



NG Study Guide: Ephesians 3:14-21 :: “In Christ You Are Loved” [5.19.24]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. Regularly review the notes at the bottom.

The Study

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

Subject: A prayer for spiritual growth

Object: Experience and share Christ’s love

Context: In Ephesians 3:1-13 we learn that divergent followers of Jesus are united in Christ to proclaim Him, His gospel, and His glorious redemption. In chapters 4-6, he will reveal how we are to live as followers of Jesus.

A. Spirit’s strength (14-16)

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

1. Spiritual understanding (14-15)

For this reason (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). God’s plan to unite previously divided people to proclaim Jesus and display His wisdom, redemption and glory. Paul *bent his knees to God* (14) symbolizing earnest prayer (Matthew 26:39). We should pray for what is important to us, and ideally important to God. Here, Paul prays for believers to grow in appreciation of 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 (Acts 17:28-29).

2. Spiritual family (15)

Jesus’ followers are a spiritual *family*. Thus we accept others in Christ, not condoning actions or attitudes contrary to Christ, nor compromising doctrine, but recognizing the grace of God towards each of us. As a family we share values and mentor the next *generations* (21).

3. Spiritual strength (16)

Paul prays for believers to be *strengthened through God’s Spirit in the inner man according to the riches of His glory* (16). The prayer 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” (Romans 5:5).** Experiencing God’s love is a spiritual experience. The Holy Spirit gives you spiritual strength to grow in faith, and experience Christ’s love.

B. Jesus’ love (17-19)

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; 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 depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge;

1. Jesus dwells in your heart through faith (17)

Paul prays the *Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith* (17). The *heart* 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 (John 14:16-23, Rom 8:9-10, 1 Corinthians 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.

2. Jesus' love stabilizes (17)

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 comes to mind. The plea is to build a deep and stable foundation of knowing and understanding the love of God in Christ for you. In essence, the knowledge of God's love for you is the foundational truth upon which all other biblical truth is built upon.

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. When you know that you are loved by God in this way, because of your faith in Christ, it provides stability. Feelings can be destabilizing, but Jesus' love helps you to not be moved away from God.

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. Knowing Jesus' love helped John to faithfully follow Jesus throughout his long and fruitful life.

3. Jesus' love is limitless (18-19)

That you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge;

Paul wants the Ephesians and all believers to *comprehend* (18) the scope of Christ's love. The Greek term *katalambano* refers to make one's own or take possession of. Thus, not to merely to comprehend as an intellectual abstract, but to appropriate *the love of Christ* (19). Paul uses four directions to highlight the scope of Christ's love (18): the width of the Lord's love is the world (John 3:16), the length is everlasting or forever (Jeremiah 31:3), the height is heaven (1John 3:1-2), and the depth of His love is seen at the cross (Ph. 2:8). Nothing can separate Jesus' followers from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:37-39).

Paul is praying for them to *know* the love of Christ (19). The Greek term *gnosko* which refers to experiential knowledge. To reflect and appreciate the love of Christ, as tangibly as one might know the love of a parent, spouse, child or pet.

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.

C. God's fullness (19-21)

That you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

1. Be filled with God (19-20)

Paul prays for believers to be *filled with all the fullness of God* (19). Bible commentator Adam Clarke observed, To be filled with God is a great thing; to be filled with the fullness of God is greater, but to be filled with *all* the fullness of God is beyond our ability to comprehend. In Jesus, dwells all the fullness of God (Colossians 2:9). Therefore, as we are filled with and controlled by Jesus and his Spirit we overflow with God. We can be *filled with all the fullness of God*, and know Jesus' love, because *God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us* (20). The *power that works in us* is the Spirit (14-16).

2. Be filled with praise (21)

To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen

Paul concludes the prayer with a doxology, or praise to God. *God deserves all glory in the church*. The church is the assembly of all redeemed people *by Christ Jesus*. Thus, from Pentecost until the Rapture of the Church all believers are to be filled with praise to God. This praise will continue into eternity, *forever and ever*.

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

3. God's fullness for the family (15,21)

The prayer is to experience Christ's love and all the fullness of God through the Spirit. Implicit in this passage is to share Christ's love among "the family." At verse 15 we see believers as a *family*, and at verse 21 *all generations*. Thus, this experience of Christ's love is experienced by one generation, and then encouraged, modeled and shared with the next generations. This is not simply intended for those in your household, because as we learned believers are also the household of God (2:19).

So, how do we share Christ's love from one generation to another in the context of the local church?

- a. Pray for the next generation(s).** Those in your household and in the local church.
- b. Volunteer to serve with students and younger kids.**
- c. Forge inter-generational Neighborhood Groups (small-groups).**
- d. Nexus Family Center.**
- e. Engage other generations and befriend.**

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. *How might it impact your life if you better appropriated and appreciated Jesus' love for you?*

Q3. *How might we share Christ's love from one generation to another in the context of the local church?*

4. *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.*

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 neighbors (inside + outside the group) better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors inside or outside the group?
2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbors inside or outside the group?

Disciples who make disciples:

1. Who would like to share how they recently sought to make disciples?
2. Here is a disciple making idea to consider for the weeks ahead:
Share the love of Jesus with a neighbor from where you live, work, study, play or worship.

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.

Notes:

1. **Preparation and participation:** Group participants should read the teacher's notes contained in this study guide prior to your meeting and be prepared to discuss the content. Remember the purpose of preparation and participation is to accelerate growth as disciples who loves God supremely, loves neighbors like self, and make other disciples who do likewise. **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. **Consider what about the 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.
3. **The "Disciples Who Dig Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Disciples Who Dig 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. **The "Love your neighbors" section encourages participants to love neighbors inside and outside the group better.** As a leader, discuss this section frequently.
5. **The "Disciples who make disciples" section provides a helpful idea, and encourages participants to be disciples who make disciples.** Leaders should regularly encourage the group to review and discuss this section.

Next week's passage:

Ephesians 4:1-16 :: "In Christ You Are Equipped"