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# The Incomprehensible Characteristic of Love



**T**he love of God is so massive, deep, wide, towering, all encompassing, that the human mind cannot understand it. At the same time, at the point of salvation and to the degree that we allow Christ to dwell in our hearts, the believer is rooted and grounded in God's Love.

This Valentine's Day, as our thoughts turn to the love we have for our wives, husbands, family, and friends, let us also contemplate that which is truly incomprehensible—the love that God has for each one of us. Just as important, we should reflect on what our response to God's deep and abiding love should be.

Read on, my friend.



Ralph Drollinger

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## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDIES

*Former Cabinet Members / White House Senior Staff*: Wednesdays 7am, Zoom.

*Senate Members*: Tuesdays 8am, rotating offices, hot breakfast served.

*House Members*: Thursdays 8am, AG Hearing Room, Longworth 1302, hot breakfast served.

*The views expressed in each Bible study are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of any individual Bible Study Sponsor.*



## CapMin Looks to Launch Ministry to Ethiopian Political Leaders



Tariku Kersima of Ethiopia, Africa successfully completed ministry leader training at the Capitol Ministries Fall Teaching and Training Conference in Washington, D.C. in September. As the Africa Director for the Horn of Africa's Hope of Africa Mission, Tariku is deeply involved in missions across Africa. He is eager to launch a discipleship Bible study based ministry to national political leaders in Ethiopia. Tariku and his wife, Frehiwot, have three children. National political leaders in nations across Africa would benefit greatly from a CapMin Bible study, he said.

"There is no question that there is a need in Ethiopia for such a ministry, as is true for most places in Africa," Tariku said. "There is good news and

*Continued on page 4*

### I. INTRODUCTION

This week I would like to turn our attention to a small but powerful passage of Scripture found in the text of Paul's letter to the Church at Ephesus:

*And that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...* (Ephesians 3:17b–19b).

At first glance, this particular passage may seem to be expressing the priority of love over knowledge per the last stanza. The preeminence of love over knowledge is certainly the case in 1 Corinthians 13:1 wherein the great apostle states, *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* Elsewhere, in comparing knowledge to love, Paul makes a similar comparison: knowledge puffs up, but love edifies (1 Corinthians 8:1). For certain, pursuing knowledge should take a back seat to the priority of love. Love must be the primary pursuit of the believer's life.

In this week's passage, what then does Paul mean when he says the *love of Christ...surpassing knowledge*? Ephesians 3 is not so much a comparison of knowledge to love (as is the case of 1 Corinthians 8:1 and 13:1) as it is a proclamation concerning the mental incomprehensibility of love: the vastness of the love of Christ is unintelligible in ways similar to star gazing. Peering into the sky at night aids more so in the incomprehensibility of the universe than it does in the knowledge of it. The greater a person's knowledge of the universe becomes—or, in this case, of love itself—

the greater is the sober admission of its incomprehensibility!

Hopefully, this clarification serves to underscore the point of today's passage: the more the believer understands about God's love, the more he becomes enamored by its vastness! The love of God is mentally unfathomable! Nonetheless:

**Today's study will help us gain a greater mental comprehension of the incomprehensibility of the total comprehensibility of the love of God.**

A further extremely important perspective is in order relative to the tension between knowledge and love: in stating the preeminence of love over knowledge, asserting the converse is improper, i.e., that a knowledgeable person in the pursuit of knowledge is therefore unloving. Those who dumb down the importance of knowledge relative to spiritual maturity often convey this attitude. As a matter of fact, recently I was talking with someone from this camp who said to me he thought one of America's greatest theologically conservative seminaries was more of a "cemetery" than a "seminary." This tragic mindset is ever brewing in American Christianity today. To illustrate my point metaphorically, someone who eats at the dinner table for three hours a night might not be puffed up at all (physically speaking). In fact, he could be competing in the Tour de France in the morning! The mental preparedness of the believer is quite necessary for any, especially lofty kingdom assignments, such as serving Christ in a nation's Capitol! Those who pursue knowledge are not necessarily unloving.



The sinfulness or otherwise appropriateness of the pursuit of knowledge depends on motives. In the book of Proverbs, the word *knowledge* appears 40 times, always related to and descriptive of a wise person. Proverbs 1:22 states, *How long, O naive ones, will you love being simple-minded? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, and fools hate knowledge?* Later, in Proverbs 1:28–29, knowledge is directly related to finding God: *Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD.*” These passages are but two that characterize the pursuit of the knowledge in a positive light.

Yet another powerful way to illustrate the point I am making—that the Bible teaches that a believer’s faith in Christ must be equally cognitive as well as loving—is to examine the three stages of the believer’s spiritual growth as listed in 1 John 2:12–14. Analyzing this passage is worthy of our time relative to supporting my proposition regarding the importance of pursuing knowledge. Notice how each of the following stages of personal spiritual growth are dependent on knowledge:

*I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name’s sake. I am writing to you, fathers, because you*

*know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

The following chart is an attempt to sort out the twice repeated, three distinct stages of spiritual maturity as delineated by the Apostle John in 1 John 2:12–14. Observe what titles John mentions in the same order, two times: little children, fathers, and young men. Think of John’s communication style used in these verses as someone’s painting a wall with two separate coats in order to obtain the desired outcome:

The Three Stages of Spiritual Growth in Christ — 1 John 2:12–14	
GROWTH STAGE	CHARACTERIZED BY
Children.....	Sins forgiven You know the Father
Fathers.....	Know Him Know Him who has been from the beginning
Men .....	Overcome the Evil One You are strong The Word of God abides in you

♥ VERSE OF THE WEEK

Ephesians 3:17–19

*... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.*



The more we learn about God’s love the more we become enamored by its vastness!





*Continued from page 2*

bad news. Evangelicals are now a majority and our prime minister, Abiy Ahmed is a Christian. After each speech, he is bold enough to name the name of Jesus and he is facing fierce resistance from the atheist groups that have been ruling for decades with iron fists. But evangelicals are united like never before. I will build on what has already been started. I have started a legislative Bible study and will strengthen that and include more people and access the new parliament that is coming in. We have a number of footholds already. I am a preacher and teacher of the Word and God has given me opportunities to reach political leaders. This will be the main pillar of my life in Ethiopia.”

In this analogy of physical maturation to spiritual maturation, the Greek words used to describe the believers’ stages of growth are not intended to relate to his or her physical age, but rather spiritual maturity. Again, keep in mind my point for delving into this exercise: each of these stages of spiritual growth relate to and are dependent on knowledge. With this foundation in mind, look more closely at each of the three in the same order John presents them:

### A. LITTLE CHILDREN OF THE FAITH

Little children are saved, but they only possess a rudimentary understanding of God: “Jesus loves me! This I know, for the Bible tells me so!” depicts his very minimal level of biblical knowledge. Nonetheless, he possesses this knowledge in comparison to an unsaved person who does not possess even this rudimentary knowledge. Satan can and often does make havoc of little children because they have little knowledge of his wiles. Christian cults often target little children in the faith because they are tenderhearted toward spiritual matters, but very naive. Ephesians 4:14 states to ignorant believers that they should not remain in such a state of infancy. They are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, or by craftiness in deceitful scheming. In opposition to those who say that knowledge in the life of the believer is unimportant or of lesser importance, note the contrary: Scripture says knowledge is absolutely critical to spiritual maturity!

### B. FATHER OF THE FAITH

The father of the faith is the one de-

picted by John as the most spiritually mature; he has a deep knowledge of the eternal God. Twice John states that he knows Him. This mastery is commensurate with Philippians 3:10 wherein the Apostle Paul (a *father* of the faith) states regarding himself, *that I may know Him....* The height of spiritual maturity is to know God in His fullness via His Word and the firsthand knowledge of having experienced the truths of His Word in one’s life.

### C. YOUNG MEN OF THE FAITH

Young men are those who, while not yet having walked with God for a longer time frame and gotten to know Him like a father, have experienced the truths of His Word firsthand, and do know sound doctrine—in contrast to the child of the faith who does not yet. They are strong against sin and error because the Word of God abides in [them], which is synonymous with having knowledge of His Word. This believer has overcome the deceitfulness of the Evil One via this knowledge.

All three—children, young men, and fathers of the faith—are in God’s family but have different levels of spiritual maturity, and each respective level is related to their commensurate knowledge. The point for stating these growth stages in the introduction is to understand that a believer can only become a *father* in the faith and have profound intimacy with God by first becoming a *young man* in the faith. And he becomes a *young man* in the faith by being strong in the Word, all of which implies obtaining knowledge. Proverbs 22:17b says it most succinctly, *Apply your mind to my knowledge.*



In summary of the introduction, here-in lies the tension between knowledge and love. Both are extremely important, foundational, and critical in the life of the believer. Proverbs 3:3 states that both are necessary in this way: ***Do not let kindness and truth leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.***

**Don't let anyone fool you into thinking that the Christian life does not include the pursuit of knowledge.**

With this understanding and balance of knowledge to love fully cemented, Ephesians 3:17b–19b, is a primary descriptor of love, providing the believer with keen insights relative to its profundity and enormity. What follows are four aspects from this passage regarding how God blesses the believer with love. Let us examine each of these great truths.

## II. THE BEDROCK OF LOVE

***And that you, being rooted and grounded in love...***

Right before the passage under study this week (in 3:17a) Paul states that Christ may dwell in your hearts. Contextually, this is not a soteriological statement, but rather one pertaining to the believer's sanctification, and that is, Christ would be at home in the heart of every believer. Therefore, believers (you and I) are rooted and grounded in love to the degree they allow Christ to dwell in their hearts. Being rooted and grounded are inseparably linked.

Obviously, these two words, *rooted* and *grounded*, are used metaphorically. The

former is a botanical word that compares the believer to a plant—*rooted* in the love of God. *Grounded* is borrowed from the world of architecture and expresses the idea of being established on a foundation of love. Whereas mixing metaphors does not make for the best in English prose, their use by Paul communicates excellent theology, implying that love will be a constant source (*rooted*) and stabilizing force (*grounded*). Both are gifts from God in the life of the believer.

How is this so? When saved, ***the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us*** states Romans 5:5b.

Second Thessalonians 3:5b states that the Lord who guides ***our hearts into the love of God....*** Accordingly, at salvation the believer is ***strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man*** (Ephesians 3:16b). He or she is positionally filled with all of Christ's love; therefore, a believer immediately becomes rooted and grounded in love at salvation. Such is the very nature of every true follower of Christ who has been born from above by Him. This incomprehensible love coming from God is a gift bestowed in you! In essence, every believer is a very loving person! Whether or not the believer—you or I—have matured to live out this truth is another thing.

Love (*agapé*) means “unconditional love” and is used here to refer to one's imputed character at salvation versus his or her emotions. When we have properly dealt with our sin and our selfishness, this love naturally flows from every believer's life. We will find ourselves wanting to serve others and sacrifice for them. Even if others have wronged us, we will find the capacity to forgive because God's love

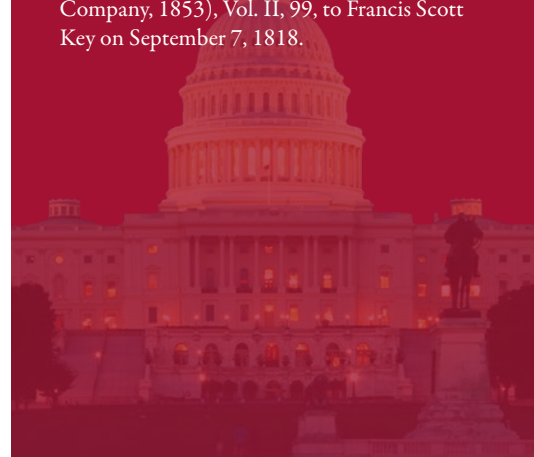
*John Randolph of Roanoke*



**“I am at last reconciled to my God and have assurance of His pardon through faith in Christ, against which the very gates of hell cannot prevail. Fear hath been driven out by perfect love.”**

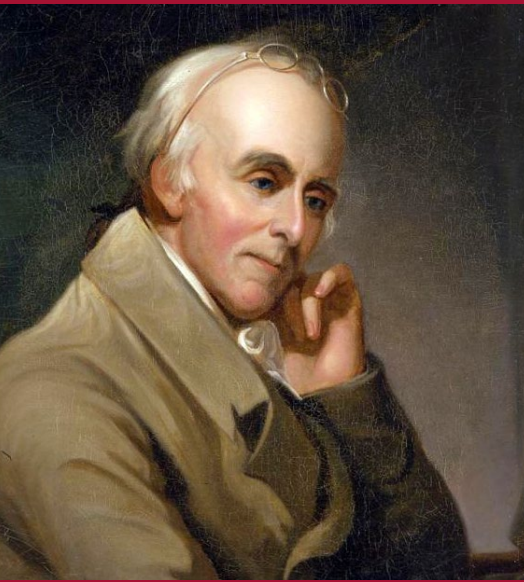
— John Randolph of Roanoke, Congressman under Presidents John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe, John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, U.S. Senator, diplomat.

Hugh A. Garland, *The Life of John Randolph of Roanoke* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1853), Vol. II, 99, to Francis Scott Key on September 7, 1818.





Benjamin Rush



**“My only hope of salvation is in the infinite transcendent love of God manifested to the world by the death of His Son upon the Cross. Nothing but His blood will wash away my sins [Acts 22:16]. I rely exclusively upon it. Come, Lord Jesus! Come quickly! [Revelation 22:20]”**

— Benjamin Rush, Signer of the Declaration of Independence, Surgeon General of the Continental Army, ratifier of the U.S. Constitution, “Father of American Medicine,” Treasurer of the U.S. Mint, “Father of Public Schools Under the Constitution.”

Benjamin Rush, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Rush*, George W. Corner, editor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 165–166.

## The Incomprehensible Characteristic of Love

has been bestowed in our hearts by Him. Love then, in this sense, is not a constant self-discipline continuously in need of conjured, fake emotions.

**Love is the bedrock of every true believer. Its unrelenting persistent presence authenticates true conversion.**

Lastly before moving on, worth underscoring here for the sake of clarity is Paul’s overall perspective in this passage: keep in mind what is being taught here by Paul relates not to our love for Christ, but His love for us. Namely, Paul is praying for the believer’s ability to comprehend the greatness of God’s love toward us (cf. Romans 5:8) as we shall further see:

### III. THE BROTHERHOOD OF LOVE

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

The phrase *with all the saints* refers to the need of every believer to be in fellowship with other believers, but note especially the context in which Paul is stating with all of the saints: it is necessary in order to fully comprehend God’s love! The writer of Hebrews 10:25b echoes this idea when he says ***not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some....*** Furthermore, in John 13:35 John expresses the fact that the unbelieving world has been given the right by God to judge the credibility of the body of Christ by the presence or absence of *agapé* love. Jesus states therein, ***“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

Accordingly, I cannot stress enough the

critical importance for believers in the Capitol not to forsake assembling together and maintaining unity and love for one another! It constantly saddens my heart to see how so many Members are flippant about their commitment to the body of Christ in the Capitol. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that lone wolf believers often are the ones who prematurely leave office: is it not predictable, given what this passage is saying? No wonder they leave saying, “Where’s the love?”

Receiving the nutrition of God’s love is difficult when shying away from all the saints that God has put around His saints in order to keep them sustained and encouraged. Likened to a lone wolf in the cold of winter, believers, perhaps naive to this passage, place themselves in danger’s way. Beloved, do not be counted among them: fulfill your calling in the nation’s Capitol by staying encouraged by the brethren!

**To avoid fellowshiping and studying the Word of God with other believers weakens both the individual and the overall witness of the ministry in and to the Capitol.**

Precisely, your failure to be with all the saints hinders your ability to comprehend the love of God in a place that is often dark, cold, impersonal and full of betrayal. “Several logs burn brightly together, remove one and the glow soon ceases” stated the late founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Dr. Bill Bright.

How well spoken and fitting!

Understanding the meaning of comprehension plays back to the introduction



of this study. There are no shortcuts to comprehending the love of God. Every believer must become a student of the Word of God in order to comprehend. Again, a good Bible study is designed to and achieves both of the aspects of this passage simultaneously: comprehension of the Word and being with all the saints.

Comprehension comes from being continually immersed in the things of God, especially His Word. *“Your words were found and I ate them,”* Jeremiah declared, *“and Your words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I have been called by Your name, O LORD God of hosts”* (Jeremiah 15:16). Job testified, *“I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food”* (Job 23:12), and the Psalmist tells us that the delight of the righteous person is in the law of the Lord, *and in His law he meditates day and night* (Psalm 1:2; cf. 19:9b–10; 119:167; etc.). There is no substitute for Members studying God’s Word together in the Capitol!

**It is incongruous to say in your district that God has called you to D.C., but then when you’re on the Hill forsake comprehending His Word with all the others He’s called here!**

Considering this week’s passage, the lack of personal and corporate comprehension of the love of Christ on the Hill is totally understandable if believers forsake the corporate study of the Word of God.

#### IV. THE BIGNESS OF LOVE

*what is the breadth and length and height and depth...*

Paul now attempts to expand the believer’s mind relative to the enormity of God’s love. As stated earlier and captured by the title of this study, in one sense he is praying that the Ephesians would further comprehend that which is ultimately incomprehensible. The following describes the love of God available to us:

1. A love which is wide enough to embrace the world (John 3:16)
2. A love which is long enough to last forever (1 Corinthians 13:8)
3. A love which is high enough to take sinners to heaven (1 John 3:1, 2)
4. A love which is deep enough to reach the lowest of the lost (Philippians 2:8)

An unknown prisoner once expressed the infinitude of God’s love this way:

*Could we with ink the oceans fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the oceans dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

God’s love is really big; it can conform the worst sinner into the strongest and most magnetic of persons for God’s glory. We need try to comprehend that miracle of the moment!

#### V. THE BENEFICIARY OF LOVE

*and to know the love of Christ which*

*Oliver Wolcott*



**“Through various scenes of life, God has sustained me. May He ever be my unfailing friend; may His love cherish my soul; may my heart with gratitude acknowledge His goodness; and may my desires be to Him and to the remembrance of His name ....”**

— Oliver Wolcott, signer of the Declaration of Independence, military general, Governor of Connecticut.

*Letters of Delegates to Congress: January 1, 1776– May 15, 1776*, Paul H. Smith, editor (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 1978), Vol. 3, 502–503, Oliver Wolcott to Laura Wolcott on April 10, 1776.



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*surpasses knowledge...*

Whereas formerly the incomprehensibility and immensity of Christ's love are delineated, herein they are brought to fore. The phrase, to know the love of Christ, means that at the end of the day the believer need grow in his experiential knowledge/understanding of love. As a believer comprehends God's love intellectually, he or she lives it out accordingly. Herein is a love which the believer can begin to comprehend in ways which the unbeliever cannot.

Lastly the words "*surpassing knowledge*" need careful understanding as alluded to in the introduction. Simply stated, to speak of Christ's love as *surpassing knowledge* means that it is so great that one can never know it fully. Again, the wording of this passage does not suggest any disparagement of knowledge. In other words, Paul is not expressing in this passage that love is superior to knowledge (although he does elsewhere); rather, that God's love is so vast it surpasses a human's finite ability to ever comprehend it totally.

## VI. SUMMARY

In order to experience the love of God, the believer must study the Word of God and be in close proximity with other believers. Assembling together not only helps buoy the individual believer in terms of his or her ability to comprehend God's love on a continual basis in a difficult environment such as the Capitol, but it facilitates a credible and powerful personal and corporate witness—all to the glory of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

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