

## Text: Eph 3.18

I thought we finished our series in *Orthodoxy* last week, but I was taking a look in another book I have and noticed a related thought in its first chapter.

So, that brings us to:

### *Post-Script: Our Greatest Challenge to Understanding*

In our series we've focused on the false teaching of several men, but especially Walter Bauer and Bart Ehrman. I think it is important for us to understand and expose these errors and accuse those who twist the truth and deceive many.

However, there is something else we need to bring in when we think of these topics. The people who fall for the deceptions of false teachers deserve some sympathy from us.

Why is that?

The book that prompted today's message is called *Inerrancy and the Gospels* by Vern Poythress. He is another Presbyterian and teaches at Westminster Theological Seminary. His concern in this book is dealing with difficulties in harmonizing the Gospels.

Here is how he begins the paragraph that got me going on this message:

“My primary challenge in accomplishing this task is myself. I am a finite, fallible human being. I am also affected by remaining sin. And sin affects biblical interpretation. So I cannot be an ideal example. Of course, neither can anyone else subsequent to the apostles.”<sup>1</sup>

He especially emphasizes the need for us to work on these problems with the help of other Christians, and that is our theme for today.

Our text is found in Eph 3.18, we'll read Eph 3.14-19.

The passage is part of the conclusion to Paul's explanation of the church, the body of Christ, made up of both Jews and Gentiles. Chapter 4 and following will move to the practical consequences of this doctrine.

Key phrase:

may be able to comprehend **with all the saints**

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<sup>1</sup> Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2012), 15.

**Proposition:** We need the work of faithful teachers to help us understand and proclaim faithful teaching.

## I. Paul's prayer

### A. Addressed to the Father

1. God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
2. God, the Father of the Church through Jesus Christ
3. God, the archetypical Father of all families "in heaven and earth"

"He is the ultimate Father over all families that have a father."<sup>2</sup>

### B. Prayer for inner spiritual strength (16)

1. This gift is "according to the riches of his glory"
2. This gift comes through the Spirit to the inner man

When we consider our own weakness compared to our God, we recognize we suffer under the effects of the fall:

- Not enough strength to keep from falling
- Not enough heart to keep on loving God and his truth
- Not enough wisdom to know all we need to know

Consequently, we need "power ... in the inner man"

### C. Three results for Paul's prayer (17-19)

1. That Christ will find a ready home in the believing heart (17a)
2. That we would comprehend the entire compass of God's love (17b-18)
3. That we would experience the love of Christ so that we would be filled up completely with his love (19)

These are dramatic phrases, full of meaning, but now we will turn to the middle one...

<sup>2</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Eph 3.15.

## II. Comprehension with all the saints

### A. The word comprehend has a comprehensive meaning

1. One usage of it has to do with “coming into possession and making it one’s own” as in an inheritance for example

Suppose you were left an inheritance of a masterpiece worth many thousands of dollars. You will hear of some examples like this on Antiques Road Show. Someone will come on and be surprised to find out that their item is worth a lot of money.

- Some will say, “Huh, we’ve had it stuck in a closet,” or another will see “Well, we’ve had it in the front room and hung our hats on the frame” or some such — they had no idea
- Others will respond, “Well I thought it was worth something, we’ve tried to keep it carefully...”

Of these, those who “dissed” their inheritance didn’t comprehend it. They treated it shabbily. Those who owned it tried to take care of it, knowing it had some value.

2. Another usage of the term is a bit better here: to comprehend is “learn all about it, grasp everything about it, understand it”

We heard Peter Masters preaching on this passage once and he talked about comprehension this way: in the London subway, everyone uses an “Oyster card” to access the subway.

You fill it up with cash and use it as you travel about. The thing is you don’t lose your Oyster card. You keep it in a safe place. You always know where it is. You know everything about it. You comprehend it.

3. So, when we comprehend the love of Christ, we know everything about it: the breadth, the length, the height, the depth — we try to surround it in our minds, to completely understand

## B. We can't comprehend it by ourselves: "with all the saints"

1. First, we stand on the shoulders of the apostles and read about the love of Christ in the Bible
2. Second, we stand on the shoulders of Christians who went before us
  - a. We read their books
  - b. We read their lives (biographies, testimonies)
  - c. We listen to their sermons
3. We then take what we know and we are ready to pass it on to others

By ourselves, we will stumble and make mistakes.

## III. Orthodoxy is the collective understanding of all the saints

### A. In the early years of the church various challenges arose

1. The periodic persecutions
2. The parasitic false teachers (esp. Judaizers, then Gnostics and others)
3. The passing of the apostles (made the churchmen more dependent on one another and mutual study)

### B. Through the ages, many Christians labored and laid down their lives and fought the fights of orthodoxy

1. They fought for the doctrine of Christ
2. They fought for the doctrine of the Trinity
3. They struggled for the doctrine of the Canon
4. They argued over the doctrine of the Spirit
5. And on and on, through all the ages

### C. We stand on their shoulders and depend much on their work

1. That is not to say they were infallible
2. And it is not to say "majority rules"
3. But it is to say that we cannot be so self-dependent that we ignore what God teaches us through the Church, through *all the saints*

## Conclusion:

**Proposition:** We need the work of faithful teachers to help us understand and proclaim faithful teaching.