

Get a grip. Usually when we say that to someone (or even to ourselves) we're inferring that they need a firmer grasp on reality. Well, that's my prayer for us today. I hope and I pray that we are gripped by God's word, so that we can get a grip on real reality, God's reality, both for our lives and for our world. Let's pray.

Our passage today is a pivotal passage. By pivotal, I don't mean that it's more important than other passages, but it is, literally, the passage in which Paul pivots from the theology he's been laying out in Chapters 1-3, to the *application* of that theology in the lives of the Ephesian believers that will come in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Today's passage highlights the vital connecting point between belief and action; between *orthodoxy* (that is right belief) and *orthopraxy* (right action.) It's not enough to just know about God, to understand who God is. Belief without action is no belief at all. Rather, Paul points out that if we truly get a grip on who God is and what God is doing, then our lives, our actions and our character, will be different as they reflect God's actions and character. Like mirrors angled towards the light, we should reflect who God is out to the world.

About ten years ago, I was just starting out in a youth ministry position. I asked my new youth group if they thought there was a difference between what their lives looked like and what the lives of everyone else at their school looked like. They looked at me as if I were a complete idiot and said "Why should there be?" It was amazing to me that a group of wonderful, good, church-grown kids should have no concept of why an ongoing relationship with the God of all things should make their life look different. It is still amazing to me that, at least functionally, many of our lives would agree with those kids. But God has a much better plan for us.

Our lives are to demonstrate the amazing character of God. God has chosen us, redeemed us, adopted us, blessed us and is continually building us up together "*in Christ*" to be His own Holy dwelling place, in order to display His overwhelming goodness to all of creation (both seen and unseen). We are called to be God's people, and may approach

God with confidence through the love of Christ. Now Paul takes all the depth and the richness of that calling (the calling to be a holy and chosen people, with our character defined by God's character) and he wraps it up in action, starting where we should always start in response to God... with prayer.

*"For this reason I kneel..."* I think it is significant that Paul has just finished talking about how freely and confidently we can approach God, but when he himself approaches God in prayer, it's not casual. It's not "Hey, God, how's it going?" Paul bends his knee before God. He gives God honor and respect to God as he prays. If you sometimes have trouble praying to God, I would invite you to try and take a different posture as you pray. Get out of the comfy chair, bend the knee, bow the head. If your knees don't bend anymore, think of something else... stand, raise your hands, sit attentively, fast first, pray with purpose. It's not just that you're doing things differently, but that you are actively working to focus on God. We cannot expect to easily humble our heart before God if we are unwilling to humble our bodies. There is something about physically placing yourself before God, to honor God as King and Lord, that helps to focus mind, heart and will.

*"I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name."* We are reminded here that God is completely sovereign, but also that he relates to us as a loving Father to his children. All creation belongs to God, and all creation is subject to God, but God has chosen to have a special relationship with His people; to place His own name on us as His adopted children. God is a cosmic God, but we are a connected people... His people.

*"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"* Paul asks one thing for the Ephesians: power. But it's not power in the way we might think of it, as the power to get things done. The power is for something much more personal, and, I think, much more difficult. The Greek word is *δυναμος* (*dunamos*), it's where we get the word dynamite from. We know power of that sort can alter the shape of the earth, can level mountains and flatten cities. But

combine all the explosives in the world, and you still don't have the power to change a single human heart. And that is precisely what Paul is praying for.

First, Paul asks for power so that they may be strengthened in their inner being. Paul doesn't ask for health, wealth and prosperity, he doesn't ask for success for their mission and ministry or great returns on their efforts. He merely asks for a strengthening of their core identity, knowing that everything else in their lives will flow from that center. He prays that they (*that we*) would be people of integrity, centered in Jesus; that Jesus would indwell us. And he recognizes that it takes strength to accomplish this. When we accept Jesus into our hearts, it is a radical shift, and it comes with a price. He is not just savior, he is also Lord, and we are to give him complete authority over our lives. That takes some strength, but the change is (or should be) phenomenal.

With Jesus at the center, everything else in life is changed in relationship to him. Paul isn't talking about the initial decision to accept Jesus into your heart. He's talking about the continual expression of a life that is lived in light of that decision. Jesus is here, and he becomes the filter through which everything else in life must run. Our work, our play, our thoughts, our actions, our family, our hopes, our dreams, all must include Jesus now. That means you drag Jesus with you wherever you go. You include Jesus in every conversation you have and in every thought you think. You include Jesus whenever you spend your money and however you spend your time. Jesus is with you every time you go to work or to school, and every time you go online. Just imagine if you had Jesus physically walking with you everywhere you went. Would you live at all differently? Well that's the life we're supposed to live. If this sounds like an invasion of privacy, it absolutely is. If Jesus dwells in you, you can't run from him and you can't hide from him. That is a painful and unpleasant fact in those moments when you are in rebellion and sin, but great comfort when you're done fighting. Christ, by the power of the Spirit, dwells in you, and explodes your life from within, transforming it into a life that you could not have possibly imagined.

*“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, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge”* I love this verse. As we are rooted in Christ, as we have Christ dwelling in us, we are given the power to begin to grasp the immensity of his love; to know something that is, frankly, unknowable. For three chapters, Paul has talked about the action of God... God chooses, God saves, God acts, God does. But now, we have this great verb *καταλαμβάνο* (*katalambano*), finally something for US to do. The Greek word *λαμβάνο* means to take or receive, or in the mental sense, to comprehend. It's used something like 258 times in the New Testament, but it is not used here. The word here is *καταλαμβάνο*. That *κατα* on the front adds a sense of force and suddenness, and makes it a real ACTION verb. It is used only 15 times in the New Testament, and it's used in cases like in Mark 9, where a demon who is possessing a man SEIZES him and throws him on the ground; or in John 8, where the Pharisees CATCH that woman in the very act of adultery and drag her before Jesus; or in John 12 where Jesus tells the apostles to walk in the light while they still can, before the darkness comes and GRABS them; or in Paul's letter to the Philippians, when Paul talks about running in such a way as to CAPTURE the prize at the end; or, in the negative sense, in John 1, where it says that the light shines in the darkness, but the darkness hasn't TAKEN HOLD of it. It's a verb more suited to the wrestling ring than to a civilized theological discourse. It means, literally, to get a grip on something.

Christian love is not meant to be just warm fuzzy affection. The love that we are to seize hold of is not like a snuggly kitten or a fluffy teddy bear. It's alive, it's wild, it's passionate and powerful and untamed. It's like... well, let me tell you a brief story to illustrate. My experience with the love of God is kind of like that horse back in the eighth grade. My family and I had gone to visit some friends at their ranch. They raised racehorses. We were out at the pasture and it was decided, after much cajoling, that we could sit on one of those glorious creatures. So they chose a “nice, calm” one... if there is such a thing in a racehorse. I

was last, and as I mounted this huge thing, I was thinking “Wow, this is so cool!” That’s when my “friend” (I use the term loosely) thought he might have a laugh at my expense. He pulled from his pocket a straw, loaded in a pin, and he shot it straight into the horse’s backside. You know how racehorses are trained to go from standing still to full speed as soon as that gate opens? I’ll tell you, I got a grip. Yeah, my experience with God’s love is a lot like that. From “this is cool” to “AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!” in a heartbeat. Let me tell you, grip or no grip, there is no way an eighth grade kid is going to control something of that magnitude. You go where it takes you, which in my case was to the edge of the pasture where the horse did a four-point stop and sent me flying over its head and over the fence to land, miraculously, standing up, still with my death grip on the reins. But you know what? (And this is probably not a big surprise to those of you familiar with the psychology of eighth grade boys) I wanted to get right back on that thing and do it again. There is nothing so terrifying, and nothing so exhilarating, as being locked with a death grip to a racehorse at full speed, unless, that is, it is being locked with a death grip to the immeasurable love of God as God moves in the world. After all, Paul tells us to get a grip on that love, “[*so*] *that you might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*”

It is only when you are centered in Christ, through God’s word, through prayer and through actually living the reality of Christ *living* in you, that you can truly get a grip on the magnitude of God’s love. And as you take hold of that love and surrender to it, you find that it is bigger than you imagined, and it will take you to places you never dreamed of.

It was the love of Christ that saved us, setting us free from death itself; now it also constrains us and sets limits on that freedom, defining our lives and telling us who we should be and what we should do. The love of Christ strengthens us to stand in whatever circumstances we face, but it also moves us beyond ourselves, reminding us that it is not just about our lives. It shapes us to truly become living examples of Christ’s love for the world (God’s mission long before it was ours.) Think back on your week. Where did you go? What did you do and say? Christ was

there with you; was he honored? Where will you take him this week, or will you let him take you? We shouldn't be the same person we were 24 hours ago. The love of Christ moves us, continually reshaping us. I realize God asks a lot from you. He asks for everything!

It asks a lot, but when we put God's love into action in every part of our lives, letting Christ be the measure of all things as he dwells in us; when we put God's love into action, by seeking His leading through His word and through faithful prayer, we will find more in return than we ever thought possible. Our very life becomes a doxology, giving glory to God. *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 [even us!] and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen!*