

Text: Eph. 3:13-19

Title: "How Big Is God's Love?"

Time: 1/26/2025

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Maureen and I had a great time with fellow-servants of the Lord in Florida this past week, but we do miss home when we are away. One of the thoughts of home that I had came to me again early on Wednesday morning. That is when some of us men normally get together for our weekly men's prayer time. I miss that time when I am away, and I mentioned to Maureen about how blessed we were to have brothers at home praying for us. We may have been uniquely blessed among the fellowship attendees in that way.

I think to a man, the group that prays together during that time would tell you that it is a spiritually strengthening time. Our Wednesday morning does not start that way – we often start tired or cold or discouraged, perhaps even overrun by our sins. But by the time the last man says, "Amen," God's Spirit has strengthened us. The source of that renewed strength, I believe, is that in our prayers we have taken some time to reflect on the magnitude of God's love for us in Christ.

The Apostle Paul would not have found our experience surprising. He prayed for the Ephesians to have this spiritual strength, and when he did so he prayed that they would be able to comprehend God's love for them. I think this prayer of Paul tells us that we are strong spiritually when we know well God's love for us, and we are less strong to the degree we have forgotten about God's love for us.

Note that truth from the passage with me. Paul prayed for believers in danger of fainting, who might have been weakened by Paul's imprisonment (v. 13), and so he prayed that their inner man would be strengthened (v. 16). When this prayer is answered in a person's life, that person knows the love of Christ (v. 19), a love that passes understanding, a love that fills us with all the fullness of God. I pray often this prayer for you.

So we can say with confidence that Paul prayed for Christians to be strengthened by understanding that God loves them. But more than that, he also prays that the Ephesian believers would understand *how much* God loves them (vv. 17-18). It is one thing to know that someone loves you; it is another to take the time to appreciate how much.

Paul tells the Ephesians how much God loves them by speaking about the infinite dimensions of God's love for us in verse 18. God's love for us has length and breadth and depth and height. Knowing these dimensions of God's love through His Spirit strengthens our inner man.

This morning with the help of God's Word, I want us to spend some time again thinking about the measurements of these dimensions of God's love for us. We are going to use the dimensions Paul mentions, breadth-length-depth-height, albeit in a different order, to think together about the answer to the question, "How big is God's love for us?"

I. The height of God's love for us: it comes from the Highest in heaven (Matt. 5:43-48; Luke 6:35-36).

Illustration: College basketball fans know the name *John Wooden*, as do many others who know nothing about basketball. John Wooden was the coach of the dominate UCLA Bruins for 27 years, a team that won a staggering 10 NCAA national championships under his leadership.

Many looked up to Coach Wooden because of the moral qualities they saw exemplified in his life. He was married to his wife Nell for 53 years. She was the only girl he ever kissed. She died on March 21, 1985, and Wooden died more recently, but on the 21st of every month, as a token of his love to his departed wife, Coach Wooden would write a love letter to her. Some quick math says he produced about 300 of these.

In the last year of his life, Wooden granted an interview to ESPN in which he spoke of the importance of love to a successful life. In

that interview, Wooden called love “the most powerful force on earth.”

Application: Earthly human love could well be the most powerful force on earth, but it is not the most powerful form of love. The most powerful form of love is higher than the earth; its height is transcendent. It comes from heaven, not earth. It is the love of the Highest, not that of us who are low. Coming from the height of heaven, the love of God is more powerful and perfect than any earthly love. God’s love is the love of *our perfect Father, who is in heaven* (Matt. 5); it is the love of *the Highest, who is a merciful Father* (Luke 6). To know the height of the love of God is to understand its heavenly transcendence, beyond our earthly form of love, in both power and perfection.

God expresses the power and perfection of His love especially by loving His enemies, not merely His family and friends: “for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust” (Matt. 5:45); “for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35). The powerful gifts of God’s love, causing the rotation of the earth and sending rain to water crops, manifest the heavenly height of God’s love.

And the recipients of God love manifest its perfection. God loves us whether we are evil or good. He loves us every single day the sun comes up, and He does so in spite of our ingratitude and sin. God’s high heavenly love can overcome our earthly lack of lovable-ness. He mercifully loves the undeserving, the sinful, the evil, and the unthankful, because His love has infinite height.

The Psalms sing of the high, heavenly power and perfection of God’s love:

Ps. 103:11, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him”;

Ps. 108:4, “For great is your love, higher than the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies.”

Ps. 21:7, “For the king trusts in the Lord, and through the steadfast love of the Most High he shall not be moved.”

We know the height of the love of God when we realize that it is the love of the Most High God, which is the omnipotent heavenly love of a powerful and perfect Father. It is a love that mightily breaks through all barriers, even those set up by the hatred and rebellion of His enemies.

Whether or not we are loved by God never depends on our lovable-ness. You and I are not lovable, but in spite of that awful truth, God so loved the world, that He made the sun shine today, gave us rain (snow), and best of all, He gave His only Son to die for our sins (John 3:16). The hymn writer asked, "How can it be that God should love a soul like me?" The answer is that God's love is very high, more powerful and more perfect than mere earthly love. He can love this unlovable world – ourselves included.

II. The depth of God's love for us: it is rooted in Christ (Rom. 8:31-39).

Illustration: The oldest known trees were thought to be about 5000 years old until the discovery of a tree in Sweden dated to be 9550 years old. In his highly publicized 2014 debate with creationist Ken Ham, evolutionist Bill Nye (who just received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from our former president) used this tree to argue against the biblical account of the global flood. His point was that we should not have a tree that is 9550 years old if all the trees were wiped out by the flood more like 5000 years ago.

What he did not explain in the debate was that the part of the tree in Sweden that was 9550 years old was its roots. For this kind of tree, the root system regenerates a new tree every 600 years or so. The roots of the tree withstood the global flood, not necessarily the trunk and branches of the tree.

Application: Paul prays in Ephesians 3 that believers would be rooted and grounded in God's love. God's love for us is very deep, rooted and grounded, so that we can survive the storms and floods of life's trials (Rom. 8:35, 38-39). We conquer not by avoiding these trials, but by never losing the love of God in them. Christ is the reason we never lose God's love in our trials. God's love for us is not rooted in our health, ease, and pleasure, but in

the work of Christ for us (vv. 32, 34-35, 39). There are roots of God's love for us that run deep in this verse – "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." God's love for us is rooted and grounded in the sacrifice of His own beloved Son. His love for us is as deep as His gift of Christ.

Having refused to spare His own Son for us, what act of love shall He withhold now? What more expensive gift could He possibly refuse to give? There are no more expensive gifts. Paul asks some wonderful questions in this passage: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (v. 31), "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (v. 33), and "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (v. 35). The answer is "No one."

When we know this about the depth of God's love for us, we are no longer tempted to believe that God has failed to love us, for He gave us Christ. It is Paul the prisoner who tells us of the depth of this love he knew. He is telling us where his strength to suffer came from – God loved him in Christ.

Satan might have said to Paul that the fact that he was in prison showed that God did not love him. Paul would have answered, "No – the evidence that He does love me is greater, for He spared not His own Son for me." Has Satan's lie caused us at times to doubt whether God really loves us? Youth can change to age, health can change to sickness, freedom can change to imprisonment, support can change to betrayal, and even life can become death, but still God spared not His own Son for us, and knowing this we know God's love, and we are strengthened. We are "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (v. 37).

III. The breadth of God's love for us: it is as wide as the spectrum of man's sin (Rom. 5:6-8).

Illustration: It is the business of military men to stand in harm's way to protect our freedoms. I read a book given to me for Christmas called *The American Story* (David and Tim Barton). Recounting of the Battle of Lexington, it told the story of an 80-year-old patriot named Samuel Whittemore. Samuel heard of the advance

of the British, grabbed his sword, two pistols, and his musket, and took a position behind a low stone wall.

Soon five redcoats appeared, and Samuel stood up and fired his three weapons hitting three of the five. Return fire hit Samuel in the face, and then he was bayoneted 13 times before being left to die. When local townsmen found him later, he was lying in a pool of blood trying to reload his musket. He was brought to a doctor who declared his case hopeless, and Samuel was sent home to die. Though badly scared, this 80 year old Revolutionary War hero lived another 18 years. He died at the age of 98.

Application: The love of country of our military personnel in harm's way is a heroic love. It is exceptional, and the Apostle Paul calls it that in verse 7 when he says, "For *scarcely* for a righteous man will one die: yet *peradventure* for a good man some would even dare to die." Our nation's soldiers have risked their lives for our freedom with a rare and selfless love.

But Paul says that the love of God is more exceptional, because it reaches even wider than this kind of commendable love (Rom. 5:8). It is while we were sinners that God loved us and Christ died for us. We were not the good guys. Ours was not a righteous cause. The boundaries of holy righteousness demanded we die for our sins, but God's wide love reached further than our sins could reach — Christ died for the ungodly.

A soldier's love can run cold when the cause seems no longer just or the country no longer good. Our nation experienced the effects of that truth to some degree during the Vietnam War. If iniquity abounds, man's love grows cold (Matt. 24:12).

God's love, however, does not grow cold when iniquity abounds. In fact, where sin abounds, grace abounds more (Rom. 5:20). There is no sinner that hates God too much to be beyond the reach of His love; there is no sin too dark to be beyond the reach of His grace; there is no betrayal too harmful to be beyond the reach of His salvation. God's love is as wide and as far-reaching as the entire spectrum of man's sin. Wherever you find a sinner in sin, God's

love is there. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Where sin abounds, God's loving grace super-abounds in Jesus Christ.

Do you remember Jesus's love for Peter? He had boasted that though all men failed Christ, he would not. Jesus informed him that he would soon deny three times that he even knew Him. Peter denied Christ in Jesus' darkest hour. Jesus still pursued Peter, giving him an opportunity to affirm his love once for each of those original denials. The breadth of God's love is wide, and it reaches further than the far-reaching destruction of man's sin, the sin of men and women like you and me.

IV. The length of God's love for us: it is everlasting (note that time is the fourth dimension; Jer. 31:1-3).

Illustration: I mentioned the touching example of the love John Wooden had for his wife Nell and the ESPN interview that spoke of this. The interviewer for ESPN was a man named Rick Reily, who introduced his segment with some insights about the age in which we live. Here is what he said:

"You know, we live in an age of sand castle loyalties, of dissolvable love, of best friends forever at least until next-week's episode. And when I'm sure that nothing lasts anymore, and nothing means anything anymore, and nobody stays true anymore, there's one place I can always go to prove myself wrong – Coach Wooden's house."

Application: Mr. Reily communicates a lot of insight about the world in which we live. The longing he speaks of is a longing for a love that lasts, a longing every human heart shares.

The problem with his solution, however, is that we can no longer go to Coach Wooden's house to be proven wrong, to find that example we seek of everlasting love. Coach Wooden is not there anymore. He has passed away. Even the best of earthly human love can endure for only so long, and then it is gone. And as temporal as human love is, it is equally fragile. Many in our day find

no place they can go that can convince them that there is any such thing as an everlasting love.

But God's people know where to go to be convinced in this way. Paul tells us that God's love has this everlasting length. The prophet Jeremiah said the same (Jer. 31:3). God loves us with an everlasting love. In our world of "sand-castle loyalties, of dissolvable love, of best friends forever at least until next-week's episode," God's love is everlasting.

Conclusion: Oftentimes, when I am in need of spiritual strength, I find it on a walk singing about God's love for me. I often sing, "I am His and He is mine." It is #66 in our hymnal.

Does the size of God's love give you spiritual strength this morning? Can you say, "I am His and He is mine"? Have you been led by grace this love to know? Has the Spirit taught you it is so?

Full peace, rapture divine, strength with might by God's Spirit in the inner man – these are the blessings that await you and I when we measure accurately the dimensions of God's love for us.

"A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction – the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*