

One Of The Greatest Prayers Ever Uttered

Introduction: There are many wonderful prayers in the Bible but few come near to the one we have heard read today. Listen again.

... That out of [God's] glorious riches he may *strengthen* you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may *dwell* in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have *power*, together with all his saints [fellow Christians], to *grasp* how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to *know* this love that surpasses knowledge –so that you may be *filled* to the measure of all fullness of God.

Notice the key words: that you may be *strengthened*, that Christ may *dwell* in your hearts, that you may *have power* to grasp how great is the love of Christ, and *know* this love which surpasses knowledge, so that you may be *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*.

Since it would be impossible to have more than 'all the fullness of God', this is a prayer that life in this world would be as good as it could possibly be. However, before we think about what this means, Paul's prayer leads up to this mighty crescendo like someone climbing a ladder.

In verse 16, he prays that God may strengthen us so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. That is the first step in a journey that lasts all through our life.

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Faith in Christ is the means by which he comes into our hearts and it is the means by which we experience his presence day by day. As John said in John 1:12; 'to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.'

Faith is the *means* by which we receive Christ who then comes to dwell in our hearts and it is by the power of the Holy Spirit that this indwelling is accomplished; verse 16, 'that he may strengthen you with power *through his Spirit* in your heart.'

But receiving Christ through faith is just the beginning; we need the ongoing strength of the Spirit so that we may climb the ladder to know more and more of his love. How can we grasp or know this great love? This brings us to the next rung of the ladder.

Verse 17, 'And I pray that you, being rooted and established in [God's] love, may have power, together with all the saints [our fellow believers], to *grasp* how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ ...'

The reason why Paul prays for the capacity to grasp the greatness of this love is because there is no way we could ever work it out for ourselves.

So where can we find out just how great the love of Christ is? We have to go to the cross. As the Bible says in another place, 'God commended his love towards us in that we were still sinners, *Christ died for us.*'

We have to open our Bibles and read, re-read, and meditate on what they did to Jesus on that terrible day and why he accepted it on our behalf.

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We have to look at how he reacted to their cruelties, how he prayed for those who drove the nails into his hands, how he forgave the penitent thief and promised that he would be with him forever, how he showed kindness towards his grieving mother, and how he cried out in pain at being forsaken by God and then calmly submitted to his judgement, not for his sins, but for ours.

Think of that wonderful old Hymn: *When I survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride.*

When we open our hearts and minds to the old, old story of Jesus and his love, the Holy Spirit takes those words and uses them to help us grasp just how wide and long and high and deep this love of Christ is.

But Paul prays for even more. Verse 18 takes us to the next rung of the ladder. He prays that we will not only have the power to 'grasp' this love but, verse 19, that we will *know* this love in ways that surpasses ordinary knowledge.

This goes beyond mere intellectual knowledge. It speaks of a personal experience of Jesus as our friend, as our comforter, as our ever-present help in times of trouble. It speaks of an inner assurance that we belong to him and that he is always with us. This knowledge cannot be explained in words but when you have it, you know it.

This brings us to the climax of this magnificent prayer, verse 18, 'that you may be filled to the measure of the fullness of God.' What is this fullness?

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It is all about our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; Colossians 2:9 says, 'for in Christ all the fullness of Deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ.' He is the image of the invisible God, the one by whom and through whom all things were created. He is the one who fills all things with his presence and power and who fills us with his love, peace and joy.

Paul was praying that this would be the experience of his friends in Ephesus and by extension, all of God's people, including us.

That is what we should pray for as well; that we should know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge and be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Is that what you want? Well ask for it. Will he give it to you? Of course he will, to the extent that you need it. How will he give it to you? He will give it through his Spirit *and* as you focus on his love revealed at the cross and poured out on you by his forgiveness and presence.

As that lovely old hymn puts it: 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face and the things of this world will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.'