



NG Study Guide: Eph. 3:14-21 "Loved" [11.26.17]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. **Leader note:** Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.

The Study

Thesis:

Followers of Jesus need to grow in their appreciation for their position in Christ which will impact how they live for Christ. This appreciation is related to experiencing the love of Christ. In this study, we discover how to experience the love of Christ.

1. Spirit's strength [14-16]

You need to pray for spiritual realization

For this reason(s) [14] refers to the mystery of Jesus, and unity of Jews and Gentiles in one body the Church through faith in Jesus [3:1-13]. Paul bent his knees to God [14] symbolizing an earnest prayer [Mt. 26:39]. We should pray for what is important to us, and ideally important to God. Here, Paul will pray for believers to grow in appreciation for their position in Christ which will impact how they live for Christ [see also, 1:15-23]. The typical model of prayer in the New Testament is prayer to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit; and all three persons of the Godhead are involved in this prayer. Paul declares God as Creator when he notes the whole family in heaven and earth is named from God [Ac. 17:28-29].

You need the Spirit to experience the love of Christ

Paul prays for believers to be strengthened through God's Spirit in the inner man according to the riches of His glory [16]. The pray is to experience God's strength, *according to* the riches of His glory and not simply out of the riches of His glory. The prayer is for the inner man to be strengthened [16]. Our physical body will become weaker with age, but the inner or spiritual man should grow stronger with age. The Holy Spirit helps us to appreciate and

experience the love of God that is available in Christ. “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” [Rom.5:5]. Experiencing God’s love is a spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit gives you spiritual strength to grow in faith, and realization of Christ’s love.

2. Jesus’ love [17-19]

Paul prays the Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith [17]. The heart [17] is seen as the center of emotion. Jesus lives and dwells in the heart of all believers by His Spirit when they receive Christ in faith [Jn. 14:16-23, Rom 8:9, 1 Cor. 6:19]. Paul wants them to experience the comfort that flows from that spiritual reality. Paul uses *katoikeo* referring to a permanent dwelling like a home rather than *paroikeo* which would refer to a temporary shelter. The word choice implies the comfort of knowing that Christ is always in a believer.

Christ’s love is to be experienced more than mere intellectual assent

The prayer is for believers to be rooted and grounded in love [17] which suggests deep roots and a firm foundation. The imagery of a tall mature tree that will not be moved. Paul wants the Ephesians and all believers to comprehend the scope of Christ’s love [18]. The Greek term *katalambano* refers to make one’s own or take possession of. Thus, not to merely comprehend as an intellectual abstract, but to own it! Paul uses four directions to highlight the scope of Christ’s love [18]: the width of the Lord’s love is the world [Jn. 3:16], the length is forever [Jer. 31:3], the height is heaven [1Jn. 3:1-2], and the depth of His love is seen at the cross [Ph.2:8]. Nothing can separate believers from God’s love in Christ [Rom. 8:37-39]. Christ’s love passes knowledge [19] in the sense that it is so marvelous that on this side of eternity we cannot fully appreciate it. God’s power [1:9], grace [2:7], riches [3:8], and love [3:19] are beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. Yet, we can definitely know or experience Christ’s love [19]. Imagine snorkeling at a tropical island. You’re excited about your experience, but you realize that there are scuba divers who have experienced so much more than you have. Yet, you also realize that no one will ever experience all that the oceans contain. In the same way, we will not comprehend the grandeur of God and Christ’s love on this side of eternity, but that should merely stir us to want to experience more!

Christ’s love is experienced as you know your identity in Christ

Christ’s love is different than the world’s love. His love is pure, unconditional, committed, sacrificial, unmerited, and most clearly revealed at the cross and in the Scriptures. Our experience flows from our identity in Christ more than our feelings. The Apostle John repeatedly referred to himself as, “The disciple whom Jesus loved.” John wasn’t asserting that Jesus loved him, but not the others. Nor was John suggesting that Jesus loved him more. John simply laid hold of the truth that Jesus loved him. Can you relate to that identity?

3. God’s fullness [19-21]

Experience more of God’s love

Paul prays for believers to be filled with *all* the fullness of God [19]. In Jesus, dwells all the fullness of God [Col. 2:9]. Therefore, as we are filled with and controlled by Jesus we overflow with God. Paul praises God who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think [20]. The reason that we can be filled with *all* the fullness of God is because God can do exceedingly abundantly more than we can contemplate [20]. We can be filled with the fullness of God because His power is working in us [20]. Paul concludes the doxology, or praise to God, by declaring that God deserves all the glory in the Church, the assembly of all redeemed people by Christ Jesus. And that this praise will continue into eternity [21].

Many of us have had the experience that we feel filled with *all* the fullness of God, but presumably all of us can relate to the sense, at various times, that we aren’t filled. The answer is to desire to experience more of God’s love.

Express more praise of God

Paul’s praise to God is not simply a response to God’s love but is also a likely way to experience more of God’s love. Our praise of God helps us to remember, reflect upon, and rejoice in His nature. Recalling that God is holy, just, loving, merciful, gracious, good and *loving* makes us want to experience more of Him.

How to experience the love of Christ:

1. Pray for spiritual realization
2. Receive the Holy Spirit's strength
3. Know your identity in Christ
4. Desire to experience more of God's love and to praise God
5. Realize your need for other believers [18] "comprehend with all the saints"

Study Guide Qs

Q1 How did your sense of Christ's love change after you received the Holy Spirit? How have times of prayer impacted your perception of God's love?

Q2 What are some ways that Christ's love is different from the world's concept of love? How do you relate, or not, to the Apostle John's declaration that he was the disciple whom Jesus loved? Do you presently see your identity as someone loved by Jesus?

Q3 How can knowing your identity in Christ help when you don't feel loved by Christ?

Q4 Paul reveals that prayer can influence people's experience with the Spirit's strength, Christ's love, God's fullness. Spend time praying for yourself and others to realize their spiritual position in Christ.

"Digging Deeper" (optional or alternative study)

Digging Deeper

1. Compare and contrast Paul's prayers for spiritual insight here [3:14-21] and earlier in the letter [1:15-23].
2. Love is the mark of Christian maturity. Read the following verses and reflect on God's love: Jn. 13:34-35; Gal. 5:22-23, 1Jn. 4:9-12, 19, Mt. 22:37-39, Eph. 5:25-33. What did you learn?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?
3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

As we enter the Advent Season and we focus on Christmas, pray for your neighbors to be receptive to the gospel. Plan to hand deliver a Christmas card to your neighbors, and a personal invite to attend your local church's celebration of Jesus with you.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?
2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.

