

**Paul's prayer continued and completed**

• That Christ will 'take up residence'

• Lives built on the foundation of God's love

• Every believer is open to knowing God's love

• Knowing the 'unknowable' love of Christ!

Paul continues his prayer for the Christians at Ephesus. We might ask: are the petitions parallel to each other, each saying the same thing in different words? Or does each petition prepare the way for the next one which refers to something greater? Certainly the strengthening is **with a view to** the indwelling of Christ and is before the indwelling. These Ephesians are Christians; they have already been sealed with the Holy Spirit. Yet Paul is praying for more. He wants them to be strengthened 'in order that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, and you become rooted and grounded in love' <sup>☒1</sup>. In a sense Christ is in the heart – the inner personality – of every Christian. But Paul is praying that Jesus will 'take up residence', that He will move in and make His presence felt. It means that Christ becomes real to us as a person. The experience comes by our diligently seeking Christ in faith. More literally translated, the Greek says: 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, being rooted and grounded in love' <sup>☒2</sup>. The 'being rooted and grounded in love' is what happens when Christ 'takes up residence' in our lives. I translate it: 'and you become rooted and grounded in love' <sup>☒3</sup>. It is not a further request, but is what happens when Christ takes up residence in our lives. Love becomes the kind of atmosphere in which we live. We love God and we love people. Our roots go down into the love of God. Our lives are built up on the foundation of the love of God.

The next petition seems not to add anything but to repeat what was said in verse 17. So it is not building on verse 17; it is parallel to verse 17. Paul restates his petition. 'My prayer is that you may be strengthened so as to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height' <sup>☒1</sup>. We might ask: 'breadth and length and depth and height' – of what? Of the gospel! Of the riches of the love and grace of God! Paul wants these gentile Ephesians to know this love of God 'with all the saints', that is, as much as the original Jewish Christians on the day of Pentecost. Every believer is open to knowing the love of God, gentiles included.

Then he prays: 'and that you might know the love of Christ which passes knowledge...'. He wants them to know what is unknowable! It **passes** knowledge but he wants them to know the love of Christ! There is something mysterious about this love of Christ. We do not fully understand it. It cannot be easily explained to others. It partly means that we come to a deep realisation of how much Christ loves us. But then when that happens the person who knows he is loved finds it easier to love others. The Christian finds himself in an entire kingdom of God. Love to God, love from God, God's love for others. Love flows in all directions. He is rooted downward into love; he is building upward from love. Love becomes the atmosphere in which we live. When we abide in this heavenly love, we fear nothing and no one.

☒1 3:17

☒2 3:17

☒3 3:17

☒1 3:18

• **God-filled people**

There is one more step. Paul says: *'The purpose of my prayer is that you may be empowered so as to comprehend...'* <sup>¶1</sup> and that you might know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, *'in order that you might be filled up to the measure of all the fullness of God'* <sup>¶2</sup>. The highest thing of all is to become God-filled people. Something of the very character of God is imparted to us. This is what will happen to us when we have bodies raised in glory, but it starts even now. The Spirit strengthens us for the Son of God to indwell us and then for the Father to fill us with His very being, such that we become God-filled people. There is no limit. We may go on being more and more full of God 'up to the measure of all the fullness of God.'

¶1 3:18

¶2 3:19

• **The Church of Jesus Christ – a community of love bringing glory and honour to God**

Paul closes this section of his letter with something that is both a prayer and an encouragement. *'Now to Him who is able to do far more exceedingly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us'* <sup>¶1</sup>, *to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen'* <sup>¶2</sup>.

¶1 3:20

¶2 3:21

The doxology of verses 20–21 is related to the prayer of 1:15–19a; 3:1, 15–19. When he says God is 'working in us', he is thinking of the kind of spiritual experiences he has been praying for. God is able to bring us to a level of spiritual experience that transcends what we have thought or known. He is working within us already and the power that has already been at work is able to do more. To such a Saviour– God Paul wants to give honour. He wants honour to come to God 'in the church'. Paul has several times referred to the amazing fact of the church with both Jews and gentiles within its number. Nothing but the amazing power of God could raise such degraded gentiles and such proud Jews and bring them into one body where all have equal access to the Father. Honour should come to God through this amazing community of love, the worldwide church of Jesus

• **Glory will go on being given to God to all generations – forever and ever.**

This honour also comes to God 'in Christ Jesus'. Everything that has happened to save gentiles and Jews and bring them into one body with the amazing possibility of becoming God-filled people, it all has happened through Christ Jesus. The glory will go on being given to Him, 'to all generations forever and ever'. Paul is glad that it should be that way. He adds his 'Amen'.

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