable. Now, that's self-contradictory, just as it's stated there. But let's just consider this from the Scripture. And under that heading, then, let's notice in the first place the possessors of this knowledge of Christ's love.

[16:25] Who are the possessors of it? And so we can discover that real quick and just pick apart some of the key words here in the text. First of all, the word able. The word able.

May be able to comprehend the love of Christ. Now, the word able does not refer to ability, per se, at least in the ordinary sense of that word.

That is, you know, to some specific aptitude towards something. That you're able, that you have an aptitude to comprehend the love of Christ. It doesn't refer to that.

The word able means literally to have full strength. To have full strength. And so, right here, again, takes us back to the idea and the understanding that these petitions are progressive because it takes spiritual strength in the inner man to experience what Paul is talking about here.

And that was the first petition, wasn't it? To be strengthened with might in the inner man. Then we have the word comprehend. Able to comprehend the love of Christ.

[17:36] And the word comprehend, in this case, does not mean just simply to understand, you know, in the ordinary sense of that word. But this word comprehend means to apprehend.

It means to mentally grasp a concept. To have knowledge. So we're talking about the intellect. It's something that we know. It's something we grasp mentally in our brains.

not to say that this isn't a spiritual thing. But God engages our minds as well as our hearts. And all those things are working.

Our emotions and many other things are all working in concert when God is revealing to us some wonderful truth about himself. In this case, the love of Christ.

Alright, so it means to mentally grasp a concept. To have a knowledge. And in this case, the knowledge is what? That Jesus really loves us. I mean really loves us more than we know or could ever fully know this side of heaven anyway.

[18:43] Now when we get to the next word that we ought to consider, the word all, you know, able to comprehend with all the saints the love of Christ, you know, do we really need to define the word all?

All means what? It means all. And so really the idea here is not the defining of the word all, but what does, what does need defining here is all of whom.

So that leads us to the next word, saints. The saints, in the word saints, hagios, does not refer, by the way, to some elite group of men or women who have had this title conferred upon them by the, quote, church, end quote.

And of course, I'm referring to the practice of the Catholics, you know, to elevate some within their religion religion or system of religion to some exalted position of sainthood, you know, like St. Christopher and St. Francis and St. Jude and so forth.

But, but see, according to the Bible and not according to some group of Catholic priests, I'm St. Don. Now, you know, I don't wear, I'm not selling medals for you to wear around your neck that has, has, you know, my face on it so that you can kiss it or pray to it or something like that.

[20:15] That'd be ridiculous, wouldn't it? I'm ridiculous. And yet, according to God's word, I'm a saint and so are you.

That doesn't mean I'm saintly. I mean, you think about that when it comes to, you know, my behavior sometimes. I mean, you don't even see that. I hide that real well. But, I'm just kidding. But, thank you, Howard. You're so good at inserting amen just at the right spot. But, we're all saints, right?

That is, if we've been born again by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we're all saints. All right? So, he's talking about all the saints.

So, the possessors of the knowledge of Christ's love is, it's for all of us, all the saints. All right? Now, second then, the progression of the knowledge of Christ's love.

[21:16] And it's not a contradiction to say, although it may seem like it, but it's not to say that this knowledge is unattainable, but that it can be attained. I don't know, if you just take that statement right out of there and look at it, that's self-contradictory.

But, in regard to our subject, it's not a contradiction to say that. It sounds like that, but it's not. The knowledge of the love of Christ, here's the idea, is progressive. In fact, it is infinitely progressive.

Paul, for example, is not contradicting himself when he said in Philippians 3.10 that I may know him, meaning knowing Jesus, but then said in Romans chapter 11, verse 33, his ways are past finding out.

Well, which is it, Paul? Can we know him, or are his ways past finding out? I mean, we can't really know him. That's not a contradiction because Paul is talking about an ongoing progression in our knowledge of God, a knowledge that will never, ever, ever be complete in this life.

In fact, I'll even step out on a limb and say that even when we get to heaven, we'll not know everything there is to know about God. We'll know as we are known, but there will still be the mystery of godliness even in eternity.

[22 : 37] And so in that regard, it's a knowledge that's unattainable, and yet, it is attainable in that it's progressive, that God allows us to know, to know his love, to know his character, his nature, and to know it, and to know more of it, and to continue to grow in the knowledge of it.

Now, again, it's not automatic. It's not attainable in our own strength, and by using our own intellect, you know, according to our own mental capacity.

Jesus, remember, said, and I think I gave this, I put this verse in there for you, Matthew 13, 12, he said, for whoever has, to him, more will be given. And he's talking about the knowledge of God, the word of God.

We could say, in the context in which he's writing here, it would be the gospel. Whoever has, and has some of it, to him, more will be given, and he will have abundance.

So more added to more, added to more. But whoever does not have, even what he has, will be taken away from him. Now, he's talking there, I believe, about lost people who may be in the church, and they have a knowledge of the word, a knowledge of the gospel.

[23 : 53] They don't have the gospel in the sense that they're not saved. But they have a knowledge of it, and maybe they're moving toward it, but they don't have it. And even that, at some point, if they do not repent and trust Christ, even that will be taken away from them.

But the point I want to make out of the passage is that this knowledge of God, in this case, the knowledge of the love of Christ, is a progressive thing.

And so we grow in the knowledge of Christ's love. And by the grace of God, our knowledge of his love becomes less and less abstract in our minds and becomes more and more concrete.

That's part of our experience as we mature in our faith. All right, so we're talking about the first seemingly impossible objective of Paul's petition, and that is to attain the unattainable.

So we have the possessors of the knowledge of Christ's love. We have the progression of the knowledge of Christ's love. And then one more, the purpose for the knowledge of Christ's love. The purpose for the knowledge of Christ's love.

[24 : 59] And the purpose for the knowledge of Christ's love is simple. It's to serve him. Now, that includes our worship as well, because worship is a part of our service to him.

But the knowledge of Christ's love is to serve him. The supreme, so the supreme motive for Christian service is knowledge, the knowledge that Jesus loves us.

Now, I want you to pay close attention to that because obviously, and we would all agree, the supreme motive for Christian service is not duty. Now, sometimes that's all we've got, you know, and shame on us.

And we serve, we continue to serve him sometimes out of duty. But that's not the supreme motive. Neither is security. That is, you know, to serve him with the idea that our salvation will continue to be secured.

And so, if we stop serving him, stop coming to church, stop tithing, you know, stop, you know, ministering to people, that somehow we're going to lose our salvation.

[26 : 07] No, we don't serve him out of a motivation to stay secure in our salvation. Also, not reward, of course, either. Don't serve him so that he will reward you.

That's self-centered and self-serving. It's not even, now listen to this, it's not even for love for Jesus. Now, that is a strong motivation.

I serve him because I love Jesus. I mean, haven't you said that? And would you agree that that is a motivation for serving him? And yet, I would suggest to you that though that's a great motivation, it will fall short sometimes.

It'll fall short. Our love for Jesus is a good motive, but it's not the motive. It is a secondary motive, secondary to the knowledge that Jesus loves us.

I serve him and I'm motivated to serve him because he loves me. And look at all he has done for me. Alright, so, we're talking about to attain the unentable.

[27 : 14] Number two, to measure the immeasurable. Here's the second seemingly impossible objective from this petition. And that is to measure the immeasurable.

Now, we're talking about measuring the love of Christ. And we, now, then, we're moving here from just, you know, the idea of comprehending the reality of Christ, his love, to the actual measuring of it.

The measuring of Christ's love. In a sense, kind of stepping back and taking a look at it as a whole, as a unit, like you would look at a new house, you know, go out by the street and get the whole view of it, you know.

or maybe it's a new car, believe it. You get out there after you've gotten inside, you check this out and that out and open the hood and open the trunk and you kick the tire and, you know, those kind of things.

And then you just step back and you look at it. What's it look like? Did you kind of take the whole in here? That's the idea here with this second part, to measure the love of Christ. Paul is referring to something, this love of Christ, he's referring to something that cannot be measured.

[28 : 31] It cannot be measured. In fact, we would sooner be able to measure this universe than we could measure the love of Christ. It's kind of like, I got to think, it's kind of like going to a movie, you know, at one of these huge IMAX theaters.

Have you ever been to one of those? I'm not talking about an IMAX movie necessarily, but one of those huge screens, you know. It'd be like going to go see a movie, one of these huge IMAX theaters and sitting on the very front row.

I just can't stand to sit up there, even if it's a small screen. And you're sitting there, you know, watching this movie and you really cannot see the whole screen at the same time, or at least what's going on there.

If you've ever been to one of these, and maybe, you know, maybe you're different, but, you know, I'm watching a movie and I'm looking over here what's happening there and then I look over here, I can't take it all in in one, kind of one field of vision, you know, even including the peripheral vision. You just can't take it all in. And so, that's the idea of being able to kind of size up the love of Christ, to kind of measure it in your mind as a whole, as a whole unit.

[29 : 48] And you just can't do that. And yet, Paul did, in a sense, measure Christ's love. And with these words, he said, to comprehend with all the saints what is, and these are terms of measurement, the width and length and depth and height of the love of Christ, or to know the love of Christ.

As I just think about these, and I'll just name these when I discuss them, but first of all, the width of Christ's love. What could that be referring to? Well, it refers to the fact that the love of Christ is broad enough to encompass all of mankind.

That doesn't mean that he's going to save all of mankind. But his love is certainly broad enough to save anyone and everyone. It's broad enough.

And really, what counts for us is that we're including in it there. The length of Christ's love refers to the fact that has no boundaries.

And what I mean is it's endless and yet it's also beginningless. His love for me had no beginning. Not in any way I could understand it, any terms of time and chronology or anything like that.

[31 : 04] His love for me, we understand from Scripture, everlasting. And I'm not just singling myself out. That's true of all of us. An everlasting love. That means there's no beginning and no ending to it.

Now, I know we can't comprehend that because we don't have, it's not, we're not capable of having eternal thoughts and eternal desires. I mean, we may have desires that reach out as far as we, as eternity, but all of our thoughts, all of our knowledge, all of our desires, all of our decisions have a beginning point.

But God's decision point about loving you and no beginning, no beginning point. It's the, that's the length of Christ's love. It has no boundaries.

The depth of Christ's love refers to this. His love reaches down to the deepest of sinners. And aren't you glad? Amen. Amen. To the deepest of sinners.

Fourth, the height of Christ's love, we could think in these terms, that his love has an ultimate and lofty purpose and that purpose is to make us good.

[32 : 16] Make us good. That is to conform us to the very life of Christ. All right, so then Paul's third petition seems to have objects or objectives that are impossible to attain the unattainable, to measure the immeasurable, and then one more, to know the unknowable.

And these are all, you know, just kind of self-contradictory, aren't they? To know the unknowable.

Well, is that possible? Verse 19 says, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

I mean, if you were thinking that my outline was, was, you know, contradictory, self-contradictory, I agree with you. But here, Paul says, makes a statement that on the face of it is a contradiction.

To know something that is past knowing. That's, that's contradictory. It's beyond knowing. You've got to know something that's beyond knowing.

But we need to understand it this way. The word used for know, it's *ginosko* in the Greek, refers to knowing something by experience.

[33 : 27] by experience. And, meaning to go from a conceptual knowledge to an experiential knowledge.

And so, when Paul says that this love passes knowledge, he means, literally, that Christ's love is a knowledge surpassing love.

That sounds confusing. confusing. Think about it. His love, the love of Christ, is a knowledge surpassing love.

And what does that mean? It means that Christ's love for us goes beyond the limits of our knowledge. Even as the limits of our knowledge expand.

And they do. I'm not just talking about our intellect, about science, and things on this planet, and history, you know, that our knowledge of things here grows.

[34 : 30] I'm not talking about that. I'm even talking about the knowledge of God. The knowledge of his person and his character. In this case, the knowledge of the love of Christ toward us.

That knowledge, hopefully, in your spiritual journey as you mature spiritually, that knowledge is growing. But even as that knowledge is expanding, as we mature in the faith, God's love continues to go even beyond that.

That's why I say it's to know the unknowable because the love of Christ is something past knowing the fullness of it, the completeness of it.

And it's very much, I think, you know, like the third verse of Frederick Lehman's *The Love of God*, which, you know, everybody's familiar with that verse, but let me read it if you have it there. Could we, this is an interesting question, could we with ink, the ocean fill, just imagine the entire ocean full of ink, and were the skies of parchment made?

So the sky is one big tablet of paper, one big parchment. All right, so we've got another ink in all the oceans and we've got this huge parchment because the entire sky is a parchment.

[35 : 50] If that were so, it could even be so. Were every stalk, every stalk on this planet a quill, on Earth a quill to write with?

You know, these are ancient words. We don't use quills anymore, do we? And every man is scribe by trade. So everyone, everyone on the planet, every man, everyone is, you know, an expert at writing, composing.

If all that were true, to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, all the ink would be gone, and nor could the scroll. If the whole sky was a scroll, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

And just beautiful words that capture, really capture, the idea behind this petition that Paul was praying for the Ephesian believers.

Thank you.