

Matthew Henry's Commentary

We now come to the second part of this chapter, which contains Paul's devout and affectionate prayer to God for his beloved Ephesians.-- For this cause. This may be referred either to the immediately foregoing verse, That you faint not, etc., or, rather, the apostle is here resuming what he began at the first verse, from which he digressed in those which are interposed. Observe,

I. To whom he prays-- to God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of which see <Eph 1:3>.

II. His outward posture in prayer, which was humble and reverent: I bow my knees. Note, When we draw nigh to God, we should reverence him in our hearts, and express our reverence in the most suitable and becoming behaviour and gesture. Here, having mentioned Christ, he cannot pass without an honourable encomium of his love, v. 15. The universal church has a dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ: Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named. The Jews were wont to boast of Abraham as their father, but now Jews and Gentiles are both denominated from Christ (so some); while others understand it of the saints in heaven, who wear the crown of glory, and of saints on earth who are going on in the work of grace here. Both the one and the other make but one family, one household; and from him they are named CHRISTIANS, as they really are such, acknowledging their dependence upon, and their relation to, Christ.

III. What the apostle asks of God for these his friends-- spiritual blessings, which are the best blessings, and the most earnestly to be sought and prayed for by every one of us, both for ourselves and for our friends.

1. Spiritual strength for the work and duty to which they were called, and in which they were employed: That he would grant you, according to the riches of his grace, to be strengthened, etc. The inner man is the heart or soul. To be strengthened with might is to be mightily strengthened, much more than they were at present; to be endued with a high degree of grace, and spiritual abilities for discharging duty, resisting temptations, enduring persecutions, etc. And the apostle prays that this may be according to the riches of his glory, or according to his glorious riches-- answerable to that great abundance of grace, mercy, and power, which resides in God, and is his glory: and this by his Spirit, who is the immediate worker of grace in the souls of God's people. Observe from these things, That strength from the Spirit of God in the inner man is the best and most desirable strength, strength in the soul, the strength of faith and other graces, strength to serve God and to do our duty, and to persevere in our Christian course with vigour and with cheerfulness. And let us further observe that as the work of grace is first begun so it is continued and carried on, by the blessed Spirit of God.

2. The indwelling of Christ in their hearts, v. 17. Christ is said to dwell in his people, as he is always present with them by his gracious influences and operations. Observe, It is a desirable thing to have Christ dwell in our hearts; and if the law of Christ be written there, and the love of Christ be shed abroad there, then Christ dwells there. Christ is an inhabitant in the soul of every good Christian. Where his spirit dwells, there he swells; and he dwells in the heart by faith, by means of the continual exercise of faith upon him. Faith opens the door of the soul, to receive Christ; faith admits him, and submits to him. By faith we are united to Christ, and have an interest in him.

3. The fixing of pious and devout affections in the soul: That you being rooted and grounded in love, stedfastly fixed in your love to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to all the saints, the beloved of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many have some love to God and to his servants, but it is a flash, like the crackling of thorns under a pot, it makes a great noise, but is gone presently. We should earnestly desire that good affections may be fixed in us, that we may be rooted and grounded in love. Some

understand it of their being settled and established in the sense of God's love to them, which would inspire them with greater ardours of holy love to him, and to one another. And how very desirable is it to have a settled fixed sense of the love of God and Christ to our souls, so as to be able to say with the apostle at all times, He has loved me! Now the best way to attain this is to be careful that we maintain a constant love to God in our souls; this will be the evidence of the love of God to us. We love him, because he first loved us. In order to this he prays,

4. For their experimental acquaintance with the love of Jesus Christ. The more intimate acquaintance we have with Christ's love to us, the more our love will be drawn out to him, and to those who are his, for his sake: That you may be able to comprehend with all saints, etc. (v. 18-19); that is, more clearly to understand, and firmly to believe, the wonderful love of Christ to his, which the saints do understand and believe in some measure, and shall understand more hereafter. Christians should not aim to comprehend above all saints; but be content that God deals with them as he uses to do with those who love and fear his name: we should desire to comprehend with all saints, to have so much knowledge as the saints are allowed to have in this world. We should be ambitious of coming up with the first three; but not of going beyond what is the measure of the stature of other saints. It is observable how magnificently the apostle speaks of the love of Christ.

The dimensions of redeeming love are admirable: The breadth, and length, and depth, and height. By enumerating these dimensions, the apostle designs to signify the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, the unsearchable riches of his love, which is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea, <Job 11:8-9>. Some describe the particulars thus: By the breadth of it we may understand the extent of it to all ages, nations, and ranks of men; by the length of it, its continuance from everlasting to everlasting; by the depth of it, its stooping to the lowest condition, with a design to relieve and save those who have sunk into the depths of sin and misery; by its height, its entitling and raising us up to the heavenly happiness and glory. We should desire to comprehend this love: it is the character of all the saints that they do so; for they all have a complacency and a confidence in the love of Christ: And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, v. 19. If it passeth knowledge, how can we know it? We must pray and endeavour to know something, and should still covet and strive to know more and more of it, though, after the best endeavours, none can fully comprehend it: in its full extent it surpasses knowledge. Though the love of Christ may be better perceived and known by Christians than it generally is, yet it cannot be fully understood on this side heaven.

5. He prays that they may be filled with all the fulness of God. It is a high expression: we should not dare to use it if we did not find it in the scriptures. It is like those other expressions, of being partakers of a divine nature, and of being perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. We are not to understand it of his fulness as God in himself, but of his fulness as a God in covenant with us, as a God to his people: such a fulness as God is ready to bestow, who is willing to fill them all to the utmost of their capacity, and that with all those gifts and graces which he sees they need. Those who receive grace for grace from Christ's fulness may be said to be filled with the fulness of God, according to their capacity, all which is in order to their arriving at the highest degree of the knowledge and enjoyment of God, and an entire conformity to him.

The apostle closes the chapter with a doxology, v. 20, 21. It is proper to conclude our prayers with praises. Our blessed Saviour has taught us to do so. Take notice how he describes God, and how he ascribes glory to him. He describes him as a God that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think. There is an inexhaustible fulness of grace and mercy in God, which the prayers of all the saints can never draw dry. Whatever we may ask, or think to ask, still God is still able to do more, abundantly more, exceedingly abundantly more. Open thy mouth ever so wide, still he hath wherewithal to fill it. Note, In our applications to God we should encourage our faith by a consideration of his all-sufficiency and almighty power. According to the power which worketh in us. As if he had said, We have already had a proof of this power of God, in what he hath wrought in us and done for us, having quickened us by his grace, and converted us to himself. The power that still worketh for the saints is

according to that power that hath wrought in them. Wherever God gives of his fulness he gives to experience his power. Having thus described God, he ascribes glory to him. When we come to ask for grace from God, we ought to give glory to God. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus. In ascribing glory to God, we ascribe all excellences and perfections to him, glory being the effulgency and result of them all. Observe, The seat of God's praises is in the church. That little rent of praise which God receives from this world is from the church, a sacred society constituted for the glory of God, every particular member of which, both Jew and Gentile, concurs in this work of praising God. The Mediator of these praises is Jesus Christ. All God's gifts come from his to us through the hand of Christ; and all our praises pass from us to him through the same hand. And God should and will be praised thus throughout all ages, world without end; for he will ever have a church to praise him, and he will ever have his tribute of praise from his church. Amen. So be it; and so it will certainly be.

Adam Clarke Commentary

Ephesians 3:16

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

[That he would grant you] This prayer of the apostle is one of the most grand and sublime in the whole oracles of God. The riches of the grace of the Gospel, and the extent to which the soul of man may be saved here below, are most emphatically pointed out here. Every word seems to have come immediately from heaven; labouring to convey ideas of infinite importance to mankind. No paraphrase can do it justice, and few commentators seem to have entered into its spirit; perhaps deterred by its unparalleled sublimity. I shall only attempt a few observations upon the terms, to show their force and meaning; and leave all the rest to that Spirit by which these most important words were dictated. In the mean time referring the reader to the discourse lately published on this prayer of the apostle, entitled, The Family of God and its Privileges.

That he would grant you-- You can expect nothing from him but as a free gift through Christ Jesus; let this be a ruling sentiment of your hearts when you pray to God.

[According to the riches of his glory] According to the measure of his own eternal fulness; God's infinite mercy and goodness being the measure according to which we are to be saved. In giving alms it is a maxim that everyone should act according to his ability. It would be a disgrace to a king or a nobleman to give no more than a tradesman or a peasant. God acts up to the dignity of his infinite perfections; he gives according to the riches of his glory.

[To be strengthened with might] Ye have many enemies, cunning and strong; many trials, too great for your natural strength; many temptations, which no human power is able successfully to resist; many duties to perform, which cannot be accomplished by the strength of man; therefore you need divine strength; ye must have might; and ye must be strengthened everywhere, and every way fortified by that might; mightily and most effectually strengthened.

[By his Spirit] By the sovereign energy of the Holy Spirit. This fountain of spiritual energy can alone supply the spiritual strength which is necessary for this spiritual work and conflict.

[In the inner man] In the soul. Every man is a compound being; he has a body and a soul. The outward man is that alone which is seen and considered by men; the inward man is that which stands particularly in reference to God and eternity. The outward man is strengthened by earthly food, etc.; the inward man, by spiritual and heavenly influences. Knowledge, love, peace, and holiness, are the food of the inward man; or rather Jesus Christ, that bread of life which came down from heaven: he that eateth this bread shall live and be strengthened by it. The soul must be as truly fed and nourished by divine food as the body by natural food.

Ephesians 3:17

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

[That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith] In this as well as in many other passages, and particularly that in <Eph. 2:21> (where see the note), the apostle compares the body or church of true believers to a temple, which, like that of Solomon, is built up to be a habitation of God through the Spirit. Here, as Solomon did at the dedication of the temple at Jerusalem, <2 Chr. 6:1>, etc., Paul, having considered the church at Ephesus completely formed, as to every external thing, prays that God may come down and dwell in it. And as there could be no indwelling of God but by Christ, and no indwelling of Christ but by faith, he prays that they may have such faith in Christ, as shall keep them in constant possession of his love and presence. God, at the beginning, formed man to be his temple, and while in a state of purity he inhabited this temple; when the temple became defiled, God left it. In the order of his eternal mercy, Christ, the repairer of the breach, comes to purify the temple, that it may again become a fit habitation for the blessed God. This is what the apostle points out to the believing Ephesians, in praying that Christ katoikeesai (grk 2730), might intensely and constantly dwell in their hearts by faith: for the man's heart, which is not God's house, must be a hold of every foul and unclean spirit; as Satan and his angels will endeavor to fill what God does not.

[That ye, being rooted and grounded in love] Here is a double metaphor; one taken from agriculture, the other, from architecture. As trees, they are to be rooted in love-- this is the soil in which their souls are to grow; into the infinite love of God their souls by faith are to strike their roots, and from this love derive all that nourishment which is essential for their full growth, until they have the mind in them that was in Jesus, or, as it is afterward said, until they are filled with all the fullness of God. As a building, their foundation is to be laid in this love. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, etc. Here is the ground on which alone the soul, and all its hopes and expectations, can be safely founded. This is a foundation that cannot be shaken; and it is from this alone that the doctrine of redemption flows to man, and from this alone has the soul its form and comeliness. IN this, as its proper soil, it grows. ON this, as its only foundation, it rests.

Ephesians 3:18

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

[May be able to comprehend with all saints] Hina (grk 2443) exischuseete (grk 1840) katalabesthai (grk 2638). These words are so exceedingly nervous and full of meaning, that it is almost impossible to translate them. The first word exischuseete (grk 1840), from ex (grk 1537), intensive, and ischuoo (grk 2480), to be strong, signifies that they might be thoroughly able, by having been strengthened with might, by God's power. The second word katalabesthai (grk 2638), from kata (grk 2596), intensive, and lambanoo (grk 2983), to take, catch, or seize on, may be translated, that ye may fully catch, take in, and comprehend this wonderful mystery of God. The mind must be rendered apt, and the soul invigorated, to take in and comprehend these mysteries.

[What is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height] Here the apostle still keeps up the metaphor, comparing the church of God to a building; and as, in order to rear a proper building, formed on scientific principles, a ground plan and specification must be previously made, according to which the building is to be constructed, the apostle refers to this; for this must be thoroughly understood, without which the building could not be formed. They were to be builded up a heavenly house, a habitation of God through the Spirit; and this must have its latitude or breadth, its longitude or length, its altitude or height, and its profundity or depth.

it is supposed by some that the apostle is here alluding to the famous temple of Diana at Ephesus, which, as I have already had occasion to remark, was reputed one of the wonders of the world, being in length 425 feet, in breadth 220; it was supported by 127 pillars, each 60 feet high; was builded at the expense of all Asia; and was 220 years in being completed. I cannot, however, allow of this allusion while the apostle had a nobler model at hand, and one every way more worthy of being

brought into the comparison. The temple at Jerusalem was that alone which he had in view; that alone could be fitly compared here; for that was built to be a habitation of God; that was his house, and that the place of his rest: so the Christian temple, and the believing heart, are to be the constant, the endless residence of God; and how august must that edifice be in which the eternal Trinity dwells!

But what can the apostle mean by the breadth, length, depth, and height, of the love of God? Imagination can scarcely frame any satisfactory answer to this question. It takes in the eternity of God. GOD is LOVE; and in that, an infinity of breadth, length, depth, and height, is included; or rather all breadth, length, depth, and height, are lost in this immensity. It comprehends all that is above, all that is below, all that is past, and all that is to come. In reference to human beings, the love of God, in its BREADTH, is a girdle that encompasses the globe; its LENGTH reaches from the eternal purpose of the mission of Christ, to the eternity of blessedness which is to be spent in his ineffable glories; its DEPTH reaches to the lowest fallen of the sons of Adam, and to the deepest depravity of the human heart; and its HEIGHT to the infinite dignities of the throne of Christ. He that overcometh will I give to sit down with me upon my throne, as I have overcome and sat down with the Father upon his throne. Thus we see that the Father, the Son, and all true believers in him, are to be seated on the same throne! This is the height of the love of God, and the height to which that love raises the souls that believe in Christ Jesus!

Ephesians 3:19

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

[To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge] It is only by the love of Christ that we can know the love of God: the love of God to man induced him to give Christ for his redemption; Christ's love to man induced him to give his life's blood for his salvation. The gift of Christ to man is the measure of God's love; the death of Christ for man is the measure of Christ's love. God so loved the world, etc. Christ loved us, and gave himself for US.

But how can the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, be known? Many have laboured to reconcile this seeming contradiction. If we take the verb *gnoonai* (grk 1097) in a sense in which it is frequently used in the New Testament, to approve, acknowledge, or acknowledge with approbation, and *gnoosis* (grk 1108) to signify comprehension, then the difficulty will be partly removed: "That ye may acknowledge, approve, and publicly acknowledge, that love of God which surpasseth knowledge." We can acknowledge and approve of that which surpasses our comprehension. We cannot comprehend God; yet we can know that he is; approve of, love, adore, and serve him. In like manner, though we cannot comprehend the immensity of the love of Christ, yet we know that he has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; and we approve of, and acknowledge, him as our only Lord and Saviour. In this sense we may be said to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge.

But it is more likely that the word *gnoosis* (grk 1108), which we translate knowledge, signifies here science in general, and particularly that science of which the rabbis boasted, and that in which the Greeks greatly exulted. The former professed to have the key of knowledge, the secret of all divine mysteries; the latter considered their philosophers, and their systems of philosophy, superior to everything that had ever been known among men, and reputed on this account all other nations as barbarians. When the apostle prays that they may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, he may refer to all the boasted knowledge of the Jewish doctors, and to all the greatly extolled science of the Greek philosophers. To know the love of Christ, infinitely surpasseth all other science. This gives a clear and satisfactory sense.

[That he might be filled with all the fullness of God.] Among all the great sayings in this prayer, this is the greatest. To be FILLED with God is a great thing; to be filled with the FULLNESS of God is still greater; but to be filled with ALL the fullness of God, *pan* (grk 3956) to (grk 3588) *pleerooma* (grk 4138) *tou* (grk 3588) *Theou* (grk 2316), utterly bewilders the sense and confounds the understanding.

Most people, in quoting these words, endeavour to correct or explain the apostle, by adding the word communicable; but this is as idle as it is useless and impertinent. The apostle means what he says,

and would be understood in his own meaning. By the fullness of God, we are to understand all those gifts and graces which he has promised to bestow on man, and which he dispenses to the Church. To be filled with all the fullness of God, is to have the whole soul filled with meekness, gentleness, goodness, love, justice, holiness, mercy, and truth. And as what God fills, neither sin nor Satan can fill: consequently, it implies that the soul shall be emptied of sin, that sin shall neither have dominion over it, nor a being in it. It is impossible for us to understand these words in a lower sense than this. But how much more they imply (for more they do imply), I cannot tell. As there is no end to the merits of Christ, no bounds to the mercy and love of God, no limits to the improvability of the human soul, so there can be no bounds set to the saving influence which God will dispense to the heart of every believer. We may ask, and we shall receive, and our joy shall be full.

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary

Ephesians 3:16

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

[According to]-- i. e., in abundance, consonant to the riches of His glory; not "according to" the narrowness of our hearts <Eph. 1:7; 2:7>. <Col. 1:11>, "strengthened with all might according to His glorious power."

[By]-- Greek, `through His Spirit. '

[In], [eis (grk 1519)]-- `infused into. '

[The inner man] <2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 4:22,24; 1 Pet. 3:4>. Not predicated of unbelievers, whose inward and outward man alike are carnal. But in believers, the "inner (new) man," their true self, the sphere of regeneration <Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10>, stands in contrast to their old man, attached to them as a body of death daily being mortified, not their true self. The spirit [pneuma (grk 4151)] is our highest part, linking us to God, the great Spirit; the soul [psuchee (grk 5590)] is intermediate between the body (with which it is connected by the animal affections) and the spirit (with which it is connected by the [nous (grk 3563)] intellect, thought).

Ephesians 3:17

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

[That]-- so that.

[Dwell], [katoikeesai (grk 2730)]-- abidingly <John 14:16,18,23>. Where the Spirit is, there Christ is.

[By faith]-- Greek, `through faith, ' which opens the door of the heart to Jesus <Rev. 3:26>. It is not enough that He be on the tongue or flit through the brain: the heart is His proper seat-- the seat of the soul [psuchee (grk 5590)] in respect to the affections (Calvin). `You having been rooted and grounded in love' (the state resulting from Christ's dwelling in the heart) (cf. <Eph. 3:19>), is in the Greek connected with this clause. "Rooted" is an image from a tree; "grounded" (Greek, `founded'), from a building (cf. note, <Eph. 2:20-21; Col. 1:23; 2:7>). Contrast <Matt. 13:6,21>. "Love" <Col. 3:14; 1 John 4:7-8>, the first-fruit of the Spirit, flowing from Christ's love realized in the soul, is the basis on which should rest the further comprehension of all the vastness of Christ's love.

Ephesians 3:18

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

[May be able]-- even still further: [exischuseete (grk 1840)] `May be fully able. '

Commentary on Ephesians 3:14-21

[Breadth, and length, and depth, and height]-- namely, the full dimensions of the spiritual temple, answering to "the fullness of God" <Eph. 3:19>, to which the Church, according to its capacity, ought to correspond (cf. <Eph. 4:10,13> as to "the fullness of Christ"). The "breadth" implies Christ's worldwide love, embracing all men; the "length," its extension through all ages <Eph. 3:21>; the "depth," its profound wisdom, which no creature can fathom <Rom. 11:33>; the "height," its being beyond the reach of any foe to deprive us of it <Eph. 4:8> (Bengel). I prefer "the breadth," etc., to refer to the whole mystery of free salvation in Christ for all, Gentile and Jew alike, just spoken of <Eph. 3:3-9>, which he now prays they may comprehend in all its vastness. As subsidiary to this, he adds, "and to know the love of Christ" <Eph. 3:19> to us. Grotius understands depth and height of God's goodness raising us from the lowest depression to the greatest height.

Ephesians 3:19

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

[Passeth]-- surpasseth. The paradox, "to know ... which passeth knowledge," implies that by "know" he does not mean that we can adequately know: all we know is, that His love exceeds far our knowledge of it; and, with even our fresh accessions of knowledge hereafter, will still exceed them, even as God's power exceeds our thoughts <Eph. 3:20>. "Know" experimentally what intellectually is beyond our powers of knowing <1 Cor. 8:2-3>.

[Filled with]-- Greek, `filled even unto all the fullness of God' (the grand goal); i. e., filled, each according to his capacity, with the divine holiness, wisdom, knowledge, and love; even as God is full, and as Christ, who dwells in your hearts, hath `all the fullness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily' <Col. 2:9>.

Ephesians 3:20

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

[Unto him]-- contrasted with ourselves and our needs. Translate, `that is able to do beyond all things exceeding abundantly above what we ask or (even) think. ' Thought takes a wider range than prayers. [Huper (grk 5228), above, occurs thrice as often in Paul's writings as in all the rest of the New Testament, showing the warm exuberance of Paul's spirit.]

[According to the power]-- the indwelling Spirit <Rom. 8:26>. He appeals to their and his experience.

Ephesians 3:21

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Translate, `Unto Him be the glory (i. e., of the gracious dispensation of salvation just spoken of) in the Church (as the theater for its manifestation, <Eph. 3:10>) in Christ Jesus (the only element wherein glory is duly given to God, <Zech. 6:13>) to all the generations of eternal ages'-- literally, `of the age of the ages. ' Eternity, as one grand `age, ' is conceived as consisting of "ages" (these again consisting of `generations') endlessly succeeding one another.