

Ephesians 14-03-09a

This is Sunday, the 9th of March, 2014. We're in the Pauline letter written to the church at Laodicea and also to the Colossians. These two letters, Laodiceans and Colossians, went in the same mail bag.

They were carried by the same messenger and were written on the same occasion. And each of them sheds a very helpful light on the other. We're in chapter 3 and we're finishing up the last four verses of this chapter.

The prayer of Paul asking that God would grant several things. The final one of which in verse 18 is that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height. To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Interesting petition. It's an interesting request. How large a container would be required to hold all the fullness of God? And yet that seems to be what Paul is praying.

That you may be filled with all the fullness of God would be pretty large. It would be like saying that you'd be filled with all the water in the ocean, all the molecules in the universe. How full is the fullness of God? Remember the hymn about if every stalk on earth was a quill and the sky was of parchment made, what would it take to write just the love of God, just one attribute? Well this is what we'll look at this morning.

Let's take a moment to go before the Lord in prayer, focus our concentration, ensure that God the Holy Spirit can find us awake, alert, sensitive to the truth of God's Word so that the few minutes we spend this morning looking at this passage will actually do us good. Shall we pray? Father, we recognize how great the blessings are that You bestow on us day by day, hour by hour. Certainly this morning as we gather and have the freedom and the opportunity to look together at this portion of Your Word and try to understand it and incorporate it into our thinking, have it become a part of the divine truth that resides in our hearts, that it will have its ultimate effect of enabling us and empowering us to live the life that You have called us to and to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus.

We thank You for Him. We know that He, even as we speak, sits at Your right hand and argues for us, intercedes for us, makes the case based on His own work that establishes the grounds and the foundation for Your grace and Your faithfulness to us. We thank You for that.

We thank You for the Lord Jesus. We thank You for the unique place that we have in all of history and in all of Your dealings with Your creation before the foundation of the world, that we are uniquely given to the Lord Jesus. We belong to Him.

We are in Him. And He is potentially in us. We thank You for the truths pertaining to this that are

revealed to us in this part of Your Word.

And we ask that as we study it together this morning, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts in a way that is motivating, that is revelatory, that strikes us and becomes a part of our thoughts and gets incorporated into our priorities, that we will be ever mindful that we are not our own. We have been bought with a very dear price. And the time that You have allotted to us on this earth, as brief as it is, is valuable.

And we have the opportunity to commit it to You from the moment we wake until the moment we fall asleep. We pray that our study this morning will be fruitful in achieving those ends. And we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Ephesians chapter 2 reminded us that God is doing a new thing in this age. Not only from chapter 1 are we in Him, but in chapter 2, the corporation, the group of which believers are a part, is defined in a different way.

In the Old Testament age, it was defined by a family relationship. And that family grew to become a nation, the nation of Israel. The family of Jacob.

In this age, we are also a family, but the family definition is different. It's not a nation. This is the family of God.

In Christ, who is the Son of God, we have the right to be called sons of God. We reviewed that memory verse together this morning. As many as received Him, the Lord Jesus, to them He gave power, authority, power, to become the sons of God, those who believe on His name.

And this kind of gets lost in the shuffle sometimes. You hear constantly, if you have any truck with unbelievers, especially your more militant atheists and alleged agnostics who want to attack Christianity, and they love to bring up the Old Testament. Oh, your God is violent.

Your God is misogynistic. Your God knocks the heads of babies on rocks. Your God drowns millions of people in floods.

He's arrogant. He's self-centered. He demands worship.

He wants you to kill things in His behalf. And all of this superficial nonsense. I have used the illustration in responding to some of them that if you had a two-year-old that you were trying to take to the doctor to get their shots, a very wonderful piece of technology we have today, vaccination, so that unlike when I was a child, we don't see hardly any children or young adults clanking around with metal braces on their legs from polio.

We don't have diphtheria and whooping cough and many of these other child-killing and child-maiming diseases prevalent. Why? Because medical knowledge has grown and we have learned how to prevent many of these. And it's a wonderful thing to look all through a school and not see

a single child in the playground with a big metal brace on their leg.

When I was a child, there were several. And you could travel around. Just in my school, my little school in Southern California, there were several kids that had polio.

And their legs were very cruelly twisted. Why does that not happen now? We have a program called vaccination. You take little children down at an early age, and the polio vaccine teaches the human body how to repel and defeat any polio infection it might be exposed to.

And it's been so far eradicated that now people don't even get exposed in most cases. Well, here's the two-year-old. I don't know how old you're supposed to be when you get polio, maybe younger than that.

I'm going to say two years old for the purposes of illustration. Most of us don't remember now when we got our first polio shot because it's just such a routine thing. But in my early life, vaccinations involved some discomfort.

You young folks, I look at your upper arms and I don't see scars. The older ones of us, you look at our upper arms and you see a scar, anywhere from the size of a nickel to the size of a quarter. And some of us, due to growth and the happenstances of life, the thing has drifted.

It's supposed to be right up here, and I think mine's back here somewhere. Now, you know how stuff moves. It does.

I mean, you think it doesn't. Some of you know, I have a very graphic illustration of this. Not only my vaccination scars have moved, but when I was in the second grade, I got into a little animated discussion with a classmate who was sitting beside me in class, and he took a dislike to something I had said and stabbed me in the leg with a pencil.

Just took his big old Eberhard Faber No. 2 and stabbed me. Well, the lead broke off in my right thigh, and about halfway down, I mean right in the middle, right in the meat of my thigh, just snapped it off.

Well, the piece of lead is still in my leg to this day. I've been able to see it ever since then. It's just this little dark piece of graphite, and it's graphite, not lead, pencil lead.

Well, it's no longer in the middle of my thigh. It's below my kneecap now. Figure that out.

It's just the way your skin moves. So you'll find people with vaccinations all over the place, somewhere in the vicinity of their upper left shoulder. But that doesn't happen anymore.

But when it used to be, when you went, there was some trauma. I remember when they would give some of those, they had to put a little plastic bubble. They had to tape a plastic bubble over it because the vaccination site would infect, and intentionally so.

It would blister and bubble, and to not get it on your clothes, and it would leak. And they had a plastic bubble that they taped over this vaccination point. When you look at some older person and see all those little pinpricks in a circular pattern, that's what that is.

Well, so you're a two-year-old. This is a really long setup for an illustration, isn't it? You're a two-year-old, and your mother is going to take you down to the doctor. I got taken down to the base dispensary to be vaccinated.

And you go see a bunch of strangers in a strange room. It smells strongly of antiseptic and alcohol in there. You get sat down, and a couple, two, three strangers come in and start messing with things.

They roll up your sleeve, and then they start hurting you. And they used to take a needle, and they'd say, That's before they had the one-gun vaccination solution. In my primitive circumstances, out in Barstow, they just had one needle, and they'd just jab, jab, jab, jab, jab, jab, jab, jab, jab, jab.

And so here I am, and I look at my mother, and I think, What kind of mother are you, hypothetically, now? I'm not sure I was capable of a rational thought. I was already extremely discontent just by being taken and put with strangers. But then they started doing that and hurting me.

And I think, What kind of mother would take their child to this smelly place, hand them over to strangers who have strapped me down in a chair and are hurting me? And then I could, in my later life, write all kinds of diatribes about how mean my mother was. As we get a bit older, or if we're old enough at the time for it to be explained, This hurts now, but it'll be good later. I got sat in another chair with another bunch of strangers and had my tooth pulled out.

And that was just a couple of weeks ago. No. When I was a little kid, I had one of my baby teeth pulled well before its time.

I went for a couple of years missing a front tooth before it was ever due to fall out, before the other one ever joined it. My mother took me, strangers pulled the tooth out of my head, and I've got this gap in my face for a couple of years. None of my other friends had a missing tooth.

So, what's up with that? What a mean mother. Well, this is the kind of short-sighted, shallow, infantile argument that atheists and agnostics make about God. What a mean God.

They attribute a quote to Epicurus, which I've shared with you before. If God is willing to get rid of evil, but He's not able, then He's not a worthy God to worship. If He's able to do it and He's not willing, then He's a mean God.

And if He's neither willing nor able, then why would you call Him God at all? And this little

epigram, this little piece of alleged logic, supposedly proves that there can't be a God, or at least not one worth worshipping, because of the presence of evil. Well, it's a false syllogism. It is a bad piece of logic, because one of the premises is manifestly false, and it's the second one.

If He is able, but not willing, then He's a malevolent God. What is the case in that syllogism? Is He willing, but not able, to deal with evil? No. Is He able, but not willing, to eradicate evil? Yes.

So the conclusion is, He's malevolent. Well, that's a false conclusion. In the same way that if your mother takes you down to get a vaccination, and strangers hurt you for a reason you don't understand, you have a malevolent mother.

No, you've got a loving, caring mother who doesn't want you stumping around the rest of your life in a metal brace. Right? There is a momentary light affliction that works for us an eternal weight of glory. Remember that from Romans? Momentary light affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory.

Light, heavy. Momentary, eternal. This is what the atheists and the agnostic refuse to acknowledge.

It isn't that they don't understand it. What may be known of God is manifest to them, His eternal power, His Godhead. But they suppress that truth in unrighteousness, and this is why they are without excuse.

Romans chapter 1. Don't let anybody foist this sort of shallow, tautological, fallacious argument on you. Well, there can't be a God or there wouldn't be evil in the world. Of course there's evil in the world.

Sin is allowed to run so that sin can be seen for what it is. How many times have you seen someone in your periphery, and you try to explain something to them, but they just don't get it until something bad happens to them. You know, don't leave your stuff laying around, it's going to get stolen.

There's something you can tell somebody, but I was told that. But it didn't really penetrate to my inmost being until I had something I really liked stolen. And guess what, after that, I was far more careful than I was after the little, you know, parental suggestions.

Hey, you know, keep track of your stuff. Lock your doors, lock your locker. There's nothing like having something you really value disappear forever, or something you have and you're careless with it.

I took my, what was the deal, I took my high school ring. I didn't take it, it was on me. I had it on, and we went to Ulugawa Lake, and I was going to go swimming.

You know, when you swim, you get cold, and your fingers shrink up, and the thing was slipping

around. I was afraid I was going to lose it, so I took it off. Well, then I forgot, and we left.

And the thing was gone for a year. And then somebody found the thing, and in the goodness of their heart, knew that it was a small school, contacted somebody they knew at the school who contacted me. And after a year, laying in the dirt by the side of the lake, I got my high school ring back, which is now my wedding ring.

Just melted it down, reshaped it. You know, now it's, I mean, you know, why get rid of good gold? But it was gone for a year, laid by the side of the lake, because I was careless. Well, same thing happened with my college ring.

Had to go to boxing. Can't box with your ring on. Hung it in a hook in the top of the lockers where we put our uniforms and stuff when we would go in and box, get all sweaty, shower, come back, get dressed.

Didn't see it, forgot about it, hanging on the hook. Went back after my next period class, it wasn't there. And, you know, Naval Academy, you've got the honor concept, people aren't supposed to steal and so on.

But it was gone, and I thought, well, you know, that's X hundred dollars down the drain. And, however, no, that wasn't my college ring. That was also my high school ring, same ring.

Because I was taking boxing, we didn't have these rings yet. It was my high school ring, and I hung in there. And that's the reason it took a long time to get it back, because it was much more difficult to figure out who it belonged to.

But a year later, I think I lost it when I was a youngster and got it back when I was in second class. A guy had found it, had stuck it in his desk, had done some minimal investigation, didn't know who it belonged to, finally ran across my name in a class list somewhere, and said, hey, I think I've got your ring, and gave it back to me. Same ring, sat on the lake for a year, sat on a guy's desk for a year at Navy, and I got it back both times.

But I learned, I have actually never lost this ring, because from losing that ring, which was a 10-carat cheapie, I learned not to be careless with my stuff. And I've never lost a billfold, never lost my ring, because I learned through early experiences to be really careful. That's a long way of saying God allows evil in this world.

God allows us to sin against one another so that we can learn. Now, why does this pertain to Ephesians 3, verses 18-21? Because contrary to, opposite of, pulls away from the argument of your atheist, your agnostic, your naysaying unbeliever. Evil in the world, suffering in your life and my life is an expression of God's love.

It is a necessary experience. It inoculates us, it prepares us for an eternal future with God where He doesn't have to remove our free will. How could you ensure that you could live forever with

God and never do what Satan did? Never see someone else rebel and decide that they think there's a better way and think they might be right and fall in with them as one-third of the angels have done with Satan.

How could you ensure that you wouldn't draw the conclusion that the unbelievers of this world have drawn and end up separated from God? This would make me somewhat nervous. I mean, eternity is a long time. They have a thing in computers called MTBF, Mean Time Between Failures.

And if you buy a really good hard drive, the MTBF will be measured in hours. And, you know, 130,000 hours. It is projected that when you have a batch of these drives, the length of time it should run before it fails is this hundreds of thousands of hours.

And before it writes a bit and when it goes back to read it, it doesn't read it properly. That's a failure. It doesn't mean the whole drive went up in smoke.

It just means that it failed to read and write properly. That's a failure. Well, the Mean Time Between Failures ideally tells you how good the drive is, how much quality it is, how good the tolerances are, how long it will last before it starts becoming unreliable.

Well, I ask myself, eternity, you know, am I, throughout the eternal future, going to have a Mean Time Between Failures of an infinitely long thing? No matter how long I last, I'll never fail. I'll never get a bad idea, never suddenly sin. The only way I could really, in my own mind, be sure of that is that God would just take away my ability to have a bad thought, have a bad decision.

And I say, well, God, just take away that switch. Just weld the switch on the positive so that I'll, you know, it's just I'm incapable of sin. So God, in eternity, has a little puppet show.

We're all just programmed to praise and to love, but that's not reality. This is something we instinctively know. You want someone to love you out of their own free will, not because you gave them a magic potion, not because a genie put a spell on them, not because they've, you know, you don't program an android to love you and you say, well, I just feel so fulfilled because of this android.

Well, of course it loves you. You programmed it to. There's something essential and something we appreciate that someone freely, with everybody else to choose from, chose you.

That someone with a lot of different options, knowing your flaws, knowing everything else, chooses to love you anyway. And this is the genuine love of God. And our genuine love for Him is important.

It is a goal. It is an objective that we come to appreciate God freely, from our own free will, not because God has destined us to do so. That's just programming.

You might as well have one of these iBos, or one of these little program pets that you put on your computer and you come in and, hello, I love you. It doesn't mean anything. It's basically, you know, something that you're doing for yourself.

There's not an independent will involved. God cares about what we think. God wants us to appreciate Him out of free will.

And only people who do so are going into the eternal future. That's what this life is about. Why are there unbelievers? Why are they free to be evil and to be sinful? It accomplishes several purposes, one of which is, we come to know sin in all of its ugliness.

It's one thing to be told that separation from God and distance from Him and loving darkness rather than light is a bad thing. It's something else to live in this world and see the corruption, smell the rot of that corrupting fleshly human effort to try to be good. Anytime humans try to do something good, they fix one thing and break another.

This is the way we are in our own energy. Well, we've got a great drug that will fix this problem in your body. You take it, side effects may include, and then it's breaking all of these other things.

All of the warnings, they say, well, you know, if you've got this incredible itchy, flaky skin coming off, you can take this thing, but talk to your doctor if you have liver problems, this, that, and the other, because this particular drug, it will fix your flaky skin and itching, but it will destroy your liver if it's not extremely healthy. This is the nature of human good. They try to cure addictions.

And the addictive nature isn't changed, it's the addictive behavior. And so you can wean somebody off of drugs, you can wean somebody off of alcohol in the human realm, but that addictive nature now finds some other weak place to leak out of, because you haven't cured the source, you're just addressing the symptoms. This is the nature of human energy.

We are incapable of solving our problem. Only God can do it. Well, we see this around us.

We experience it throughout life. And this is not a bad thing. Evil in the world is not a bad thing.

Evil in the world is a good thing. Think vaccination. Think setting a broken bone.

You fall and you've got a broken bone. Well, don't move it, because moving it hurts. You go to the doctor, and the doctor says, I've got to set that bone.

What kind of parent would allow this stranger to take this broken leg and give me this horrible spasm of pain? You are the worst parent ever. Here's a child that's injured, and you're saying, Injure me more. I'm hurting.

You're making me hurt more. What is the matter with you? What kind of insane parent are you? You don't love me. Look at the pain you're allowing these people to inflict on me.

But when you step back, as we have been doing, go large, big picture, momentary light affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory. Right? And that's what we're talking about. This is the love of God.

This is what we're trying to understand. When Paul prays and says, I pray that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints. He says, I pray this for you as I do for all the saints.

He doesn't say all the saints get it except you, and I pray that you'll catch up. That would be one way to read this. All the saints get this.

What's the matter with you, Laodiceans? I wish you'd join the fast track club here. No, he says, I pray that you, with all the saints, that all of us will come to know, comprehend, begin to grasp and appreciate what is the width and length and depth and height. If you get a shallow grasp, if you've got a limited view, if you've only got part of the detail, you're not going to comprehend.

I've told you before, but there was a real famous case where there was a guy, I think he was a doctor, and his family turned up murdered. And they charged him, and he maintained that it was outsiders that had come in and murdered his wife and family, and other people said, no, the doctor did it. Well, they had a two-hour special on this, one of these 20-20 Investigates or something like that on TV.

And it's a very famous case. And so they presented it, and it was in sort of 13-minute segments. You've got 13 minutes, a bunch of commercials.

13 minutes, a bunch of commercials. And there were like four or five of these 13-minute segments. So they presented the case, and in the first 13-minute segment they said, here's what happened.

Well, in the second 13 minutes, they came back and said, as police began to investigate, here was a piece of evidence, and here was something that the doctor couldn't account for, and this, that, and the other. And so in the second segment, by the time they got finished with that section and the commercials came back on, you thought, this doctor is guilty as sin. Why is he not already dead? I mean, look at it.

Look at these facts. I mean, you know, there's blood on the bottom of his shoe, and he made a track, and there are fingerprints on the knife, and this kind of thing. Guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty, guilty.

So a couple of Cottonelle commercials come on. You come back, and they say, however, upon further investigation, it turned out that he had removed the knife because he was trying to do resuscitation on his wife, and he had stepped in the blood because he ran to call 911. And so by the end of the next 13 minutes, you're saying, well, what's the matter with these people? They should have turned him loose.

He was a good husband. He did everything he could. I mean, obviously, he's innocent.

Well, you go back, and now you've got commercials. Come back for the third segment. But upon further investigation, here's a fact, and here's where he couldn't account for, and here's the blood in the trunk of the car, and you're thinking, well, he's guilty of sin.

Run that rascal. Why is he not already in the gas chamber? I can't believe it. I mean, look at this.

It's just so clear. Well, then in the fourth segment, more commercials. You come back, and they said, but upon further investigation, it turns out that there was contamination of the evidence, and they can't really tell if it was this or the other, and it could have been more than one reason why this, not the other, and so by the end of it, you're as confused as everybody else, and you still don't know by the end of the two hours if the guy's guilty or not.

But what fascinated me about this is how with a certain presentation of the evidence, you get whipsawed between let the wheels of justice start to spin and roll that guilty rascal in, grind him under the highest penalty of the law. He should be either locked away or, you know, hanging is too good for that rascal. And then by the end of the second segment, you say, well, I see angel wings sprouting out of his back, and his halo is glowing, and this poor innocent guy has been wrongly accused.

Mean old police department. Somebody ought to go down and fire all of those guys, and just back and forth and back and forth. Depending on the information that is given and the way that it is presented, we can be led to draw conclusions that are in keeping with our predispositions, with our prejudices, with our bigotries.

And this is why it makes a difference what news outlets you frequent. If you listen to some cable networks, if you listen to some radio networks, the news, and especially if you've informed yourself on a subject and then you listen to the way they present it, you can hear the sound of the spin. I mean, it's like one of those little toys that you used to have that spins around like this.

It was made out of hollow tin. Nobody's seen one of these since some of us were little because it's just primitive. If it doesn't run on batteries and have LED lights, nobody knows what it is anymore.

But there used to be a round, cheap Japanese metal deal, and it had a spiral handle in the center, and you would push this handle up and down, and it would spin this thing faster and faster, and then you'd let go, and it would spin like a top. And they would perforate it with holes so that when you got it going, it would whistle. And this was entertainment for back in those dark, cave-like days.

And you could hear it spinning, and the faster you got it going, the louder it would whistle. Well, you could hear it. You could hear the spin in a lot of news.

I listen in small doses to national public radio, or as I like to call it, national people's radio, because it just reminds me of a communist news outlet. And subjects on which I'm well-informed, and they start presenting them, it's like the doctor is guilty, the doctor is guilty, the doctor is guilty. You get one side, and they're posing as objective.

They're posing as just the facts, ma'am, just the facts, but they have selected. And in some cases, it's probably even unconscious. To them, it seems as though this is the truth.

To many atheists and agnostics, it seems as though God has no love. How could there be a God that acts this way? Israelites going in, slaughtering pregnant women with a sword. There's no way you can make sense of that.

No God worth worshipping would tell any group of people at any time in history, slaughter pregnant women with a sword, kill children. Every moral fiber of my being convinces me that such a God has to be a made-up invention of man, and you're crazy to worship him. They do not understand what Paul is praying that you and I will understand to come to know what is the width and the length.

If you went back to the doctor case, and you could actually have every single fact, including security camera footage of everything that went on at the moment that his family was killed, if you had every possible piece of knowledge that pertained, you would know exactly whether the guy is innocent or guilty, right? Because with all of the facts, you'd have a record of what took place. You would know the wherefores, and the whys, and the whens, and the hows for this event to have taken place. The reason human justice is limited is we never have all of that.

We have a slice. We have a few bits and pieces of the puzzle, and we have to try to interpolate everything that's missing. Paul says, I pray that you will have the width, and the length, and the depth, and the height to know the love of God, to comprehend, that all saints would comprehend the love of God, because with that dimension, with that amount of appreciation and understanding, these things fit together and make sense.

If you happen to know, for example, you think, oh, slaughtering children, there's no way that's ever right. Innocent child, they're not a Baal-worshipping child. They're probably in danger of being fed to Molech, you know, passed through the fire.

In what universe would there be a righteous God that would tell an Israelite, all right, Uriah, pull out your sword, slay this little child. Slash him in the neck, their blood spurts out, and the little child is dead. Where is the righteous God involved in that? There is no scenario under which that is right.

Want to bet? This little child is in a family, is in a clan, is in a Canaanite tribe, where they're going to take that little child two weeks from now and burn it alive in a hot iron replica of Molech, because this will make the crops grow, and I've got two or three other kids anyway. Don't like this

one. That'll be the sacrifice.

And when this Israelite comes in, and this child is alive, and in a twinkling is not alive, hasn't had a chance to come to a knowledge of God or make a decision, doesn't know about the code that Joshua wrote on the cliffs, hasn't had a chance to make a decision about God, guess what? This child is going to be brought back in the millennial kingdom with a 900-odd year lifespan, and is going to have every benefit and every blessing, is going to be surrounded by witness to the beauty and the love of God, and is going to have a wonderful opportunity to make their decision and to live a life that is so far above and beyond what they would have had in the primitive, backward, child-slaying, Canaanite cultures that God sent the Israelites to destroy. Why did He say, slay the innocents? This is the equivalent of saying, put them in the transporter and send them to a better place in time. Exit them from this depraved, cruel, tragically evil culture.

Well, God's not going to land angels with flying saucers and say, everybody come on board, we've got the cocoons in the pool and you're all going to a better place. How does He do it? It's time travel. Slay them now, they come back in a much better place in time.

It's like the prick of a needle. It's like the pain of a vaccination. It's a momentary light affliction, gives them a much better opportunity.

The Lord is coming back and His reward is with Him and the lambs are in His arms. What are the lambs? Little sheep. Little sheep.

What else can it be? His reward is with Him. Rachel who was weeping for her children is now comforted. Why? Because the children are back.

So now, what do you think about an Israelite mercifully, and not cruelly, and not vengefully, and not slow torture, burning alive, roasting in a glowing red iron idol, mercifully transporting this child to the millennial kingdom, good or bad? Well, it changes the perspective, doesn't it? We need to know, we need to come to understand the width and the length and the depth and the height of the love of God. If you just get a little sliver, you're going to misunderstand, you're going to not appreciate, you're going to not come to the place of thinking like God, understanding the thinking of God, appreciating Him for who He is and loving Him out of genuine free will, free choice, appreciation. It takes knowledge.

It takes understanding. And Paul says, I pray that you will come to have this. Because, look at verse 20 and 21, if you understand the love of God, which is so large that it admits pain and suffering, it admits the presence of evil for a time, for a season, a momentary light affliction.

Why? Now, see the word now in verse 20? Now, if you have come to appreciate the love of God, you can praise Him, to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us. What is the power that works in us? It's God's power. It's the working of His mighty power.

Paul's been talking about that for two and a half chapters now. To Him, glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, to all generations. You can't get to the doxology until you comprehend the vastness, the wideness, the depth, the wisdom of God's love.

It is love that is great enough to allow for suffering. No parent is happy about the pain of a bone being set. No parent is happy about the pain of a vaccination, or the pain of a tooth extraction, or the pain of any other procedure that is ultimately designed to benefit the child.

Not happy about that, but in our maturity, we recognize the necessity. We recognize the necessity of, in some limited cases, letting our kids make their own mistakes. Bump their heads, scrape their knees.

We recognize that this is a better way to learn and to remember than for us to try to sit them down and give them a two-hour lecture every morning. Don't do this, don't do that. Oh, well, Dad said, I'll never do that as long as I live.

No, experience is our best teacher, isn't it? God knows this, and it's a part of the dimensionality of His love that He uses suffering. He uses challenge and testing in our lives, and rather than resenting and questioning and ultimately rejecting the love of God as so many do, Paul says, I pray that your perspective will widen so that you appreciate that this is God's love and that you can wholeheartedly join in this doxology, this praise. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to look at a couple of the specific words here that Paul uses that really help us not only appreciate that we should understand God's love, but how, okay? His love is big, but I'm kind of in the midst of a thing. How can I get that perspective? How can I get it, hold on to it, and maintain it? Paul tells us right in this passage. We'll see it when we come back.