
EPH 3:14-21 : AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER [8]

No. EE16

WE STARTED LAST TIME with the second petition and established that the phrase *being rooted and established in love* is actually just a bridge between the two petitions, although it can correctly be regarded as part of the second. We now continue with the second petition.

Paul's prayer is that the Ephesians - if the loving indwelling of Christ has wrought a rootedness and soundness in their lives and they show the concomitant signs of fruit bearing and steadfastness - will be able to *grasp* and to *know*. We will look at a later stage at *what* it is that he wants them to understand and to know. Today we consider the two concepts "grasp" and "know".

TO GRASP

□ The word that Paul uses here (the Greek word *katalambano*) and the form that he employs (Aorist Medium Infinitive) means to lay hold of something in order to make it your own and to claim it for yourself.

Let us look at three other places where it is used, in order to get a clearer understanding.

1 Cor 9:24(b): "Run in such a way as to get the prize". The literal meaning of the sentence is that we should run the Christian race in such a manner that we might *grasp* the reward that Christ has for his children, *lay hold* of it and *make it our own*.

Mk 9:18: We read of a demon that *seized* a child.

Jn 8:3-4: The Pharisees and Scribes have *caught* a woman in adultery. Here the verb indicates to us

that they not only saw her committing the crime, but laid hold of her and dragged her to Jesus.

□ Accordingly the apostle prays in our text that the Ephesians will be able to *lay hold of with their minds, get a grip on, and make their own*, how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is

Acts 10:34 Peter says with reference to his vision of the sheet, "I now realise (Gr. *katalambano*) ... that God does not show favouritism but accepts men from every nation..." Can you believe it! He must surely have heard this from Jesus Himself. In fact, he himself preached it on the day of Pentecost when he assured the crowd with great certainty that the promise of the Holy Spirit is not only for those Jews who are listening to him, but also to "all who are far off" (Acts 2:39). This expression was used to denote the Gentiles, from as far back as Isaiah (43:6-7; 49:1, 12; 57:19). Paul also specifically describes the Gentiles in this way (Eph 2:13, 17).

So what is really happening here in Acts 10? Peter realises for the first time that God's plan of salvation actually does include the Gentiles. In the past he would have said, "Yes, yes, of course..." But now the truth has hit him like a bolt of lightning and he will never forget it.

□ In the light of the foregoing we can now understand what it is that Paul is praying for here: It is his heartfelt wish that the Ephesians may come to a full understanding of the extent and depth of Christ's love for them - in what He has done and still does and forever will do.

They must come to know Him as God's great Prophet - that He is the culmination and summation of God's self-revelation to mankind. They must understand that his teaching, his commands and his example are the perfect explanation of God's law.

They must come to know him as God's great Priest who has brought the Old Testament sacrificial system to perfect culmination when He sacrificed Himself as the Lamb of God. They must understand that He is the interpretation and fulfilment of the faith

and religious practices of the previous centuries.

They must come to know Him as God's great King who subjects all his enemies and will rule forever as the Prince of Peace. They must understand that as sovereign ruler, He governs over the most minute details of their lives.

Their insight into these things must keep on growing in depth and in scope. These things must become the passion of their lives - permanently, and life-changing! They must be fascinated by these truths, and must have a passion to proclaim them.

□ Do I hear an objection? You say that if we read further we will find that in the prayer Paul's concern is with knowledge of Jesus Christ's love and not all the other things mentioned above. Let us not be short-sighted. Does Jesus Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King do anything which is not an expression of his love? Or to put it differently, we can reduce everything that He is for us and does for us to one single expression: *his love!*

□ This brings us to the inevitable question: Why is it so important to Paul that the Ephesians should understand so deeply and fully who and what Christ is? The answer is simple. It is because he himself has experienced the overpowering effect of that which he is praying for on their behalf. And every one of us who has experienced but a fraction of this knows that we are overpowered by a desire that many others should also see what we see.

Why? Have you ever stood at the Victoria Falls or watched a Karoo sunset? Do you remember how you longed every time to share the experience with a loved one? That is how it is with love. You want those whom you love to share your feelings. Paul is driven here by his love for the Ephesians.

But there is an even more important reason. His passion that Christ should be glorified burns day and night like a fire in Paul's breast. He finds it unbearable that people should profess to be Christians without appreciating the Lord Jesus for whom and what He is. No, with his whole being he

desires that a pleasant fragrance of glorifying worship should rise heavenwards daily from more and more lives. Innumerable people to the ends of the earth must worship, trust, love, serve and proclaim the name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

TO KNOW

❑ The word that the apostle uses here (Gr. *ginosko*) is loaded with meaning. Whereas the previous word implies mental insight, *ginosko* has to do with relationships and experience.

To the question, "Do you know Mr Mandela?", most of us would have to reply in the negative, although we probably all know quite a lot about him and may have read his voluminous biography. But unless we have a personal relationship with him, we have to answer "No!" But it is for such a personal relationship with Christ that Paul is praying here.

❑ How do I experience a relationship with Jesus Christ? My fellowship with Him (and the Father and the Holy Spirit, because the three Persons of the Trinity never operate separately from each other) comes to expression in at least two different ways:

Firstly I will recognise in faith his loving involvement in every aspect of my life, acknowledge it thankfully and praise Him for it. I will therefore look in faith at my life through the eyes of the Word and see his intimate involvement with me in every circumstance and detail of my life.

Secondly, I will devote myself to Christ in trusting faith and serve Him all my life with love and in thankful obedience. I will try, in all integrity, to apply in practice the full implications of his calling. What we are talking about here is a response to Christ's saving initiatives, his ongoing loving faithfulness and his sovereign rule over me that direct my entire life.

Luther said, " Religion and discipleship are a matter of personal pronouns". This is beautifully illustrated by the life of David, especially as exemplified in the psalms. We see for instance David writing in Ps 139 about God's divine

characteristics, such as his omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence. But he does not do so in abstract terms as might be expected, but as *he personally experienced them*. The name of the Lord is mentioned 6 times, while personal pronouns referring to Him occur approximately 30 times. And to himself David refers about 50 times. In David's deepest religious experiences there are really only two persons involved: the Lord and David himself. That is why he does not speak of "He", but of "You"; and not of "people", but of "I".

TO SUMMARISE

❑ Paul prays here for two types of knowledge:

He prays for a more rational and objective insight into the wonders of Christ's love. He prays for an understanding of the Scriptural revelation about the Son, for a grasp of the teaching about Christ.

He also prays for a subjective experience of this love leading to a radical and practical application of the implications thereof in the life of the individual.

Two words summarise it: *understanding* and *experiencing!*

❑ Can you see how closely related these two types of knowledge of Christ are with his love? The knowledge and the love are like Siamese twins.

On the one hand, without a proper understanding of the person and work of Christ, we lapse into a subjective, even mystical pre-occupation with experience. This results more often than not in blasphemous emotionalism and self-deceit. We start believing all sorts of things that are unscriptural and untrue. No, we need not fear emotion *per se*, but it should always be founded upon a true understanding of God's Word. That is why Paul prays for a proper understanding of Christ's love.

On the other hand, without a practical and emotional experiencing of our faith, we will soon lapse into a cold intellectualism, and a conceited hyper orthodoxy. That is why Paul prays for knowledge that is not just cerebral.

❑ In pursuing these two types of knowledge of Christ - understanding and experiencing - there are a few things we should always keep in mind:

One, our growth in this knowledge is only possible by the grace of God. That is why Paul prays for this growth and does not simply instruct the Ephesians to grow in it. And if we pray in earnest, we can confidently expect to receive it increasingly, because nothing pleases the Father more than his Son being glorified in the lives of his children.

Two, it is the Holy Spirit that brings this to fruition in our lives. Let us never fail to acknowledge Him.

Three, the Lord reveals Himself only to those of humble, childlike and deeply dependent faith (Mt 11:25-30). The proud know-all does not stand a chance, nor does the choosy.

Four, the knowledge of the Lord is not for casual and insincere seekers. It is something we must pursue in a purposeful and persistent manner. "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Hos 6:3; Jer 29:13).

❑ In conclusion, here is a Biblical principle we should always keep in mind: *The Bible never accepts that a learner knows a truth unless it controls his life. And more than anything else, this applies to the knowledge of the Lord and his love.*

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