

**How now Shall we Worship?**  
Ephesians 3:14-21

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One of my favorite activities is going for a longer walk with my dog while listening to a message or podcast. I enjoy the outdoors, the funny behavior of my dog and learn from others while listening. One podcast I listened to through much of last year talked about the 4 D's of the Christian Life. When I learned about them, I thought to myself, "I wish I would have known this way earlier in my Christian walk." They summarize the Christian life in a way that doesn't miss much.

I began to think about how easy it is to focus on one of the D's above all the others. I also noticed that denominations of churches, individual churches, Christian groups and individual people can do this. As I look back over my life, I realized I've done that. I've focused on one of the D's to the exclusion of the others. But all 4 are equally necessary. The 4 D's show where worship fits into the totality of the Christian life. Since this is the final message on God pleasing worship for this Fall I wanted to share the 4 D's with you. Then we'll work through a passage where you can see how they show up. We'll conclude with some ways to respond in light of the worship series.

**What are the 4 D's of the Christian Life?**

The first one is the **Drama**. Now I'm not talking about the drama that occurs when people have issues with one another at the office or there's some tension between grade 5 girls over some boy. This drama is the story of God. It talks about what God has done, the big story of the Bible. We can make huge errors in living the Christian life if we don't see the big picture. That's why I emphasize the necessity of reading the whole Bible. You've got to know the story to put the pieces together. A common error made by Christians is to only focus on the commands or ethical demands. So Christianity gets reduced to nothing more than a set of rules to be followed without the power of God or a heart for God. If that's all we teach our young people, it's no wonder they leave the church when they have the choice. We haven't given the overall incredible story of what God has done through history and for us that gives context to the law.

The second D is **Doctrine**. Drama answers the question "What has God done?" Doctrine answers the question "What does it mean" or "What was God doing?" So the Gospels tell us the story of Jesus' life, teaching, death & resurrection. The New Testament letters explain what God did and accomplished through all this. The Doctrine flows out of the Drama.

The third D is **Doxology** or worship. Doxa is the Greek word for Glory. So worship is giving glory to God. We are prepared to do that when we know the story and what it means for us. Doxology addresses the question “how will we respond” to what God has done and what it means for our lives?

The final D is **Discipleship**. This D answers the question “how will we live” in light of the Drama, Doctrine and Doxology. Because of the drama of God’s big story, we discover that we can live in the power of the Holy Spirit. God calls us to grow in holiness & maturity. But He doesn’t leave us to do that on our own. The drama and the doctrine teach us that He dwells within those who trust Christ. From Christ’s power in us, we can grow in maturity.

All four D’s are necessary for a healthy Christian life. You might have a favorite in these four. You might default to one over the other three. But you must not overemphasize your favorite at the expense of the others. If we only focus on the Drama, then the Bible becomes a bunch of stories for some interesting reading. That it has little or no relevance to our lives today.

If we only focus on doctrine, we lose the big picture and the big story. The usual result of a doctrine only focus is legalism. The Pharisees were the prime example of this. They got so wrapped up in the law that they wrote their own commentary on it and enforced it on the people. They also had an oral tradition that they knew but the people didn’t. So they walked around constantly pointing out to people some law they broke. Jesus declared that people such as the Pharisees who only focused on doctrine were on their way to Hell. They were confident in themselves and their own righteousness.

If we only focus on Doxology or worship, then we risk offering a worship that is not governed by a right view of God. We’ve just come through the minor prophets of Amos, Hosea and Micah. They spoke to the Israelites who spent a lot of time worshipping. But they worshipped a wrong understanding of God. So their worship turned into an abomination to God. Some Christians are more focused on worshipping worship than they are on worshipping God.

If we focus only on Discipleship, we get detached from the big story. We can lose understanding for why we engage in discipleship. We can become legalistic about discipleship practice. We can get hard hearts towards those who don’t do discipleship like we do. We can conclude that discipleship is mostly about doing a course or study. But it’s much more than that.

By knowing the Big Story or the Drama; by learning the doctrine that explains the big story; we can worship or respond appropriately to God and then grow to maturity in our Christian lives by the power of God.

Now let's see how the four D's show up in short passage of from the New Testament. Ephesians 3:14-21 – page 830 in the Bibles in front of you. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to explain what God has done, what it means, how we must respond and how we live in light of it. Verses 14-21 give us a little snap shot of this.

### **Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV)**

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians telling God's story & explaining its meaning. In chapter 1 he explains what God has done in the spiritual realm; in chapter 2 he explains what God has done for us and in chapter 3 he shares what this all meant for his ministry. Now in our little passage, in verses 14 and 15, he tells them that he is praying for them. Then he explains what he has been praying for them. Paul reveals 3 ways God provides for us.

The first way is found in verse 16. **1 - God provides strength with His power through his Spirit in our inner being.** Now what need would the people have for him to pray this prayer? If the prayer is for strength, there is some sort of weakness. When it comes to living the Christian life, do you any of you ever feel weak? Do you ever feel like giving up? Do you feel like it's just too hard? Do you feel like we're losing – or it's not working – or the kids aren't getting it – or you've got problems that don't seem to go away and you can't understand what God is up to?

If you feel or have felt any of that, you're not alone. This is a very common experience for all Christians. Paul recognized this need in his readers and himself he prays for the solution, what is it? Ongoing strength to live the Christian life comes from God Himself.

I pray that “according to the riches of his glory he may he grant you to be strengthened.” Glory can describe God's brightness, radiance, greatness and renown. But it can also describe God's power. Romans 6:4 for example –

“We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. So here in Ephesians “according to the riches of his glory” – His incredible power, from that peace flows strength.

But where does that strength go? “Through the Spirit in your inner being.” So he prays that God does this spiritual work in us to give us internal strength. Paul talks about our outer life – our bodies and our inner life – that part of us that you can’t see but we know is there. It’s the part that leaves the body when the person dies. Paul talks about this in 2 Corinthians 4:16 – “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.” It’s our inner part, our soul, our personal, rational, moral self. Somehow, God, through the Holy Spirit in us, gives us that strength in our inner being to keep going. This might result in strength to carry out some ministry calling, strength to go through a difficult time, strength to persevere when others give up. Notice we don’t automatically have this strength. We need to pray for it and ask for it. We need to pray for one another to have it. So one of the greatest prayers you can offer on behalf of someone else is for God to strengthen them through the spirit in their inner being. The strength God provides will be strength to do what He wills. He won’t provide strength to sin – to keep going in a rebellious life – that depends on our own strength. But strength to live the Christian life is always available by prayer.

This strength results in Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith at the beginning of verse 17. Now that doesn’t mean that Christ was not already in our hearts. Earlier in the letter, Paul announced they were sealed with the spirit and united with Christ in His resurrection. Just above in 2:22, Paul says they were being built together into a dwelling place for God. So I take the beginning of verse 17 to mean that the person becomes more aware of Christ’s presence in them. When we are more aware of our union with Christ we gain strength. We realize we’re not alone. Think of the power that comes with the reminder from Psalm 23:4 – “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.” So when we pray for inner strength from God for others, they become more aware of Christ dwelling in them and gain even more strength.

The second way God provides for in this text is found in the second half of verse 17 all the way through to the first half of verse 19. **God provides strength to comprehend the multidimensional love of Christ for us.** The request again is for strength. But what’s the weakness? Well they apparently lacked an ability to comprehend the love of Christ. They

were weak in knowing the full extent of Christ's love. What happens to us when we are unsure of another person's love? We begin to doubt them. The foundation of our lives that includes the love of those near us begins shaking. We look elsewhere for love. We begin to construct a new life with less dependence on that person's love. Sadly that happens a lot in human relationship. Those of you who have been through a break up of a friendship or relationship know the turmoil that accompanies uncertainty about another's love.

Now think about going through this with God. When bad things happen to people especially Christians, common responses are "why did God allow this? Does God love me?" This can lead to other questions like "what is God doing? Where is God? Doesn't He care? Does He exist? Why does God hate me?" So we need reminders of the extent of His love for us. So Paul gives them a little picture of the vast extent of Christ's love. He talks about it terms of the breadth (or width) and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

Whoa! What a verse! Do you think you know and the extent of Christ's love for you? We need strength to comprehend how wide, how long, how high and how deep is the love of Christ. We need strength to comprehend the love of Christ displayed in the lives of all the saints. You get a bigger picture of God's love when you hang around other Christians and hear how God has loved them. We need strength to know this love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. So we won't ever get to the end of understanding the love of Christ completely. We think we know the love of Christ? We've just scratched the surface. We've just touched the tip of the iceberg. We need strength to comprehend it.

Illustration – if you've ever tried to understand or grasp some massive topic or subject, you need strength to do that. You need strength to comprehend that vast knowledge required for nursing or being a doctor or parenting or engineering or contracting or discovering the full range of a child's personality. With many of those, none of us grasps the full extent of the subject or the knowledge required. The extent of Christ's love for us requires way more knowledge than the most complex subject or the most obscure medical condition. It surpasses knowledge. I hope you have been moved to the point of wanting to respond to worship.

When I think of the width of Christ's love, I think of wide open arms. When I think of the length of God's love, I think of a long love offered through the whole of our lives. When I think of the height of God's love, I think of something tall that you can see from anywhere that brings hope. When I think of the depth of God's love, I think of a deep love

that goes way beyond surface affection. Christ is willing to go into the depths of our lives and no matter what He finds there, He offers His love. So we pray for strength to comprehend Jesus' multidimensional love for us.

The last provision of God found in this passage comes in the little phrase at the end of verse 19. **God provides filling with the fullness of God.** I struggle to even know what that means. Is it the fullness of all God wants for us? Is it maturity in Christ like that talked about in chapter 4, verse 13. Is it the filling of the Holy Spirit like talked about in 5:18? Yes. It's likely all of these and more. Somehow, we can pray for one another that we will filled with all the fullness of God. It seems this describes a God saturated life that is lived in accordance with all He wants for us and all for which He created us.

Now what have you been experiencing as we have gone through this? We've heard a little about the drama – the story of God and what He accomplished through Christ. We have heard a fair amount of doctrine explain the results and possibilities that lie before us because of what God has done. So now comes the doxology – the response to what God has done. That's exactly what Paul does in verses 20 and 21. He blesses God and gives Him glory. We'll close the service today with these verse. But we have also been given instruction in discipleship. How can we pray for one another? We can pray that God will strengthen one another through His Spirit with power in our inner being. We can pray for strength to comprehend the vast love of Christ and then live on a firmer foundation despite what we face. We can pray that we will all be filled with the fullness of God. Then we go out to live the Christian life in the power of God.

So now with worship placed in the bigger context of the Christian life let's focus in again on it for the final moments of this series. So how now will we respond to the God who has provided us with all of this? How will we now worship?

**Remember worship starts with getting God right.** One of the biggest lessons from the Minor Prophets was that Israel worshipped a wrong understanding of God. Therefore, they got worship wrong. Our current Christian sub-culture tells us that as long as we get the right kind or style of worship, then, we will encounter God. But that's backwards. First – the Drama. Then the Doctrine. Then the Response.

**Reorient your weekend to prepare for Sunday worship.** What steps do you take on Saturday to prepare to be ready and alert for worship on Sunday? What does your Saturday night look like? I suspect a lot of us stay up late or stay out late. After all, it's the weekend. But if you are up or out super late, will that help us in readiness for worship on

Sunday? Or will you just drag yourself here and hope to get an anonymous spot in the balcony where you can shut your eyes.

So instead pray. Focus. Prepare to come to worship. Shut down media – disengage from the world and it's messages. Ask the Lord for Scriptures; words of encouragement and other people to pray about.

Then Sunday morning deal with the hardness or the pride in our hearts. I need a spiritual correction every morning. If I just blast out the door, I'm likely to be harsher, less patient and critical. We need to deal with our hard or proud hearts heart before you come to church. Come seeking to encourage & be encouraged by fellow believers.

**Participate as a worshipper rather than a spectator or consumer.** Spectators pay money to be entertained. Spectators feel entitled to receive a return on their investment or they leave angry or disappointed.

Consumers come to receive and consume. If they don't receive what they want, they leave hungry and cranky. But participants participate. They come anticipating their part in the activity. They come recognizing their role to play. They come to respond to their King and great God.

**Ask a different question of yourself after every worship service.** Instead of asking yourself or others "Did you like it," ask yourself "Was God pleased/honored by my attitude/approach/heart?" If you have a concern or question about whether the worship service itself was God pleasing, will you direct that to one of the Elders. Please don't talk to the worship leaders or the technicians. They're working their hearts out. It's pretty deflating to have someone come up and criticize something a few minutes after they've poured out their hearts. Formulate your thoughts and pass them respectfully to an Elder where we can pray, weigh and think about what is on your heart.

**Living ever-flowing imperfect justice-filled lives outside of worship.** Remember Amos 5:24? Let justice roll down like the waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. God couldn't stand the worship of His people who participated in the rituals on Sabbath and then went back to unjust and unrighteous living the rest of the week. God does not respond to worship offered by someone who has no heart for Him the rest of the week – unless that response is repentance. God responds to those who do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with Him.

Where's your heart today? Which one of the D's do you need to grow in? Which one have you overemphasized? I pray the Lord will out of His glorious riches strengthen you by the Spirit in your inner being. Strengthen you to comprehend the multidimensional love of Christ & fills you with all the fullness of God.