

## PAUL'S PRAYER FOR BELIEVERS, PT. 2; EPH. 3:18-21 (Ed O'Leary)

### INTRODUCTION.

TODAY, ~ WE WRAP UP OUR LOOK AT THIS NEXT SECTION OF EPHESIANS, ~ 3:14-21.

▶▶ As we know, ~ in this section Paul prays for six things for believers and then closes with a doxology.

AS WE SAID LAST TIME, ~ WHAT PAUL PRAYS HERE IN THIS PARAGRAPH FOR THE believers in Ephesus is needed in every believer's life.

▶▶ So it is vital that we explore these requests to see what exactly it is that we need; ~ and then subsequently ~ to continually pray this prayer for our fellow believers and for ourselves.

ALSO, ~ LAST TIME, ~ WE EXAMINED VERSES 14-17, ~ THE INTRODUCTION TO PAUL'S prayer ~ and his first three prayer requests.

▶▶ As we noted Paul began his prayer by emphasizing the sovereignty of God. ~ Paul assures us right at the start that when we pray, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ we can rest assured that we are addressing the one true God, ~ the sovereign creator of both the visible and invisible realms and all they contain, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ who, ~ because of who He is, ~ is more than able to answer our prayers.

▷▷ There is absolutely no force in the earthly realm or the spiritual realm, ~ we said, ~ that can sever our line of communication that we have with our almighty God, ~ or that can prevent Him from answering our prayers.

▶▶ Paul first prayed that believers would be "mightily empowered through the Holy Spirit in [our] inner being."

▷▷ As we noted, ~ as long as we think that we can handle the Christian life, ~ as spelled out in Scripture, ~ on our own, ~ we will fail miserably. ~ We cannot succeed spiritually by our own strength or by our own power.

↳↳ But when we wait on the Lord, ~ when we seek empowerment from the Holy Spirit, ~ we "shall renew [our] strength; ~ [we shall soar] like eagles; ~ [we] shall run and not be weary; ~ [we] shall walk and not faint," ~ ¶¶

↳↳ and not even a mighty mountain . . . . ¶¶ 1/9

▶▶2<sup>nd</sup>, ~ Paul prayed that Jesus would become the very center of believers' lives, ~ that He would exercise His lordship and reign over every area of our lives.

▷▷As we noted, ~ Jesus loves us beyond measure ~ and wants what's best for us.

↳↳And what's best for us is to make Him the very center of our lives, ~ the controlling factor in our minds, ~ our attitudes, ~ and our conduct.

▶▶In Paul's third request, ~ he combined two metaphors to emphasize his concern that believers be sufficiently well established in the knowledge of God's extraordinary love for us.

▷▷As we observed, ~ when we, ~ i.e., ~ believers, ~ are sufficiently well established in the knowledge of God's abundant love for us, ~ *in the assurance that God loves us, ~ has accepted us, ~ and that we are precious to Him, ~*

↳↳then nothing will be able to shake us.

TODAY, ~ WE WILL COVER PAUL'S LAST THREE PRAYER REQUESTS AND HIS CLOSING doxology.

### WE FIND PAUL'S FOURTH PRAYER REQUEST IN VERSE 18.

PAUL PRAYS THAT BELIEVERS "MAY HAVE STRENGTH TO COMPREHEND WITH ALL THE saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth."

▶▶This is a request for divine empowerment in order for believers to "understand ~ with all the saints ~ what is the breadth and length and height and depth."

NOW, ~ PAUL DOES NOT ADD A DIRECT OBJECT HERE.

▶▶So the question is "the breadth and length and height and depth" of what?

▷▷Well, ~ since this verse is sandwiched between a verse in which Paul prays that we become "rooted and grounded in [God's] love," ~ and a verse in which Paul prays that we come "to know the love of Christ," ~ ¶¶

↳↳more than likely *verse 18* is talking about Jesus' love for us.

▶▶So, ~ Paul is praying that believers would be divinely empowered to understand "with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Jesus' love for us."

NOW WE MUST BE CAREFUL WITH THESE FOUR DIMENSIONS, ~ IN THE SENSE OF seeking out Paul's primary point. ¶¶ 2/9

▶▶ Most importantly, ~ these four dimensions are to be treated as a unity, ~ a totality which brings to mind the immensity of a particular object, ~ and that object is Jesus' love for us.

▷▷ So, ~ most likely, ~ Paul's prayer request here is that God would enable believers to understand how immense Jesus' love for us is.

↪↪ And by combining these four dimensions, ~ Paul is undoubtedly emphasizing the immensity of Jesus' love for us.

▶▶ In Ps. 103:11, ~ David helps us see what Paul is getting at here.

▷▷ He writes, ~ For as high as the heavens are above the earth, ~ so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him." ~~ Indicates infinite distance.

▶▶ So, ~ again, ~ primarily, ~ Paul's prayer request here is that God would enable believers to understand ~ with all the saints ~ how infinitely immense Jesus' love for us is.

▷▷ The implication here being that believers do not possess this ability to understand how infinitely immense Jesus' love for us is.

↪↪ So we need to make Paul's prayer our prayer, ~ and continually pray that God would give our brothers and sisters in Christ ~ and ourselves ~ the ability we need to achieve this understanding.

NOW, ~ HAVING IDENTIFIED PAUL'S MAIN POINT, ~ WE CAN REVISIT these dimensions on a secondary level.

▶▶ Each of these dimensions gives us a good picture of the infinite immensity of Jesus' love for us, ~ and helps us understand just how immense it is.

▶▶ Take the "breadth" of Jesus' love for us. ~~ We might say that the "breadth" of Jesus love includes every individual in every age. ~~ No believer stands outside the love of Christ.

▷▷ And no unbeliever in this life is beyond its reach.

↪↪ If you've never accepted Christ, ~ it doesn't matter what you've done ~ or are doing. ~~ In this life ~ not beyond Jesus' love and therefore His saving hand.

→→ "depth of mercy! ~ can there be ~ Mercy still reserved for me?" ~~ yes!

▶▶ When we consider the "length" of Jesus' love, ~ let's ask ourselves, ~ "For how long has Jesus loved me?" ~ and ~ "For how long will Jesus' love me?" ⇓ 3/9

▷▷ The answer to both questions is "for eternity."

↳↳ As God says through Jeremiah, ~ in Jer. 31:3, ~ "I have loved you with an everlasting love."

↳↳ And in Ps. 106:1, ~ the psalmist calls upon us to praise and give thanks to the Lord ~ because "he is good" ~ and because "his steadfast love endures forever!"

▶▶ When we consider the "height" of Jesus' love, ~ let's ask ourselves, ~ How high does the love of Christ lift me?

▷▷ It has lifted believers to the heavenly places where we are seated with Jesus.

↳↳ As Paul says in Eph. 2:6, ~ NIV, ~ "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

↳↳ Hymn we sang earlier summarizes it quite well. ~ "I was sinking deep in sin, ~ far from the peaceful shore, ~ Very deeply stained within, ~ sinking to rise no more, ~ ¶¶

→→ But the Master of the sea, ~ heard my despairing cry, ~ From the waters lifted me, ~ now safe am I. ~ ~ ¶¶

↳↳ Love lifted me! Love lifted me! ~ ~ When nothing else could help ~ ~ Love lifted me!"

▶▶ And regarding the "depth" of Jesus' love for us, ~ Paul in Phil. 2:6-8 tells us how deep Jesus' love for us is.

▷▷ Paul says that Jesus, ~ "though he was in the form of God, ~ did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped ~ [i.e., ~ Jesus did not consider equality with God ~ something to be used to his own advantage], ~ ¶¶

↳↳ but emptied himself ~ [put simply, ~ He gave up his divine privileges], ~ by taking the form of a servant, ~ being born in the likeness of men. ~ ~ ¶¶

→→ And being found in human form, ~ he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, ~ even death on a cross."

▷▷ Jesus endured a cross, ~ the most cruel and disgraceful of deaths, ~ so that we might have eternal life.

BEFORE MOVING ON, ~ LET'S NOTICE ONE MORE THING HERE IN VERSE 18. ¶¶ 4/9

▶▶ Paul prays that God would enable believers to understand ~ "with all the saints" ~ how infinitely immense Jesus' love for us is.

▶▶ The phrase "with all the saints" tells us that all blood-bought believers can achieve the divine enabling in order to understand how immense Jesus' love for us is.

▷▷ It is not for a favored few, ~ or an upper class of believers.

▷▷ The phrase "with all the saints," ~ like the phrase "fellow citizens" which we looked at back in Eph. 2:19b, ~ points to equality among God's people.

▷▷ As we said, ~ and it bears repeating, ~ there is no caste system in the kingdom of God. ~ ~ There is no spiritual elite in the kingdom of God. ~ ~ There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God.

▷▷ In Gal. 3:28, Paul writes, ~ "There is neither Jew nor Greek, ~ there is neither slave nor free, ~ there is no male and female, ~ for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

▷▷ Being citizens of heaven makes us all united and equal. ~ ~ In God's kingdom there is no spiritual superiority or inferiority.

▷▷ All believers share the same standing before God. ~ ~ And all disciples of Jesus can receive the ability to understand how infinitely immense Jesus' love for us is.

### PAUL'S FIFTH PRAYER REQUEST IS IN VERSE 19a.

HE WANTS BELIEVERS "TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST THAT SURPASSES knowledge."

▶▶ This is a request for believers to come to a greater knowledge of Jesus' infinitely immense love for us.

▶▶ Paul prays that believers will know Jesus' infinitely immense love in a much greater measure, ~ but he employs a paradoxical expression to highlight the unknowable extent of Jesus' love for us.

▷▷ Paul says in effect: ~ ~ I want you to know that which cannot be known.

▶▶ Now, ~ Paul is not playing some kind of trick or joke on us.

▷▷ Undoubtedly, ~ Paul is saying that there is a real knowledge of Christ's infinitely immense love possible to us, ~ a knowledge that is capable of increase, ~ while a complete or exhaustive knowledge will always remain beyond our capacity. ↴ ↴ 5/9

▷▷ Even in heaven we will not gain an exhaustive knowledge of Jesus' infinitely immense love for us; ~ ~ ¶¶

↳↳ because, ~ even though we will be glorified, ~ we will still be finite.

→→ And Jesus' infinitely immense love for us is infinitely unknowable in extent.

▷▷ The hymn writer sums it up quite well.

↳↳ "Could we with ink the ocean fill, ~ ~ And were the skies of parchment made; ~ ~  
Were every stalk on earth a quill, ~ ~ And every man a scribe by trade; ~ ~ ¶¶

→→ To write the love of God above ~ Would drain the ocean dry; ~ ~ Nor could the scroll contain the whole, ~ Though stretched from sky to sky."

▶▶ And Paul wants us to be growing in this knowledge that can't be fully known.

THIS GROWING KNOWLEDGE THAT PAUL DESIRES WE HAVE, ~ CAN BE LOOKED AT two ways.

▶▶ First, ~ it can mean "to learn" or "to possess factual knowledge." ~ ~ Paul holds out to us Jesus' infinitely immense love for us as a subject that should occupy our study of Scripture.

▷▷ As we study the Scriptures, ~ we will grow in factual knowledge of Jesus' infinite love for us.

▶▶ And second, ~ it can refer to learning something by observation or noticing something.

▷▷ It looks like Paul is praying that, ~ in addition to knowledge gained from studying Scripture, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ we will learn more and more about Jesus' infinitely immense love for us through observing it in our own and our fellow believers' lives.

▶▶ All those who have confessed . . . need to grow both in our knowledge of Jesus' infinitely immense love for us.

▷▷ So we need to make Paul's prayer ~ our prayer.

↳↳ And continually pray that our brothers and sisters in Christ ~ and ourselves will grow in our knowledge of Jesus' infinitely immense love for us, ~ that surpasses knowledge. ¶¶ 6/9

ALONG WITH HIGHLIGHTING THE INFINITELY UNKNOWABLE extent of Jesus' love for us, ~ which we mentioned earlier, ~ in noting that Jesus' love for us surpasses knowledge, ~ ¶¶

▶▶Paul most likely is also emphasizing that we belong to an all-powerful God, ~ who is extremely capable of keeping all of his people under the cover of his infinite love, ~ no matter what happens to us in this life.

AS PAUL WRITES IN ROM. 8:38-39, ~ AND I'LL COMMENT AS WE GO THROUGH THIS, ~ LEB ~ ¶¶

▶▶"For I am convinced ~ [the verb Paul uses expresses certainty. ~ And the form of the verb points to a permanent state. ~ This is no passing whim. ~ Paul stands absolutely convinced once and for all time] ~ ¶¶

▷▷that neither death, ~ nor life, ~ nor angels, ~ nor rulers, ~ nor things present, ~ nor things to come, ~ [i.e., ~ neither present nor future circumstances and events] ~ nor powers ~ [i.e., ~ the spiritual forces of evil], ~ ¶¶

↳↳nor height, ~ nor depth ~ [perhaps in the sense that space cannot come between us and our Savior's love], ~ ¶¶

→→[and lest a picky reader think that Paul has omitted something that could threaten the believer's security in God's love, ~ Paul concludes with the comprehensive] ~ nor any other created thing, ~ ¶¶

↳↳will be able to separate us from the love of God ~ [i.e., ~ God's love for us] ~ that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

↳↳Nothing and no one are able to separate us from God's love because God is sovereign.

▶▶If none of these can cause a separation between believers and God's love for us, ~ then why should we fear anything?

▷▷My . . . ~ we are assured that our all-powerful God will always keep us secure in his great love.

↳↳As David writes in Ps. 27:1, ~ ¶¶

→→"The Lord is my light and my salvation; ~ whom shall I fear? ~ The Lord is the stronghold of my life ~ [or, ~ The Lord protects my life]; ~ of whom shall I be afraid? ¶¶ 7/9

## PAUL'S SIXTH, ~ AND FINAL ~ PRAYER REQUEST IS IN VERSE 19b.

PAUL PRAYS THAT BELIEVERS "MAY BE FILLED WITH ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD."

▶▶ Interpreters have explained this phrase in several different ways. ~ I agree, ~ at this time, ~ with the view that it refers to a believer growing spiritually mature.

▷▷ The similarity between this expression and Eph. 4:13, ~ where Paul talks about spiritual maturity, ~ seems to point in this direction.

▶▶ So, ~ we can look at Paul's request as praying that believers become more and more spiritually mature. ~ And that means becoming more and more like our heavenly Father.

▷▷ Perhaps we can paraphrase Paul's request here in verse 19b this way: ~ I pray that you grow more and more like God our Father."

▶▶ Jesus expresses the same thought in Matt. 5:48. ~ He says, ~ NASB ~ "Therefore you are to be perfect, ~ as your heavenly Father is perfect.

▷▷ The word "perfect" does not imply sinless perfection, ~ for that's not possible for us in this life, ~ although it is a good aim to strive for.

↪↪ The word "perfect" indicates completeness, ~ maturity. ~ "Be like your heavenly Father," ~ Jesus says.

▶▶ So Paul is praying that believers grow more and more like our heavenly Father.

NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE ON THE SPIRITUAL MATURITY SCALE, ~ ALL BELIEVERS can and need to improve.

▶▶ This is evidenced in Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonian church.

▷▷ In 1 Thess. 4:1, ~ Paul writes, ~ "Finally, ~ then, ~ brothers, ~ we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, ~ that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, ~ just as you are doing, ~ that you do so more and more."

▶▶ All believers can and need to improve spiritually.

▷▷ All believers can and need to become more and more like our heavenly Father. ~ So we need to make Paul's prayer our prayer.

↪↪ And continually pray that our brothers and sisters in Christ and we ourselves will grow more and more like our gracious, ~ merciful, ~ and loving heavenly Father. 📖 8/9



## PAUL CONCLUDES HIS PRAYER WITH A DOXOLOGY ~ 77

THAT BOTH EXALTS GOD AND ASSURES BELIEVERS THAT GOD IS MORE THAN ABLE TO grant these requests.

▶▶ To any believer wondering if God can really answer this prayer that we should be praying for our fellow believers and ourselves, ~ 77

▷▷ Paul responds in no uncertain terms, ~ God can absolutely grant these requests, ~ and more!

↪↪ There are no limits on God's power that is at work within believers.

▶▶ Paul writes, ~ "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, ~ according to the power at work within us."

▶▶ Now, ~ it's extremely important that we notice the phrase "according to the power at work within us."

▷▷ Paul is not talking about external, ~ material things. ~~ This phrase restricts the phrase "far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" ~ to things that pertain to inward spiritual growth.

↪↪ 1<sup>st</sup> & foremost . . . . ~ But wider app. it means anything pertaining . . . .

## CONCLUSION.

AGAIN, ~ 77

▶▶ To any believer wondering if God can really answer this prayer that we should be praying for our fellow believers and ourselves, ~ 77

▷▷ Paul responds in no uncertain terms, ~ God can absolutely grant these requests, ~ and more!

↪↪ There are no limits on God's power that is at work within believers.

▶▶ Then Paul adds, ~ "to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, ~ forever and ever. ~~ Amen."

▷▷ Without a doubt ~ to God be the glory!!

LET'S PRAY . . . . 9/9