

Part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was that **"Christ may dwell in [their] hearts by faith."** Faith is key to receiving and living God's love. When teaching the doctrine of faith to my catechism classes, I define faith by using three words: knowledge, acceptance, and trust. Remembering that faith is not something self-produced; it's not something we can manufacture on our own, we approach the subject with the understanding that faith is a gift of God the Holy Spirit. As he describes God's gracious way of salvation, Paul writes, **"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ep 2:8, 9).** By the powerful working of the Spirit of God, we acknowledge the triune God to be the true God, revealed to us in his Word, the Bible, and we trust that all his words and promises there are true. In his first letter John the Apostle writes, **"This is how we know that we live in [God] and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us" (4:13-15).** And so, with faith worked by the Holy Spirit, we know what God tells us in his Word, we accept it to be true, and we trust it for eternal life.

Finally, we live God's love by loving others as he has loved us. Paul says that, when we grasp God's love, we are **"filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."** Think about that! Only God has complete fullness. He created everything; he owns everything; he controls everything. He is God. And yet he allows us to approach him—unabashedly and shamelessly—to ask, not for a few crumbs but for the whole loaf. You might say that God wants us to be filled to overflowing with all the good things, especially love, that belong to him. John says, **"No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12).** The best way for us to know God's love is to let it flow through us. As Jesus once said, **"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Jn 13:34, 35).** [Tell story of Bill and Sandy in IGH.]

Let's close today by joining our voices together with the Apostle Paul and reading together the concluding doxology of our text. **"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations. Amen."**

Eph 3:14-21—Family Church: Lifeblood Is Love – 391, 492, 490, 499
09/30/18 – Pastor David M. Kuehl – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI

I believe I'm accurate in stating that, to one degree or another, we're all familiar with God's love. We've heard verses from the Bible that tell us that **"God is love" (1 Jn 4:8)** and that **"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (Jn 3:16).** We're familiar with the Bible's central teaching that, above all else, God is a God of love. But how deeply does God's love penetrate? At the core of our being, where things really matter, are we rooted and established in God's love? Because of life's experiences, it's natural for us to question God's love. When we're down or discouraged, troubled or tempted, it's hard to stay focused on the unshakable love of God. My friends, I'm here today to assure you that, when you doubt that anyone could love you, there is Someone who does.

This is especially important in light of our *Family Church* worship series. To date, we've seen that we have a perfect identity in Christ, that some of us have been called to a shepherding role—whether it be in a relational family or a functional family, and that we have God's own power at our disposal. Today we see that the lifeblood of the *Family Church* is love, God's love for us and our love for each other. Using words that the Apostle Paul was inspired to pen to Christians living in the city of Ephesus centuries ago, we celebrate this truth:

Our Lifeblood Is in God's Love

- 1. Grasp the fullness of this love.**
- 2. Live this love by loving.**

1. Paul begins with three short words: **"For this reason."** What reason was that? Remember, Paul was writing from prison; things weren't going well for him. When life is going well and the outlook is rosy, it's easy for us to believe that God loves us, isn't it? But when life's in turmoil, then it's not so easy. When the pot of life is stirred up, a part of us is exposed that we don't know very well, the part where we feel anger, pain, and insecurity. Paul calls it our **"inner being."** Does God's love penetrate there? Do we grasp God's love there? And if we do, what impact does it have on those around us?

Paul wants us to grasp God's love in all its fullness. How do we do that? Well, it's impossible to know love just by reading a definition of it in the dictionary. Love must be experienced personally and relationally. So is it with God's love. **"God is love" (1 Jn 3:8),** his Word says. Will you say that with me? **"God is love."**

This is not an abstract statement. It expresses the fullness of God's love. It reveals how God relates to us on both a personal and a relational level.

In the Bible, God's love is revealed in the three persons of the Trinity. These three persons are perfectly united in their love for each other and in their love for us. Paul describes this harmonious relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit, when he writes, *"I pray that out of his glorious riches,"* that's God the Father, *"he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith."* Let's flesh this out a little bit.

First, God loves us as the Father. Jesus revealed God's fatherly love to the Jews in ways they had never heard before. As God's eternal Son, he described his relationship to the Father this way: *"The Father loves the Son and shows him all he does"* (Jn 5:20). As true man, Jesus taught his disciples that they, too, could call God "Father." He said to them, *"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"* (Lk 11:11-13) Of course, the greatest expression of God's fatherly love is in his sacrificing his Son, Jesus himself, so that we would be restored to his family. *"This is how God showed his love among us,"* John the Apostle says: *"He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him"* (1 Jn 4:9). How does God love us? He loves us as the Father.

Next, God loves us as the Son. Paul writes, *"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 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 Father's sacrifice was matched by that of the Son. *"This is how we know what love is"* John writes: *"Jesus Christ laid down his life for us"* (1 Jn 3:16). So many of us are struggling with a deep sense of unworthiness. We feel that, if others really knew us, they couldn't love us. And because God does know us, he cannot love us. The good news for us today is that God loves unworthy people. In fact, there are no worthy people. Jesus loved all of us enough to die for us. *"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Ro 5:8) is the way Scripture puts it. We don't have to pretend that we're perfect. We don't have to give excuses for our sins. We don't have to try to justify ourselves before God. Jesus has already made everything right with God. How does God love us? God loves us as the Son.

Then, God loves us through the Spirit. Paul expresses this in a way that's hard for us to understand. He writes, *"I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."* Why would we need God's power to grasp the fullness of his love? Isn't God's love obvious? The short answer is no. Because God's love is perfect and our ability to grasp it is not, we need his power to grasp it. It's sort of like a child trying to understand the discipline that loving parents are handing out. It's difficult for a child to grasp how the things their parents are doing are motivated by love and have their good in mind.

Because we are so broken by sin, because we are naturally hostile to God and regard his gospel as utter foolishness, we need God's Spirit to penetrate deeply, to repair our brokenness, so that we can grasp the fullness of his love and believe the gospel. Paul says elsewhere, *"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit"* (1 Cor 12:3). We need the Holy Spirit because God's love goes deeper than what our human knowledge can comprehend. Paul says that this love *"surpasses knowledge."* It's a love we can grasp only when the Spirit opens our hearts to receive it, something he does through the miracle of faith. How does God love us? He loves us through his Spirit.

Having established how deeply each person of the triune God loves us, the question begs asking, how do we go about living God's love? We can answer in three words: prayer, faith, and love.

2. It shouldn't escape our notice that three different times in this short text Paul mentions prayer: *"For this reason I kneel before the Father"* (v. 14); *"I pray"* (v. 16); and *"I pray"* (v. 17). Pray for yourself, and pray for others. That's one of the benefits of being in a small group, of belonging to a *Family Church*. Paul was praying that God would connect with his readers in love. At its core, prayer is relational—with God.

Can you remember a time when you wanted to develop a love relationship with someone? What did you do? You spent time together; you talked and listened; you shared thoughts and ideas, hopes and dreams, frustrations and desires. As a result, love developed in the relationship. The amazing message of the Bible is that God wants to have a love relationship with us. So, spend time with him; talk and listen to him; share your thoughts and ideas, hopes and dreams, frustrations and desires, and everything else with him. If you pray like that, your love relationship with God will grow.