

Ephesians 3:14-21

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 July 2018

Preacher: Dominic Smart

[0 : 0 0] So, if you want to turn to Ephesians 3, 14 to 21, or turn your Bible on and swipe through to it, whatever you happen to do, then we're going to stick fairly closely to the text, so you'll be way more edified looking at the Bible than looking at me.

I know I'm good to look at, but, you know, hey, I'm working on that kind of mix between George Clooney and Tom Cruise at the moment, but I'm kidding.

But it's just going to be more edifying looking at the words on the page. So, Paul begins, for this reason I kneel before the Father, and we think, well, what's the reason?

And if we go back up to verse 13, we're stuffed because it goes further back than that. So, if you look at the beginning of chapter 3, Paul says, for this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for the sake of you Gentiles, em dash.

And then, verse 2, he like goes off on one, on what it is to be the bearer of the gospel, which was a mystery to the Gentiles.

[1 : 1 1] Because it means so much to him to do that, that just mentioning it sends him off on something. So, why does he, then he comes back to it, so we get that from the repetition of the phrase, for this reason.

What is it that Paul has in mind which prompts verse 1 of chapter 3 and the prayer that follows in verse 14 following?

Well, let's just take it back as far as chapter 2, verse 19. Consequently, that is because of the cross, because of the cross by which Jesus broke down by putting to death the wall of division between Jew and Gentile, two houses, if you like, the house of the Jews, the house of, you know, like we have the royal house of Tudor or Windsor or Soud or wherever it happens to be.

These two domains, through the cross, Jesus broke down the hostility between them, putting it to death, so that he could bring together into one united house one building in which he would inhabit, not a temple in Jerusalem, nor even a temple anywhere else, not a building, but these people, this one united people.

And Paul wants them to understand these Ephesian Christians, some Jews, mostly Gentiles, brought together that they're going to need help to get on with one another.

[2 : 4 8] Breaking down the wall of hostility is what Christ has done. Living and experiencing life together in one united house is something they have to work at, like it is in any home.

So consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

In him, the whole building that is Jew and Gentile together, this house that God is inhabiting, in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him, in Jesus, you too, in Ephesus are being part of this. You know, you have some of the Lego bricks that God is putting together here. And in him, you too, are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So this isn't just the church generally. It is that. Jew, Gentile, big people group stuff, brought together, huge new people group, Christian.

[4 : 12] It is also local. And in him, you too, in Aberdeen, Bon Accord, are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

So you are one united house. And God is building you. Week by week, year by year, he is building you and he inhabits you.

So immediately, we have to think away from and deliberately think away from the kind of individualism that our culture teaches us.

Because for many, many Christians throughout their entire lives, church is primarily an individual experience. I go to church. I sit in church. I comply with the sort of social norms.

And I get something from the singing or from the preaching or from the fellowship, I hope, that I will take away with me. And if I can take something away with me and I've had a need or two of mine met, then that's been a good experience.

[5 : 21] And I'll go back to that church, particularly if the coffee was decent, which I'm assured it will be. And service will be with a considerable smile downstairs afterwards. A plug.

A plug. But what prompts Paul's prayer isn't sort of just the multiplying of an individual experience.

I mean, that wouldn't require the praying that he's doing. And that wouldn't be adequately described by what we read in verse 22 of chapter 2.

He is building you together. So far from being sort of a mere bag full of Lego bricks, you don't really become a brick until you're built into a building.

You're just lump of plastic on which nobody ever wants to kneel or tread with a bare foot. So because God is building you together, because your primary experience of God is a shared together experience, because your primary growth in Christ is a together thing, because God inhabits us, yes, the Spirit is within us, but God is within us together, and that's what verse 22 is about.

[6 : 54] Because of this, we need prayer. In fact, we need more than prayer. We need God. And so Paul prays for them, and he says, For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives his name.

It's simply a way of saying that God made us all. There ain't anybody alive who hasn't been given life by God. God is the creator of all of us, Jew or Gentile, Scots, English, Welsh, whatever, whatever nationality we are, whatever social background we are, God made us all.

And what I'm praying is, and then there are three things that Paul prays that are bound to be, because it's a sermon, so there are bound to be three things. There are these three things that Paul prays.

So let's look at them. I pray, first of all, verse 16, and this goes on into verse 17. I pray that out of his glorious riches, or better, according to his glorious riches, that's probably a better translation.

Some of you will have that in your version of the Bible. I pray that according to his glorious riches, not according to your merits, not according to your worthiness, not according to your compliance, church norms, not according to your intelligence, or Bible knowledge, or niceness, or whatever it is, but according to something immeasurable, something inexhaustible, according to his glorious riches.

[8 : 32] That's the measure, not necessarily the source, but the measure, the pattern. Out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell, always abide.

The idea that dwelling there might come to you again and again and again, like you have to get saved again and again and again, but that Christ who is in you may remain and dwell and abide thrivingly in your hearts through faith.

So let's just unpack that for a moment or two. First of all, what we need is immeasurably huge.

What you need as a fellowship to grow into one united house in which God dwells gloriously requires immeasurable and inexhaustible resources.

You can't do it yourselves. No amount of intelligence, no amount of organizational ability, no amount of institutional support, no amount of anything that we can do will be enough.

[9 : 54] It won't be enough to take us across our socially inhibiting barriers. It won't be enough to cause us to speak to people in a way that is more interested in them than in us.

It won't be enough. Whatever we've got won't be enough to bother about how anybody else feels. Because you can go to church and go home basically just not bother about anybody else.

I mean, you go through kind of social British norm politeness things. You know, we do that fairly well. But you can go home and basically not give a monkey's about how anybody else felt in the place today.

It's perfectly possible, particularly for men. See, what we've got isn't enough to build us together to become a house in which God will dwell.

We need immeasurable and inexhaustible resources. The free church can't turn you into a living church. No other denomination can do it, by the way.

[11 : 09] There's no agenda there. Neither good independence. Nothing can do that. Singing this or singing that won't do it.

Having this version of the Bible as a church Bible or that version of that won't do it. Sharing gospel tribalism won't do it.

Only God can pull you together. And so he says that he may strengthen you with power through his spirit.

This is the power that made the world. This is the power that takes dead sinners like us and brings them to life in Jesus.

There's no power like that amongst us, you know, that we've got, is there? So if you think of power, I've sometimes kind of heard this.

[12 : 17] I'm sure maybe you've heard the same. Well, the word for power is dunamis. It's like dynamite. Well, unless Paul was a time traveler, he wouldn't have had dynamite in mind. Because dynamite, precursors of dynamite, something like gunpowder, were around in China in about the 800s, late 700s, and they were used for fireworks.

In fact, dynamite wasn't around until the late 1800s when, lo and behold, it was Nobel who invented dynamite. And then when he, it was simply used as a sort of a trigger for other explosions using gunpowder.

And he felt so bad about it that he initiated the Nobel Peace Prize. So unless Paul's a time traveler, he wasn't thinking of a big explosion.

He's thinking of the ability to create something when there was nothing. The power to move things.

So our sense of something being dynamic, moving, progressing, rather than being like, you know, stuck in a rut. That's more the kind of thing that is in this word power.

[13 : 32] I need the power of the Spirit to move towards anybody in Jesus' name.

Because my own movement will always be left to myself, without the Spirit, self-referential.

My key question will be, what's in this for me? Is what I like getting changed? Am I going to enjoy this?

Do I agree with this? I didn't get much out of the songs, sermon, fellowship, whatever. My thoughts are always eventually to me, self-referential.

Only the Spirit can move me, has that power to move me, not explode me in all directions at once.

[14 : 41] Move me towards anybody else. Only God's Spirit has the power to make any of you other person-centered.

More bothered about how they are than whether they know how you are. More bothered about how their week has gone. Truly bothered, truly caring, than how your week has gone.

You get the point. And we need this power so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. We need the Spirit of God in us so that we keep, keep, keep trusting Jesus.

Instead of turning our Christian lives into a performance-based appraisal system, which is just one more example of being self-referential.

So, instead of, thank you, Jesus, you're my righteousness, we're saying, hey, I did that pretty well, don't you think, Lord? Oh, I feel mince. I know you can't love me.

[15 : 52] You can't look at me because I didn't do very well. The problem with either the pride or the despair is that it is essentially about me.

And I'm not resting in the righteousness of Christ. By which we live, walk, move, have our being.

By which we live from first to last. We read in Romans. Second prayer, in case you were wondering about your lunch.

So, verse 17. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and I pray that you, so second half of 17, being rooted, so now we're turning into plants now, everybody, okay?

So, I am a tree. Imagine yourself as a tree or something. I pray that you, so now we're going to have a tree, and I pray that you, so now we're going to have a tree. I pray that you, so now we're going to have a tree, and I pray that you, so now we're going to have a tree, and we're going to have a tree.

[16 : 56] May have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the beauty of doctrinal correctness and over-hyphenated aphorisms on Twitter.

No, the love of Christ. So, let's unpack this one. What's he praying? What is it that we need that requires God?

Well, the first thing is that he says you are rooted and established, which is very encouraging. About this time last year, we moved out to Kintor, so we live in the Shire along with the Hobbits, and we have a great time.

And it is beautiful out there, and it's warmer than in the city. We don't get the Haar, and that's a joy. It's like that kind of schadenfreude thing.

We rejoice in sunshine, particularly when we know that the Haar has crept in the city, because we're not that sanctified yet. And we took trees with us, two trees, from where we used to live in town, out to the Shire.

[18 : 11] And neither of them are doing very well. They both look dead. They dropped whatever leaves they had, and so we had this weird thing, you know, like we had to pretend it was a deliberate design of, like, two dead trees.

This was last summer when every other tree was bursting with life. And so now they've started showing a few signs of life. So we know what it means to have a tree that is rooted, sort of, but not established.

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power. So we're back to the work of the Spirit again.

Same power. May have this dunamis, this unique power to move. May have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

The most important thing for any human being is to know that they are loved. People will always gravitate to a place where they feel loved.

[19 : 21] If people don't feel loved when they come to Bonacord Free Church, then they might get them to find themselves, they just start coming, they might find themselves suddenly, sort of, getting visited by the Mormons or going somewhere else, and they will be made a fuss off.

I've watched this happen. It's happened to a guy who's starting to come along to Grace Church in Montrose. And just like a couple of weeks after, he started coming along to Grace Church, with some big questions in his mind, the Mormons knocked on his door, and they just made a big fuss of him and told him things that were just what he wanted here, whether they were true or not.

And we could just see him being pulled. Now, it wasn't understanding doctrine that way or that way.

I'm not knocking doctrine, I just don't want to miss the point that what was actually pulling him was that he felt, whether or not it was a true feeling or not is another matter, but he felt some love there that he hadn't felt for years.

And in that, he was just being a human being. We will always gravitate to a place where we think, feel, we are loved.

[20 : 46] We need to know love. And it's interesting that Paul uses the word grasp here.

Grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. The word grasp, how can we understand that?

There are, there was a, I was chatting away with somebody who had been working for a while in a supermarket.

This is not autobiographical. And, they said to me in conversation, I never knew what a personality clash was until I met Steve. Which is a memorable phrase.

And, some of you may have Steve's in your life. Anybody who is actually called Steve. It's not you. This is over in Lancashire. I never knew what a personality clash was until I met Steve.

[21 : 55] Now, that person who was saying that understood the concept of personality clash. But, they grasped the meaning and the reality of personality clash thanks to Steve.

That's what grasping something means. It means when it changes from being a merely conceptual knowledge about something to the really getting it.

Now, I get it. Now, I understand it in relation to so many other things. Now, I see how it impacts my life. Now, I feel it as well.

I grasp it. What do we need to be built into this united house in which God dwells?

We need to get the vastness of the love of God. And yet, in my own experience and my own experience of ministry, so this is something that I didn't do, something I didn't really cotton on to, and in what I know to be the experience of many, many people in many churches throughout the UK, since I, too, have been roaming to and fro throughout the earth, that would be about the last thing that anybody would describe as being really, really important in the church that they go to.

[23 : 44] It would be an unusual thing for somebody when asked what was the thing that seemed most important in their church to say, well, it's our grasp of how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Most of it has to do with conforming and complying, intellectually, behaviorally, whatever, fitting in. A lot of it has to do with doing things or hearing things that make you feel okay about yourself because we're all broken.

But even then, it is unusual for a church to give people the sense that the most important thing to the elders, the most important thing to the minister and the deacons, the most important thing to others who hold power and influence within a congregation is knowing how wide and long and high and deep love of Christ is.

Paul is praying this because without the Spirit's power to do this, we won't be built into one united house in which God lives.

God who is love. And then the third thing, I guess you're worrying about your tea now, verse 19, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

[25 : 42] so the biblical use of the word know in both Old and New Testament is different from our 21st century, well actually not that different from our 21st century, but certainly different from our 20th century understanding of knowledge.

So culturally, philosophically, in terms of education, in terms of what gets you advanced, then knowing is primarily a rational thing.

You know facts, you know data, you have technical expertise, you have knowledge. Even so far as to say that there is this whole world where knowledge just exists, independent of knowers.

So knowledge exists on your hard drive, or your USB stick, or in the cloud now, knowledge exists in libraries, in cities and universities.

Knowledge exists in books, so you can have knowledge quite apart from any knowing person. That's how far we've got in the West.

[26 : 59] That is an utterly, that would be incomprehensible to Paul, or to any of the other writers of the Bible, Old and New Testament. First of all, they hadn't located knowledge in a brain and in rationality.

They lived before Descartes, weirdly. Second thing is, they located knowledge mostly in the heart. Feelings were lower down.

So Paul talks about if there are any bowels of mercy, which like no translator in English is going to use nowadays. *splanchnicē*, the guts in your gut, that's where feelings reside.

Knowledge is something that you feel. Knowledge is something that you know, not just know about. Knowledge of a person is always relational, which is why the word know, particularly in the Old Testament, is used for the intimacy and connection of physical union between a husband and a wife or others.

So, knowing, when Paul says it here, is not just knowing about being able to play with words cleverly. Knowing is like it's just part of your experience, your being, heart, head, hand, every part of you knows this love of God that surpasses knowledge.

[28 : 48] To know this love, to feel loved, to know that you are loved, to know that despite everything, you are loved, to know that even though you feel like nobody else thinks you're good enough, nobody thinks you're beautiful, everybody kind of looks through you now, because you've reached an age when that begins to happen.

You are loved by God, when you've been rejected or betrayed or ignored, when your experience of yourself has been caused by others to be irrelevant, not to be listened to.

you are loved. To know that, to feel it, to sense it, when your world falls apart, when your sense of worth just evaporates, to know that you are loved keeps a person sane.

It can be the only thing that keeps you putting one foot in front of the other. It can be the only thing that even reminds you of brightness in the midst of darkness.

It can be the only thing that keeps you human. So, what is filled to the measure of all the fullness of God? Well, typically, the measure of the fullness of God is not brim full.

[30 : 45] So, here is this glass of, in celebration of the World Cup, vodka. It's not, I tried it earlier.

So, we think that fullness would mean like right up to the brim there, okay? But that is, biblically speaking, not the measure of the fullness of God, because the fullness of God is always like fuller than the brim, because it's always overflowing.

So, the measure of the fullness of God would be shown if I took a jug and started pouring the water in and it got to the brim and I just carried on. Or like those sort of stack, those pyramids of champagne glasses that are never typical at free church weddings.

You feel the top one and it just overflows and overflows and overflows until they're all full. The measure of the fullness of God is overflowing. So, His love is not just to the brim of the Trinity.

His love is overflowing, making, creating, loving, sustaining, providing for. His love just goes beyond Himself.

[31 : 59] And that is the measure of the fullness of God. And Paul knows that this congregation in Ephesus, a star congregation, will never be built into a united house that God can dwell in without love that just overflows.

So, he's pouring his love into the top glass in that champagne pyramid and it's overflowing to others in the fellowship and to others and to others and to others.

And out into the world, neighbors and colleagues and friends and family members and total strangers that we just find ourselves sitting next to on the bus.

And he wants them to be so assured and knowing of God's love that they cannot keep it in.

And it doesn't just overflow with words. it overflows with behavior and attitudes and looks and words about and overflows in speech to and overflows in listening to and overflows with compassion for other people which moves you.

[33 : 21] One of those gut words. things. Can God do that? We know we can't.

I've said it enough times. We know it anyway. Of course he can do that because he can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine according to his power does it work within us.

If I just left you with a task of loving each other and said get on with it you know what it is doctrinally you've heard an exposition get on with it I would be betraying the very verses that we've been looking at.

Because power is God's and the measure of what can be done in you is God.

Which is pretty neat isn't it? I mean that's fairly neat to know that the measure of the power of what can be done in you is God.

[34 : 33] It ain't bon accord you can't expect all that from the minister. It ain't the free church it's God.

Let's pray. Father thank you for your love.

Thank you that those three remain faith, hope and love the greatest is love. Thank you that your love never ceases.

it is steadfast. So we echo Paul's prayer and we pray for your spirit to move and to move us with your love.

In the name of Jesus amen. Amen.