



09 Ephesians 3:14-20 – Comprehending the Width, Length, Height, and depth of the Love of Christ

¹⁴ For this reason I bend my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.

²⁰ 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, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:14-20, NASB).

I had intended to give the full story of St. Patrick this morning, but I gave it on Wednesday night. This morning I'll just end with a summary of his life to show how he obeyed scripture and allowed the Holy Spirit to work mightily through his life. On Wednesday we spent time looking at parts of a document called "Patrick's Confession"¹ which gives a summary of St. Patrick's life's story. He wrote it as an old man and it is absolutely beautiful. The reason I decided to jump back into Ephesians this morning is because this very chapter where we are is exactly the kind of thing that Patrick would have written. Paul wrote it at the end of his life and was in prison when he wrote it.

Remember that Paul began the chapter describing himself as a "slave" of Jesus. He knew that he wasn't a slave of the Roman Empire, rather he knew that once he had come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, he no longer belonged to himself. We learned last week that biblical truth tells us that our problems do not own us. At times we may feel like they do, but they do not! Both Patrick and Paul understood that God owned them and that nothing could happen to them without God allowing it to happen.

¹ https://www.confessio.ie/etexts/confessio_english#

When Paul wrote the believers in Corinth, he told them twice, *"You were bought with a price."* He was making an impassioned appeal to this fleshly church to allow God to change their sensuous lifestyle. He concluded his appeal reminding them *"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 ESV)

We are coming to the end of the first part of Ephesians. These sermons have been about the church and cover this first part of Ephesians which is about who we are in Christ, our identity, and our inheritance. Paul spoke about the mystery and majesty of the church. WE need to remember that church isn't really something we GO to. WE ARE THE CHURCH. We, the Church, are the Body of Christ here on earth. It is a universal family made up of all believers of all races and ethnicities in the world. In this passage today, we are going to hear Paul as he prays for each of us.

Prayer is a hard topic for many of us. I told a group of pastors on Monday that I just don't pray like I should. I certainly pray more than I used to, but I need to learn more about how the saints throughout the centuries have prayed. In this passage, Paul explains that he's down on his knees praying. I think we've all wondered whether it's okay to pray in some way other than down on our knees. The answer is of course "yes." Praying on our knees puts us into submission before the Lord. I know that most of my intense praying is done laying across my bed. I go to the Father laying across my bed with a prayer shawl over my head. It is my time of private conversation with God. Few have seen me like this other than Sandy who has occasionally come into a room when I am in such prayer. But the times that I talk to God and listen on my zero turn are just as precious. Sometimes I feel like I am transported into heavenly places when I'm on that mower. I'm cutting the grass, but I'm hardly there. I'm somewhere between heaven and earth having a wonderful conversation with God.

In Paul's prayer, the first thing we see is the Trinity. He writes that he bends before the Father on his knees, that the church would be strengthened through Christ's Spirit, so that Christ may dwell in their hearts. As all three persons of God are in this prayer, Paul gives us insight into the function of each member of the Godhead, the Trinity.



I want to add that although Paul is praying to the Father, it is okay to pray to any of the three because they are all One. People have asked me about this over the years. We often say "Father, I come to you in the Name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit." It sounds like Paul is almost praying that we might have Christ in us. That reminds me of a pamphlet I read back in my

college years called "My heart Christ's Home". It talked about letting ALL of my heart be a place that is suitable for Jesus to inhabit. We aren't to reserve ANY part of our heart for fleshly things if Christ is to be "at home" in our hearts. I think Paul is talking about just that. In Greek, there are two words to describe "living in" something. One is living somewhere where you are kind of a guest. The other describes living somewhere where you are a permanent resident. The word for permanent residence is the term that the Old Testament uses to describe God "living" in His holy temple. The Greek is κατοικησαι (*katoikesai*), which is exactly the same word that Paul is using here.

Paul is praying that the church will come to the point where Jesus can live in their hearts without feeling unwelcome. So, let me ask you the question today, "Is there anything in your heart that would make Jesus feel unwelcome?"

What kind of things in our hearts make Jesus feel unwelcome? Is our heart an environment where Jesus feels welcome or are our thoughts constantly adverse to what God wants for our lives? Is our heart a blessing to God? This is kind of uncomfortable because you and I both know that our thought life goes in all kinds of crazy directions. We don't want God in the middle of certain things that pass through our minds. David, a 'man after God's own heart', asked God to clean his heart up.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me,

and lead me in the way everlasting! (Psalm 139:23-24, ESV).

David didn't even have the Holy Spirit, but he was willing to ask God to look into his heart to root out anything that was contrary to God. Do we have a heart like that? I know sometimes I prefer to think that God can't see the junk in my heart that needs to be swept up and cleaned out.

In our text in Ephesians, Paul is praying that Christ would dwell comfortably in our hearts by faith. This covers how we treat one another when no one else is around. This includes how and where we spend our resources (time, talent, and treasure). This includes the words we use to speak to others. Are we letting the Holy Spirit clean out those things that make our hearts an unwelcoming environment? We don't have to live a perfect life, but we should be quick to respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

David told God, "see if there is any grievous way in me." David intended to change whatever was in his heart that wasn't of God. Similarly, we don't have to live a perfect life, but we need to be quick to respond to sin in our hearts when God reveals it to us.

Paul prays that we'll have the power through the spirit to recognize our sin and to let God do a work in our hearts to make them a place in which He is comfortable residing. Paul then writes, *"being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 4:17b-19, NASB).*

It all starts in being rooted and grounded in love. When we are rooted in love, it means we are being ruled by the Holy Spirit. Being rooted in Him, means the Holy Spirit is having His way in our lives. God is love and when we become more Christ-like, it is reflected in how we relate not only to Him but to those He puts in our path. When we experience a real relationship with Him, we begin to comprehend the width, length, height, and depth of what this whole Christian life business is all about. That is what lit a fire in Patrick that burns even until today. He experienced the width, length, height, and depth of what Jesus was all about.



Patrick's life was a life well lived. I am sure he was very familiar with Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Maewyn Succat (his native name) was born in Roman Britain (probably somewhere between Wales and Scotland). His grandfather was a pastor and his father was a deacon. His Roman name was Patricius (Patrick in English). Patrick was born right at a time when the Roman empire was coming apart. Scholars think he was born in 371. At that time raiders were coming from all sides of Britain and were forcefully taking people as slaves. When Patrick was just 16 years old, Irish raiders grabbed him on the coast and took him to Ireland where they sold him into slavery to a petty king in the north of Ireland (near where Belfast is today).

He was a slave for 6 years in Ireland and during that time his confession (one of the two written documents we have that we know were penned by him) tells of how he came to the end of himself and surrendered his life to Jesus. Like Paul, Patrick came to understand that he wasn't a slave of the Irish, rather he was a slave of Jesus. He came to know and understand that God was in total control of his life. He relates how he prayed probably 100 times a day and how his life became a continual conversation with the Lord. God began to show him piece by piece the things within him that needed to change. Like Paul, he responded to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Near the end of his time of enslavement, God spoke to him in a dream and showed him where to catch a ship to freedom. The ship carried him to Gaul (modern day France) where he joined a monastic seminary in what is now Auxerre, France. Scholars believe

he spent about 15 years there where he was trained and ordained, first as a deacon, and then as a pastor/bishop. He left seminary and returned home to his family in Britain. By that time Rome had pretty much abandoned Britain and the little Christian communities were there on their own. While at home he had another dream where the Irish were calling out to him to return to teach them about Jesus. Against his family's wishes he made his way back to Ireland where he took the place of the first bishop who had been tending to the small Christian community there. The power of the Holy Spirit was mighty in Patrick and he had no fear. He confronted the forces of evil head on and tended to believers as well as evangelizing the entire island.

Patrick was on the cutting edge of spiritual warfare. There are many folk tales of mighty mystical works that he did. It all could've happened or it could all be myth. It doesn't really matter. But something huge did happen because the Irish people have not stopped talking about him for 1,600 years. Patrick took the Druids head on. They were the leaders of the ancient customs and religion in Ireland. Patrick used the medium of nature that was familiar to the Gaelic people. He showed them the principle of the Trinity by using a three leaf clover (a shamrock). It is an expression in nature that is one yet it has three parts that make it the whole of what it is.



At that time in Ireland at a certain time of each year, the head Druid lit a fire.² Other Druids would see this fire on a neighboring hilltop and then light a fire in their community. Hill by hill the fire would spread throughout the whole of Ireland. If a person were to light a bonfire prior to this ceremony, it was punishable by death. Patrick

lit a fire on the Hill of Slane which was visible from Tara, and the High King of Ireland was incensed. Patrick did this to tell the world that "Jesus is the light of the world." Instead of killing Patrick, the gospel was presented and many of the king's court came to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

That light can still come into hearts today. When it does, the person will begin to comprehend the width, length, height, and depth of what this whole Christian life business is all about. Paul was a slave of Christ. Patrick was a slave of Christ. We too can be slaves of Christ. And in our servanthood we can find the most wonderful freedom available to men and women. Let me end by reading a poem which by tradition is attributed to Patrick. (Patrick's Breastplate – "I bind unto myself today"). His defense was an intimate knowledge of these biblical truths.

Let us pray.

² https://traditioninaction.org/religious/h115_Patrick_2.htm

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Neese-Webster, Texas.) All financial gifts to this ministry are tax-deductible as a 501 (c) (3) Corporation.