

Ephesians 3:14-21¹G. Prayer for Strengthened Love ([3:14-21](#))1. The approach to prayer ([3:14-15](#))

¹⁴When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, ¹⁵the Cre-ator of everything in heaven and on earth.

Notes**[3:14](#)**

When I think of all this.—The Greek text begins this verse with the prepositional phrase “for this reason” (*toutou charin* [^{TG} <G3778>/<G5484>, ^{ZG} 4047/5920]), which indicates a resumption of the sentence begun in [3:1](#), a sentence interrupted by the long digression of [3:2-13](#).

I fall to my knees and pray to the Father.—The Greek text does not have “and pray,” but it is clearly implied when Paul states, “I fall to my knees.” There are three parts to the prayer: the approach to prayer ([3:13-14](#)), the appeal in prayer ([3:16-19](#)), and the ascription of praise ([3:20-21](#)). This prayer 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. Generally speaking, it is not unusual to employ lengthy sentences for prayer.

to the Father.—After “Father” some texts add the words “of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The additional words have wide distribution in the manuscript tradition, while their omission is found primarily in the Alexandrian text-type.

[3:15](#)

the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.—The Greek text literally states, “from whom every family in heaven and on the earth is named.” Although difficult to decipher, it probably refers to God’s sovereignty in his creation, stressing his continued activity in history, which is demonstrated by his naming of every family in heaven and on earth.

Commentary

As previously mentioned, in [2:11-22](#) Paul had discussed the union of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church. At the beginning of [chapter 3](#), it appears that he was intending to offer a prayer on behalf of these believers, but he stopped right in the middle of the sentence (at the end of [3:1](#)) and digressed to the subject of the secret plan of God. He then resumed his prayer by first explaining that he fell to his knees before the Father. This coincides well with [3:12](#), where he had just mentioned believers’ access to God. His action provides a timely example to them.

1. Philip W. Comfort, ed., *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary – Volume 16: Ephesians-2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 71-76.

The Father to whom Paul prayed is described as the one who names every family in heaven and on earth. There is a play on words here because Paul prays to the *pater* [^{TG}<G3962>, ^{ZG}4252] (father) from whom every *patria* [^{TG}<G3965>, ^{ZG}4255] (family) is named. This last word conveys the sense of a family headed by a father ([Exod 12:3](#); [1 Chr 23:11](#), LXX) or a nation that is composed of many families, all of which have originated from one father (cf. [Acts 3:25](#)). Paul described the Father as the one who names every family in heaven and on earth. As a human father gives names to children born into his family, so the heavenly Father names all those whom he creates. The present tense may well indicate that God continues to name every family, since he is still creating them. He is a God who is alive and acting in the present time, rather than a god who has died and is no longer active in history.

This was Paul's second prayer in Ephesians. His first prayer ([1:15-23](#)) for the believers was that they would have a deeper relationship with the God who had enriched them with every spiritual benefit, and that they would experience those benefits in a deeper way ([1:3-14](#)). His second prayer sprang out of what he had developed in [2:11-3:13](#). He had explained that believing Jews and believing Gentiles had become "one new person," the body of Christ—positionally speaking. He now proceeds to pray that they would be united experientially. He desired that they would experience the power of Christ's love in them and through them in their love for one another.

2. The appeal in prayer ([3:16-19](#))

¹⁶I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. ¹⁷Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong. ¹⁸And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. ¹⁹May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

Notes

[3:16](#)

I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources.—This is a good rendering of the literal text, "I pray that he may grant you according to the wealth of his glory." "According to the wealth of his glory" indicates that the wealth is in accordance with the infinite nature of God's glory.

[3:17](#)

Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him.—Rather than another request, this is a continuation of the request in [3:16](#) for their inner spiritual strength. Continuing, Paul prays that the result of this strength is that Christ would be at home in their hearts. "As you trust in him" is literally "through/by faith."

Your roots will grow down into God's love.—This is a participial clause syntactically related to the subject of the following verb—hence the rendering, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, might have power to understand with all of God's people...." This expression combines two metaphors, *rooting* from agriculture and *grounding* from architecture. Though there is some debate as to whether it might refer to God's love (NLT; Best 1998:343; O'Brien 1999:260) or Christ's love (John Chrysostom, *Ephesians* 3:18-19; PG 62.51), it is best to see this as the believers' love (Eadie 1883:249; Lincoln 1990:207), which is rooted in God's love that he displayed in choosing, redeeming, and sealing them ([1:4-14](#)).

[3:18](#)

And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should.—The “power to understand” refers to the “ability” to understand. “God’s people” is a translation of “saints,” those who are set apart for God and his service.

[3:19](#)

May you experience the love of Christ.—This verse begins with the postpositive conjunction *te* [^{TG}<G5037>, ^{ZG}5445] to indicate an internal logical relationship and can be translated “and so, to know the love of Christ.”

though it is too great to understand fully.—This comment is intended to intimate the vastness of the love of Christ, which is too great to comprehend fully. Rather than stating it negatively, the Greek text states it positively, “which surpasses knowledge.”

Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.—The KJV and RSV translations (“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God”) wrongly imply that the whole fullness of God can be contained in a believer’s life. They ignore the preposition *eis* [^{TG}<G1519>, ^{ZG}1650], which indicates movement toward a goal and is more accurately translated in the NIV “to the measure of.” So it can be translated “that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God.”

Commentary

Paul’s request in this prayer can be divided into two parts: his petition ([3:16-17a](#)) and its purpose ([3:17b-19](#)). His petition is that believers will be strengthened in the inner person. He asks for the power of God that is according to the wealth of his glory. The word “glory” conveys the idea of the reflection of the essence of one’s being, the summation of all of one’s attributes. The wealth of God’s glory is the wealth of his essential being. Hence, the rendering “unlimited resources” accurately portrays his wealth. Continuing, he prays that they would be strengthened with power in the inner person. Paul uses two words for power. The first is *dunamis* [^{TG}<G1411>, ^{ZG}1539], already defined in the note on [1:19](#) as “power, ability, capability to act.” It has a living and dynamic sense. The second word is a complementary infinitive, *krataiōthēnai* [^{TG}<G2901>, ^{ZG}3194], meaning “to be strengthened with power/ability.” The passive voice reinforces the idea that it is God who gives the strength; it is not self-endowed.

The following prepositional phrase “through his Spirit,” a reference to the Holy Spirit, underscores that it is God’s power. It is the Holy Spirit that enables believers to be strengthened with God’s power. This power is to be in the sphere of the inner person, which is described in [2 Corinthians 4:16](#) as being renewed day by day, in contrast to the “outer” person, who is perishing. Hence, the inner person (or, innermost being) is to be strengthened with God’s power through God’s Spirit. The words “inner strength” correspond with the “heart” in the following verse. Paul proceeds to explain in [3:17a](#) that this renewal is necessary so that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith. At first glance, this is a curious request since Christ already dwells in their hearts. However, the word “dwell” is accurately rendered in the NLT as “make his home in your hearts.” The infinitive *katoikēsai* [^{TG}<G2730>, ^{ZG}2997] is a compound verb that means “to dwell, reside, inhabit, settle down”—a settled dwelling. Hence, there is the objective strengthening through God’s Spirit and the subjective means by which believers obtain this. The infinitive “to dwell” expresses the result of this innermost strength, which is the deep indwelling of Christ in peoples’ hearts by faith. Thus, the Trinity—Father ([3:14](#)), Spirit ([3:16](#)), and Son ([3:17](#))—is involved in the spiritual growth of believers. Paul prayed to the Father for the believers to be strengthened by the Spirit with the result that Christ would be deeply rooted in their lives through faith.

Having made the petition ([3:16-17a](#)), Paul now states its purpose, namely, that believers would at least partly understand Christ's love and that this would result in a deep love for one another ([3:17b-19](#)). The participial clause is difficult to decipher. Rather than expressing a new request, it most likely relates syntactically to the following verb. Two metaphors are used to express the same idea. The first one is agricultural, *firmly rooted*, and the second one is architectural, *firmly founded*. The root and foundation of love is God, who chose believers, predestinated them, graciously bestowed grace on them in the Beloved One, redeemed them, made them a heritage, sealed them with the Holy Spirit, made them alive, raised and seated them in the heavenly realms, and placed them equally in one new person in the body of Christ. Paul's previous request for them to be strengthened in the inner person ([3:16](#)), with the result that Christ would be at home in their hearts ([3:17](#)), was for the purpose that they, who had been rooted and grounded in love, might be able to comprehend Christ's love ([3:18-19](#)). This applies to all of God's people.

Much discussion has been generated concerning the four dimensions: width, length, height, and depth. Although they could have reference to the wisdom or power of God, they probably refer to Christ's love. This suits the context well, since in the preceding verse ([3:17](#)) Paul referred to Christ's dwelling deeply in their hearts, and in the next verse ([3:19](#)) they are enjoined to know the love of Christ. Also, the spatial dimensions fit well with the agricultural and architectural metaphors used to portray rooting and grounding in love, which has its source in the love of God. The four dimensions delineate not so much the thoroughness of the comprehension as the vastness of the thing to be comprehended. Paul prayed that the believers might be able to comprehend the vast dimensions of Christ's love, with the result that they might know experientially that love that surpasses knowledge. To fully comprehend the sacrificial love of Christ is beyond the capability of any human being. His continued love for believers is equally incomprehensible. In fact, no matter how much knowledge believers have about Christ, his amazing love surpasses that knowledge, and the more we know of that love, the more we should praise him for it. However, mere knowledge of his love is not the end; rather, it issues into a final purpose, namely that we might be filled up toward all the fullness of God.

The fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ, and only through him is a believer made complete ([Col 2:9-10](#)). Though in Christ this divine fullness already belongs to the believer positionally, Paul prayed that it might be experientially appropriated in each one (cf. [4:13](#)). In [1:23](#) Paul concluded that the church was being filled with the moral excellence and power of God; in the present context the fullness involves the love of Christ. It is important to keep in mind that this vast love cannot be fully experienced by any single individual; it takes all the believers to appreciate the fullness of Christ's love (see also [1:23](#); [Col 2:9-10](#)).

As believing Jews and Gentiles experience God's moral excellence, perfection, and power, a love for each other will result. Positionally, we are one in Christ ([2:11-3:13](#)); experientially, we are to love one another as one in him. As a result, Jesus' asserts that "Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" ([John 13:35](#)). This starkly contrasts with the situation prior to redemption when there was animosity between Jews and Gentiles.

3. The ascription of praise ([3:20-21](#))

²⁰Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. ²¹Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.

Notes

[3:20](#)

Now all glory to God, who is able.—Lit, “Now to the one who is able.” What God is meant to receive (i.e., “glory”) is not stated in the Greek text until the next verse.

[3:21](#)

through all generations forever.—This speaks of the generations of human life that continue into eternity.

Commentary

Paul ended his prayer with a doxology. This doxology provides a very fitting conclusion to his prayer, as well as to the previous section in which the mystery was revealed ([2:11-3:13](#)), and finally, to the entire first three chapters.

Before Paul offers this praise to God, he delineates who God is—that is, he is the one who is able to do infinitely beyond all that we might ask or think. Humanly speaking, it might be readily surmised that true reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles could never happen. Paul had prayed that there would be true love between them, achievable only in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul believed that God is able to do infinitely beyond what we ask or think. Earlier, Paul prayed that believers would be strengthened with power through the Spirit ([3:16](#)); now he gives praise to God for that power and then continues by stating that believers can appropriate that power, which is working in them. He again uses *dunamis* [^{TG} <G1411>, ^{ZG} 1539] to indicate a dynamic, living power that is capable of working in the believers. Paul expresses confidence that true reconciliation between Jewish and Gentile believers is possible through God’s infinite and matchless power of love in the life of each believer.

In his concluding remarks in this chapter, Paul gives glory to God. This is the last time “glory” (*doxa* [^{TG} <G1391>, ^{ZG} 1518]) is used in the letter. It conveys the reflection of the essence of one’s being, the summation of all of one’s attributes, and here it refers to God’s splendor, power, and radiance. God’s great work of reconciling Jewish and Gentile believers cannot but prompt an outflow of praise to him who is glorified in the church. Our praise must also go to Christ Jesus, the person in whom the reconciliation was accomplished. It is his creation, the church, into which believing Jews and Gentiles are united. Indeed, the church could not have come into existence without him. The ending to this doxology is unique. Both the terms “generation” and “forever” are used, indicating an apparent mixture of both time on earth and in eternity. All generations, that is, all human life, will give praise eternally. Therefore, God is to be glorified, beginning with the present age and continuing into eternity.

Paul marked the end of his prayer and doxology with “amen,” a term he used almost exclusively to end doxologies. Its basic use is to confirm what has just been stated. Here it is a “yes” to the praise just expressed. It does not reflect Paul’s pride in his own wording but rather his sense of being overwhelmed by God’s grace and glory. He was essentially saying, “Let me repeat that again.” This “amen” not only concludes his prayer and doxology but also concludes the doctrinal section of this book. It is a truly fitting response to the powerful message Paul has imparted in these three chapters.