

This is what the metaphoric language means when Paul writes “that Messiah may dwell in your heart.” In a biblical sense, the “heart” is the seat of one’s intellect and volition, where desires and decisions in regard to desires are made. To have “Messiah dwelling” in one’s heart means that one constantly is submitting to that which pleases the Messiah—that the righteousness that characterizes Yeshua Himself as He walked upon the earth is that which one seeks to emulate, both by putting to death the sinful flesh and committing oneself to be conformed to the ways of Yeshua.

...*dwell in your hearts through faith* – Such ability to put to death the sinful nature and to grow in righteousness is through the exercise of faith, the personal constant affirmation and application of the truth as revealed to us by God Himself in His inspired word. Faith, which is a gift of God to everyone whom He calls to Himself to be saved, must be strengthened and enlarged which requires a cooperative work between the regenerated believer and God Himself. Divinely given the ability to exercise saving faith in the person and work of Yeshua, the child of God is enabled to increase in his or her faith through the means of God’s grace, namely, regular prayer, worship, the study and application of the Scriptures, and the fellowship of other believers within the body of Messiah.

That Paul emphasizes the need for corporate fellowship as a means of spiritual maturity for the individual believers is emphasized by the fact that in our immediate text, the pronouns and verbs in vv. 17–19 are all plural. Paul’s prayer is that all the believers in their respective communities would mature in their faith and that their fellowship together with one another would play an important role in their mutual spiritual growth.

*so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love*¹ – The Greek word translated “rooted” (ρίζω, *rizoō*) carries the basic meaning of “cause to take root” but is used figuratively in the sense of “to fix firmly,” “to put on firm foundation.”² In the Greek of our text, the word “rooted” is a perfect passive participle (ἑρριζωμένοι, *errizōmenoi*), which

1 For the difficult grammar of this phrase, in which the nominative participles, ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι, seem to have no proper antecedents, see Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 231 and the explanation he gives, in which the two nominative participles are taken as an emphatic expression: “You are rooted and founded in love!”, thus giving the basis for Paul’s admonition to comprehend and know the love of Messiah.

2 BDAG, “ρίζω,” p. 906.

emphasizes that the action is done upon the believer and not by the believer himself, and that the initial action, “being rooted,” remains an ongoing reality.

The same is true for the Greek word translated “grounded,” which is *θεμελιόω* (*themeliōō*). This word generally carries the sense of “laying a foundation,” used figuratively in the sense of “to provide a secure basis for the inner life and its resources, to establish, to strengthen.”¹ Once again, the middle/passive voice of the participle as well as its perfect tense emphasizes that, like “being rooted,” so “being grounded” is the work of God bringing to life the one He would save, a work that continues and does not cease.

It is in God’s love that the believer is “rooted and grounded.” And it is Paul’s prayer for the believers to whom he writes that they would grow in their understanding and appreciation of God’s love, and would thereby mature in their love for each other. This same theme or emphasis will be repeated in the remainder of Ephesians (cf. 4:2, 15–16; 5:2, 25, 28, 33; 6:23–24).

Commenting on Paul’s meaning here, Klein writes:

The point is clear: he desires that their roots go deeply into God’s love, that their lives become built on the foundation of God’s love. They already love one another (1:15) as a response to God’s love for them (2:4; cf. 5:2, 25), but Paul longs for God’s love to be the hallmark of Christ’s presence among and within them....²

When we as believers in Yeshua grow in our understanding and deep appreciation of God’s love, manifested to us in the giving of His Son, Yeshua, we grow in our own spiritual ability to love each other. Indeed, to become overwhelmed by the greatness of God’s love by appreciating the immeasurable cost of salvation, one is humbled on the one hand and given a sense of true acceptance on the other. Experiencing God’s love through the witness of the indwelling Spirit sets a person free to emulate God’s love in loving others. And this is Paul’s point as he continues to outline the substance of his prayer for those who are receiving his letter.

1 *BDAG*, “*θεμελιόω*,” p. 449. It should be noted that by using both “rooted” and “grounded,” Paul appears to mix the metaphors of agriculture and architecture. In this regard, note also 1Co 3:9; Col 2:7.

2 Klein, *Ephesians*, pp. 98-99.

[so that]... you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth – Since believers in Yeshua have, by faith, been divinely rooted and grounded in the love of God, Paul expresses his second prayer request for his readers, the first being “that Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith.” This second request is that they might grow in their ability to comprehend, but the object of the requested comprehension seems to be missing.

So what is it that Paul desires his readers to comprehend? We may note first of all that it is something “all the saints” comprehend, where the phrase “all the saints” (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις), “those declared to be holy/righteous,” refers to those who have proven their faith in Messiah by their sanctified lives. And what is it that “all the saints” know and affirm, even if undergoing great persecution for their faith? It is that the love of Messiah is real and eternal, and that there is no other means of salvation except through faith in Him and in the work of salvation He has accomplished in His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession.

Yet the comprehension itself is described by using four terms that describe dimension: breadth, length, height and depth. There have been many attempts at explaining Paul’s use of these terms in our text. Some commentators note that in Gnostic and Magical texts, these same Greek terms were used to describe cosmic dimensions or, as in the apocalyptic and Stoic literature, to describe “walking in heaven to contemplate God.”¹ But Paul would not have used terminology from Magical, Gnostic or Stoic beliefs here, and it is better simply to recognize these four dimensional terms to have been a common way of expressing “wholeness” or “completeness.” The fact that there is only one definite article that governs all four terms gives further proof that Paul is using these words as a unified expression to denote that which is complete and whole. Calvin puts it this way:

The love of Christ contains within itself the whole of wisdom, so that the words may run thus: *that ye may be able to comprehend the love of Christ, which is the length and breadth, and depth, and height, that is, the complete perfection of all wisdom. The metaphor is borrowed from mathematicians, taking the parts as expressive of the whole.*²

1 See Lincoln, *Ephesians* in *Word Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1990), 42.210.

2 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 264.

Paul desires that his readers grow to have a full and complete comprehension of their eternal salvation in Yeshua, and thus to be energized by the Ruach to be living testimonies of the surpassing greatness of His love.

The knowledge or comprehension for which Paul prays is not mere intellectual knowledge but personal, experiential knowledge of what it is to be loved by God and to have a one-to-one relationship with Him through His Son Yeshua and His abiding presence in the indwelling Spirit. As Paul will emphasize in the next chapter, such a comprehension of God's love in Messiah for each of His children is made known as believers form communities together as the "body of Messiah" in which every part is necessary for the body as a whole to grow and become what God intends.

...and thus to know the love of Messiah that surpasses knowledge – This is not a third request of Paul's prayer but the conclusion of the previous request. That is, when the believer seeks to comprehend that full extent of God's grace poured out upon those He determines to save, the believer begins more and more to comprehend the value, extent, purpose, and eternal results of God's love in Messiah Yeshua.

Clearly the phrase "love of Messiah" (τοῦ Χριστοῦ, *του Χριστου*) is describing Messiah's love for His own, not the believers' love for Him, though the two are obviously combined. For "we love because He first loved us" (1Jn 4:19). But as Paul intercedes for his readers, he prays that they might grow in their understanding and appreciation for Messiah's love for each one of them, by which they have been drawn to Him in faith and remain secure in Him. For His love is effectual, meaning that His love always and inevitably changes the one He loves to more and more appreciate what He has given them.

Yet there is an antinomy or paradox in Paul's statement, for he prays that they would "know the love of Messiah" and then adds that this divine love "surpasses knowledge." His point is that we may truly know the love of Messiah as we comprehend what He has accomplished for us through His coming to earth, dying to pay the penalty for our sin, raising on the third day for our justification,¹ and ascending on high to intercede for us at the right hand of the Father. We do not need to have an exhaustive knowledge of God's eternal and infinite being and works in order to know that He is and that He saves those who come to Him in faith. Indeed, since God is infinite in all of His being and attributes, we will never have a comprehensive and complete knowledge of Him,

1 Cf. Rom 4:25.

but the knowledge which has been given to us through His self revelation and through the work of the Ruach drawing us to faith in Yeshua is sure and true knowledge. It is this knowledge that Paul desires his readers to have, a knowledge that grows and deepens through a living relationship with God as we walk with Him in this world. Paul's prayer is that we would know "the love of Messiah" which involves being known by Him and being controlled by His love.

...so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. – Once again, Paul is using grand terms to express his prayerful desires for the believers to whom he writes this epistle. He teaches us that the knowledge he has just described is that which transforms character. Having the truth and accepting it as God's truth given to each individual He redeems, brings about a change in one's character, and change that continues to take place in which the "old self" is more and more diminished and the "new self" continues to be transformed into the very likeness of Messiah. This process brings to our attention not only our walk in this world but also our future presence in the world to come. Hendricksen notes:

To contemplate the glory of Christ's love means to be increasingly transformed into that image. In one sense that process of transformation will cease at the moment of death. At the very moment when the soul of the believer enters heaven, a great change will take place, and he, who a moment before was still a sinner, a saved sinner, will be a sinner no more, but will behold God's face in righteousness. He will then be absolutely perfect, completely sinless, in every respect obedient to the Father's will (Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21:27).¹

Thus, "to be filled up to all the fullness of God" does not mean, as some cults have taught, that mortals actually evolve into divine beings, but rather "all the fullness of God" (πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ) should be taken as a subjective genitive, i.e., the fullness which God accomplishes." As we will see in 4:13 where Paul defines the believers maturity as being measured by the "fullness of Messiah," so here the fullness which God brings to pass means that those He has chosen unto salvation are in the process of becoming all that God created them to be.² To fulfill this purpose is the highest attainment for one created in God's image, and such attainment is possible only by God's grace.

1 Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, p. 174.

2 Note the comments of Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 237;

20–21 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the *eklessia* and in Messiah Yeshua to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Paul concludes his prayer with a benediction or doxology of praise, which sounds as though it may have been part of an early liturgy in the communities of The Way. Such liturgical doxologies may have been modeled after similar doxologies which were used in the Temple.¹ Paul uses the same opening, “Now to Him Who is able,” for the benediction he pens in Rom 16:25.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Yeshua Messiah.... (Rom 16:25)

Note also Jude 1:24–25, which begins with the same opening words:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Yeshua Messiah our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

In bringing to a close this first major section of the epistle, Paul gives us the foundation for understanding how the requests of his prayer can, in fact, become a reality in the lives of those for whom he intercedes. For God is able to do all that He intends to do and nothing can stand in the way of His omnipotence. This is true for all believers in all times, for when we pray in accordance with His will, He is able to bring about that which may, in our own perspective, seem impossible. For God, nothing He intends to do is impossible!

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think – Once again, Paul uses superlative terms to describe the greatness of God to accomplish His holy will even as he has described the love of God in Messiah in the preceding verses. The phrase “far more abundantly beyond” (δυναμένῳ ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ)

1 Cf. 1Chron 16:28–29; Ps 29:1–2; 96:7.

piles up four words to emphasize that absolutely nothing is beyond the power of God to accomplish. His omnipotence is often described in the Scriptures by reference to His creative power to form the whole of the universe and all that is in it.¹ And this is why the enemy seeks to do all in his power to discount divine creation, for if God is indeed the creator of the universe, then His power is known and cannot be contested.

Paul states that He is able to do “abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.” The Greek word translated “abundantly” (ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ, *hyperekperissou*) is used by Paul twice in 1Thessalonians:

as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith? (1Thess 3:10)

and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. (1Thess 5:13)

The word generally carries the meaning of “quite beyond all measure” being “the highest form of comparison imaginable.”² When used, then, to describe the ability of the Almighty, Paul employs a word that offers the greatest superlative idea possible. Used of humans, it means to endeavor with all of one’s power and ability. When used of God, it obviously means that there is no limit to what He can and will accomplish. And this is why Paul adds “*beyond all that we ask or think.*” God’s power and omnipotence exceeds mortal mankind’s ability to even ponder.

Here must be the constant focus of God’s people as we pray to Him. Our faith in Him is based upon what we know to be true, and this we have from the Scriptures which, by His Spirit, are the inspired and true revelation He has given us.

according to the power that works within us... – The “power that works within us” is the ability given to us by the indwelling Spirit of God, so that as we walk in the way He directs, all that He intends us to accomplish will come to pass. Calvin notes:

for every benefit which God bestows upon us is a manifestation of his grace, and love, and power, in consequence of which we ought to cherish a stronger confidence for the future.³

1 Cf. Is 44:24; 51:13; Jer 10:12-13; Job 26:7-14; Ps 19:1 115:15; 147:4-5.

2 BDAG, “ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ,” p. 1033.

3 Calvin, *Ephesians*, p. 266.

As Paul notes in Romans:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? (Rom 8:31)

to Him be the glory in the eklessia and in Messiah Yeshua to all generations forever and ever. Amen. – When believers in Yeshua recognize that all they have and all they hope to be is the gift of God’s grace in Yeshua, we are in the right frame of mind to know that all praise and glory belong to Him.

Note that such glory and praise is “in the *eklessia and in Messiah Yeshua*.” The *eklessia* is the body of Messiah and He is the head, the One Who has first place in everything (Col 1:18). It is the Father’s will that all things be summed up in His Son, Yeshua.

He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him [Yeshua] with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Messiah, things in the heavens and things on the earth. (Eph 1:9–10)

The Father is most glorified when all things are summed up in His Son, our Messiah, Yeshua.

In the final phrase of this doxology, Paul uses words that, when put together, are the highest superlative possible to denote eternity. Given a wooden translation, this final phrase would be: “unto all the generations of the ages of the ages.” Though we, as finite beings, can only speak of eternity by using finite terms, God is eternal and the life He has given all of those He saves is likewise eternal. Paul uses the best words and construction he can find to emphasize this grand truth. John Newton penned it this way:

When we’ve been there ten thousand years,
Bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise
Than when we first begun.