

“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here” Continues

Study in Ephesians

Ephesians 3:14-21

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Jeff: Well, brothers, I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I am very much looking forward to being with you again and counting the days. Hopefully, that will be soon, and especially now that we’ve entered into the yellow phase, or at least I think we will tomorrow. And hopefully that will mean that we’ll be able to enter into some sort of gathering soon. And I’ll look forward to that; I hope you will, too.

I just want you to know that in the intervening time Don Maurer has sent me an email and confessed to harassing me. It’s staggering, but not surprising. And what I mean by that is that it’s not surprising, because we all know that Don harasses me quite a bit. But it’s staggering that he would actually admit it. He actually labeled it and called it “Stivason Harassment Withdrawal.” He said that’s what I was experiencing. And I want you to know that Don, I’ve been resting and recovering from the harassment that I’ve experienced from you. It’s been freeing. And I hope you’re repenting at home Okay. Anyway, I digress. But I just wanted to get that off my chest and let you know that I’m doing well, recovering from the harassment I’ve experienced from Don for quite a while now. Hopefully when we get back together he’ll behave himself. But I doubt that would be the case and I’ll end up having to go back into therapy. But again I digress. You see what this is doing to me. Anyway, I need to get started. I’m wasting all of my teaching time doing my therapy sessions.

Anyway, I want you to focus with me on the last few verses of Ephesians chapter 3 starting in verse 14. I’ll read to the end of the chapter. Listen to God’s word.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Well, let’s pray briefly. Father in heaven, thank You for the day, for the time You’ve given and Your word sent before us. Bless us in it. Father, we also pray that You will cause it to be that we would meet together soon. And we pray for You to vanquish this virus. Father, we pray for a good time of learning in the midst of this isolation, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Let me just remind you and encourage you to look at your newsletter and to be praying for those prayer requests that Sig is so faithfully listing there and helping us to keep track of.

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Well, if you remember right, we are in chapter 3. And in chapter 3 you’ll remember that this is the final chapter wherein Paul is going to tell us about what God has done for us, the indicatives. In chapter 4 he’s going to begin telling us many imperatives, teaching us many imperatives. But for now we’re in this indicative stage, and he’s telling us what God has done.

And one of the things that God has done is that He’s given us ministry. Now again the idea is not that He has given us ministry. Now do it, and here’s the imperative. No, the idea is that this is what He has done for you. Enjoy it; draw down on it. And that’s what we’ve been looking at as we’ve gone through chapter 3. And we’ve been looking at how ministry is a gift, how ministry which is a gift connects us, how ministry strengthens us. And now what we’re going to look at is *how ministry bears fruit among us*. And again I would just encourage you to remember that what we’re looking at is not an imperative, but it’s an indicative. In other words, it is again what God has done for us, what He’s doing in our midst. And so when we talk about the fruit that’s being born in our midst, it’s something that God is doing; it’s His gift to us.

So let’s think about that. And I want us to think about the fruit that it bears among us.

Now what is the result of this ministry among us? And I think that if you look at the text, one of the answers that clearly comes to us is *love*. Love is the fruit of the ministry that abounds to us.

Now when you think about this you have to think about this from the perspective of the first century. One of the things that I think would have been obvious had Paul used the word *fileo* is that this would have been a brotherly sort of love. This is Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. And so I think that one of the things that we would have understood is that brotherly sense of love.

But that’s not the word Paul used. He didn’t use the word *eros*, which is the sexual form of intimacy between a husband and wife. He didn’t use that sort of love. He didn’t describe the love that is abounding toward us in that usage of the word.

What word did he use? Well, it’s a word that’s very familiar to us, but would have not been very familiar to those back then—*agape*. In fact, it’s interesting to notice that before Jesus picks up this word and begins to use it, and Paul then uses it, before that this word was not used frequently in extra-Biblical literature at all.

In fact, it’s interesting. Some of the lexicons describe this word. And one of the things that you find with word studies is this. when you get a really valuable lexicon, a word study book, what it will tell you is this. It will tell you all the places that this word was used in extra-Biblical literature, and how it was used, and as far back as they’ve been able to find it when this word appears, and so on. So it gives this really flourishing knowledge of the word—its usage, its changes over time, and so on.

If you look at the word *agape* in some very valuable word studies, one of the things that it will say is this, and this is a quote. It will say that “*agape was uncertain in its meaning, weak and variable prior to Jesus and Paul taking it up and using it.*” In other words, *agape* was a word that was not often used. Its meaning was variable and its intensity was weak prior to Jesus’ and Paul’s usage of it.

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When Jesus picks up the word *agape*, He imports it with meaning. And when He imports it with meaning Paul takes it up and he begins to use it, and invests in it the same meaning.

And so, for instance, when John writes in 1 John chapter 3 you get this idea. Listen to what it says. “*See what kind of love*”, (see what kind of *agape*) “*The Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.*” And the idea is what sort of love is this love with which God has loved us? In other words, what kind of love is it? This is an alien sort of love, a love that we know not of, that sort of love. And so here’s this wonderful word that we are really familiar with. It’s sort of been taken right out of the Greek and popped into the English—*agape*. But it wasn’t well known and well used prior to the first century. And so here it is in this text. Paul is using it, and he is impressing it upon the Christians to understand the fruit of the ministry.

And again the question is this. What does it mean? And here I’m not asking what it means in the sense of what does it mean? *Fileo* means brotherly love; what does *agape* mean? Here I’m asking the question. What does it mean for us that this sort of love that is introduced to us is now being impressed upon us?

Well, maybe we do need to ask the question. What sort of love is this? Can we describe it and define it? And I think that the best way either to describe or define this love is in this way. This is a love that is not person-centered. In other words, let’s say that a woman walks into the room and a man sees her and says, “That’s the woman I’m going to marry.” Why does he say that? He says that because of the way she looks, because of the way she acts. In other words, there’s something about her that he finds very attractive.

Well, *agape* love in the Scriptures is not like that. *Agape* love sees the sinner coming, walking in the door. God sees the sinner coming, walking in the door, and the sinner is very detestable—unlovely, unworthy of love. And yet *agape* love is the sort of love that moves out from the heart of God to the undeserving. That’s *agape* love. And that’s the kind of love that’s described for us in Jesus’ words and in Paul’s accounts of it, and certainly in John and other writers.

Now the question that we have to ask is, what does this mean for me? What does this sort of love mean for me? And I think we have to ask the question in this way. Does this mean that I’m being called to love more and in this way? And I think there are other Biblical texts where we might say yes. We’re being called to love more, to *agape* more, and in this way where the love moves out from us.

Now that love moving out to others is after the pattern of God Himself. And yes, we must. But in this text that’s not what we’re being called to do, because remember that this is a bunch of indicatives. This is what God has done for us.

So the idea then is this. This is the love that God has shed abroad in our hearts. And so God is not necessarily calling us to love more in this way as that He is calling us to recognize the love with which we have been loved. And when we recognize that sort of love with which we have been loved, we will love out of it. That’s coming. But right now he is calling us to recognize the love that we have been loved with. That is the love of God.

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And that means this. That means that we have resources within us, so that when we are called to love with an *agape* love we can draw down on those resources and love. This is not something that we have to work up, something that’s external to us where we have to say, “Ah, now I have to work up this love for that person.” No. If we’ve been loved with this sort of love, then it’s a love that we have as a resource. Why? Because it is a love with which we’ve been loved by Christ. And Christ is now indwelling in us and we indwelling Him. And therefore we have the resources out of which to love. It’s that sort of thing.

Now let me give you an example of that. For instance, in our day when some of the larger hospitals in New York needed respirators, let’s say that the warehouse doesn’t have any respirators to give. And the Governor is calling for respirators. And the guy on the other end of the phone says, “Look, Gov, there are no respirators in this hospital. So I don’t have any resources to draw upon in order to give them to you.”

Now let’s say that warehouse was full of resources. Let’s say that it was full of respirators. And he Governor called up and said, “Look, I need some respirators.”

“How many do you need?”

And he says, “Well, I need three hundred.” And let’s say that the place was filled with them, had thousands of them. Well, they would draw out of their resources and give them to the Governor. That’s the idea.

The resource we have is the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us with that sort of *agape* love. And we draw down on the love that we have been loved with because we possess it in Christ. And I think this is why Paul says that “I’m praying that you might know that which surpasses knowledge.” In other words, “I’m praying that you might know this love that surpasses knowledge,” because it’s infinite, because that kind of love that God loved us with in Christ is infinite, just as He is infinite. But it’s not beyond knowing. “So I’m praying that you know something of the love that You’ve been loved with.” And that’s what he’s saying here. We are to know something of that love.

Now let me give you another example of this. Let’s say that you love your wife. Hopefully you love your wife! But it’s interesting. When I do premarital counseling and I call these guys in who are about ready to get married, I’ll say to them, “Why do you love her?” And you know, I’ve learned that in order not to embarrass the man, you have to tell him ahead of time, “I’m going to ask you why you love her,” because if you ask him on the spot why he loves her, nine times out of ten you will get an answer that is inarticulate and doesn’t make any sense, and really could cause hurt feelings. So you’ve got to forewarn that guy, “I’m going to ask you this question,” so that he has some time to think about it.

And let’s say, for instance, that he says, “Well, I love her because she’s godly.” Okay, well he’s going to find out just how godly she is over time. In other words, he’s not going to know how godly she is at the moment of that meeting. He’s not going to know how godly she is at the moment of his wedding day. But over time he’s going to find out just how deep that godliness runs in her. And so he’s going to continue to plumb the depths of what it means for her to be godly.

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Well that’s what Paul is saying with this love. He says, “Look, I pray that you come to know something of this surpassing love.” In other words, “I hope you get a little taste of it now. And I hope that taste increases over time.” But you’ll never come to the bottom of this love. You’ll never get to the bottom of it. You’ll never say that I fully know this love. And that’s the idea.

And how do we come to know this love? Well, it’s the love that was exemplified in Christ. In John 13:1 it says that Jesus loved His own, and *“He loved them to the end.”* The idea is that this love is exemplified in Christ Jesus.

Now let me just say this. Christ then is our security. He’s the source of our love. We draw down on Him as our resource. But here is the point that I would make, the one that Paul is going to make. And it’s this. We can use this love to be a blessing to others, to be a help to others, especially in this time of real difficulty. This is the kind of love that so abundantly dwells within us. This is the kind of love that has a great deal of potential to be a ministry and a blessing to others.

Now I want you to just see this for a second. It says, *“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.”* The question is, what is that power at work within us? That power at work within us is the power of Christ’s love with which He loved us even to the end.

Notice what it says in Ephesians 1:19 ff. *“And what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.”* In other words, what Paul is saying is this. The power that is at work in you, the power of God’s love that is at work in you, that’s the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the heavenlies. That power is at work within you.

And so I think that when you think about the love with which we’ve been loved in that sort of way, and understand that it is an abounding love, well then it has the power to bring forth fruit in our lives and in the lives of others to whom we minister. And I think today that is the call of the hour and the need of the day. And may it be that while we’re apart that we exercise that kind of love to those who are closest to us, even those in our own families, that we might be well practiced so that we can exercise that love with those who surround us on a day-to-day basis when we are able to return to our lives.

The Lord bless you, men. It’s good to be with you in this way. But it will be even better to be with you presence wise. The Lord bless you.