

# Deep and Wide

Knowing the Power and Love of God

**Ephesians 3:14** For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,  
<sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,  
<sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,  
<sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith-- that you, being rooted and grounded in love,  
<sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,  
<sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.  
<sup>20</sup> 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,  
<sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

(Eph 3:14-21)

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## Love and Power

GOD IS **SIMPLE**. By this, theologians do not mean that he has a low I.Q., a kind of “**simple is as simple does**,” like **Forrest Gump**. Rather, they mean that God is **not composed of parts**. God is not the equivalent of a cake, made up of one-

part holy, one-part just, one-part good, one-part love, one-part power, all of which are then stirred up together to create who he is. Rather, he is uncreated. His attributes are his essence. How exactly this works itself out has been debated for centuries, and I'm not interested in pursuing that here.

What I am interested in is thinking about two of these attributes, God's **love** and God's **power**, and simplicity is a good starting point to do that. God is not half love and half power. He is all love and all power. The Father is all love. The Son is all love. The Spirit is all love. The Father is all power. The Son is all power. The Spirit is all power. It is better to say that they *are* love and power rather than they *have* love and power. And yet, there are not three loves and three powers, but only one, for God is One.

The problem is, it is extremely difficult for a finite person to grasp this. Yet, moving on the road to doing so truly, if not fully, or as Paul says “**comprehending ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth**” (Eph 3:18) is vitally important to any Christian and church. Not doing so, on the other hand, leads to terrible confusion in who God actually is, and this in turn leads to horrible theology and practice all due to a warped understanding of God.

Growing up in the circles I did, I would say that everyone understood that God *is love*. We talked about God's love all the time. We often did so to the exclusion of his power, especially *his power in salvation*. In fact, the whole "God is love" thing when it came to salvation was sometimes pitted against his power. You've surely heard the terrible slogan, "*God is a gentleman, he'll never force his way in*" as it refers to how a person becomes a Christian. At its heart, the slogan pits God's love (he is "a gentleman") against his power (his "force"). Never-mind that no one believes that salvation is God breaking and entering your heart like a thief beats down your door or window to rob your house. In this understanding, salvation is really something that lies within your power, your power of choice, your power of goodness. Yes, God made it possible for you to be saved, but that last and most important power of salvation is up to you.

I didn't really know any other idea until I was presented with something Paul spent quite a bit of time discussing in the first chapter of Ephesians: *predestination*. At first, the idea troubled me. Then, I came to see that it was everywhere in the Scripture, and often it was talking about personal sal-

vation. Suddenly, *the power* of God came into very sharp focus in my thinking. Salvation is God's power, not mine. The fact that I am saved was up to him, not me. The only power I had was that of a dead man, until the power of God came to me and made me alive. Faith and belief in Christ was a gift granted to me by the one-sided (monergistic) gracious power of God to bring me to life through the Gospel, as Paul discusses in Ephesians 2.

Then I began reading some modern views on all of this. I started to see that there were some in these new circles where power almost completely eclipsed God's love. Some people were relishing in the power but barely ever talking about his love. In fact, some were denying that this God, who is love, had any love whatsoever, in any sense, for certain people. Even the kindness that he "supposedly" shows to them by making it rain on their crops was done purely so that he could add misery to them in hell for rejecting him. Yes, God still had love, but only for some people. And if you disagreed with that, then you had better start to reconsider how powerful he is.

It isn't that this *far left God of love* had no power whatsoever, nor was it that this *far right God of power* had no

love whatsoever. It was that both the far left and the far right were doing the same thing. Like two balls hanging from a string pendulum, where if you take them both to the top and then throw a little force in as you send them crashing together at the bottom, they both rise back up all the way to top and kiss each other, so these two opposite views of God kissed each other as they disregarded God's simplicity and essence in order to glorify one attribute over the other in their thinking.

The ramifications for this are many. This **only-love** idea creates people who begin to **care less and less about holiness and justice and goodness**. Certain ideas that demand justice are disregarded for others that seem only to demand love. God starts to look more like a hippie in the 60s wearing his tie-dye shirt and John Lenin glasses while holding up his hand in the form of a peace sign. Soon, morality has to go and with it any kind of objective ethic, though, of course, there are always personal ethics that always manage to be justified because of this only-loving God.

Meanwhile, the **only-power** God begins to work his way into the actions of his followers. Some become absolutely **obsessed with power—their own power**. And as the

love of God decreases in their minds, so also does **their love for others decrease** in tandem. Loveless, power-hungry people that run churches and pitiful love-obsessed people that run churches are two of today's greatest crises.

There is a vital need, an almost overwhelming fundamental need in fact, that we have as Christians to understand the love and the power of God simultaneously, both to the fullest extent that we can. In fact, this is a great cure to what ails so much of Christianity (and the world) today. How can anyone find this cure? This is the subject of our passage today.

## A Prayer and Benediction

### *Recap*

**Ephesians 3:14-21** completes the third chapter of the letter. It comes on the heels of **a digression (Eph 3:2-13)** that the Apostle wanted the church to see. Though he is in prison, Jesus is powerful to save and sanctify. Indeed, *because* he is in prison, Jesus will prove his power through the very letter being written from a gloomy dungeon in Rome, a let-

ter that creates things out of nothing. Jesus had just been depicted in the previous chapter and a half (1:15-2:23) as this great Warrior who has become King of heaven and earth, has conquered his heavenly fallen angelic foes, has liberated those who were in slavery to them, and who is building a temple now unlike any other in all the universe—his living church, his new creation.

This divine warrior theme began with a prayer for the Ephesian Christians (1:15-23). In that prayer, Paul really only prayed for one thing. That they might be given wisdom and revelation (17) and enlightenment (18) regarding the knowledge and power (19) of God in Christ. God's power was its focus. He then begins to unfold that knowledge by expounding upon Christ's glorious authority as king over everything in heaven and on earth because of his work as the warrior in his death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. More power. But then he discusses the "great love with which he loved us" (2:4) in sending Christ to die for us and grant us all the gifts we could possibly need in salvation.

## *Structure and Purpose of the Prayer*

What we are looking at today is a **second prayer**. It is the fifth of the eight long sentences in this epistle (1:3–14, 15–23; 2:1–7; 3:2–13, 14–19; 4:1–6, 11–16; 6:14–20) with 126 words,<sup>1</sup> though some Greek bibles break the one sentence into two according the natural divisions of a prayer (14-19) and a benediction (20-21).<sup>2</sup>

The new prayer contains **two distinct requests**. That they may be “**strengthened**” (16) and “**indwelt**” (17) followed by “**comprehending**” (18) and “**knowing**” (19). To see what the object of these verbs is, looking at the structure is helpful.

The whole passage forms a **chiasm** with a central verse (see next page). Like the first prayer, this verse has at its heart the idea of **power**, though it is a power given to us by the powerful God (vv. 16, 20). Thus, it is **related to the first prayer**. **But it adds something** to that prayer. He prays for this power for the purposes of our apprehending or seizing the

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<sup>1</sup> **Harold W. Hoehner**, “Ephesians,” in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon.*, vol. 16, ed. Philip W. Comfort and Peter H. Davids (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 72.

<sup>2</sup> A good exegetical study is **Mykola Leliovskyi**, “Exegetical Study of Ephesians 3:14-21,” *Academia* (Jan 27, 2017), [https://www.academia.edu/32739189/EXEGETICAL\\_STUDY\\_OF\\_EPHESIANS\\_3\\_14-21](https://www.academia.edu/32739189/EXEGETICAL_STUDY_OF_EPHESIANS_3_14-21).

knowledge of the four-fold vastness (breadth, length, height, depth) of the Father's love and power through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

- A** <sup>14</sup> I bow my knees  
**B** <sup>15</sup> every family / [*space:*] in heaven and on earth  
**C** <sup>16</sup> His glory,  
**D** power through His Spirit in the inner man;  
**E** <sup>17</sup> Christ may dwell in your hearts;  
**F** in love,  
**G** <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth,  
**F'** <sup>19</sup> the love  
**E'** be filled up to all the fulness.  
**D'** <sup>20</sup> the power / that works within us,  
**C'** <sup>21</sup> the glory  
**B'** all generations / [*time:*] forever and ever.  
**A'** Amen.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, this prayer “in some sense takes up again the burden of the first prayer by developing and supplementing it.”<sup>4</sup> While he repeats his burden that they grow in the

<sup>3</sup> LJHooge, “Ephesians 3:14-21,” *Biblical Chiasmus* (Nov 25, 2010), <https://biblicalchiasmus.wordpress.com/tag/ephesians-314-21/>; also Elna Mouton, *Reading a New Testament Document Ethically* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 66; SDE, “Ephesians 3:14-21,” *Biblical Chiasm Exchange* (Apr 5, 2015), <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2015/04/05/ephesians-314-21/>; Christine Miller, “Eph 3:1-21 Chiastic Structure,” *alittleperspective* (Aug 26, 2016), <http://www.alittleperspective.com/ephesians-3-2016/>. Mouton uses the curious word “palindrome” for any chiasm that has one non-repeated central verse (p. 65, n. 14).

<sup>4</sup> Clinton Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1989). 86; Peter Thomas O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 254.

knowledge of divine power, he now adds that they would increasingly gain greater awareness of the immeasurable *love* of Christ. And so we can *summarize this prayer* as 1. Inner strengthening through the Holy Spirit and the indwelling Christ who grounds the life of a believer in love, and 2. A personal knowledge of both the power and love of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Like the Great Sentence that started off the letter, this whole prayer is profoundly *Trinitarian*. He bows his knees to “*the Father*” (14). He prays for the power of the Holy Spirit (16). He asks that *Christ* may dwell in your hearts (17). Hence, the love and power of the prayer comes from the Father and from the Son and from the Holy Spirit. One power. One love. One God. Three persons.

Finally, it is important to see *the grounding of this prayer*. Some see the grounding as the entire divine warrior epic (1:14-2:22). But that epic, as they all do, has its climax in the building of a glorious house for the conquering king. Recall that Paul began this prayer in 3:1 with the words, “*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...*” For this reason refers most immediately to the building of this amazing temple-house made up

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<sup>5</sup> Arnold, *Power*, *ibid*.

of living stones, a building of which is composed of disparate former enemies—Jews and Gentiles.

He now picks up the prayer in **vs. 14** with the same words, “**For this reason,**” but now he completes the thought, “**... I bow my knees before the Father.**” He is echoing Isaiah, “**To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance**” (**Isa 45:23**), doing willingly what God says all will one day do, and what in Philippians Paul says all will do to Christ (**Php 2:10**). The posture demonstrates that this is a prayer, and this prayer is “**grounded in God’s declared purpose of creating a new humanity in Christ, which is an essential element in his sovereign design of summing up all things in his Son (1:10).**”<sup>6</sup>

When you pray for something, you are doing it because something is **out of your control**. You are in need. You do not have the power to get what you need. You need someone more powerful to grant this request. Hence, the posture. He bows his knees. Bowing the knee is what subjects do to kings. In our country, no one gets on their knee to the President, because he is one of us, our equal save for his office. But a king is not your equal except that he is a fellow human.

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<sup>6</sup> **O’Brien**, *Ephesians*, 254.

Kings are royalty. You aren't. Those living in democracies or republics have a kind of love/hate relationship with royalty, as **Lorde**'s song "Royals" demonstrates. She sings of how she proud of her postcode and has no use for royals, yet she fantasizes about being her own little royal to her boyfriend. We fought a war to gain independence from a king and yet every time one of those same kings or queens dies or their children get married, basically our entire country stops to watch. But do we bow?

### *The Father*

Paul addresses his prayer to "**the Father.**" He gets on his knees to the Father. He knows that the Father is royalty, the King. And yet, he also knows that he is not a human, one of us. This makes his posture that much more important, because he is coming to the Father to ask for something very important.

But before he gets to his request, he makes a parenthetical comment. He is the Father "**from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named**" (15). This kind of seems like a throw-away phrase, mostly because it is hard to figure out why it is even here. What can we make of this?

**First**, it isn't a throw-away line to the early church, for this idea of God being the Father of families in heaven and earth made its way into some compromise forms of the Nicene Creed.<sup>7</sup> Curiously, there is a **word-play** going on in the Greek between Father (*Patera*) and "family" (*patria*). *Paters* have *patrias*; fathers have families. So, this is said deliberately and with purpose.

**Second**, this family is found in two places: **heaven and earth**. As Origen said long ago, "The meaning concerning earthly paternity does not appear to be difficult."<sup>8</sup> He is talking here about Christians, God's adopted sons and daughters (**Eph 1:5**). This is what the Puritan Paul Bayne called "**Earth for the [Church] Militant**."<sup>9</sup> Remember, the church is the ground of this prayer. Christ is building it. So he mentions that this church is a family and all of these brother and sisters have a common Heavenly Father.

The "**heaven**" part is more difficult. Origen may be wiser than I when he says, "**What it means in heaven ... he**

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<sup>7</sup> "We believe in One God, the Father Almighty, Creator and Maker of all things; from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named" (**Athanasius**, *Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia* 25); "We believe in one God the Father Almighty ... of whom the whole family in heaven and upon earth is named" (**Socrates Scholasticus**, *The Ecclesiastical Histories* 2.18). These were not accepted as they compromised on Christ's nature. Was this line from Paul being abused?

<sup>8</sup> **Origen**, *Homily on Exodus* 1.2.

<sup>9</sup> **Paul Bayne**, *An Entire Commentary Upon the Whole Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians* (London: R. Milbourne, 1643), 400.

alone knows.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, he isn’t going to comment. My study has shown that every Reformer I could find believes that the heaven reference is to glorified saints, what Bayne calls “Heaven for the [Church] Triumphant.”<sup>11</sup> While many of the Fathers just let it pass without comment, a few lead the way in this interpretation. But a couple of them seemed to include heavenly beings and not just glorified saints. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* refers to “all beings, ‘from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named’” (*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 8.12).<sup>12</sup>

It seems to me we have to remember the context. Paul has referred to all things being summed up in heaven and earth in Christ (Eph 1:10). He has referred to the wicked powers and rulers being conquered by Christ (1:21; 3:10) and their having lost the ability to blind the elect when the

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<sup>10</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Ronald E. Heine, vol. 71, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 230.

<sup>11</sup> See also Calvin, James Ferguson, Jean Diodati, David Dickson.

<sup>12</sup> Jerome (Ephesians) said, “But we also ask why ‘all paternity in heaven is named’ from him. Just as we, who are not of the race of Abraham, are called sons of Abraham if we shall have held his faith, and we also say that the patriarchs and prophets are our fathers (if, that is, sins have not separated us from them), so I think the angels and the other powers too have the originators of their race in heaven whom they rejoice to call fathers. For archangel cannot be mentioned except in reference to angels, and dominion and principality and power are not mentioned unless they have inferiors who are their subjects (cf. Eph. 1: 21).”

gospel comes (2:2ff). This, and the whole context of Artemis' temple must never be forgotten. Thus, Clinton Arnold writes that Paul, “Addresses his prayer in 3:14ff. to the Father from whom every [family] in heaven and upon the earth derives its name. The phrase is no doubt used in its most expansive sense, i.e. every living being finds the source of its life in God the ‘Father.’ The inclusion of [in heaven] points unmistakably to the angelic realm, both good and evil.”<sup>13</sup> This would obviously include the Church Triumphant, but also more. It must not be forgotten that elsewhere the Scripture refers to some heavenly beings as “sons of God” (Gen 6:4; Job 38:7; etc.). Family.

The last thing he says in this verse is probably **the key** to it all. It says that they are “**named.**” Earlier, he even calls some of these heavenly beings, “**names that are named**” (Eph 1:21). Names were thought to have great power, which is why people in Ephesus used magical incantations to summon them. Power, of course, is a terribly important part of what Paul is going to pray about. Arnold gives the practical importance:

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<sup>13</sup> Arnold, *Powers*, 58.

The “naming” of names was important in magical practices. This passage affirms that every name, without exception, is derived from God. He is creator. There may even be a tinge of irony in the phrase, i.e. “It may be true that the so-called divinities have a name with power, but it is the Lord God, the Father of all, who gave them their name.” Therefore, no conceivable “power” is outside of the parameters of his sovereignty. The people of God can approach him in full confidence when they pray knowing that no hostile force can prevent him from hearing their requests.<sup>14</sup>

Such is the faith of the Apostle who is about to pray for something truly amazing, something that he says must come from “the riches of his glory” (Eph 3:16). God is abounding in riches, overflowing with them. But since he is also kind and generous, he loves to give from his overabundance to his people. This is, Paul says, God’s glory to do unto others.

*The Prayer: Strength and Power through his Spirit (16, 19b-20)*

The meat of the prayer begins in vs. 16b. “... he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.” The request is that the Father may

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<sup>14</sup> Arnold, 58-59.

grant something to these Christians. As I said, it is something *he* must *give*, and he is the only one who can do it. If he grants it, then it is solely his prerogative, for that is the nature of a grant. It is one-sided.

The prayer is that they would **be strengthened**. The word means to become strong and so it is a word of **power**. Curiously, the word “power” appears next. He wants them, and therefore you, to be “**strengthened with power**.” If God would grant this, then it means that it must come from his power, for it would be a truly powerful act to grant such a gift of power to someone else.

This power must come from God himself, and so he prays for God to work “**through his Holy Spirit**,” who is himself God. Curiously, in the literary parallel of vs. **20**, the verse which begins the benediction, the Spirit is parallel to “**the power at work within us**.” The Spirit is called “the power.” This is a very curious thing to me because scholars have realized that Jews of the first century and earlier taught something that they themselves called “**two powers in heaven**.”

Commenting on **Exodus 15:3**'s “man of war,” what we know is that the Rabbis later came to teach that this was a

heresy, impermissible in modern Judaism, mainly because of Jesus Christ. For example they write, “So as not to give an opportunity to say, ‘There are two powers in heaven’ ... He appeared to them at Sinai like an old man.”<sup>15</sup> The “heretics” (including Christians) said no, there are two powers in heaven. Paul seems to be coming out of this tradition, except that he adds a third power here: The Holy Spirit. Without question, he views the Spirit as a Power because it is the Spirit who works “within us.”

See that the power here is personal. He works “within us,” or as vs. 16 says, “in your inner beings” This is not an outside power like Arnold Schwarzenegger or Andre the Giant. It is an inner power he is asking God to grant.

### *The Prayer: Indwelling of Christ through Faith (17a, 19)*

This prayerful thought continues in vs. 17. “... so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” Here, Christ and the Spirit are almost inextricably linked, as they are when the Spirit is sometimes called “The Spirit of Christ”

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<sup>15</sup> MRSbY, Mekhilta of R. Simeon, Bashalah 15, cited in Alan Segal, Two Powers in Heaven (Boston: Brill, 1977), 33. See also 3 Enoch 16:3; b.Ber 33b; b.Meg 25a; SifDeut 329; Mekilta deRabbi 'Išma'el, Šîrāb 4, Yitrô 5, m.Sanh 4:5 (cf. b.Sanh 38a).

(Rom 8:9; 1Pe 1:11). What is true of one is true of the other because they are One God. And yet, they are distinct. That's Trinitarian theology. The distinction is in the names and persons. But their sameness is that Christ might dwell inside of us, it says, "In your hearts." This is the same thing as the Spirit in your inner being.

So his prayer is for strengthening power of the indwelling presence of God inside of them. But though he is speaking to a group, he has to be thinking about individuals, for this indwelling must come "through faith." Groups don't have faith. Earlier he told us that faith is a gift (Eph 2:8). This verse reinforces that point, because this has to be granted by the Father. Such an inner power as faith must come from the eternal power of God himself giving you such a glorious rich gift.

The parallel to this is vs. 19. He repeats "Christ" again saying, "... to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Look at how the words "Christ" and "Spirit" and "power" and "fullness" and "God" are all intertwined, like some kind of brilliant tapestry. That is the nature of this One God in Three Persons. The goal here is for the fullness, a rich

word that also denotes “divine power, essence, glory, and presence.”<sup>16</sup> This is a “filling” power, a power in your heart, one that is personal and teaches you by direct experience about the fullness of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It teaches you this directly because they come to dwell inside of you. The goal is to come to that point poetically written by John Ryland (1753-1825),

*When all created streams are dried  
Thy fulness is the same;  
May I with this be satisfied  
And glory in Thy Name!*<sup>17</sup>

Don't wonder that the world cannot understand this power, for it does not have the living God dwelling in its heart. That doesn't mean they do not know about power that can fill their hearts, however. There are powers, satanic and demonic, that fill many hearts. Those powers are wicked powers, destructive powers, blinding powers, darkening powers, violent powers, deadening powers, morally relativizing powers, enslaving powers, selfish powers, harmful

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<sup>16</sup> Arnold, *Power*, 84.

<sup>17</sup> John Ryland, “Grant Lord, I May Delight in Thee,” 1777.

powers, obliterating powers destroying all distinctions of right and wrong, beautiful and ugly, good and evil.

These powers make people **dull and hardened to the power of God**. Real people do truly know of these powers, and many in very personal ways. Help people see those powers by speaking to them the word of the power Paul prays you might have. As you do, do not forget the power of God to change a heart through *the gospel*. It is power we are talking about here, a strength, a might, a sovereignty, a force that knows no equal in this universe, for it created everything out of nothing, even as it does with the church here in Ephesians. Many people do not believe in the power of God for much of anything. Yet, they see these other powers at play nearly every moment of every day. Apprehend God's power by faith and call others, as I call you all even now, to behold this power of God spoken of here from Paul's gloomy prison chains of Rome, a power that loves our weakness, because it is through that we he shows himself strong.

## *The Prayer: The Love and Power of God (17b-19a)*

But **brute power is not enough**. As the prayer closes in on its center, he gets to the heart of it. You must be empowered by God himself on your inside man through faith “... **that you, being rooted and grounded in love, to comprehend with all the saints...**” (18a). Again, the repeating line in vs. 19, “**to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.**” It is the word “love” that comes into sharp focus here. He repeats it twice.

First, you are **rooted and grounded in love**. You are not rooted and grounded in **power**. You are not rooted and grounded in **knowledge**. Both have their place; both are vital. But they are not the root and the grounding of Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith. The root of the tree is love. The grounding of your faith is love. God’s love is what keeps you stable. It is what keeps you from drifting and floating away. It is what plants you firm. It is what keeps you from being double-minded. Love is what you must return to, whenever you find yourself slipping. Love is where you must go when feel yourself falling away from faith,

from obedience, from church, or from Christ. You have to be grounded in his love for you.

**But what love?** Again vs. 19. “*The love of Christ.*” This is the love that the Father that he has shown in sending Christ to us: The love of God in his becoming one of us, born of a virgin; the love of God in causing him to be born under law, to obey it for us and to show you what obedience looks like; the love of God in his bending his own will to that of the Father’s to die for your sin, to bear the consequences of your guilt; the love of God that he might descend to the place of the dead, thereby taking the very curse upon himself that you deserve; the love of God in raising from the dead, for he had done no wrong; the love of God in bringing him back to heaven, so that he might be seated above every power and principality in heavenly places; the love of God in showing forth this man to be the conqueror of sin, death, and the devil; the love of God in sending his Holy Spirit to indwell his people, giving them a power that was never born, uncreated, eternally existent, yet personal, good, holy, and kind; the love of God that would open your eyes to receive Christ as Lord by faith.

Notice the paradox that sandwiches this “love of Christ.” On one end he prays for you “to know” the love. On the other, he says this love “surpasses knowledge.” So you have to know. “**How can they believe if they have not heard?**” There is something you must know. But true knowledge is one that surpasses brute reason. It is personal knowledge, intimate knowledge, experiential knowledge because it is on the inside, in your heart and in your soul.

This knowledge that surpasses all understanding is of the love of God. As you hear, you come to see his love for you. As you trust, you come to know his love for you. As you tire, you think about his love for you. As you falter, you remember his love for you. As you sin and are full of regret, you refuse to forget his love for you. As you are caught in sin, you can’t believe his love for you. As you suffer in pains of this world, you look at the love of Christ on the cross and see displayed before your eyes the love of God for you.

Do you see? Power is important. To not believe in the power of God is to be a fool. But **love is the key**. Brute unmitigated power terrifies. Love added to it softens and cajoles, it woos and draws, it saves and sanctifies. But this is something only God can give. The prayer is that he would

grant it to each one of you today through faith in the Lord Jesus.

But it says you do this “with all the saints.” Sinclair Ferguson comments, “We need each other in order to grasp the measure of Christ’s love as he makes it visible in the lives of our fellow-believers. We need to be taught and encouraged by them in order to understand it better. We need to receive from them the fruit of the grace-gifts that Christ has given to them in order to bring a sense of his love to us.”<sup>18</sup> When we do this together, how can it not natural increase our love for one another, thus building upon the very foundation of love that we have in common?

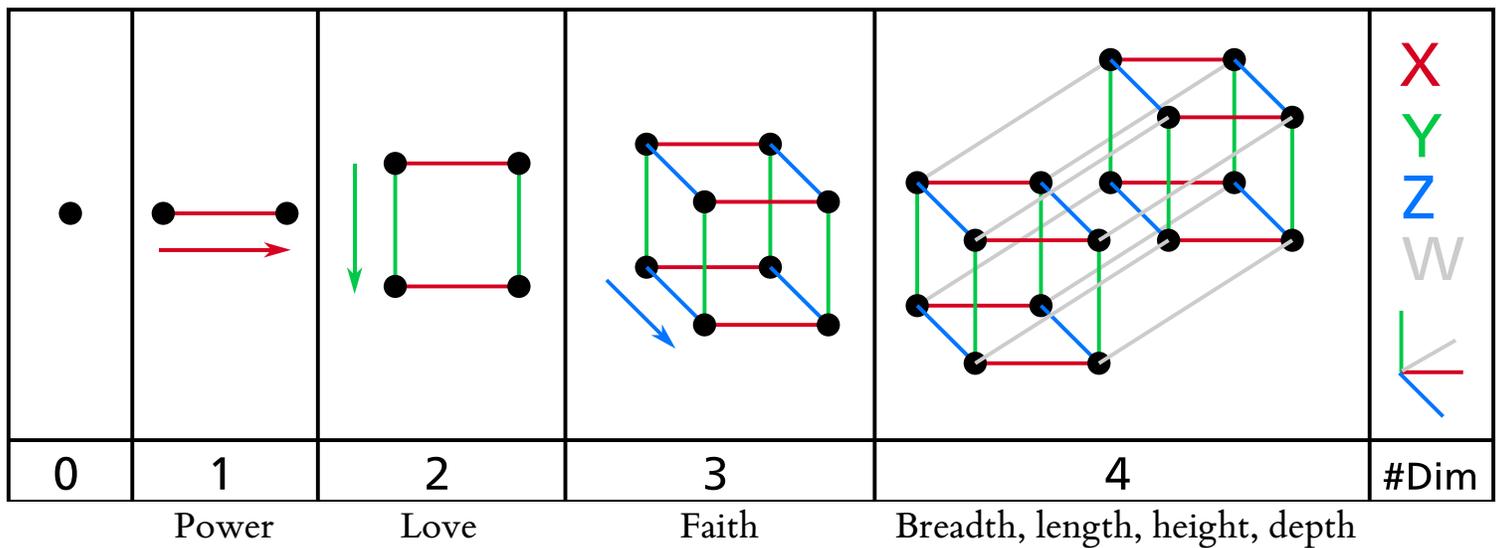
### *The Prayer: The Vastness of God’s Power and Love for You (18)*

Curiously, the very center of the prayer is not the idea of power or love in and of themselves. It is of their vastness: “The breadth and length and height and depth” (18). Think of power as a dimension. It is a line on a graph connecting power to God. Love adds the second dimension. It is more 2-D lines connecting the two words with God. Faith is a

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<sup>18</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *Let’s Study Ephesians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2005), 93.

third dimension, it makes power and love 3-D, a personal experience in your heart. But this is the only place where four dimensions occur. This adds eternity to your 3-D experience. It makes it not only transcend space but time as well.



The power and love of God are broad. They have length. They have height. They have depth. They are inexhaustible for they come from an eternal God, a God who is not part love and part power, but all love and all power. Both fully. Both equally. Both totally. Both eternally. There is no way you can exhaust their riches, mine all their wealth, contemplate all their beauty, study all of their intricacies, understand fully their functions. They are not finite, like your

power and love. They are not corrupt like the power and love of all fallen creatures. They are Triune in nature, always giving to others, but always glorifying God. They are perfect in how they work. They are glorious in how they save. Their function is for your good, for they come from God who is Love. And they are given without measure to all who hear the call of God through the Gospel. They are, in a word, given for you.

## The Benediction

How could it even be possible to end such a prayer as this? The only way is with a benediction. Lloyd-Jones says, “Nothing greater can ever happen to us than the answer to, and the satisfaction of, the petition that we may be ‘filled with all the fulness of God’. Having asked for that, having prayed for that, there is nothing more that one can do, there is no further prayer, there is nothing to do but to praise God.”<sup>19</sup>

Usually we think of benedictions coming at the end of something. Paul’s prayer **ends** in benediction, but it comes

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<sup>19</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1979), 302.

at the [end of ch. 3](#), right in the middle of the letter. Yet, the middle of this letter and the end of this prayer also happens to be the [end of glorious theology](#) that grounds all of the ethics that will begin to be discussed in chapter 4. In other words, it does come at the end, but it also starts something new.

The doxology occurs in [Ephesians 3:20-21](#). We've already looked at it in part. Let's turn to the whole. D. A. Carson says, "Paul has been asking God for some blessings of extraordinary value; he has been petitioning the Almighty for blessings that are immeasurably great. Now in his closing doxology (his 'word of praise'), he puts these petitions in perspective by stressing two themes."<sup>20</sup>

[First](#), The God whom he is praying to is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. The benediction begins with power. For what good is his love if he is not able to make you know it? "[Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us](#)" (20). He has just asked and thought of some very amazing things in these three chapters.

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<sup>20</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 203.

Perhaps they are more amazing than anything else ever written by man. He is very soon going to imagine a church where the people obey because they are now grounded in the love of God. The point here is that whatever he has said or will say, and therefore certainly whatever you think or imagine about such things, **God is powerful** to grant far more than anything we ask or imagine. Ask and imagine that God would show his love to you and display his power in you. Ask in a way that is full of confidence and does not doubt. He can exceed whatever you ask by a factor of infinity, because he is not on a scale and he is the omnipotent God.

**Second**, the ultimate purpose of this prayer is that **God might be glorified** in the church and in Jesus Christ, for the two are one as a head and body, as a husband and wife, as a temple and stones are one. **“To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (21).**

There is a curious parallel in the chiasmic part of **“all generations forever and ever.”** The parallel was **“every family in heaven and on earth.”** One refers to **space** (heaven and earth). The other refers to **time** (forever and ever). Every

family and all generations. It is all encompassing. Truly, Christ is summing up all things in heaven and earth. Judgment for the unrepentant. Salvation and glory for his chosen people. Heaven and earth will be united, and this will be for all time and forevermore.

The uniting centers around the giving of glory to God. There is only one being worthy of worship. It is the being who has done and would do such things as we have seen here. He can do them. He has done them. He will do them. That is how **deep and wide** his power and love extend. Therefore, church, honor Christ, “**fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man**” (**Eccl 12:13**).

Such is his prayer. May it be yours as well.

Amen.

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