

"Be All That You Can Be" Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

- In a quiet street in London lived the Darling family. There were Father and Mother Darling, and Wendy, Michael, and John. There was also the children's nursemaid, Nana-a St. Bernard dog. For Nana and the children the best hour of the day was bedtime, for then they were together in the nursery. There Wendy told wonderful stories about Peter Pan of Never Land. This Never Land was a magical spot with Indians and Mermaids and Fairies-and wicked pirates, too. John and Michael liked best of all to play pirate. They had some fine, slashing duels between Peter Pan and his arch-enemy, the Pirate Captain Hook. Father Darling did not like this kind of play. He blamed it on Wendy's stories of Peter Pan, and Father Darling did not approve of those stories either. "It's time for Wendy to grow up," he decided. "This is your last night in the nursery, Wendy girl." All the children were upset at that. Without Wendy in the nursery there would be no more stories of Peter Pan!
- When Mother and Father Darling had gone out for the evening, leaving the children snug in their beds with Nana on guard below, who should come to the nursery but Peter Pan! It seemed he had been flying in from Never Land to listen to the bedtime stories, all unseen. Only Nana had caught sight of him and nipped off his shadow as he escaped. So back he came, looking for his lost shadow and hoping for a story about himself. With him was a fairy, Tinker Bell. When Peter heard that Wendy was to be moved from the nursery, he hit upon a plan. "I'll take you to Never Land with me, to tell stories to my Lost Boys!" he decided as Wendy sewed his shadow back on.¹

Transition

Too many of God's children, who should have left the nursery years ago, have, like Peter Pan, refused to grow up. Instead, the church is nursing a multi-generation family of Lost Boys and Girls who have flown off to Never Land. One of the great weaknesses of the church at large, and this church in particular, is the overwhelming lack of maturity by many of the people who show up on Sunday morning. Too many of us live our Christian lives in Never Land, refusing to grow up. As we continue in this series, one of God's great purposes for this church is that we mature in our faith. But what does it mean to mature spiritually? What does it mean to leave the nursery? I believe with all my heart that...

Proposition

- **Christian maturity means growing in appreciation of Christ's limitless love**

Transition

In the passage we will look at this morning, Paul makes a rock solid case that those who are most mature in God's eyes are those who are continually growing in their knowledge of Christ's love. You heard me right. Not growing in love for God but something slightly different; growing in

¹ Walt Disney's *Peter Pan*, Golden Press, Racine, WI, 1976.

knowledge and appreciation, wonder and awe of God's love for us. That is the path out of Never Land and into Christian maturity. This morning, as we close the first half of the book of Ephesians, my prayer is that you and I would grow up. Turn with me to Ephesians 3:14-21 where I want us to look at...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two (2) parts to Paul's prayer for Christian maturity**

Background and Setting

- There is a reason that Paul's plea in prayer is made at this point in his letter. So far in this series all we have talked about is what Christ has done for us, one great spiritual truth after another. Paul goes to great lengths to try to explain the incredible heavenly riches that have been procured for us because of Christ. He labors so that we might understand the mystery of the gospel of Christ and the church. And so, as the first major division of Paul's letter draws to a close, he ends the only way he knows how, with prayer. Specifically a prayer for maturity, a prayer that asks God that the Ephesians might grow in their knowledge of God's love, that they might mature.

Transition

Let's turn now to [verses 14-19](#) where we find the first part to Paul's prayer for Christian maturity. Remember, **Christian maturity means growing in appreciation of Christ's limitless love**. And that maturity is brought about by God's power. That's the subject of the first part of Paul's prayer and the first point on your outline. [Maturity is brought about by God's power](#).

Main Points

I. **Maturity is brought about by God's power (3:14-19)**

A) Validation

- i) American author [F. Scott Fitzgerald](#) once wrote, "*Growing up...is a terribly hard thing to do. It is much easier to skip it and go from one childhood to another.*"² If we want to grow up as Christians and end our perpetual Pan-like childhood we will need help. In fact, you and I are dependent upon God's power to reach maturity. But what does God's power empower us to do? In these verses, Paul prays for inner spiritual strength so that believers might know more intimately the infinite love of Jesus Christ for us. And the implication is, the more we grasp this, the more mature we become. And the less we grasp this, the less mature we are as Christians. **Maturity is brought about by God's power.**

B) Explanation

- i) Paul prays in verses 14-19 that we might be strengthened by God's power, so that we might be able to grasp Christ's love and in doing so, reach full maturity. Listen. [Verse 14](#). *For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he*

²**F. Scott Fitzgerald** (1896–1940), U.S. author. *The Crack-Up*, "Notebook E" (ed. by Edmund Wilson, 1945). *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

- may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.* Paul expresses his desire in prayer that God might give the Ephesian believers, out of the glory of his riches-which are never ending, power to become strong using two parallel phrases: *being strengthened in our inner being* and *Christ dwelling in our hearts*. Both phrases have the same end in mind; the strengthening of our inner being, power to become strong, given by God's Spirit, the Spirit of Christ. Our hearts or our inner being is Paul's way of talking about the core of our beings, the center of our moral selves. Are you weak? Immature? Call on God to strengthen you. Believe by faith that God will give it. Paul prays for that same strength, that it might come by faith, for the Ephesians.
- ii) Now the Spirit's strength in this instance is given for a very specific purpose. Look at the second half of [verse 17](#). *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.* The Spirit's work on the inside of our life, manifesting his power and strengthening us works to *root us* and *establish us*. Paul uses two metaphors, a tree and a building, to explain the Spirit's strengthening work in our lives. To be rooted brings to mind a large tree that has sunk its roots down deep so that it is immovable, fixed, stable, mature. Similarly, he speaks of the established believer, a believer who has a solid foundation, a solid basement on which to build the rest of their spiritual life. The Christian who has matured by the power of God's Spirit has matured by one thing. By love. By love we have been rooted and established as the text says. And what kind of love is Paul referring to? Our love for God? Our love for others? He says, very specifically, that it is actually knowledge of God's love for us which is the result of the Spirit's strengthening. God's power enables us to grasp, to take hold of, to perceive, to recognize in our inner spirits an infinite truth, the surpassing greatness of the wideness and length and height and depth of Christ's love for you and me. You can never reach the ends of Christ's inexhaustible love. It is higher than the highest high. Deeper than the deepest deep. Wider than the widest wide and longer than the longest long and it is what will make you and me mature. It's a love that surpasses knowledge.
- iii) But if, by God's Spirit working to empower us, we are able to grasp this love something absolutely amazing will happen. Look at the remainder of [verse 19](#). *That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.* It is by knowing Christ's love that we are "filled up to the measure of God's own fullness."³ That's Paul's way of saying that we will have become mature, right? Those who are filled with the fullness of God are certainly mature. The NT idea of filling literally means to fill a vessel. And so as God's Spirit empowers us to know the love of Christ, we literally become filled, like a vessel or a jar, with God himself. Think about it. Mature, no longer carried about by every wind of doctrine, but established, rooted, full of the infinite God of the universe himself. What an amazing promise! Ephesians 4:13, which we will look at next week, speaks of this very idea; *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* God wants you to become mature. How? By experientially knowing through the Spirit's power, Christ's infinite love for you.

³ Bruce, p. 329.

C) Illustration

- i) I was reading the **Daybreak** section of the *Wisconsin State Journal* yesterday and noticed an add for a film that I didn't know even existed. There actually is a movie called *Superbabies: Baby Geniuses 2?* I didn't know there was a *Superbabies 1!* And then I thought of this passage. As absurd as this movie sounds, that's how God's people are. We act as if we are mature, like we know everything, even though we're still walking around in diapers.

D) Application

- i) I say this with the deepest love and care for my flock. There are a lot of people in this church who are still in diapers. You simply know no more of God's love for you now than you did a year ago, or five years ago, or worse yet, when you were saved. If you are not growing in your love of God's love for you, you simply can't mature as a Christian.
- ii) I think that one of the reasons that some of you are stuck in the nursery is because you have not relied on each other. The experience of growing in the knowledge of God's love for us happens, as [verse 18](#) says, *together with all the saints*. "*The isolated Christian can indeed know something of the love of Jesus. But his grasp of it is bound to be limited by his limited experience. It needs the who people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences.*"⁴ We must be a together people. Our maturity depends upon it.
- iii) [Aristotle](#) has said that "*All men by nature desire knowledge.*"⁵ That may be so, but are you desiring the knowledge of Christ's love for you?

Transition

The second part of Paul's prayer is found in [verses 20-21](#). In this concluding doxology-or praise to God, Paul explains that God's power will ensure that we will come to maturity. That's the second point on your outline. [God's superabundant power ensures our maturity.](#)

II. God's superabundant power ensures our maturity (3:20-21)

A) Validation

- i) [Armitage Robinson](#) once said the following of Paul's prayer in verses 14-19. "*No prayer that has ever been framed has uttered a bolder request.*"⁶ Did Paul in fact, pray for too much in his prayer? That we might be rooted and established by Christ's love for us and attain the very fullness of God himself? Absolutely not. Paul reassures us that "it is impossible to ask God for too much. His capacity for giving far exceeds his people's capacity for asking-or even imagining."⁷ Be encouraged!

⁴ Stott, p. 137.

⁵ Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), Greek philosopher. *Metaphysics*, bk. 1, ch. *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* is licensed from Columbia University Press. Copyright © 1993, 1995 by Columbia University Press. All rights reserved.

⁶ O'Brien, p. 266.

⁷ Bruce, p. 330.

God will answer this prayer for maturity. **God's superabundant power ensures that our maturity will come about.**

B) Explanation

- i) I love Paul's choice of words to get across the feasibility of our maturing by God's power. He uses the highest form of comparison possible to get across his point that God is able to do more than we could ever ask or imagine. Superabundantly more.⁸ **Verse 20.** *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. As John Stott so eloquently puts it, "He is able to do or to work, for he is neither idle, nor inactive, nor dead. 2) He is able to do what we ask, for he hears and answers prayers. 3) He is able to do what we ask or think, for he reads our thoughts, and sometimes we imagine things for which we dare not and therefore do not ask. 4) He is able to do all that we ask or think, for he knows it all and can perform it all. 5) He is able to do more...than all that we ask or think for his expectations are higher than ours. 6) He is able to do much more, or more abundantly, than all that we ask or think, for he does not give his grace by calculated measure. 7) He is able to do very much more, far more abundantly, than all that we ask or think, for he is a God of superabundance."*⁹
- ii) And because God is so powerfully working within us, Paul praises God and concludes with maybe the most striking phrase in his entire prayer. **Verse 21.** *To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.* Paul unequivocally states that the locus of God's glory is found in two arenas. The life of Christ and the church. Simply striking. In the church! I believe that what Paul is saying is that the more you and I, *together with all the saints*, grow in our knowledge of Christ's love for us, the more we mature. The more we become like the one who loved us. Together, with all the saints, as God's church matures in its understanding of God's love, collectively it will bring great glory to God. And it will do this, along with Christ, forever and ever and ever.

C) Illustration

- i) As the dawn of another season of football approaches, it looks as if the Cincinnati Bengals are finally coming of age. You want to talk about an exercise in immaturity. For 13 years I have subjected myself to the rantings and ravings and tantrums and whines of the league's worst franchise, a franchise that has refused to mature and get with the program. But this year, I think that things have finally turned around. What happened? There is finally some hope. It looks as if there is someone on staff, head coach Marvin Lewis, who can actually bring about the unthinkable. It looks as if he is single handedly going to usher the Bengals from the league nursery into young adulthood.

D) Application

- i) As Christians, we have someone far greater working to mature us. The God of the universe, who hears our prayers, even the most ridiculous full of faith prayers, is able to bring about the unthinkable. He is able to mature you as Christians making you a people set apart for his glory. When was the last time that you asked that God would mature you by showing you the depth of Christ's love?

⁸ Reinecker, p. 530.

⁹ Stott, p. 139-40.

- ii) And when God works to mature us, watch out. Things are going to get exciting. When we stick together and come to intimately and continually grow in knowledge of Christ's love for us, there will be nothing that can stop us. [Rick Warren](#) quoting [Vance Havner](#) says, "Christians like snowflakes are frail, but when they stick together they can stop traffic."¹⁰
- iii) Let me say one final thing about this passage. You want to explode with authentic worship for God? Know your doctrine. As this passage demonstrates, doctrine leads to doxology. Paul erupts with praise in verse 20-21, a flurry of praise to God because of what he's been dwelling on with his mind, in this case, God's great love for us through the cross.

Conclusion

- This weekend was a milestone week in Ethan's life. Miriam and I have been preparing Ethan for quite some time, the day in which Ethan would give up his pacifiers. We were dreading the whining and sleepless nights but by God's grace it hasn't been bad. Here's how we did it. We've been telling Ethan for some time now that he's not a baby; he's a big kid and that big kids don't need pacifiers; that its time to put down the passy, as he calls it. And so we began explaining to him that when its time to give up the passies we'll go to Wal-Mart and he'll get to pick out a toy. And then when he gets to the register, he'll hand all of his passies over to the cashier and get to take his toy home.
- This past Thursday was the big day. Ethan, extremely excited about the prospect of a toy, along with Miriam and I headed to the toy aisles at Wal-Mart. Ethan spent at least half an hour walking around looking at different toys and then we made our way to the aisle with the aquariums and fish. That was it. He was sold. He wanted an aquarium with fish. And I did too, so we headed to the checkout aisle, he handed his passies to the cashier, we paid for the aquarium, came home without the slightest hint of a whine or protest. Three days later he has only hinted at wanting the passy one time. He's growing up.
- This morning, it's time that you and I put down our passies. We are big kids now. Today's the day we exchange the symbols of our immaturity for the one thing that will bring us to complete maturity; Christ's surpassing love for us. Please pray with me.

¹⁰ Warren, p. 275.