

taking action!

small group material



www.studentlife.co.nz

Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Labourers

ROOTED & ESTABLISHED • Experiencing the Power and Love of God

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul is about to begin his general and specific instructions for how to live out the Christian life (chapter 4-6). But before he does this, he makes some incredible requests on behalf of the Ephesians (his second prayer in the letter). He wants the deep truths of the gospel, which he's just explained, to sink deep in their hearts. In his prayer we'll see Paul's passion for the church's maturity and ultimately for God's glory. Let's take a look.

Paul's Prayer

One way you can help your group engage with the text is to ask them to break down the structure of the prayer in vv. 16-19. This isn't as simple as it seems and there is some disagreement among commentators as to the number of requests here.

We are going to argue that there are really two requests: 1) That they'd be strengthened to live out the Christian life (vv.16-17a) and 2) That they'd be strengthened to know the immeasurable and maturing love of Christ (vv.17b-19).

The big question concerns v.17. Is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts" restating verse 16: "that you may be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner beings" or is it the result of verse 16?

I think the former makes more sense. Being empowered by the Holy Spirit is equivalent to having Christ dwell in your heart, giving you power to live a godly life. If someone disagrees, it's not huge as long as they're not seeing a two staged version of God's rule (i.e., first you get the Holy Spirit, then maybe you get Christ to come into your heart. You can't have one without the other.)

The same could be asked about 17b-19a and 19b. Being "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" could be seen as a summary statement of all that followed, (e.g., to comprehend Christ's mind-boggling love is to be filled with him) or as a result of it. Again, I'd argue for the former.

Rooted and Established in Love

It will also be helpful to think about the metaphors Paul uses in his prayer, especially in v.17. "Rooted" is an agricultural metaphor, which should paint a picture of an extensive root system that not only attaches itself to the source of nutrients but keeps the plant set in place. "Established" is more structural or

What's the Big Idea?

Essential to Christian maturity is a deepening experience of the central promise of the gospel: that God loves us perfectly and completely despite our sin. This comes only as God empowers us through His Spirit to grasp Christ's measureless love. All that God wants us to become is vitally tied to all that He is for us in Christ. Our completed transformation will only showcase His power and glory.

What's the Problem?

All of our lives we've heard that if it's too good to be true, it isn't true. The total, unconditional love of God for sinners like us is too good to be true. But it is true. Our fallen hearts are slow and fearful to really hope that it might be so. As a result we are fearful to really yield our lives to Christ.





architectural and offers us another picture of stability and strength. (Paul uses the building metaphor in 2:20-22. He uses physiological ones in 4:14-16.) What is noteworthy in 3:17 is that both of these metaphors are tied to love.

Take some time in the study to help your group think about that connection. It appears what Paul is saying is that maturity can be seen in love. Growing Christians have a growing understanding of God's love for them and consequently that love is shown through them. This is why Paul can say, "Christ's love compels us." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15) To be mature isn't necessarily accomplishing great feats or being able to argue difficult doctrinal points, but primarily seems to be the result of experiencing the magnitude of His grace.

Filled and Being Filled

Also, take note of the tension between his request in v. 19 that they would be "filled with the fullness of God" and his observation in 1:23 that the church is "his body, which is the fullness of him who fills everything." Do the Ephesians need to be filled (3:19 or 5:18) or are they already filled (1:23)? The answer is both. It is the tension of living between the Christ's first and second coming. It's like being a teenager: Is she an adult or a kid? To her frustration, she is both.

Christians realize that God has accomplished His plan through Christ, but we still live feeling the out workings of that plan. Christians are genuinely filled to the fullness but not completely filled to the fullness. You'll notice the same tension regarding unity even though Christ has created one new man, holiness even though He predestined us to be holy, and the need to fight spiritually even though Christ has conquered.

Conclusion

Often we think that knowing God loves us is Sunday school-basic. The reality is that knowing this and really believing it is the essence of Christian maturity. And it's so difficult – so counter to what our fallen hearts fear – that it takes the supernatural power of God to really make it stick in our hearts. Join Paul in praying for your people and helping them to believe that He really does love us like the Bible claims.

What's Our Response?

The primary response we hope this study will have is an increasing capacity to believe in the love of God, and as a result of that, to fully yield our lives to Him.

What Are the Questions?

Ephesians 3:14-21

LAUNCH

Think about the painful and frustrating experience of being a pre-teen or teenager. You wanted to be treated as an adult, but you were still a kid. You wanted to move towards maturity. If a young Christian asked you how one grows towards maturity, what advice would you offer?

EXPLORE

Read 3:14-15

1. 3:14 begins with the phrase “for this reason.” How does the prayer relate to what comes earlier in the letter?

Read 3:16-19

2. What does Paul pray for? How would you summarize the main themes of his prayer?
3. What do you observed about the structure of Paul’s prayer? How many requests does Paul have?
4. How does strengthening with the Spirit relate to indwelling Christ? See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”
5. What are some of the metaphors Paul uses in this prayer (see especially v.17)?
6. Where in this passage would you point a young believer who was convinced that Christianity is only a private experience?

7. In v. 19, Paul’s request is that the Ephesians would be “filled with the fullness of God”. However, in 1:23 he describes the church as His body, which is the fullness of Him who fills everything.” Do the Ephesians need to be filled (3:19 or 5:18) or are they already filled (1:23)?

8. How are maturity and an experiential knowledge of God’s love related?

Read 3:19-21

9. In this doxology, what does Paul teach us about God?
10. Why is this praise significant and appropriate for Paul’s prayer in vv. 14-19?
11. Do these feel like the climax of the letter so far? Why or why not?
12. What does Paul want us to understand is essential to becoming mature in the faith?

APPLY

13. Let’s imagine that Paul’s prayer was answered in your life. What might that look like?
14. Why do you think it is so important to Paul that we experience at the deepest level the love of Christ?
15. Describe a time when you were overwhelmed by an experience of the love of Christ. What keeps you from living out of a daily experience of the love of Christ?
16. Does the thought of Christ, whom God appointed to be head over everything, taking up residence in your life scare you or excite you? Tell us why?
17. How has this prayer challenged the way you think about praying for others? How does it invite you to pray differently?

What Are the Answers?

1. In chapter 2 Paul explains the gospel to them. In 3:1 he was beginning his prayer but then wanted to talk about his ministry. Now he is praying that they would experience what he has proclaimed to them.
- 2-4. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”
5. The metaphors “rooted” and “established” are agricultural and structural, respectively.
6. v.18 shows us that a growing comprehension of God’s love will include all the saints or in the most general terms, community.
7. It’s both. See “What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?”
8. Paul is saying that maturity can be seen in love. Maturity comes from experiencing the magnitude of His grace and results in loving others.
9. That He can do all things; that His power works in us; that He is and will always be worthy of all glory.
10. Paul’s prayer requests are amazingly bold. He prays for God to power and strengthen the Ephesians to grasp the immeasurable love of Christ and so to be saturated with the power and love of God. The praise shows that this prayer can only be answered by this kind of God.
11. Paul, at this point, is not just recounting the breadth and depth of grace God has poured out on his people, but Paul is also pleading for more grace. He wants God to make all these blessings in Christ an experiential reality in their lives. In some ways, it is the crescendo before he turns the corner towards instructions and exhortations in the last half of the book.
12. See “What’s the Big Idea?”
13. Allow the group to discuss.
14. This is the basis for all the imperatives in the second half of the book. See 4:2; 5:2 and 5:25.)
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. You don’t have to know someone well or even know them at all to pray this kind of prayer for them. And because God wants this, we can be confident that this is a prayer He would answer.

Memorize

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

Ephesians 3:17-18