

For this cause, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, that you may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man; 17 that Christ may dwell in your heart through faith; to the end that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be strengthened to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and height and depth, 19 and to know Christ's love which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to him be the glory in the assembly and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

I know that all of you have seen beauty pageants. Evening gowns that cost thousands of dollars. Swim suits like you would never see at the beach. Talents that NO ONE wants to see except the contestant's mom and dad and grandmother or their dance teacher.

Of course all the pageants. are different. Some have talents and evening gowns and swimsuits and some leave out the talent part (if you can call it talent).

The one thing that they all seem to have in common is the “question and answer” part. It SEEMS that this part is supposed to show the maturity and the intelligence and the composure of the contestant.

I have a problem with the question and answer section. For the sake of sounding important and high-brow, the questions always seem to be very serious and far-reaching (WAY out of the beauty-pageant arena, if I must say so myself.) Often they ask a question that cannot even be answered in the allotted time.

“OK, Denise, if you had a billion dollars, how would you use it to the greatest ends? YOU HAVE 10 SECONDS, GO!!!” OR...”If a fairy landed at your house and granted you ONE WISH, what would that wish be? YOU HAVE TEN SECONDS, GO!!!”

One problem is that in order to answer the question properly you would have to do research for a day or two or maybe a week and then you would want another week to work on the answer.

AND they ask all kinds of things, so you can't make up the answer ahead of time.

The one theme that sort of runs through all the questions is the idea of the greatest or the most important or the best or what I want most—that kind of thing.

[Go to someone in the congregation] OK—if wishes and dreams could really come true—what would you dream? YOU HAVE 10 SECONDS...

For this passage, Paul was not in a beauty contest and I can't imagine him in an evening gown or a swim suit. I'm pretty sure that Paul couldn't tap dance while whistling “She Will be Coming Around the Mountain” in three part harmony.

He DID have a question to answer though. It seems that there were no judges—he asked it of himself. The answer is there but the question isn't—but I think we can figure it out from the answer.

“Paul—for 100 points, the championship, a gold watch, and a brand new Harley Davidson motorcycle, answer this question: **Of all the things God could grant to his church, what do you want for them most of all?**”

Fortunately he had a lot more than 10 seconds to think about his answer—what he wrote to the church at Ephesus (and to us by proxy).

First we can see what he hopes for and what he wants in a verse I didn't read. Verse 13 says *Therefore I ask that you may not lose heart at my troubles for you, which are your glory.*

Some translations say “lose heart” and some “say persevere” or something similar. Paul wanted for them and he wants for us to stand and to “keep heart” no matter what is going on around us and no matter what is happening to us.

He wants us to hold on—in stress and strife. He wants us to “be” the church when we agree and when we disagree. He wishes for us to be strong even when we are afraid. He wants us to hold on to the knowledge that we are the children of God and that we are his church—even when things look bleak. We are not to faint when we grow weary and we are to hold our heads up even when we so other Christians suffer as Paul was doing.

In verse 14 we see that Paul says “I bow my knees” and I take that literally. I believe that he probably stopped, even as he was composing this letter and said this prayer for them—and wrote it out for them and for us to read.

He begins writing the prayer by telling his preferred position.

“I bow my knees” he says. Some of the Jews at that time stood to pray and held their hands open and their arms spread wide. You know that the Muslims put their foreheads on the floor when they pray. Many times we pray while sitting in church, but I have been in churches where everyone stood when they prayed or when they read scripture. Some churches have kneeling rails to use even in the pews.

As I said, Paul seems to have knelt.

Last week we talked about prayer but not about position. I have an opinion on prayer position—and that is that it matters not one tiny bit which one you prefer or which one you use. I know that standing indicates reverence or respect and so to kneeling or placing your forehead on the floor—but what I believe is that God cares much more about the position of our hearts and souls than he does the position of our bodies.

Jesus made it clear over and over again that it is not the external that is most important in our relationships with God and each other. It is the internal. Prayer requires a heart that is open and ready to speak and listen to almighty God.

What I see in this verse is not a statement on prayer position, but something much more important. Paul wants them to “keep heart” so he prays. He loves them—so he prays. He is worried about them—so he prays.

Seems there is a lesson there, don't you think? When we desire something that is very important—take it to God.

Praying counts.

Notice that he desires something very general in nature. He wants them to have strength and perseverance—that they keep a strong heart—but what he prays for are very specific things.

None of the things he prays for are strength exactly. None are perseverance exactly. BUT what he prays for has the power to bring those things.

If they are that important to Paul and if they keep our hearts strong and if they are the answer that that unspoken question, “Paul, what is it that you want most for Christians and for the church?” then maybe we need to take look and then maybe desire them and pray for them ourselves.

Look in verse 16. Paul is asking God to grant his desire, his wish—his prayer—not based on the goodness of the Ephesians, not based on the power and the goodness of Paul. He is asking his prayer be answered based on the richness of God's glory—out of the very essence of almighty God.

The first request is that they (and we) be given the strength that come from having a healthy dose of God's Spirit in our being. That we might be comforted and strengthened by his presence. That we might be led and guided by his wisdom. That he might provide an extra measure of grace and love because of his presence within us and his work as The Comforter.

Following Paul's example and his wish for us—we are to seek the Spirit and pray for him to be all those things for us. To invite him to strengthen, guide, and control our hearts and lives.

I pray that for you, Zion—and for myself.

The second request is similar. That is the indwelling of Christ in our hearts through faith. That COULD be speaking of a salvation experience, but since he is writing to the church—to Christians—then maybe it means something else.

Sometimes we invite Jesus into the house of our hearts but then we begin to crowd him out of some of the rooms. He is still in our hearts, but instead of being a presence in every part of our being—I'm afraid sometimes he winds up sleeping on a couch in the basement.

This ought not to be so! Just as the Holy Spirit takes up residence as comforter and teacher—Jesus is to take up residence in our hearts as King and Lord.

Did you ever watch a movie where the lead character is a rich person who lives in a big city like New York? Where did they live? [In the penthouse of a famous building—right up there at the top.]

And I'm afraid you and I sometimes put the King in the basement. Again, this ought not to be so. We are to desire and to pray for Christ to be on the throne of our hearts—on the top floor and in control.

So, back to the verses. What is the result Paul is seeking from the in-dwelling of the Savior and the Holy Spirit? That we be rooted and grounded through love and by love and in love.

The love of God. Love FOR God. Love for one another. Love for Christ and the love of Christ. I think all of these things figure into Paul's prayer for the church—for you and for me.

You and I are to pray that God, through Christ and through the Holy Spirit, strengthen and broaden the love in our hearts and make it greater—so that we are more likely to persevere in hard times—that we continue to “keep heart” no matter what is going on around us and what is happening to us.

Many of you know that when I was at the church in Smyrna I also did landscaping.

I learned that you can have a great lawn in the Summertime south if you are willing to irrigate—but only if you irrigate the right way. If you turn on the sprinkler for a little while each morning, it will make your grass look great but it will be weak. If you stop, even for a few days, your grass will turn brown and might even die.

BUT if you water it for a few hours every few days and let it get dry between, the grass will grow stronger. The watering the drying causes the roots of the grass to grow and get deeper as it seeks water. The grass had to work hard to get there, but it makes strong healthy and deep roots.

Paul prays for us to be rooted deeply and well grounded in the love of Christ and the love of each other.

Verse 18 says that this will give us a better view—a better understanding of the height, depth, breadth, and length of God's love through Christ.

That will do two main things in our lives.

First, it will affect how we deal in the world. How we look at strangers and how we treat our enemies.

Second, as Christians, it will affect how you and I deal with each other. You know, as a group we often focus on loving strangers and turning the other cheek and working to love our enemies. That IS biblical and right. But sometimes we forget that it is important that we do the same, and even more, for our Christian Family.

Traditionally, we have loved our enemies and yet we split a church over personality conflicts and irritations at a deacon or elder or pastor—or another church member.

Paul prays that we know the love of Christ that passes all understanding. He prays that we experience the love and the forgiveness and the affection of our Lord every day. The one who loved us so much that he was born and lived and died—and lived again—for each of us and for those out there all around us.

That will be easier, we might say, if we keep the Spirit in our hearts and Christ on our heart-thrones.

Paul also wishes that we be filled with the fullness of God. I'm not exactly sure what he means by that—but it sounds good to me (how about you?) I'll take it even if I don't understand it exactly. If it is the good that God provides physically, I'll take it. If it is the good that God provides spiritually, I'll take that too. If it is simply the comfort that comes from knowing God—that also works for me.

If given a choice—and I believe we do have that choice—I'd take one of everything Paul wishes for Ephesians and for us.

What a big-time list. Kind of like that contestant who answers, “well, if I had one wish I would wish to end hunger and for the end of war and world peace...and...”

Maybe that answer is a bit too much—but Paul is confident that he has not asked for too much. He is confident that he has asked for the very things we need and that God can and will grant.

Where does that confidence come from? Let me read the last two verse again: *Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be the glory in the assembly and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

Through the power of God.

Zion, I also pray these things for you—for us—as we close the service.

I pray for a strong heart that perseveres. I pray for a filling of the spirit. I pray for the in-dwelling of Christ with all his love. I pray that love might be made known in our actions.