

Ephesians 3:20-21: Now to the one who has the power to do super-abundantly beyond all things we request...to him [be] the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus into all the generations forever and ever, Amen. (37)

Introduction

The evening wasn't much different than others. The only distinction was that a disagreeable verbal transaction occurred between me and my oldest son.¹ I can't necessarily, at this point, recall the exact details of the engagement, but I'm pretty sure it had something to do with the time of evening and bed. What I do remember clearly was the near three-year-old standing at the top of the stairs yelling down at me, full of fury and ferocity (angry as the dickens!). The summary of what he yelled down at me, red faced with tiny fists clenched, was that I wasn't a very good mom and he—at that moment—didn't like me very much.

I informed him that he could have those feelings, but he needed to go have them in his room. Then I added: *you can come out when you're calm and sweet*. I watched *and* listened to him go *ish* to his room, slam the door, and proceed to throw things and vent that (in summary) I wasn't a good mom and he—at that moment—didn't like me very much. While I'm an advocate for taking time and space when emotions run high and heated, there was a something in the moment that shot through my heart and altered my perspective. In the midst of his anger—specifically at me—I felt the surge to go to him. *But this isn't what the parenting book says*, went through my head as I tried to circumnavigate the increasing conviction to go to him. *Hold your ground...Don't give in*. So, I didn't move.

I stood there looking up the stairs and listened to my son rant and rave as much as his little lungs and heart would allow him. And then, *Nah, this doesn't feel right*. I ascended the stairs and opened the door to his room—just barely missing the most recent airborne but not the current toddlery lambast. I walked in and wrapped him up in my arms and held him. As passionate as his mother is, he fought back with intensity. I held him to me. *I love you so much*. I whispered as he fought me. I said it a few more times, *I love you so much*. Then, what felt like suddenly, he relaxed and melted into my embrace as we sat on his bed. Then, *I love you, too*.

Ephesians 3:14-21

[I pray]² that, [God]³ may give to you--according to the abundance of the glory [of God]—strength to become strong through God's spirit in⁴ the inner person, Christ

¹ I did obtain permission from my eldest child before relaying this story in this context.

² Markus Barth *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* The Anchor Bible Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974 *Ephesians* 368, "Paul does not begin vs. 16 with the words 'I ask,' but he treats the statement 'I bow my knees... that' as an equivalent to 'I pray that' (1:16-17); cf. the combination of "bowing the knees" and "praying" in Acts 9:40, 20:36. Three petitions may be discerned in what follows (a) 7 Intercession for the inner fortification of the saints; this is unfolded the prayer that Christ reside in their hearts (vss. 16-17)- (b) Supplication for interpreted by a request for knowledge of Christ's love (vss. 18—19a). (c) Petition for perfection with God's perfection (vs. 19b)....At this Point Paul's thinking follows the form of devotion and meditation rather than that of deduction, induction, careful subordination or coordination."

³ Intentionally dropping the pronouns for God because the best way to refer to God is with "God".

⁴ I'm taking the εἰς as spatial translating as "in"

being permanently settled⁵ in your hearts through faith, having been fixed firmly and founded in love...⁶ (Eph. 3:16-17)

One of the things that the author of Ephesians does here, in chapter three, is link the love of God to parental love. While the author uses the term “father”, the emphasis isn’t on “fatherhood” specifically. Rather, the emphasis is on accessibility and presence and acceptance that is a significant part of parenthood in general. According to our faith claims and this text, God is the parent of all peoples (3:15)—all are elected and adopted through Christ (1:5, 11) and there is now no dividing wall between those who are near and those who are far off (2:14-15). It is this tight correlation of God as parent—of Jesus Christ and of the people—that underscores the reality of God’s love for God’s people. God sees you; God knows you; God loves you like a mother loves her child even when he’s losing his little three-year-old mind.

Essentially, the author is highlighting positive disintegration: 1. There is the disintegration of the separation of people groups (there is now no longer an in group/out group dynamic at play); and 2. The disintegration of distance between God and humanity. This disintegration emphasizes a revolutionary way to think of God: close and personal. You are profoundly loved by a cosmically big God⁷ who is not far off and strange, but who is close and familiar.⁸ God is close and familiar not in an abstract purely spiritual way but in a material way evidenced by Jesus the Christ, God of very God, the Word and Love of God incarnate. And evidenced by the sending of the Holy Spirit (the Paraclete) who is of the same substance of God and who resides in you uniting you to God and giving you a new heart (you are the new temple of God).

⁵ Barth *Ephesians* 370, “The verb ‘to dwell’ denotes permanent habitation as opposed to sojourning, pitching a tent, or an occasional visit. The “heart” is in biblical diction man’s total identity and existence described under the aspect of his vitality, intelligence, will, decision. In the OT and NT the bowels rather than the heart are the seat of emotion. When in II Cor 6:11-12 Paul intends to speak of the emotive capacity of the heart he adds a reference to ‘bowels’ (or ‘compassion’). More frequently he mentions joy or sorrow without locating them in the ‘heart.’ The term ‘heart’ can also denote an essential trait of human existence hidden to the eye; Paul is as much aware as OT writers that not everything human is apparent on the surface. In Eph 3:17 he may have in mind not only Christ’s rulership over man’s reason, will, and decision, but also the hidden quality of a Christian’s existence. It is far from evident to every onlooker that Christ fills and directs the saints.”

⁶ Translation mine unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Barth *Ephesians* 368-9, “In 3:14-15 the title of Father pointed out God’s stable love, and the reference to ‘all families’ stressed God’s universal power. The inexhaustible ‘glory’ of God is the third and final presupposition of Paul’s prayer. The triad ‘love,’ ‘power,’ ‘glory’ and the reference to ‘riches’ were also found in 1:3-23. In remembering the ‘riches’ and ‘glory’ of the Father, Paul is convinced that God need not change or lose anything by granting the requests made to him. God is expected to act according to his nature, his character, i.e. his radiating love and power...”

⁸ Klyne Snodgrass *Ephesians* The NIV Application Commentary Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996. 179, “Paul again emphasizes God as Father He refers to God as Father forty-two times in his letters, of which eight are in Ephesians. No other description of God is used so frequently in the New Testament. No doubt this goes back to Jesus’ teaching his disciples to address God as Abba, the Aramaic word for ‘father’ used by both children and adults but considered by Jews to be too familiar to use without qualification in relation to God, God is the Father of believers, but both a narrower and a broader use of ‘Father’ also occurs. More narrowly God is viewed as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which marks out the uniqueness of Jesus’ relation to the Father. In 3: 15 (and 4:6) the broader sense occurs: God as the Father of all humanity’s The emphasis in Ephesians on a cosmic Christ and a cosmic role for the church is based in an understanding of God as a cosmic Father.”

It is the close presence of God that establishes divine love as the fertile soil you are rooted in and which is the firm foundation from which you grow.⁹ You grow as you are and into who you are¹⁰; herein lies the increase of strength that is found in our union with God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹¹ God's love for you¹²—unconditional love—creates space for you to exist as you are, to see yourself as you are, and to grow as you will into who you are more and more every day, every moment, in every step you take with Christ in love. And as you are loved fully by God, you *know* love. As you know love you are transformed by this love.¹³ This is what love does.

Hear me here. Love's goal is not to transform you, you are *not* a means to an end. Rather, love's goal is to love you as you are, and as you are loved *as you are* you **are** transformed and strengthened—this is the beautiful byproduct of being loved, of being liberated, of being accepted as the marvelous person God created you to be.¹⁴ And the more you relax into that love, the more you find yourself, and the more you find yourself (growing in knowledge and love of who God is and who you are) you can then love others as they are and just because. We cannot love well from a deficit or from self-hatred—if we do this, we will consume others by making them fit into our own stories. Instead, knowing who we are, loving who we are, we can love others well granting them love, liberty, and acceptance to be who they are as they are.

⁹ Barth *Ephesians* 371, "Therefore, it is probable that in Eph 3:17 love is designated as the soil upon which the seedling can grow. The same love is also the ground upon which the building is to be constructed"

¹⁰ Harold W. Hoehner *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002. 479 "Hence, the inner person is the heart or mind of the believer whereas the outer person is the physical body that is wasting away. In the present context it is the innermost being of the believer which is to be strengthened with Gods power. That innermost being corresponds with the heart of the believer in the following verse."

¹¹ Hoehner *Ephesians* 481, "The strengthening in the inner person results in the deep indwelling of Christ by means of faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως see the use of this phrase in 2:8) and this takes place in the hearts of believers (ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν). This demonstrates both the work of Gods Spirit in strengthening the believer and the subjective means by which the believer obtains this.³ However, it is not a reference to Christ s indwelling at the moment of salvation (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:3, 5; Gal 2:20; cf. Col 1:27). Instead, it denotes the contemplated result, namely, that Christ may "be at home in," that is, at the very center of or deeply rooted in believers' lives. ⁴ Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct."

¹² Hoehner *Ephesians* 484, "In the present context Paul states that believers are firmly rooted and grounded in love. This root and foundation of love refers to God having chosen them, predestined them, bestowed them in the beloved, redeemed them, made them a heritage, sealed them with the Holy Spirit, made them alive, raised and seated them in the heavenlies, and placed them equally in one new person in the body of Christ. Therefore, for the believer, the origin of this love is God's love."

¹³ Snodgrass *Ephesians* 181, "God's love is the wellspring from which believers are nourished and the foundation on which they find stability. Being rooted and established in love enables them to perceive love, and from knowing love they are filled with the fullness of God. Love is both the source and the goal. When Christ permeates people, they know they are rooted in his love. From the experience of love they know love and are transformed."

¹⁴ Snodgrass *Ephesians* 182, "Love brings movement,- it causes things. To know Christs love is to be transformed by love and expanded into the fullness of God...In experiencing Christ Christians experience the fullness of his presence, and power. In experiencing that fullness they themselves are made full by Christ. That is, the/ partake of God's own being and are made like him....The implication in Ephesians is that as believers encounter Gods love in Christ, they will be filled with love."

Conclusion

Being loved by God I knew that sending my son away from me (at that moment) wasn't the right answer. *God never asked me to calm down and become sweet before God would be with me.* While there are significant benefits to learning to self-soothe, at that point and time my son couldn't. I had to go to him just as God has come to me time and time again. Each time received and accepted; each time transformed. I'm not the same woman I was when I first encountered God in the event of faith; yet, I'm more fully me than I've ever been because of the love of God perpetually consistent and unconditional

Quinn relaxed into my embrace because my hold told him I wasn't going anywhere, that love wasn't going to leave him. I didn't tell him to calm down or to stop fighting me; I merely held him and told him I loved him. This persistent and unconditional love and acceptance in that moment didn't cause more tantrum or more toy throwing. Rather, it produced what no command or amount of quiet time on earth could ever produce: freedom, liberation, rest, and transformation. In being free to be who he was in that moment, he was truly free. This radical love and acceptance caused the transformation from fight to rest, rooted and founded in love.

Love, true love, persistent love, unconditional love, will wrap up us and soften our edges. It will pick us up and create safe space for us to reckon with ourselves: to be free to be completely honest with ourselves because we are truly and radically loved and accepted by God in love. Even in the thick of our worst, Love enters in and sweeps us up, embracing us and holding us tightly no matter how much and how hard we fight against it.

We are loved, deeply loved by a Love that does not know a limitation of depth, height, width, length (3:18-19). A love so magnificent not even death can separate you from it. There's no conditionality attached to God's love for you, the beloved. Just as Jesus went to the margins and the fringes and dwelled with those who were outcast, so does God's love in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit seek you out always and everywhere. You cannot run hard enough or fast enough to outrun the inexhaustible love of God.

Love loves and knows not how to do anything else but love. You are the beloved, caught up in the majesty of the divine love that comes close to you and is not far off. You are heard, you are seen, and you are loved...wrapped up (tightly) in the arms of the God of Love and washed in the divine word: *I love you, so much...I love you, so much.*