

Before we examine this prayer in its details, let's survey its overall message.

Paul prays for several things here, all of which pertain to our sensible experience of the person of Christ. He prays that we might be internally strengthened by the Spirit so that Christ might dwell in our hearts. But how can that be, if we have already received Christ into our hearts when we were born again? The only viable explanation is that Paul is referring to an experiential enlargement of what is already theologically true. He wants us to be strengthened by the Spirit so that Jesus might exert a progressively greater and more intense personal influence in our souls.

The result of this expansion of the divine power and presence in our hearts is the ability to "grasp how wide and long and high and deep Christ's love for us really is." Again, this is Paul's way of saying that God intends for us to feel and experience and be emotionally moved by the passionate affection He has for us, His children. D. A. Carson, says that "this cannot be merely an intellectual exercise. Paul is not asking that his readers might become more able to articulate the greatness of God's love in Christ Jesus or to grasp with the intellect alone how significant God's love is in the plan of redemption. He is asking God that they might have the power to grasp the dimensions of that love in their experience. Doubtless that includes intellectual reflection, but it cannot be reduced to that alone" (A Call to Spiritual Reformation, 191).

But how are we to compute such love? What are its dimensions? Does it come in meters or miles? Do we measure it in yards or pounds? Does Paul intend for you to think in terms of mathematical proportions, as if to suggest that God loves you one-hundred times more than he loves the angels or fifty times less than He loves a purportedly more godly Christian?

Quit to the contrary, says Paul. There is a width and length and height and depth to Christ's love for you that goes beyond human measurement. The immensity and magnitude of that love is incalculable. Its dimensions defy containment. It is beyond knowing. Yet, Paul prays that we might know it! This deliberate oxymoron serves to

deepen what is already too deep to fathom. Andrew Lincoln summed it up best by saying "it is simply that the supreme object of Christian knowledge, Christ's love, is so profound that its depths will never be sounded and so vast that its extent will never be encompassed by the human mind" (213).

After the parenthesis of vv. 2-13, the apostle resumes the prayer he broke off in v. 1 (again, note the phrase "for this reason" in v. 1 which is repeated in v. 14 ["for this reason" points back to all of chapter 2, but especially the concluding words which focus on his readers being part of the new temple in which God's Spirit dwells]). The prayer contains 4 parts, each of which is related to the one that precedes it as an effect is related to its cause. These 4 elements or stair-steps, as it were, are found in vv. 14-19: Paul prays that (1) they may be strengthened by the Spirit, (2) so that Christ may dwell in their hearts, (3) so that they may be able not only to understand but feel Christ's love for them, (4) so that they may be filled to the fullness of God. Paul then closes his prayer with a doxology in vv. 20-21. Note also the Trinitarian structure of the prayer: Paul asks that his readers be strengthened through the Spirit, indwelt by Christ Jesus, and filled to the fullness of God the Father.

If Paul's request seems humanly impossible, his benediction reminds us that God is able to do far more than we can ask or think, according to His power that works within us. And, he reminds us that all of these amazing blessings are not primarily for our happiness (although we will be supremely happy when they are applied to us), but rather for God's eternal glory.

What does Paul mean by the Father in this context?

It could mean the Father as part of the Trinity, the Creator, the ultimate example of Fatherhood or the spiritual/adoptive sense as the Father of all believers-Jew and Gentile.

Pages are written about each and without lengthy discussion I would eliminate Creator and ultimate Father because of the context. The one new people of God is a continued context here and supports the spiritual/adoptive and it is a Trinitarian

prayer.

Now, based on whether or not you accept a translation's word usage can make a difference as to how you might interpret the word Father here and the greek can make allowance for two translations.

The first is every family the second in the whole family.

The ESV, KJV, NKJV, NIV NASB all use "every family".

Phillips uses the form whom all fatherhood approach which we have ruled out.

AS the sovereign of all living creatures

The content of Paul's prayer 3:16-19

The essence of Paul's prayer is for power. He earlier prayed that believers might "know God's incomparably great power toward them" (1:18-19). Now he prays that they might inwardly and personally experience it as well.

1. he prays that God might strengthen them v. 16

Lit., that He may give to you . . . to be strengthened with power.

This strengthening is:

* according to the riches of God's glory (v. 16a) The word translated "according to" points beyond the idea of source/origin (merely, 'out of his riches) to that of correspondence (i.e., in proportion to his riches; on a scale commensurate with God's riches; God gives as lavishly as only God can; cf. Phil. 4:19).

* with power (v. 16b) To be strengthened with power according to glory may simply mean to be

strengthened by God's radiant power! "Believers," notes Best, "are not left to whistle up strength from within themselves in order to be able to do God's will" (340).

* through the Spirit (v. 16c) Divine power is in one sense synonymous with the Spirit and in another sense mediated by the Spirit. This passage, notes Fee, also "shows that for Paul the 'power of the Spirit' is not only for more visible and extraordinary

manifestations of God's presence, but also (especially) for the empowering necessary to be his people in the world, so as to be true reflections of his own glory" (695).

* in the inner man (v. 16d) see Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16; it is "the interior of our being . . . the seat of personal consciousness, . . . [and] of our moral being" (Fee, 695-96) = heart. I.e., "that part of them which is not accessible to sight but which is open to his energizing influence" (Lincoln, 206).

2. he prays that Christ might dwell in their hearts v. 17

To make Christ at home in your heart, you need faith(3:17a).

The aim of the Spirit strengthening you with power in the inner man is "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." It is clear that Christ indwells every believer through the Holy Spirit (Gal. 2:20). If Christ does not live in you, you are not a Christian, no matter how religious you may be or how strongly you affirm the Christian creeds (Rom. 8:9-10).

So, why then in our text does Paul pray that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith? He was writing to Christian believers. The only conclusion is that Paul is talking about something more than Christ indwelling us at the point of salvation. He is talking about Christ being at home in our hearts. He is talking about having close fellowship with Christ. We can't push Christ out or ask Him to leave. It is about how we grow in grace and knowledge Christ.

Some commentators (e.g., O'Brien, Fee) argue that the dwelling of Christ in our hearts is simply an expansion upon or further definition of what it means to be strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man as Paul prayed earlier. But it seems better to understand Paul as praying that we might more deeply experience the presence of Christ himself. In the final analysis, the difference is minimal.

Christ is a permanent, abiding resident.

Two questions: First, isn't "indwelling" a ministry of the Spirit? See Rom. 8:9-10. According to the NT, Christ dwells in his people by means of or through his Spirit (see 1

Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 4:6). Second, if Christ, through the Spirit, indwells the believer from the point of the new birth, how can Paul pray as he does in this text? It would seem that he is praying for the emotional increase or experiential expansion of what is already a theological fact. His desire is that the Lord Jesus, through the Spirit, might exert an ever-increasing and progressively more powerful influence on our lives and in our hearts. It is the ongoing transformation of the Spirit that causes us to love Christ more

Several things should be noted:

- * This indwelling influence occurs in the human "heart" (i.e., in the depths of our personality; the core of our souls).

- * This indwelling influence occurs only through human "faith" (i.e., it isn't automatic; it is only as we, through the Spirit, continue to trust Christ as our only hope, our only source of salvation, the lover of our souls; the point is that doubt and skepticism concerning who Jesus is and what he has done is the enemy of feeling his affection). We have a responsibility in the process.

One more interesting observation: although the concept of Jesus being "in our hearts" is a popular way of expressing what it is to be a Christian, this is the only place in the NT where that precise terminology is found!

- * This indwelling influence is in some way related to being "rooted and grounded in love." Here Paul employs a double metaphor: one from agriculture and one from architecture. Love, says Paul, "is the soil in which believers are to be rooted and grow, the foundation on which they are to be built" (Lincoln, 207). Is this yet another, perhaps subsidiary, prayer, or does it describe the attendant circumstances, so to speak, in which this experience might come to pass? If the latter, then a precondition for experiencing the fullness of Christ's indwelling presence is having been rooted and grounded in love. But whose love? (1) Is it God's love for us in Christ? That would mean: you are rooted and grounded in God's love for you so that you can know God's love for you(?). (2) Is it our love for God? No, for how can that enable us to know his

love for us? (3) Is it our love for one another? Yes. See 1 John 4:7-12. But there may be another option. O'Brien suggests that these two metaphors express "the contemplated result of the two previous prayers, which in turn provides the condition for the next request. Thus, 'through the strengthening of the inner person by God's Spirit and Christ's indwelling in their hearts, the readers are to be established in love so that they will comprehend the greatness of the love of Christ'" (260).

3. he prays that they might grasp the incalculable dimensions of Christ's love for them vv. 18-19a

Before looking at the object of Paul's prayer note that only God himself can impart this knowledge. Divine enabling is absolutely essential. Human will-power alone, together with good intentions and fervent passion, cannot produce the experiential knowledge Paul has in mind.

The breadth and length and height and depth . . . of what? Options:

- * the perfections of God (i.e., his infinite attributes; cf. Job 11:7-9);
- * the mystery of salvation itself (Eph. 1:3-14 and esp. 3:9);
- * a metaphor of the immeasurable and incalculable and unfathomable dimensions of Christ's love for his own (as defined in the subsequent clause in v. 19a). Says Stott: "the love of Christ is broad enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters), 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and high enough to exalt him to heaven" (137).

v. 19a simply restates v. 18b. To grasp the incalculable love of Christ for his own is to "know what can't be known!" We may know Christ's love in some measure but we will never exhaustively comprehend it. No matter how much we learn, no matter how much we think we know and see and feel and grasp, there is always an infinity left over!

Yet, for all its glory and the great heights from which it came, such love can only be experienced 'together with all the saints (cf. 1:1,15; 3:8; 6:18)! Our experience of

Christ's love is personal, but not private. It is meant to be felt and proclaimed and enjoyed in the context of the body of Christ. It is a personal, yet shared, experience. 'The comprehension the writer desires for his readers is not some esoteric knowledge on the part of individual initiates, not some isolated contemplation, but the shared insight gained from belonging to the community of believers" (Lincoln, 213).

4. he prays that they may be filled to the fullness of God v. 19b

"That fulness or perfection is the standard or level to which they are to be filled" (O'Brien, 265). What does that do to our low expectations of what is available to us in this life? Think of Jesus, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Pharisees.

In some sense, then, it is with the radiant power and presence of God himself that we are to be filled, the measure of which is God himself! Whereas the church as Christ's body already shares in, embodies, and expresses his fullness (Eph. 1:23), we have not yet experienced the plenitude of God in the way that is available for us. That is why Paul now prays as he does. "What the Church already is in principle, it is increasingly to realize in its experience" (Lincoln, 214).

Has Paul asked for too much? Has his boldness gotten out of hand? 'No, for it is impossible to ask for too much since the Father's giving exceeds their capacity for asking or even imagining'" (O'Brien, 266).

a. God's greatness 3:20

Paul's effusive praise of God reflects the unbounded bounty of his ability to bless his people in response to their prayers:

(1) He is able to do or to work, for he is neither idle nor inactive, nor dead (contrast the dumb idols in Ps. 115:1-8).

(2) He is able to do what we ask, for he hears and answers the very prayers that he commands we pray! Principle: when it is God's will to bestow a blessing, he graciously incites the human heart to ask for it!

(3) He is able to do what we ask or think, for he reads our thoughts, and sometimes

we imagine things which we are afraid to articulate and therefore do not ask. In other words, his ability to provide for us must never be measured by the limits of our spoken requests.

(4) He is able to do all that we ask or think, for he knows it all and can perform it all. There is nothing that is proper for us to have that transcends or outstrips his power to perform.

(5) He is able to do more . . . than (hyper, "beyond") 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....the idea of an extraordinary degree, considerable excess beyond expectations, etc.).

(8) All that he does he does by virtue of his power that even now energetically works within us.

God often displays His mighty power by working when we are incapable of doing anything in our own strength, at times for reasons we do not usually understand, He chooses not to display His power in such ways. At those times, His power is displayed through the patient, joyous endurance of His people in the midst of their suffering (Col. 1:11-12; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). But even when God chooses not to deliver us, it is not because He is lacking in power. He is able to do far beyond what we ask or think because He is omnipotent.

b. God's glory 3:21

in the church (How? See 1:22-23; 2:7,22; 3:10. Amazing! Of all the places one might think God would choose to reveal and embody and express his manifest glory, the church, with all its weaknesses and divisions and failures, scarcely seems to qualify! Yet such is God's intent in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever

I'll begin with a quote from my friend and brother, Shane Becker,

"(1) God unleashes the display of his glory (2) through dramatic cosmic restoration under the rule of the enthroned Christ (3) enjoyed by and enacted through the church"

That is exquisitely esoteric coming from a laid back Aussie.

However it is intended to be understood by all believers in Christ's church.

Simplified: God displays His glory through the church.

In the era of the New Covenant:

God unleashes the display of His own glory more fully now than ever before- nothing is now held back, especially in light of His glory manifested in Christ as we discussed last evening.

The New Covenant Era is dramatic because it is exciting and tense in the revealing of gripping events and actions, in a way that grabs men's attention and causes an excited, shocked and even startled reaction to a very noticeable degree and often with surprising suddenness. The world was and is being turned upside down by the preaching of the Gospel.

The continued and increasing persecution of Christian people groups is an ever-present indicator of this and even it is unto the praise of His glorious grace.

This glory is all revealed under Christ because Christ rules and reigns as head of all things and in this New covenant era, the Church comprised of Jew and Gentile as, the bride, the body of Christ, His Temple in Him and One New People in Christ – is God's chosen means of displaying His glory now. This has **never** been accomplished before. (all Covenant theologians present here tonight may throw stones at me after this session)

The Church – is God's chosen means of displaying His glory now.

God is a glory displaying and pursuing God.

God is in pursuit of his own glory thru Christ's church. This is the overriding umbrella under which God operates in the world. We see this in Ephesians:

"he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace . ." Ephesians 1:5-6a

We are also chosen ". . . in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory." Ephesians 1:12

We are sealed by the Holy Spirit " . . . who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory". Ephesians 1:14

Christ is seated far above all rule and authority. God is bringing everything under his rule. He is the one who displays and unleashes in the universe the fullness of God who fills everything in every way. And the means is His church! Christ is the fullness of God who fills everything in everyway. And that fullness is displayed "in his body" – the church.

Through the church – the living theatre of God's glory - displayed before a heavenly audience is – his love, his unsearchable riches, and his immeasurable grace that would cleanse and eternally unite a once sinful people to himself and to each other.

God is saying "Look at the display of my Glory! Look at the display of my Son and His redemptive work in and through His Church!

And all the heavenly hosts fall before Him in worship saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God almighty. Awesome and mighty are his deeds for he has done great things!"

Church, Paul is seeking to wake you up and put before you a vision of reality – you are part of something incomprehensively awesome.

You are the final chapter of the display of God's glory through his son Jesus Christ (as head) and His body (the church).