

Praying For Your Potential: New Testament Prayers For Believers

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Introduction

God knows exactly what He is doing. He has an eternal purpose and plan. That purpose, that plan, was hidden in the counsel and foreknowledge of God from times eternal. It is now being revealed and accomplished in His Church.

God's eternal purpose is being carried out in His elect believers. We are "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). God has purposed to build the character of Jesus Christ into believers. Character is forever. God is fitting us for eternal fellowship with Himself; and to have fellowship with Him, our character must be completely compatible with His character. This divine fellowship is the destiny of Christ's disciples. It is God's grand design of the ages, and the elect carry that grand design within them.

God is most serious about the destiny of believers and their preparation for it. So should we. Because it is of supreme importance to God—and to us—He has built into the process the absolute certainty and guarantee of its success. *God's eternal purpose in and for His Church has no possibility of failure.*

Because God has predetermined to build the character of Jesus Christ into believers, it is our responsibility to cooperate with Him purposefully in the process. His purpose must become our purpose. It must be our life objective. Believers are truly "purpose driven."

So then, it is up to each one of us to decide how we are going to come—the easy way or the hard way. Let us all cooperate with the Holy Spirit and save ourselves a lot of unnecessary difficulties!

The process is life-long. It is not achieved in "a few easy steps." It is a permanent discipleship—learning, training—that takes place in a personal, loving, devotional, obedient, stable and ever-deepening relationship with Jesus Christ.

Also, the process does not take place in isolation. It involves all of the "one another" relationships, obligations, and blessings embodied in the Church. It will include mistakes and also divine correction and encouragement. No matter what, if you continue to follow Jesus Christ with an honest heart in faith, *you will not fail!*

What, then, is our potential as believers? What is God doing and desiring to do in us? We find these embodied in the prayers that the Holy Spirit has inscripturated in the New Testament, especially in our Lord's great high-priestly prayer, recorded in The Gospel According to John, Chapter 17, and also in the prayers of the apostle Paul contained in his epistles.

As we shall discover, some of these prayers have common themes. Some emphasize specific objectives. Together they give us a full portrait of our potential in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that these are prayers to God for *Him* to answer and to fulfill in us. This is not a "do-it-yourself" project, a self-help formula to follow in order to achieve our own personal potential. These are objectives that only God can bring to fulfillment in us. Yes, we must cooperate with Him. Our obedience is essential. Nevertheless, "it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:13).

So then, ask yourself: where am I right now in my personal spiritual growth toward full maturity in Christ? As a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, where am I compared to a year ago? five years, ten years, fifty years ago? Have I grown with other believers in the body of Christ, the Church, or am I still stuck in the "nursery"?

Of course, if you are not saved—that is, if you have not been reconciled to God by personal faith in Jesus Christ—you are still spiritually dead. You have not yet been born again. Even if you attend church, you are just as dead spiritually as the furniture and the walls. A mannequin looks well dressed, but it has no life in it. You need eternal life in you, that wonderful gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 6:23).

But if you are spiritually alive, you must grow. Our destiny calls us on! We grow by prayer, by the word of God, by fellowship, by serving. We can grow as fast and as healthy as we choose.

When I was a student at what is now Bethany University in Scotts Valley, California, our pastoral theology professor, Leland R. Keys, said to us, "If you want to grow great saints, feed them great food."

Most of us are familiar with Ephesians 4:11 - 16. "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the

work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."

The apostle Peter gives us some inspired instructions about our spiritual growth. "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby [many manuscripts add "*eis soterian*"—that is, into everything included in salvation]" (1 Peter 2:2). "Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Consider also what Paul wrote about Epaphras, a faithful minister in the church at Colosse: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

The record indicates that during the two years when Paul's ministry centered in Ephesus (Acts 19:10), Epaphras evangelized the cities located in the Lycus Valley (Colosse, Laodicea, Hierapolis), settling down in Colosse.

Some doctrinal issues threatened the church at Colosse. They were serious enough that Epaphras felt the need to make the long journey to Rome, where Paul was imprisoned, to get some apostolic answers. Paul's response was his Epistle To The Colossians, sent to Colosse by Epaphras. The epistle includes the personal reference to Epaphras.

We note particularly the content and purpose of Epaphras's prayer: that the believers "back home" would "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God." This is the essence of what the apostle himself prays for them and for other believers. It also harmonizes with what our Lord Jesus Christ prayed in His high-priestly prayer (John 17).

Earlier, Paul had written to the believers of Galatia, who faced a different threat to their faith. He addresses them as "my little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Galatians 4:19). We become conformed to the character image of Jesus Christ not only by *imitating* Christ, but more vitally by *Him living in us and forming His character in us*.

All of the prayers for believers that are recorded in the New Testament embody God's purpose for believers. They define what God desires to do and is actively working to accomplish in us and for us. We must live for the same purpose, pray for it, cooperate with God in it, and anticipate its fulfillment.

"Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Chapter 1

John 17: Security, Purity, Unity, Destiny

We begin with the most sublime prayer of all: the great high-priestly prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, recorded in The Gospel According To John, Chapter 17.

It is late Thursday or early Friday of the Passover week. Jesus and His disciples had just completed the Passover meal in the upper room. They were walking together at night through the streets of Jerusalem, headed toward the Garden of Gethsemane. On the way Jesus gave them some very important instructions. These are recorded for us in John, Chapters 15 and 16.

Before they crossed the Kidron, Jesus paused to pray His magnificent prayer to the Father on behalf of His disciples and all who would believe on Him in the coming evangelical age.

John 17:1 -10: the beginning of the prayer.

"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may also glorify You, ²as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom

You have sent. ⁴I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. ⁵And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. ⁶I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours; You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. ⁷Now they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You. ⁸For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. ⁹I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. ¹⁰and all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them."

In verse 1 Jesus begins by acknowledging that the hour had come for Him to be offered up to God as the final and all-sufficient sacrifice for human sin. Looking beyond the cross, He asks the Father to glorify His Son that His Son also may glorify Him.

In verse 2 Jesus affirms that the Father has given Him authority over all [human] flesh, so that He (Jesus) should give eternal life to as many as the Father has given to Him. This establishes two facts: (1) that divine election is according to foreknowledge (see Romans 8:29 and 1 Peter 1:2), and (2) that eternal life is granted only in and by Jesus Christ (see Romans 6:23). Apart from Jesus Christ there is no eternal life, no salvation.

In verse 3 Jesus states the definition of eternal life: an experiential knowledge of the Father and the Son in a living, personal relationship. The Father is the only true God. This does not imply that Jesus Christ, the Son, is not "true God." He most certainly is. Jesus is speaking here in His humanity, His voluntary and temporary self-abnegation, not in His essential and unforfeitable deity.

In verse 4 Jesus testifies that He had glorified the Father on the earth and finished the work the Father gave Him to do. Christ's earthly ministry was now complete. The moment had arrived for Him to be offered up as "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

In verse 5, speaking of His full deity, Jesus prays that the Father will glorify Him with His (the Father's) *own self*—full, co-equal, pre-existent deity with the Father—by restoring to Him the glory He had with (*para*) the Father before the world was, that is, from times eternal. The Father answered this prayer when He raised Jesus from the dead, set Him at His own right hand (Ephesians 1:20), and gave Him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9), the name Jesus Christ fully shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity—I AM (see Exodus 3:14, 15; John 8:24, 58).

In verses 6 - 8 Jesus affirms that His disciples are among those whom the Father has given to Him and to whom Jesus has given eternal life. Along with all the elect they already belonged to the Father in His eternal purpose of election. By keeping (believing, obeying) the Father's word they proved that they were chosen by the Father. They also knew that what the Father had given to Christ was indeed from the Father.

Jesus not only manifested the Father's *Name* (person, authority, works) to His elect disciples but also gave them the *words* that the Father gave Him. Because Jesus declared the Father's words by the manifest authority of the Father's Name, the disciples received His words and came to the sure knowledge that Jesus Christ truly came out from the Father and that the Father had sent Him.

In verses 9 and 10 Jesus defines the ones for whom He is praying specifically at that moment. Jesus died and rose again to provide salvation for the whole world (John 3:16). He commanded us to preach the gospel to everyone and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15). Jesus' redeeming sacrifice on the cross is *sufficient* for all; it is *efficient* only for those who truly believe. So Jesus states that *at that moment* He is not praying for the world but specifically and exclusively for those whom the Father gave to Him during His earthly ministry—that is, His immediate disciples. In a moment (verse 20) He will pray also for all who will believe on Him in the future through what will be the disciples' eye-witness and divinely validated testimony. Jesus prays for them because they belong to the Father. The Father gave them to His Son, Jesus Christ. The original disciples of Jesus Christ, along with all who will become and remain His disciples, are Christ's and therefore are the Father's. As Christ is glorified in the original disciples, Christ is glorified also in all of His disciples.

The First Petition: Security. John 17:11 - 16.

"¹¹Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me [some manuscripts read, "keep them in your name which you gave me], that they may be one as We are. ¹²While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept [some manuscripts read, "I kept them in your name which you gave Me"]; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."

Being only hours away from His crucifixion, Jesus has now fulfilled His earthly ministry. He is "out of this world." The preaching, the teaching, the healings (except for Malchus's ear) are all behind Him.

He is on His way back to the Father by way of His crucifixion, His resurrection, His ascension, and His glorification at the Father's right hand.

At the same time Jesus is keenly aware that He is leaving His Father's elect ones back in this world. The world will hate them, tempt them, oppress them, even kill them. While He was in the world, Jesus kept (protected, guarded) them in the Father's name. Now He is concerned about their potential spiritual vulnerability. And so He prays that the Father will continue to keep them by (or in) His name.

God *identified* Himself as I AM (Exodus 3:14). He *revealed* Himself as Jehovah (JHVH, YHWH—Jehovah, Yahweh, or Yahvah), the unpronounceable name of the complete Godhead—the Trinity—in Whom the Second Person is essentially, substantially, and eternally included. God sent the angel Gabriel to earth to announce that the eternal Second Person is to be named Jesus—a name that in a unique sense in this case embodies the very name Jehovah. I AM has always included the Second Person. Jesus Himself made that clear (*e.g.*, John 8:24, 58). The moment that He was begotten of the Father by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary, He became forever the only begotten (uniquely one and only) *Son* of God (as the psalmist stated proleptically in Psalm 2:7).

The voluntary self-abnegation of the Second Person of the eternal Godhead (Trinity) is now over. He took on our humanity, and now as both the glorified Son of God and Son of Man, the Father bestowed on Him in His new hypostatic union (of both God and man) the name that is above every name—Jesus, Jehovah Savior (Philippians 2:9).

Jehovah (Yahweh, Yahvah) is the covenant Name of God that embodies His all-sufficiency through Jesus Christ for all our needs. Proverbs 18:10 assures us, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runs to it and is safe" (NASB).

So Jesus prays that the Father Himself will keep His disciples (and us) through His own Name.

The basis for this request, and also its precedent, has already been laid down in The Scriptures, particularly in The Psalms.

In Psalm 31:19, 20 we have the inspired assurance, "Oh, how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have prepared for those who trust in You in the presence

of the sons of men! You shall hide them in the secret place of Your presence from the plots of man; You shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues."

The entire Ninety-first Psalm is a comprehensive assurance of divine protection to the person who "dwells in the secret place of the Most High."

God's promise to keep us is also the theme of Psalm 121.

The New Testament also is replete with assurances that God will keep believers. It is expressed by three verbs: *tereo*, *phroureo*, *phulasso*.

tereo means "protect." It is the word translated "keep" in John 17:11, 12, and 15. It is translated "preserved" in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (KJV). It is translated "preserved" in Jude, verse 1, "To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ." It is translated "keep" in Christ's promise recorded in Revelation 3:10, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

phroureo means "set a guard." It is translated "kept" in 1 Peter 1:5, "...who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

phulasso also means "guard, keep in protective custody." "But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one" (2 Thessalonians 3:3). "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Timothy 1:12). "[God] is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).

Jesus prayed that the Father will keep us in order that we may be one, just as He and the Father are one (verse 11). So then, *the purpose of our security is our unity*, eternal unity with the Father and the Son, and therefore with one another. It is the unity of love that embodies and expresses all the character qualities of the perfect unity of love that exists between the Father and the Son. The establishing of that divine unity in believers results in our complete and corporate compatibility of character with God

Himself—our eternal fellowship with God in love, holiness, and joy. Jesus asked the Father to keep us so that we will be fully and forever united together in fellowship with Him in His holiness. This is the destiny of the elect.

God has everything invested in the elect. We carry within us the eternal purpose of God, the grand design of the ages. This is why Jesus prayed that the Father will guard and protect His Church, His chosen. We are absolutely sure that the Father will do it.

Judas Iscariot, "the son of perdition," is lost, as The Scriptures predicted. But none whom the Father gave to Christ is lost. Jesus kept them in the Father's name while He was in the world.

Jesus did not pray that God would remove us from this present world but that He would keep us out of the evil. We are not of the world system, even as Christ is not of the world system. We are in it, but not of it.

The Second Petition: Purity. John 17:17 - 19.

"¹⁷Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

God is holy. To have fellowship with a holy God, we also must be holy. God commands us, "Be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15,16). Because total and eternal fellowship with Himself in complete compatibility with His holy character is God's purpose in and for believers, it is essential that we be sanctified wholly, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. To be sanctified means to be separated *from* sin and set apart *to* God for His purpose.

Think of it this way. A man goes to a garage sale and there he finds a dirty, tarnished metal pan. He thinks to himself, "I can use that pan in the garage. I can drain the old crankcase oil into it." So he buys it for a couple quarters and goes home.

Just as he walks into the house, his wife spies the pan and says (with a tone of authority), "I can use that pan in the kitchen!" So she hands him a scouring pad and assigns him the project of making that pan fit for a much higher purpose.

The moment she said "I can use that pan in the kitchen" she *sanctified* it in the sense that she set it apart for a much higher purpose. But to make it fit for that much higher purpose, the crud and all the impurities must be removed. Otherwise, in no way would she allow it into her kitchen. So she assigned to her husband the responsibility to *purify* it, and gave him the means to do so.

And so we read in 1 John 3:2, 3, "Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." The word for purify is *hagnidzei*, decontaminates.

For our sakes Jesus "sanctified" Himself (verse 19). That is, He set Himself apart completely to the will and purpose of the Father to be the sinless sacrifice for us for our salvation. Jesus did not have to purify himself from sin, because He "knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). He always lived in complete, voluntary, self-imposed separation to God and from sin.

What is the effective means that God uses to sanctify us? Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them by Your truth" (verse 17 and also verse 19). The truth—the word of God—is the effective means of sanctifying believers and keeping us holy. The Scriptures are the "detergent" that cleans up our minds and our behavior and keeps them clean. The Scriptures are like a light that shines into our minds and hearts, showing us where we as believers need to apply the "polish" of the word to bring luster to the "dull" and "discolored" spots in our attitudes and behavior. It has been said that the Bible will keep you from sin, and sin will keep you from the Bible.

The Holy Spirit applies the word of God to us exactly where and when we need it. Thus we are sanctified also by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11).

We notice that the apostle Paul prayed in agreement with Christ's prayer: "Now I pray to God that you do no evil" (2 Corinthians 13:7). This is a prayer that God will cause us to see sin for what it is in the light of God's holiness, to see its consequences, and to abhor it and leave it alone.

So God takes the world (its lusts) out of us, fills us with Himself and His holiness, and sends us back into the world (society) to show Himself to the world through us.

The Third Petition: Unity. John 17:20 - 23.

"²⁰I pray not for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as we are one: ²³I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

We read in verse 11 that the purpose of our divine security is our divine unity. This unity is universal among believers. It is timeless and perfect (complete). It transcends differences in historical periods, geography, location, races, cultures, education, socio-economic classes, and political considerations. The prayer is for all believers, everywhere, for all time, including us today and all in the future.

This unity is essential to the success of our witness. For effective witness and evangelism, our unity must be just as the unity between the Father and the Son, that is, we with God and with one another. It is the unity of the Father and the Son on display on earth. It is the convincing evidence that Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, sent from the Father to be the Savior of the world.

Earlier Jesus had said to the disciples, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:5).

This unity is unique. It is beyond human ability to create, duplicate, or fabricate. It transcends all other human relationships and associations. Its closest model is marriage; yet, marriage itself models this divine unity in Christ only when and where the unity of believers in Christ is established and functions in marriage.

This divine unity is a unity of heart, mind, and character. It is a growing, maturing unity. It is the unity of the Spirit that we are commanded to keep "in the bond of peace..." "...till we all come to the unity of the faith..." (Ephesians 4:3 and 13).

How is the Father answering this prayer of our Lord? First, by giving glory to His Son, Jesus of Nazareth. This delegated glory—this wisdom and power by the anointing of the Holy Spirit—enabled Jesus Christ to fulfill His earthly mandate and mission. Then, in turn, Jesus gave believers the glory that He received from the Father by the Holy Spirit.

This delegated authority is *not* the glory that He had with the Father "before the world was" (verse 5). *That* glory is the eternal glory resident only in God Himself, the glory that He will not give to anyone. He said, "I am the LORD [Jehovah], that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

In verse 5 Jesus was asking the Father to restore to Him His pre-existent eternal glory that is rightfully His as a co-equal Person of the Godhead, the Trinity.

In verse 22 Jesus was speaking of the glory that the Father delegated to Him on earth, and that Jesus has given to us. This is the glory that the Holy Spirit demonstrated in power in the life and ministry of Jesus in His incarnation. Jesus gave this glory to the disciples proleptically when He breathed on them after His resurrection and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). He fulfilled it when He ascended to the Father and sent the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Acts 2:1 - 4 was only a few weeks after John 17:22!

The unity of the Spirit is "top priority" with God. Nothing that is of lesser importance must be allowed to break it. Only what would break our fellowship with God should be allowed to break our fellowship with one another. Sin and the rejection of essential truth do that. Jesus said, "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:6). Also, in 2 John 9 we read, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." So then, remaining in the doctrine of Christ is essential to remaining in Christ. We cannot forsake the doctrine of Christ and still have Christ. If we by-pass the truth of Christ, we miss Christ.

It is by the glory that the Father makes us one. The glory is essential to unity. Many attempts have been made to achieve Christian unity by organizational means. These attempts are commendable and usually accomplish much good; however, they fall short of achieving the unity of believers for which Jesus prayed. *United witness does not produce the glory. The glory produces united witness.*

"I in them, and You in Me" (verse 23). Jesus Christ is in us, and the Father is in Jesus Christ. So we are united with the Father in Jesus Christ, *and only in Jesus Christ*. Believers are made perfect (*teteleiomenoi*—perfect passive participle—completed) only in this spiritual unity with the Father and the Son. It is a spiritual and moral unity in love. Love does not separate spirituality and morality. Both are essential to this true unity.

By this unity the world may know: (1) that the Father sent Jesus (John 3:16), and (2) that the Father loves us *just as He loves Jesus*.

The Fourth Petition: Destiny. John 17:24 - 26.

"²⁴Father, I desire that they also whom you gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. ²⁶And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

This is the culmination of Christ's prayer. It expresses the ultimate purpose of the entire prayer. It embodies our Lord's deepest desire. It reveals the destiny of the elect.

Jesus asks that the elect may behold His glory, His pre-existent glory that the Father has now restored to Him. He is now glorified together with the Father, with the glory that He had with the Father before the world began (verse 5). In our present mortal state, we cannot look on that glory. God said to Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live" (Exodus 33:20). The disciples had seen His incarnate glory. In John 1:14 the apostle writes, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Now we see in our hearts "the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). Then, with glorified bodies and pure hearts, the redeemed shall see God (Matthew 5:8). As the angels do now, we shall behold the face of the Father (Matthew 18:10). We shall see His face, and His name shall be on our foreheads (Revelation 22:4). Face to face we shall see Him in all of His glory—the Father and Jesus Christ glorified together.

Jesus asks the Father that the deepest and most intimate relationship that exists between Himself and the ones whom the Father has given Him be experienced by them forever in His very presence, in the fullness of the love that the Father has for Him from all eternity and that the Father has

also for them. In the intimacy of this unity in love, believers will behold forever the full revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Thus the destiny of believers is defined as perfect, complete, total oneness—intimacy in unity—with Jesus Christ in the divine love that exists between the Father and the Son, and that exists also in them. O the indescribable blessedness that awaits the redeemed!

In verse 25 Jesus again affirms that the world does not know the Father. Only the Son knows the Father, and those to whom the Son will reveal Him (Luke 10:22). Jesus declared the Father's name (Person, character, works) to the disciples. The Father's name has been declared by Jesus Christ. By that revelation we come to know the Father and to receive into ourselves the same love that the Father has for the Son. This is the eternal destiny of all who will believe on Him.

Chapter 2

2 Thessalonians 1:11, 12: Glorified According To Grace

"¹¹Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, ¹²that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

This passage begins with "therefore" [*eis ho*]*—*that is, "to which end." It refers to the consummation of God's purpose in believers, its ultimate result and grand finale, as stated in verse 10 (that Christ be glorified in His saints when He comes).

Jesus Christ will return. When He comes, He will be glorified in His saints and admired (*thaumasthenai*=wondered at) among all believers. This is our calling and our destiny.

The purpose of the prayer is embodied in the prayer itself. It is a prayer that God will prepare believers for their eternal glorification in Christ, and also His glorification in them, by qualifying them for that high calling. It is a prayer for our ultimate and eternal glorification with Christ.

Jesus Christ will be glorified in believers in the Day of the Lord because the Holy Spirit has been working (producing) in them the character qualities of Christ.

According to verses 4 and 5, that high calling is our calling to the kingdom of God. The Thessalonian believers were enduring persecution and tribulation for the sake of the kingdom of God. Throughout their suffering for the kingdom they remained steadfast and faithful, so much so that Paul held them up before the other churches as an example of patience (endurance) and faith during times of trouble. At the same time he also mentions the importance of being "worthy of the kingdom of God" for which they were suffering.

This purpose—this calling—is of such utmost importance that it motivated Paul, Silas and Timothy to pray *always*—constantly, ever, at all times—for the believers. It is a prayer that God would count them worthy of the calling (worthy: *axiosei*, from *axioō*=fit, qualified by their obedient response to God's grace in Christ). This is an echo of verse 5, "that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God." In verse 5 the word is *kataxióthenai*, from *kataxióō*=entirely fit, fully qualified).

As the elect, we are the people of destiny. Our high calling motivates us, impels us forward, calls us onward and upward. We have the highest of all objectives, the highest of all obligations, the most glorious future imaginable.

The calling is no light matter. It is not a religious hobby, a spiritual diversion from the stresses of life, a compartmentalized segment of our life. It is our primary vocation, our life, and the *whole* of our life that infuses all the components of our life with reality, meaning and purpose.

Live according to the calling! In God's sight live in a way that is worthy of the calling, so that *God* "may count you worthy of the calling." Live for God's highest approval in all things.

We are "the called of Jesus Christ... called to be saints" (Romans 1:6, 7).

God saved us and called us with a holy calling (2 Timothy 1:9). A holy life is the only kind of life that the calling deserves and demands. "As He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct" (1 Peter 1:15).

We are called to glory and virtue (2 Peter 1:3). The calling to glory is likewise a calling to virtue. God does not will the end, the result (eternal glory), apart from the necessary means and conditions (holiness and virtue). This is a calling to live in eternal and intimate fellowship with God Himself. Only the pure in heart will see (personally experience) God (Matthew 5:8).

When we come to Paul's first prayer in his Epistle to the Ephesians, our attention will be drawn again to "the hope of His calling" (Ephesians 1:18).

The call has a *beginning*, a *process*, and a *final result*. Jesus said that many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 24:14). That is why we are urged to make both our calling and our election sure (2 Peter 1:10). Accordingly, Paul declares, "I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14).

Paul and his co-workers (Silas and Timothy) prayed that God will complete the process in the believers by fulfilling all the good pleasure (purpose, God's and ours) of His goodness (or "of goodness"). God's goodness toward us and working in us produces its intended result in us and fills us with all goodness. The mature church in Rome was an example of this. At a later date Paul wrote to them and affirmed that they were "full of goodness" (Romans 15:14). May that become so of every true church, every true believer in Jesus Christ!

God has called us and He Himself will complete the process in us. Keep in mind that this is a prayer to God, asking Him to accomplish it. In his First Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul expressed the divine purpose: "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23). He goes on in verse 24 to assure them and all elect believers, "faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it." It is God who works in us both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13).

Here we see again that God purposes and ordains both the end (our destiny) and the means and conditions (sanctification, holiness). The means are indispensable to the end. God is faithful to establish in us the means and conditions that make us worthy (fit, qualified for) the end.

So then, no matter what happens in the life of an elect believer, "we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

God puts His purpose into our hearts and so it becomes our purpose. We develop right desires; we desire what God desires. God delights in holiness, and so do we. God delights in all the character qualities of Jesus Christ, and so do we. God predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:29, 30). The more we know Jesus, the more we want to be like Him in heart, word, and deed.

"We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6). Holy heart ambition motivates us to full character development, demonstrated in behavioral transformation.

Paul's prayer goes on to ask that God will not only fulfill the good pleasure of goodness (His and ours), but also fulfill with power their work of faith.

In his first Epistle to the Thessalonians Paul stated that he, Silas and Timothy remembered "without ceasing" their "work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ " (1 Thessalonians 1:3). Now their prayer is that God will strengthen their God-given holy desires, fulfill them, and translate them into holy and dynamic action and living.

It is *all* in *power*. It is not in our power, but in His. There is nothing weak about our divine resources!

So, the great aim of all this, the highest request of the prayer, is that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and we in Him. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ stands for His nature, His character, and His exalted position. We are called by His name; we are named by His name; we are baptized in His name; His name is upon us; we carry the honor of His name.

We are glorified in His name. He alone is our glory; all that He is is to be glorified in us. This is a two-fold glorification. As Christ is glorified in us, we become glorified in Him. This is the product of our dynamic relationship in and with Him, and He in and with us.

We remember that in John 17:10 Jesus said to the Father concerning His disciples, "I am glorified in them." He also said, "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them" (verse 22). This is an imparted, reflected glory that is now the possession of Christ's true disciples.

Paul, Silas and Timothy pray that we will be glorified in Christ and He in us "by the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." We have nothing in ourselves of which to glory. God's grace alone is the source and the means of our glorification. Everything that makes us glorious as believers comes from "our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" by grace.

The greater the grace, the greater the glory. Acts 4:33 records that "great grace was upon them all." We all need "great grace"—an awakening, a clear view of Christ and of spiritual reality, of our purpose and destiny—*so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us and we in Him.*

With all this set before us, we must not neglect the necessary means of grace, e.g.: prayer and worship, the Bible, "the assembling of ourselves together."

God has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9). Still, many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 24:14). Whether or not we are among the chosen is known by how we respond to the call.

If you are still in spiritual darkness, God is calling you now to step out of your darkness and into His light. Stay in the light; walk and live in the light—forever.

Chapter 3

Philippians 1:1 - 11: Educated Love

"¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons: ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus

Christ. ³I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; ⁷just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. ⁸For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. ⁹And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, ¹¹being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God."

Love is a decision, a commitment of the heart (will). The mind perceives and recognizes what is real, true, valuable. It affirms that what is real, true, valuable in itself ought to be chosen because it is real, true, valuable. When the heart (will) chooses what is real, true, valuable, *that is love*. It is loving God supremely and others as oneself, putting God first and others equal to oneself.

If the heart (will) chooses otherwise, it does so for only one reason: selfishness. The mind affirms the moral obligation to choose what is real, true, valuable; but instead it chooses desire over reason and against reason. It sacrifices what is real, true, valuable to the gratification of the ruling desires. This is unreasonable; it is immoral; *it is sin*.

As the realization of the intrinsic value of what the will rejects increases, the guilt of rejecting it also increases. The will is set on a course that, if not checked and/or changed, has the inherent *potential* of sacrificing everything to one's personal gratification and would do so if only sufficient desire, ability, and opportunity were present. This is the true definition of total moral depravity, and it began at the initial commitment of the heart (will) to put self and the gratification of self first.

Love likewise grows. As the realization of the intrinsic value of what the heart (will) chooses increases, the virtue of choosing it also increases. The heart is set on a course that, if continued, has the inherent *potential* of securing an immeasurable amount of good, happiness and well-being if only sufficient desire, ability, and opportunity were present. This is total moral integrity, and it began at the initial commitment of the heart (will) to put God first and others equal to oneself.

So then, love grows as knowledge and discernment increase. Love abounds increasingly in increasing knowledge and *all* discernment. Biblical knowledge and Holy Spirit enlightenment together increase the flow of love continuously and direct it intelligently.

So the prayer is that believers' love may flow more and more. God has begun a good work in us, and that work will continue until it is completed "at the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (verse 6).

Romans 5:5 says that "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." Now, this does not mean that God took some literal "lid" off our hearts and poured in some mystical "substance" called "love." Of course not. It means that God turned our heart (will) to Himself and opened our minds and hearts to the truth. As we received the truth into our minds and hearts, heart-love for God and others displaced and replaced all selfishness. It was an act of our will in response to God's gracious persuasive agency. The result was complete moral and spiritual transformation.

Our love grows and flows as our knowledge of the breadth, length, depth and height of God's love in Christ grows (Ephesians 3:17 – 19). We will explore this in detail in Chapter 6.

Love is the most powerful force—moral motivation—in heaven and on earth. It flows and overflows. Nevertheless, the more love flows and overflows, the greater is the possibility of it being misdirected, dissipated and wasted. *Love must be educated and directed by knowledge and discernment.* It must be nourished and directed by the truth. Truth gives love content, insight and direction.

Love is not merely a feeling; nevertheless, love generates deep and powerful feelings. These deep and powerful "love-feelings" are important. They "lubricate" love and make its actions pleasant. Still, *our feelings have no brains.* Because they do not think, we have to do their thinking for them. Love can be stupid. *Biblically informed reason and Holy Spirit insight keep love from doing foolish things.*

We must avoid investing our love and the energies and resources it generates on objects that do not merit our love. We must not love what is unworthy of our love. We must be careful what and whom we fall in love with. "Puppy love" might seem real to the "puppy," but it can lead to "a dog's life."

We must also avoid the mistake of loving the right things but in the wrong way. Peter's love for Jesus moved him to take his Master aside and rebuke Him, even forbidding Him to be crucified; nevertheless, it was a mistaken and misdirected love. Jesus had to reprove Peter for expressing his love inappropriately (Matthew 16:21 - 23).

Love well. Love wisely.

Increased love should result in increased knowledge. What and whom we love we want to know more about, and we will also seek to know more about. Love is the motivation for greater true knowledge.

"All discernment" (verse 9). Insight, perception, sense, good judgment. Perceive intuitively what is good and right. Recognize and recoil from what is harmful and wrong. Even though we cannot know everything, there are some things that we should and must know and know correctly.

"That you may approve the things that are excellent" (verse 10). This means to apply biblical criteria to test and approve things that are excellent. "Excellent" means what is superior, what surpasses lesser things in value, what really matters, what is the best.

In Romans 2:18 the apostle Paul addresses the Jew: "[you] know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law." The point here is that the Jews knew but refused to obey. They had knowledge without love (1 Corinthians 13:2).

Love instructed by knowledge has a sense of what is pure, holy, proper, suitable, beneficial. It sees through error; it sees the reality beyond the mere impression; it discriminates between good and evil and also between the worthy and the unworthy; it accepts the real and rejects the false; it holds fast to the real and lets go of the illusory; as it were, it knows gold from iron pyrites; it recognizes what is excellent; it passes by some things that are good and goes instead for what is best.

Real values do exist. They are not merely subjective "values," things that we *think* are valuable and therefore become valuable to us personally or collectively. They are real in fact and therefore are objectively valuable in themselves. These real, objective values form absolutes that place on us a moral obligation to choose them for their own sake, that is, for their own intrinsic value. Our intelligence affirms to us that these real, objective values are to be our priorities by their very existence. We are obligated to choose that these come first in our lives.

The apostle Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 3:8 - 10, "But indeed I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death."

"Sincere and without offense till the day of Christ" (verse 10). "Sincere" means pure, transparent before the light of truth—God's "x-ray." It focuses on what we are on the inside, our integrity, our moral and ethical wholeness. "Without offense" focuses on what we are outwardly, blameless in our conduct and relationships.

"Until the day of Christ"—with a view to and in preparation for the day of Christ, continuing in this course of life until He comes. Inward purity and integrity results in outward blamelessness as we remain steadfast in faith and love until the return of Christ. *There will be a test.*

"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness" (verse 11). This has to do with holy living and good works. *Love plus knowledge equals character*, and character produces good behavior and good works.

God is not interested in "leaves." He is after the fruit of righteousness in us, and He is anticipating a bumper crop!

The fruit of righteousness in believers is through Jesus Christ. We do not become spiritually productive on our own. It is through a living relationship—connection—with Jesus Christ; otherwise, it is merely self-righteousness.

Jesus taught this very clearly. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:4, 5).

It is all to the glory and praise of God. To glorify God is humanity's highest purpose, duty and privilege in life and living. It is the believer's ultimate and high motive. It is what we were created for. It is what we were chosen for. It is what we are saved for. It is what we are living for. It is what God is preparing us for eternally.

We must keep in mind that all of this is an inspired prayer, placed in The Scriptures by the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul. As do also the other prayers in the New Testament, it embodies God's purpose for and in His elect believers. We are to live with that purpose in mind. It is our destiny. It is a prayer that God Himself will produce these understandings and virtues in believers. It is a prayer for each

and all of us. God has chosen to bring us into cooperation with Himself in bringing about His sovereign purpose in the Church. He has provided prayer as a major means of accomplishing this. We must not neglect the vital function of prayer. Jesus prayed for us while He was here in the days of His flesh, and He continues to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). Paul prayed constantly and earnestly for the Church. Epaphras prayed faithfully and fervently for the believers at Colosse (Colossians 4:12).

The obligation to pray now rests on us. The prayers recorded in The Scriptures are precise and powerful. They provide a pattern for us in our praying. Pray God's word back to Him in faith and see what happens!

Chapter 4

Colossians 1:1 - 12: Filled With Knowledge For A Worthy Walk

"¹Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; ⁵because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; ⁷as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that you may have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."

Paul and Timothy begin this epistle by giving thanks to God for the believers and praying for them faithfully since the day they heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and their love toward all believers, with a view to their future hope in heaven. Here we find again the three constant virtues listed in 1 Corinthians 13:13—faith, hope, love.

Beginning in verse nine and continuing through verse twelve we have the substance of Paul's and Timothy's prayer. It is composed of two main requests: (1) that the believers be filled with the knowledge of God's will, and (2) that believers walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. The second request is amplified in four participles. The first three are present passive participles: (1) being fruitful,

karpophorountes, (2) increasing, *auxanomenoi*, (3) being strengthened, *dunamoumenoi*. The fourth is a present active participle: giving thanks, *eucharistountes*.

God desires that all believers "be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The prayer in Philippians, Chapter 1 emphasizes the necessity that love be educated by the truth. "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all discernment" (Philippians 1:9). Here in Colossians the prayer includes the necessity that our faith also be educated by the truth.

Paul and Timothy heard of their faith and love (verse 4). Since the day they heard that, they did not stop praying for them that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in *both* their faith and their love.

Love can be foolish. Faith can be blind. We have all seen the sad and even tragic results of foolish love and blind faith. So, just as love must be educated and directed by knowledge, so also faith must be educated and directed. Both must be informed, enlightened, directed and regulated by biblical knowledge and spiritual insight.

Knowledge is having the information; understanding is knowing what the information means; wisdom is knowing what to do with the information.

We are to be *filled* with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This is not a side interest, "one of the things we're involved in," a hobby. Rather, it is the supreme object and highest quest of the soul. It is about the great purpose of God in us and for us both now and forever.

The knowledge of God's will is informational; it is experiential; it is practical. *Get full of it*. Hear, study, learn the word of God, all the while keeping in mind that this is a prayer that *God* will accomplish this in us as we pursue diligently the means of grace.

The prayer is that we will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in *all* wisdom and spiritual understanding (*sunesis*—"putting things together"). It is to be complete and balanced. We must have more than an educated intellect; we must also have an honest heart and an enlightened conscience.

Spiritual knowledge motivates us to desire practical knowledge. When Jesus Christ arrested Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus, the future Paul the apostle asked immediately, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

What is our purpose? To please God fully (verse 10). Each step of our daily "walk" is taken with that high purpose uppermost in our heart and mind. Being filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding gives us the "smarts" to know how to live worthy of Him, that is, to make the choices that He deserves from us and to carry them out in daily practice in all we think, say and do in a way that He deserves.

Most modern versions read "live" for "walk." That is good so far as it goes. However, the word is "walk." "Live" has to do with one's general direction and course of life. "Walk" has to do with where we "put our feet," that is, the practical details of living, the way we order our thoughts, words and actions. It is conducting ourselves day-by-day and moment-by-moment in wisdom and understanding so as to please God in everything. It is a top-quality life for a supremely worthy Person.

Faith and love plus knowledge and understanding result in character expressed in conduct.

Conduct must come out of character, not merely out of habit. If it does come out of character, it will become a habit. Any momentary lapse in conduct will be contrary to character, and character will correct it by God's grace. The contrast between Judas Iscariot and Peter is an example. Judas betrayed Jesus and perished because he acted according to his character. Peter failed miserably, even denying his Lord and cursing and swearing. Jesus restored Peter because Peter acted contrary to his character.

Knowledge must not be separated from conduct. Knowledge is not for curiosity, speculation, display, or argument. Knowledge is for *worthy walking*.

Enoch "walked with God" (Genesis 5:22).

God commanded Abraham, "Walk before me and be perfect" (Genesis 17:1).

"No good thing will He withhold from them who walk uprightly" (Psalm 84:11).

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

The apostle Paul wrote prolifically on the believer's walk. Here are many of his inspired words on the subject.

"Therefore we are buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4).

"Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in licentiousness and lewdness, not in strife and envy" (Romans 13:13).

"We walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7).

"Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Galatians 5:16). He went on to write (verse 25), "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk [march] in the Spirit." The believer's walk is a disciplined walk with a consistent "cadence."

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1).

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind" (Ephesians 4:17).

"Walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us,..." (Ephesians 5:2).

"You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8).

"See then that you walk circumspectly [accurately, precisely, carefully], not as fools but as wise" (Ephesians 5:15).

"To the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind. Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3:16, 17).

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus our Lord, so walk in Him" (Colossians 2:6).

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time" (Colossians 4:5).

"Have a walk worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (1 Thessalonians 2:12).

"We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God" (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

"We command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly, and not according to the tradition which he received from us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6). "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies" (Verse 11).

The apostle John also wrote in his epistles about the believer's walk.

"If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6, 7).

"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

"I rejoiced greatly that I have found some of your children walking in truth, as we received commandment from the Father" (2 John 4).

"I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (3 John 3, 4).

We remember Paul's prayer here in Colossians 1:10 that we "have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him." Pleasing the Lord. *That* is what every true Christian is aiming at. *That* is the ultimate reference point that guides us in our daily walk.

The prophet Isaiah said, "Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Sometimes we run; once in a while we fly; however, most of the time we *walk*. The Christian life is essentially a daily *walk*.

This takes us to the four participles in Colossians 1:10 - 12. The first three are present passive coordinate participles and the fourth one is a present active participle. These are the characteristics of those who "have a walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him."

The first participle is "being fruitful in every good work" (verse 10). This refers to our productive conduct and our works. The believer's walk is a *fruitful walk*.

This reminds us of Philippians 1:11, "being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ." It also reminds us of what our Lord said to the disciples just before His crucifixion:

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:1 - 8).

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you (John 15:16).

The second participle is "increasing in the knowledge of God" (also in verse 10). This means increasing in the knowledge of God Himself. The believer's walk is an *instructed* walk. The knowledge of God and the knowledge of His will increase together.

The third participle is "strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power" (verse 11). The believer's walk is an *empowered* walk. We are to be "empowered with all might and power according to His glorious might and power." It is the glory of who God *is* and where and how His power is working and on display. His power is the source of our power as believers.

This is the power of the Holy Spirit. After His resurrection and just before His ascension to Heaven, Jesus said to the disciples, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The result of this empowering is "all patience and longsuffering [endurance and steadfastness]" (verse 11). We receive all we need daily throughout the entire course of our pilgrimage here on earth.

Patience (*hupomene*) is staying power, the power to bear up under trials and adversity. Longsuffering (*makrothumia*) is self-restraint under provocation; refusing to retaliate; being gentle and gracious when mistreated.

The prepositional phrase, "with joy," is in what is called the amphibolous position grammatically. That is, it can go either with "patience and longsuffering" (verse 10), or with "giving thanks" (verse 11). Either makes good sense and both are true. "The joy of the LORD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

The fourth participle is "giving thanks to the Father" (verse 12). The believer's walk is a *worshipful, thankful, praise-filled* walk. Why? Because the Father has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (verse 12).

He did it! How? We find the answer in verses 13 and 14. The Father: (1) delivered us from the power of darkness; (2) translated (transferred) us into the kingdom of the Son of His love; (3) redeemed us by the blood of Jesus Christ; (4) forgave our sins. He did this all at once—in us and for us—in the great transformation that took place at the moment of our salvation.

So, where are you? Are you still under the dominion of darkness? or have you been transferred out of darkness into the blessed kingdom of God's beloved Son? We cannot be in both and under the rule of both at the same time.

Please ask yourself, "How am I walking? Am I walking in the light or in darkness?"

Each one of us is preparing for one of two places. What we are to be we are becoming. What kind of future are you preparing yourself for? Has the Father qualified you to share in "the inheritance of the saints in light"? Have you repented of your sins and received forgiveness by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ? If so, rejoice. If not, this is your first priority. Do it right now. The Father is drawing you. Christ is waiting for you.

Chapter 5

Ephesians 1:15 - 23: His Calling, His Inheritance, His Power

"¹⁵Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, ¹⁶do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: ¹⁷that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, ¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power ²⁰which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. ²²And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

To prepare ourselves to explore this inspired prayer, to attempt to grasp its depth and to feel its power, we must give our full attention to the magnificent grandeur of the revelation of God's sovereign purpose as it is displayed before us in the preceding passage (verses 3 - 14).

After his salutation (verses 1 and 2), Paul breaks out in an inspired praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for the spiritual blessings that He has fully bestowed on us in heavenly places in Christ, including choosing us before the foundation of the world, predestining us to eternal glory and lavishing on us abundant grace in Christ. The passage flows into a revelation of the mystery of God's will in us and for us. We heard; we believed; we are redeemed; we were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.

This is not "pie in the sky when you die." It is "grace for the race that you face." Believers in Jesus Christ experience "heavenly life for earthly living" as we keep our eternal destiny clearly in view.

Notice how often we find the word "in" throughout this passage: "in Christ ...in Him ...in the Beloved ...in Whom ...in Himself." The emphasis is on our relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Everything is contained in this divine relationship, functions in it, flows from it—now and forever.

"Wherefore"—*dia touto*—"For this reason" (verse 15). This refers to the cause and purpose of the following prayer. In a sense it tells us what the prayer is all about. It is about "all of the above" (verses 3 - 14). The prayer itself is that God will give us a full and precise knowledge of His grand design for believers and the abundant blessings we have in Christ so that we will order our thoughts and lives accordingly.

Paul heard of their "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love for all the saints." Faith and love are essential to salvation. We are saved by grace through faith (2:5, 8). Love rules the heart and life of every person who is truly saved by grace through faith. Faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9). Faith works by love (Galatians 5:6). Faith overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). Faith is the essential saving act; love is the essential result.

Verse 16. Paul assures them that he makes mention of them in his prayers as he unceasingly gives thanks for them. Paul had a long "prayer list" of many churches and individuals. He depended on God entirely for the spiritual well-being of the believers, and his love for Christ and His church drove him to his knees in intercession for them. In this Paul is an example for all ministers and all other believers.

Verse 17. Paul appeals to "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory." Our Lord Jesus Christ is co-eternal and co-equal with the Father; yet, as the Mediator in the eternal Trinity, He occupies a subordinate *administrative* position, especially now because of His incarnation and His eternal identification with our humanity. "The head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Nevertheless, subordination does not mean inferiority of being. Thus, in this regard it is proper to refer to the Father as "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus Himself so refers to the Father even in His exaltation and His restoration to His pre-incarnate glory. In His full glorification Jesus Christ refers to the Father four times as "my God" (Revelation 3:12).

So then, the Father is "the Father of glory," *to* Whom all glory ultimately belongs (through Jesus Christ) and *from* Whom the glory of the Church is derived (through Jesus Christ).

The apostle prays that the Father may give the believers "the spirit [literally, a spirit] of wisdom and revelation" in the knowledge of Christ—that is, that our human spirit would be illuminated by the Holy Spirit in the precise and full knowledge of Christ. This is what Jesus promised immediately prior to His crucifixion and glorification. "When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you" (John 16:13, 14).

Wisdom: general and broad spiritual and practical illumination regarding Christ.

Revelation: deep comprehension of Christ in His many specific and intimate relationships to believers.

Knowledge: *epignosei*—precise and full knowledge. We find this word again in Ephesians 4:13, "till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God,..."

We are reminded of Colossians 2:3, where it is stated that in Jesus Christ "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

We find the word again in 2 Peter 1:1 - 8 (see verses 2, 3, and 8). Peter uses the word again in the last verse of his second epistle. "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Paul continues (in verses 18 and 19) to state the purpose of his request that the Father would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of Christ. It is that, the eyes of our understanding [literally, hearts] being thus enlightened, we may know fully three things: (1) the hope of His calling; (2) the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints; and (3) the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. This three-fold knowledge is the object of the prayer and the result of the enlightening of our hearts. This enlightenment is more than mental clarity. It is also spiritual and moral perception.

First, know the hope of God's calling. In the Bible, "hope" is the anticipated blessed future that is absolutely certain. It is "the hope laid up for you in heaven" (Colossians 1:5). We are to get a firm grip on our hope, because it is the anchor of our soul (Hebrews 6:18, 19).

God calls us to our hope, our destiny in Christ. This destiny to which we are called is our supreme purpose and therefore our highest priority and greatest motivation. Our destiny in Christ is our reason for being. It is our ultimate focal point in everything we are and do. It is imperative that we know it and fully understand its practical implications for us in our daily living.

The Holy Spirit is working diligently and faithfully to keep our minds clear, our values correct and our priorities straight. He keeps focusing our minds and hearts on Christ and eternal realities. *We can go through anything in this world if we keep focused on our hope, our destiny in Christ.*

Second, know the glory of the riches of His inheritance in the saints. Think of what God has invested in His elect. It cost God everything in order to save us from total moral depravity to full

righteousness and entire sanctification, from ruin to redemption, from death to life, from certain hell to certain heaven.

God has invested all the riches of His grace in His Church, His "called out" ones. God formed the earth for our habitation. He unfolded His plan through the patriarchs and through Israel. He gave us His prophets and His word. He allowed human disobedience and all the evils it would bring, knowing that He would bring about good in spite of it. He sent His *monogenes*—His only Son—to be the Light of the world and to suffer and die to make our redemption morally possible. He raised Him from the dead for our justification. He sent the Holy Spirit to strive with sinners and suffer their abuse in order to bring us to Jesus Christ and to guide us into all truth (because all truth is in Christ). He invests the resources of His Spirit-anointed Church to spread the gospel and to advance His kingdom on earth. Oh the glory—the full grandeur—of what God has invested in His elect!

The Church is precious. It is glorious. It is victorious. We are God's heritage in Christ. We belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God. Christ has inherited us for the glory of the Father. The Father has fully glorified Jesus Christ and has given us to Him. As a result, we are glorified in Christ—not with the glory that He had with the Father before the world was (John 17:5), but with the delegated glory that the Father gave Him and that He in turn has given us (John 17:22).

Jesus Christ is the "heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). Christ fully shares His inheritance with His elect. We are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:17). Except for that which belongs exclusively to Jesus Christ in His deity, *everything that belongs to Jesus belongs to us.*

Third, know the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. Think about the divine power (*dunamis*) that is now working "toward us" (*eis hemas*—to us, into us, in us, on our behalf). It is the power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, broke open His tomb, and presented Him to His disciples in His glorified body. In Jesus Christ that divine power once and for all conquered man's ancient and last enemy, death itself.

This divine power not only raised Jesus Christ from the dead, but also glorified Him and exalted Him to the highest position in the universe and above the universe—the right hand of God Almighty—with universal authority. God's own full divine power has put all things under the feet of Jesus Christ. God's power gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, *the fullness of Him who fills all in all*. That appositional phrase is a straightforward declaration that the Church is the fullness of Jesus Christ on earth: the fullness of His glory, the fullness of His power, the fullness of His character.

This divine resurrecting and elevating power is now directed toward believers and working on our behalf. All the resources of heaven are now directed toward believers to lift us up, establish us, sustain our faith, and make us more than conquerors in all of life.

God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). So, no matter what our present earthly situation might be, we view it objectively from that vantage point. We are not "under the circumstances," but above them—*far* above them. If things are "getting you down," see yourself seated with Christ, looking down on your situation and viewing it as He does. You are more than a conqueror through Him. You can do all things through Christ, who strengthens you (Philippians 4:13).

If you are still "dead in trespasses and sins," without God and without hope in the world, get up and get out of that spiritual "coffin" you are lying in. Jesus Christ is speaking the words of life to you. Surrender everything that you may gain everything. Salvation is the gift of God. It is yours now by grace through faith. Believe and you shall receive.

Chapter 6

Ephesians 3:14 - 21: Strengthened, Indwelt, Knowing, Filled

"¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. ²⁰Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Following his first prayer in this epistle, Paul continued to glory in God's eternal purpose in the church. The believers, mostly gentiles, had been "dead in trespasses and sins," as is true of all before coming to Christ. But God, in His rich mercy and great love toward us, brought us to life by the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead; and, together with Christ, raised us up and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that forever He will fully display "the exceeding riches of His grace" before the entire universe in all the kindness that He has shown us in Christ Jesus (2:4 - 7).

This great salvation is by grace through faith, and that salvation is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God, not of our works. That excludes all human boasting. The resulting moral character and productive lifestyle of the elect are the result of the supreme creative genius of the Master Craftsman, Who purposed and decreed from times eternal to bring about that holy character and conduct in the church, the masterpiece of His grace (2:8 - 10).

Paul then speaks specifically to gentile believers. He reminds them that they were outside the covenant promises and hope that God gave to Israel. Being gentiles, they followed the common course of self-gratification. By their cultural, moral and spiritual nature they were "the children of wrath (verse 3). As a result, before they came to Christ they had no hope and were without God in the world (2:11, 12).

"But now" (in complete contrast) they are no longer "far off" but brought near by the blood of Christ. He is our peace—not only peacemaker but the peace Himself. He has broken down the wall that separated them from Israel. By fulfilling all the laws that were types that pointed forward to Him, Christ abolished them in His flesh on the cross. What was intended to remind Israel that they were a separate, holy people had become a system of exclusiveness. Israel's protective "wall" became the Gentiles' barrier. The message of peace through reconciliation by Jesus Christ is now being proclaimed. Because both Jews and Gentiles now "have access by one Spirit to the Father," gentile believers are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints and are full members of the household of God (2:13 - 19).

This is the result of our "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. All believers in Christ are now being built up together into a holy temple in the Lord. God is the Masterbuilder of His temple; we are His workmanship (verse 10). God is fitting us together according to the Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, to be a habitation of God through the Spirit. Christ is the ultimate reference point; the entire church must "square" with Him (2:20 - 22).

Then Paul states, "For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles..." (3:1). But he does not go on and finish the sentence. Instead he breaks out, not into an inspired, spontaneous praise to God as he did previously (1:3), but into an inspired, spontaneous expression of gratitude that God had chosen to reveal to him, "less than the least of all saints," the divine mystery (God's hidden masterplan of the ages) "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ" (3:2 - 12).

This rich passage glories in the church as God's demonstration to man and also to "the principalities and powers in heavenly places" His manifold (much varied) wisdom in carrying out His "eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Up until the revelation of God's purpose in the church, all that God seemed to be doing with humanity appeared to be failing—the fall, the flood, Israel's backslidings, failures and defeats. What is happening? What is God doing?

Then finally, the church! At last, it all became clear. Now "the principalities and powers in the heavenlies" know the eternal purpose of God, and it was purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. The church is not an afterthought, a "plan B" in case Israel failed. The church—all who are reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ—is God's "plan A," and it has been so from times eternal. The church is the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose both in creation and in redemption.

So Paul tells the believers, "Therefore I ask you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory" (verse 13). Paul does not want them to feel sorry for him or to give up because of what he is going through for them. It is their glory.

"For this reason..." (3:14)—God's purpose in the church. Now that Paul has laid out the purpose of his prayer for them (the divine mystery of the church, now revealed to him), the apostle picks up from where he left off in verse one. After repeating his beginning phrase, "for which reason," the apostle goes on to tell them what he is asking God to accomplish in them because of its vital importance in fulfilling God's purpose for them.

As with all these prayers for believers, this prayer is for all believers in all ages—you and me—because it is essential that all believers know, understand, and live according to the divine purpose for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

As in his first prayer in this epistle, Paul addresses this prayer to the Father. He does this because what he asks in both prayers comes directly from the Father out of His own eternal purpose, "which He purposed in Himself" (1:9). The Father revealed it *through* Jesus Christ, *in* the church, and now Paul is asking Him to reveal it *to* the church.

"The whole family in heaven and earth" (verse 15) includes all believers in heaven and on earth. Believers from all ages are in a great "family migration" from earth to heaven. We "are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (2:19). John saw the final gathering in Revelation 5:8 - 10 and 7:9, 10. It is "a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues."

Paul prays that God will grant his request for the church "according to the riches of His glory (verse 16). The Father is "the Father of glory" (1:17). He is the source of all the glory and the full measure of its abundance. The apostle asks the Father to grant his request as a free gift of grace to His precious and exalted church.

The apostle asks the Father to accomplish four (some say five) specific works of grace in His church.

The first petition is that the believers "be strengthened with might (power) through His Spirit in the inner man." So the focus of the first petition is on the "inner man," that is, the soul. This is tied directly to the psalmist's testimony, "In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul" (Psalm 138:3).

The "inner man" is where the strength of God is needed the most. Paul testified, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). This continuously renewing inner strength equalizes and overcomes the outside pressure of the world, the flesh, and the devil. It maintains our spiritual, mental, emotional and also physical equilibrium. This is the work of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, filling us, anointing us, and establishing us in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:21, 22). Every believer needs this baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Along with this is Paul's second petition "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

Faith removes the barriers of sin and lets Christ into the heart. Genuine saving faith is a living faith, as James reminds us in his epistle. Faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9), works by love (Galatians 5:6), and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4).

Christ is not a guest. Our heart is not His "motel" or "vacation cottage." Our heart is His permanent residence. He is "at home" in every true believer. He holds the title. He is in full ownership and complete charge of our heart and therefore of our whole being. What an honor it is that the King would choose each of us as His palace! What beautiful changes He made when He moved in! How He has adorned us and made us one of His "street of dreams" attractions! What joy is ours to be occupied by Him and filled with His presence!

What "dwells" in your heart? What owns it? If not Christ, something else does. Certainly not you, though you might think so. It is either Christ or an intruding, usurping, dominating pride and passion. Self is a squatter; it should be the devoted, happy servant of the King.

Paul's third petition is "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend [may be strong to grasp] with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge."

If this is separated into two petitions (making five total), what then is the object of the former of the two? It is left hanging. We are to comprehend with all saints the width and length and depth and height—of what? All kinds of possible answers have been conjectured over the centuries. "However, we need not travel beyond the immediate context to find a suitable object; it is given us in *agapen tou Christou...*" (Driver, Plummer, Briggs, The National Critical Commentary). In other words, it is the full, multi-dimension love of Christ. This completes the petition. Thus the petition is one, not two.

This third petition, then, is that believers firmly grasp the fullness of Christ's love, the love that surpasses knowledge, so that we may know and experience its surpassing fullness. This happens only when we have been "rooted and grounded" in love (perfect passive participles, "having been rooted and grounded" in love).

This is not a detached, "objective," impersonal study project. It involves each of us personally and transformationally at the very core of our being. We cannot grasp the love that surpasses knowledge unless and until we ourselves have made love our motive, the foundation of our character, and the ground where all of our choices and actions are rooted. The love of Christ must first have conquered our heart and become the very soil where we are rooted, the very ground wherein our personal love—our soul-commitment—is founded. It is the solid stability that is in love itself and that love produces.

This pure love is fully described in 1 Corinthians 13. Without it we are nothing, even if we were to speak in tongues, prophesy, understand all mysteries and all knowledge, have mountain-moving faith, give all to the poor, and die as a "martyr." All of that has validity, true value and meaning only if it is founded on love and grows out of roots deeply embedded in love.

Paul prays that believers will be strong: (1) to grasp, and (2) to know.

First, to grasp (comprehend). We need something beyond our natural mental ability in order to grasp what is beyond our natural comprehension, and to do so "with all the saints." The love of Christ that surpasses human comprehension is very personal, but it is not private. It is the priceless treasure all true believers in Christ have in common. It is for all the saints, not just an elite, initiated few. No believer is to be left out.

To understand love, we must love and be loved. An act of love, given and/or received, can teach us more about love than a sermon in itself cannot. And the greatest act of love toward us was Christ's sacrifice of Himself on the cross for us.

We are to grasp the love of Christ in all of its dimensions: *breadth*—its completion; *length*—its unending duration; *depth*—Christ's condescension and humiliation; *height*—Christ's ascension and exaltation.

As believers, we are at the center of all multi-dimensions of the love of Christ. We are rooted and grounded in it. It radiates and extends out from God and from us in all directions ("to infinity—and beyond!").

Grasp this and your faith will explode!

Second, to know. To know love and to grow in it, we must be firmly rooted and grounded in it. It surpasses knowledge, transcends knowledge, exceeds knowledge. It extends far beyond the limits of the unaided, spiritually unilluminated human mind. It is always providing new vistas and opening new treasures and possibilities in Christ. It is beyond the head alone to know, but not beyond the enlightened heart to grasp and experience.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter' [Psalm 44:22]. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35 - 39).

Paul's fourth petition is "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." Fullness. This word and its powerful statement is in Paul's first prayer in this epistle. "He [the Father] put all things under His [Christ's] feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22, 23).

We see the word again in Ephesians 4:13, "...till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Later, in reference to Jesus Christ, the apostle John writes, "And of His [Christ's] fullness we have all received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16).

It is important for us to understand that to be filled with all the fullness of God in and through Jesus Christ does *not* mean that believers themselves will be deified and become "gods" or God. All humanity was and is created in the image and according to the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26). This has to do with our spiritual, intellectual and moral nature. A clear and definite distinction forever exists between the *Creator* and the *created*. Who God *is* and what He *fills* are not and never will be the same. God desires that believers be filled with all His fullness without themselves becoming deity, just as a clay jar is filled with something very valuable without itself becoming its contents.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7 says that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels." The treasure is the treasure; the clay jar is still a clay jar. Even in our resurrected and glorified eternal state, we will remain forever the containers and God the treasure. The difference will be that every physical and earthly restriction on our capacity to contain the "Treasure" will be removed.

God wants believers to be filled with all His fullness right now to the full extent that we can contain it in our present human "clay jars." In his first prayer in this epistle Paul declared that the church right now on earth in this age *is* "the fullness of Him who fills all in all." Now in his second prayer he prays that we will be filled with all that fullness; that is, that we will *be* what we truly *are* in Christ.

To be filled with all the fullness of God, given to us in Christ and brought to us and into us by the Holy Spirit, we must remain "rooted and grounded in love," and continue to grow in love. We must increasingly comprehend—apprehend, grasp hold of, possess—its "width and length and depth and height." Paul prayed that God would grant this. Let us also pray and believe for the same divine grace. God will do it. He is faithful.

Because all the fullness dwells in Christ (Colossians 1:19), and Christ dwells in believers by His Holy Spirit, He brings into us—individually and corporately—the fullness of all that God has provided for us and imparted to us in Christ. It is the fullness of the blessings *from* God and the fullness of the indwelling presence *of* God.

The prayer is that believers will be filled with the fullness of God's Spirit, His grace, the intimacy of His presence and communion, His power, His truth, His moral nature, His character, His blessings, His joy, and all that He has provided and imparted in Christ.

This is what the apostle Peter meant when he wrote, "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who has called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:2 - 4).

What unlimited possibilities are open to us! What a holy ambition motivates us! What a glorious quest energizes us! Look diligently into the word of God. See its promises and meet their conditions. By prayer and faith "download" the provisions and blessings. Plunge into the fullness of God and be filled with all its fullness. It is a fountain springing up into everlasting life (John 4:14). It is rivers of living water flowing from within (John 7:38).

In The Pulpit Commentary, Professor T. Croskery writes that it is "a well so full and overflowing, our vessels need never be empty. You may ask too little; you cannot ask too much, for the very fullness of God is ever flowing into you. You cannot exhaust it..."

There is no place for sin in the heart and life of the person who is filled with all the fullness of God. Doubts dissolve, and "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

Paul concludes this prayer by breaking out into an inspired doxology. As is the entire prayer, it is addressed to the Father, "to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that works in us." That power is described in the first prayer, in chapter 1, verses 19 through 23.

By the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, God is able to do immeasurably above and beyond (*huperekperissou*) the highest possibilities requestable or imaginable. We cannot imagine anything that God cannot do. Likewise, we cannot pray a prayer too big for God to answer—and He is able to do it "according to the power that works in us."

No wonder that Paul in his earlier prayer asked that God would give to us "a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge" of God, the eyes of our hearts being enlightened so that we would know "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe." All that power is there—in God. It is now directed toward believers and working on our behalf. It is working for us and in us. Believe; receive; and experience its fullness.

The ultimate purpose of this is that God be glorified in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

So, let's take a moment to ask a vital personal question. What are you filled with? The fullness of God? Or are you filled with pride, unbelief, lust, anger, bitterness, falsehood and false ideas, addictions,—sin?

God never created you to be a trash can of the devil. Come. Ask Jesus Christ to clean out all the junk in you and fill your empty heart and life with His fullness. There will be no room for sin. Do it now.