

## INTRODUCTION

The words 'for this reason' in verse 14 take up the same expression that Paul used in verse 1. Paul is now going to proceed with what he was originally going to say before he broke off to talk about his ministry to the Gentiles. The reason that Paul is thinking about is the spiritual state of the Ephesians as outlined at the end of chapter 2. They are being built together spiritually to become a dwelling in which the Holy Spirit dwells (Ephesians 2:19-22)

Because this spiritual building process is still going on, Paul senses the need to pray for them in this section that we are looking at today. This shows Paul's concern for the church at Ephesus, for one of the best ways to discover what really concerns a Christian is to look at their prayer life. For the things that we pray for generally speaking are the things that we are concerned about the most. The things that we do not pray for reflect our lack of concern in those areas.

Now it is worth mentioning in passing that it is God's word and his purposes for the church and the world that shape Paul's praying here. It is because he knows it is God's intention to build his church, a church that consists of both Jews and Gentiles that he can now pray further for God's purposes in his church to be fulfilled. One thing that should fuel our prayer life is a knowledge of God's purposes for his church. For once we know what God's intention for his church are then we can pray to that end knowing that God will answer our prayers for that is what he has promised to do. So make sure that when we read the bible that we turn what we have learnt or what we already know about God's purposes into prayer. This will keep our prayer life fresh but it will also encourage us for we know that he will answer those types of prayers.

### 1. THE SUBSTANCE OF PAUL'S PRAYER (vs. 16-19)

Paul prays to God the Father the one from whom all believers derive their name whether dead (church triumphant) or alive (church militant). The church on earth and the church now in heaven though separated by death are nevertheless only two parts of the one great family of God. It is to this Father that Paul prays that he may be gracious in giving gifts to his church according to the riches of his glory (v 16).

Paul has no doubt that God has inexhaustible resources at his disposal and out of these resources God is well able to answer his prayer for the church in Ephesus. Once again there is an application here. It will greatly help our prayer life and it will increase our faith as we pray if we remember that the one we are praying to is God our heavenly Father and one to whom we belong along with all other believers both past and present. This Father has all the resources needed to answer our prayers at his disposal. God is not a reluctant God that we have to convince of the rightness of our particular request. No he is our Father, who desires the very best for his children. But God has all the resources at his disposal so that he is also able to answer our prayers; there is nothing that we can ask him for that he is unable to deliver.

That person we long to see saved, God can deliver, that circumstance we need to see improving God has the resources to deliver. That health problem that we long to alter God can do so. The only question that any of us need to concern ourselves with is not can God do it, but will God do it. Prayer has to do with his will rather than his ability. We must always keep this in mind when we come before our Father in prayer.

Do not be afraid to ask him for those big requests, he is able but always have a heart that is committed to submission to his will in every situation or circumstance so that we will bow at every turn to his sovereign will for our lives. So what does Paul pray for the church at Ephesus?

a) He prays for the church to be strengthened with power (vs. 16-17) – There are really two requests here but they can be summarised into one request. Paul is really praying about the Christian's innermost being and heart. This strength that Paul is praying for comes by the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul knows like every serious minded Christian knows that the church is unable to serve God in its own strength. It needs to be strengthened in order to withstand the temptations and trials of living for Christ in this world.

We all know that we all too easily give way and succumb to temptation we know that if we as a church are going to walk in the ways of God then a strength which is more than our own strength is needed. A strength that comes from God that comes with power through his Spirit. Paul is asking for divine power to be exercised through the work of the Holy Spirit. The church cannot stand on its own it needs God's power. We sometimes can forget this especially if we have been Christians for many years.

Perhaps we become complacent we have been able to walk with God now for many years we have not succumbed disastrously to temptations so we will be able to continue in the faith. Although none of us would say that; that is how we can so easily think we may do so subconsciously, but we must remember everyday our need for God's power to give us strength in our inner being so that we can withstand the onslaughts of the evil one and worldliness in general. We would never withstand these onslaughts in our own strength we are far too weak for that but as Christians we can withstand such things because God's power through his Holy Spirit enables us to do what we could never do on our own strength. Of course its not only temptations and the devil's onslaughts that we need God's power for. We would never pray, or read his word, or enjoy fellowship or evangelise if left to ourselves, we need God's power at work within to keep us doing what we know as Christians we need to do.

To live for God by God's standards is impossible in our own strength there are far to many professing Christians who try to do that and they end up being content to live by the world's standards and they accept worldly mindedness as their normal everyday Christian experience. But it is not normal, normal Christian experience is living a life by God's standards as they are revealed to us through his word.

It is seeking the things that God desires and to do that we all need to be strengthened with God's power through the work of the Holy Spirit in our inner beings. Paul also asks that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith (v 17). The verb 'dwell' is not very common in Paul's writings; he only uses it three times. It indicates a permanent settlement, not a causal visit or temporary stay. The heart of course I'm sure you will know stands for the inner being of a believer, that is thoughts, will, emotions and whatever else there might be at the very centre of what we are as human beings. If Christ dwells in our hearts he is at the very centre of our being and exercises his influence over all that we do and are as people.

But what exactly is Paul praying for here for surely these are Christians he is praying for; therefore they already possess Christ for you cannot separate the Holy Spirit from Christ.

If you have the Holy Spirit you have Christ if you have Christ you possess the Holy Spirit. Well that is right but Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit may dwell in the sense that he might be at home in the hearts of the Ephesians believers. Perhaps I can illustrate the point like this. When you buy a house and you move in then you are a permanent resident there. But over time you begin to make that house your home. You change the décor, you make alternations and slowly the house begins to reflect your ownership of that house.

Well that is what Paul means here. When we repent and believe we receive the Holy Spirit he is a permanent resident within our hearts. But over time he begins to work in our life so that he stamps his mark upon our life so that increasingly it becomes obvious that the Christ lives within us for we

can see the evidence within our lives, our attitudes are changing our actions change our conversation changes and so on. What is happening is that the Christ is making the house of our lives his home. Well that is what Paul is praying for here and it is a good thing for us to pray for that too. We need to pray for one another that the work of the Christ might make it obvious that he lives within our hearts.

We are really praying for changes in our lives, changes that will make us more godly, more like Christ for if Christ is dwelling within us what ought to be happening is that we all ought to be progressively being like Christ. So if we are not sure what to pray for the members of this church, pray for these things, pray that we might be strengthened with God's power and pray that Christ might make his home within us so that we become like him.

**b) He prays for the Church to grasp the love of Christ (vs. 17-19)** – Paul says that the church is rooted and established in love. Actually Paul's word order places love first so 'in love rooted and established.' Let's look at these two phrases for a minute. Being rooted and established in love. What does Paul mean? Well just as roots are of utmost importance for plants so love is of utmost importance for believers. Love is the root that sustains believers and it is through the roots that spiritual nourishment comes. If the plant is to live let alone flourish then its roots are absolutely essential. What Paul is saying is that he does not see love as an impulse that moves Christians from time to time but it is basic to Christian living. But along with the word rooted Paul uses the word established or grounded. Here the metaphor is taken from laying the foundation of a building.

A solid well-laid foundation is essential if the building is to stand and if it is to be permanent. But Paul is not praying for the church to know this love he is stating a fact they are rooted and established in love for that is true of every Christian. We all have the love of Christ within our hearts and love for him will feed us and establish us in Christ. So this being the case what is Paul praying for. He prays for power or strength to understand and grasp the full dimensions of the love of Christ (v 18).

Someone has said, "Christ's love is broad enough to encompass all mankind, long enough to last for eternity, deep enough to reach the most depraved sinner and high enough to reach to heaven." Paul's point is that God's love cannot be fully measured and it cannot be exhausted.

Paul is praying that these Ephesian believers will be able to comprehend something, which is beyond comprehension, and that they will know something, which is ultimately unknowable. It's like explorers being sent to explore a vast ocean. After a period of doing so they all come home knowing something about the ocean that they did not know before, perhaps some know more than others but no one knows all there is to know about the ocean. That is what Paul is praying for here.

That the church might understand something about the love of Christ but also that they might know experimentally something of His love. He knows that no Christian knows everything about the love of Christ but he prays that the church might discover something of its dimensions. For this to happen the church needs power, God given power to understand that it is wide enough to reach both Jew and Gentile, that there is a universal invitation to sinners in the love of Christ.

He longs that the church might understand that from eternity to eternity he loved his people. Christ loved us even before anything else was created, he loves us now and he will still be loving us when we get to heaven with him. Who can measure his love?

O how deep his love is that it brought him from heaven to earth, to live among sinners and to die in their place. Look how high his love is as he has taken vile sinners and has placed us in the heavenly realm. Now we all understand and know something about this marvellous love, we all know more about it than once we used too. But Paul's desire is that the church at Ephesus along

with all the saints will explore even further the love of Christ and that you might have limitless experiences of it within our everyday situations.

He longs that every Christian might ponder and think about the love of God and might increase in understanding of the greatness and vastness of Christ's love for sinners. No Christian has gone as far as they can possibly go no Christian has understood all that there is to understand about the love of Christ. None of us has experienced all that there is to experience concerning this love, there is so much more yet to learn and experience about the immeasurable love of Christ for his people.

No Christian should be content with their current level of understanding and experience of the love of Christ. We need to pray for one another that we might somehow grasp the width, length, height and depth of the love of Christ. This is done collectively because Paul says it is with all the saints. It's only as we live in fellowship with God and with his people that our understanding and experience of the love of Christ increases as we see His love in the lives of others and as we see it at work in the life of the community of the church. No isolated Christian will understand and know as much about the love of Christ as those who are in regular fellowship with God's people.

The aim of Paul's praying is now given (v 19) it is so that the church might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. This is a difficult phrase to end with but I think it means that we might be filled with the fullness of God that is with the fullness that fills God. What Paul seems to be asking here is that all Christians may be filled up to the fullness that is in God himself? How can this be we might ask? God is infinite and so is his fullness.

What Paul is asking is that we might continue to be filled and filled and filled until we reach the fullness of God. That God might pour his fullness out into our lives. Of course we never will reach the fullness of God even though we have all eternity to be filled with God's fullness. Paul's prayer is about maturity, no one is completely mature as a Christian no one knows all there is to know about God and we never will, even throughout eternity we will still be amazed and overwhelmed by the fullness of God.

That is probably what will make heaven, heaven. Now I don't understand this final phrase and I don't think Paul really understood it either, that's why he says and we will come to this next time that God is able to do immeasurably more than we can ever ask or imagine (v 20). It is to him be glory forever and ever

Amen