

The Summation of All Things in Christ

Studies in Ephesians with a Local Church Emphasis
LESSON LVII : PAUL'S PRAYER AND DOXOLOGY (3:14-21)

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. (Eph 3:14-21 KJV)

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph 3:14-21 NIV)

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He may give to you, according to the riches of His glory, with might to be strengthened through His Spirit, in regard to the inner man, that the Christ may dwell through the faith in your hearts, in love having been rooted and founded, that ye may be in strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, to know also the love of the Christ that is exceeding the knowledge, that ye may be filled — to all the fulness of God; and to Him who is able above all things to do exceeding abundantly what we ask or think, according to the power that is working in us, to Him [is] the glory in the assembly in Christ Jesus, to all the generations of the age of the ages. Amen. (Eph 3:14-21 Young's Literal Translation)

PAUL'S PRAYER

PAUL STARTS TO PRAY FOR HIS READERS BUT DIGRESSES:

¹ *For this reason, I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you the Gentiles ...*

PAUL RETURNS TO HIS PRAYER:

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,*

PAUL SETS FORTH HIS PRAYER WITH THREE REQUESTS FOR HIS READERS, THE FIRST BEING FOR GOD TO GRANT THEM SOMETHING:

¹⁶ *in order that (hina) he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory,*

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #1 (an infinitive is a verbal noun, a verb not restrained by number or person)

to be strengthened (infinitive) with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #2

¹⁷ *and that Christ may dwell (infinitive) in your hearts through faith —*

TWO PERFECT PASSIVE PARTICIPIAL FORMS (a participle is a verbal adjective):

being rooted and grounded in love,

PAUL'S SECOND REQUEST ALSO HAS TO DO WITH STRENGTHENING BUT USES A DIFFERENT WORD THAN ABOVE:

¹⁸ *in order that (hina) you may be able, may be empowered*

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #1

to comprehend (infinitive) with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

INFINITIVE CLAUSE #2

¹⁹ *and to know (infinitive) the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*

PAUL'S THIRD REQUEST FORMS A CLIMAX TO HIS PRAYER:

in order that (hina) you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

PAUL'S DOXOLOGY (a liturgical formula of praise to God)

PAUL BEGINS WITH THE MENTION OF THE ONE TO WHOM GLORY IS ASCRIBED ...

²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,*

BUT HIS ELABORATION ON THE POWER OF GOD BECOMES LENGTHY ENOUGH THAT PAUL FINDS IT NECESSARY TO BEGIN THE DOXOLOGY AGAIN WITH THE REPETITION OF THE ONE TO WHOM THE PRAISE IS ADDRESSED:

²¹ *to him be glory in the congregation and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

PAUL'S FIRST PRAYER PETITION (vv. 16~17a)

¹⁴ *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,*

¹⁶ ***in order that (hina) he may grant you,** according to the riches of his glory,*

***to be strengthened** with power through his Spirit in your inner being,*

¹⁷ *and that Christ **may dwell** in your hearts through faith,*

PAUL'S SECOND PRAYER PETITION (vv. 17b~19a)

¹⁸ ***in order that (hina) you,** being rooted and grounded in love, **may be able, may be empowered***

***to comprehend** with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,*

¹⁹ *and **to know** the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,*

v. 17b — **that you, being rooted and grounded in love,** — ὑμῶν ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι [humōn en agapē errizōmenoi kai tethemeliōmenoi] — **DOES THIS PHRASE GO WITH THE PRECEDING OR WITH WHAT FOLLOWS?** — “The function of the following participial clause ‘you, being rooted and established in love’ within Paul’s intercession (3:14-19) is not entirely clear. It has been regarded as (1) a subsidiary request flowing from the previous petition for the indwelling of Christ (and the empowering of the Spirit). Within the New Testament participles can express wishes (or exhortations), and in the context of this prayer ‘being rooted’ and ‘established’ are thought to have the force of a prayer-wish.

[*‘in order that [hina] God would grant you*

to be strengthened by the Spirit in your inner person,

to have Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,

and you to be rooted and grounded in love’]

(2) A variation on this is to regard these two coordinated participles, which break the pattern of a finite verb followed by two infinitives (vv. 16-17a, 18-19), as a prayer-wish which spells out the aim of the indwelling / strengthening. As a result, one of the goals of Christ’s indwelling is to establish believers on a firm foundation of love.

[*‘in order that [hina] God would grant you*

to be strengthened by the Spirit in your inner person,

to have Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,

the goal of which is for you to be rooted and grounded in love’]

(3) **Our preference is to interpret the words ‘you, being rooted and established in love’ as expressing the contemplated result of the two previous infinitives, which in turn provides the condition for the next request.**

[*‘in order that [hina] God would grant you*

to be strengthened by the Spirit in your inner person,

to have Christ dwell in your hearts through faith,

the result of the Spirit’s indwelling and Christ’s dwelling is you being rooted and grounded in love

in order that [hina] you may be empowered ...’ .]

Through the strengthening of the inner person by God’s Spirit and Christ’s indwelling in their hearts, the readers are to be

established in love so that they will comprehend the greatness of the love of Christ.” [O’Brien, 259f]

Most of the English translations agree with his conclusions and bring the *‘hina clause’* from v. 18 into v. 17:

‘that ye, being rooted and grounded in love’ (Tyndale’s NT, KJV, RSV, NKJV, NASV, NIV, ESV)

‘to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love’ (RV, ASV)

Note especially the Geneva Bible which moves these words to v. 18:

¹⁷ *‘That Christ may dwell in your heartes by faith: ¹⁸ That ye, being rooted and grounded in loue, may be able to comprehend with al Saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height’* (Geneva Bible)

THIS IS NOT AN ADDITIONAL PRAYER REQUEST BUT ARE STATING THE BELIEVERS’ CONDITION — *“The perfect tense of the participles implies a condition which came into existence in the past and still continues; the participles are not then part of the prayer, i.e. [Paul] is not praying that the readers should be well founded in love, nor are they [commanded], ‘be well founded in love’. Instead they state that believers have been and continue to be well founded in love. As empowered by the Spirit and indwelt by Christ they have been rooted and founded in love and therefore are able to grasp the nature of love, and so will be in a position to keep the injunctions of the later part of the letter.”* [Best, 342f] Most of those that I read agrees with this assessment. Hoehner says it is best to consider this phrase with what follows in v18 because it is in the perfect tense, emphasizing the resulting state. Thus ‘they are rooted and grounded for the purpose of having the ability to comprehend the love of Christ.’ [Hoehner, 483f] “So we translate it — ‘ye having been rooted and grounded in love in order that ye may be able,’ etc. The rooting and grounding are expressed by the perfect participle, as they indicate the state which must be realised in connection with the indwelling of Christ before the ability for comprehending the love of Christ can be acquired.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK NT, 315]

TWO DISTINCT METAPHORS — In order to stress the foundational nature of the love that is envisioned, two metaphors, one botanical and the other architectural, are closely linked. **ROOTED** — passive, therefore *‘to become firmly rooted’*. “It appears only five times in the LXX (Isa 40:24; Jer 12:2; Sir 3:28; 24:12; Pss Sol 14:4) with the same meaning *‘to take root.’* It occurs only twice in the NT (Col 2:7; Eph 3:17), both of which refer to the personal roots of believers.” [Hoehner, 484] **GROUNDING** — from a word meaning *‘to found, lay the foundation of a building.’* It appears forty-one times in the LXX (thirty-seven times in the canonical books) meaning *‘to lay the foundation’*. Twenty-seven times it translates a Hebrew word meaning *‘to establish, found, lay the foundation.’* *“Paul uses the same two basic figures in Col 2:7, being rooted and built up in Christ. In 1 Cor 3:9 he summarizes his argument with figures of a farmer and builder where both illustrate that one receives his rewards on the basis of good works. In the present context Paul states that believers are firmly rooted and grounded in love. This root and foundation of love refers to God having chosen them, predestined them, bestowed them in the beloved, redeemed them, made them a heritage, sealed them with the Holy Spirit, made them alive, raised and seated them in the heavenlies, and placed them equally in one new person in the body of Christ. Therefore, for the believers, the origin of this love is God’s love.”* [Hoehner, 484]

‘LOVE’ IS EMPHATIC — *“The word order of the original (with ‘in love’ appearing first) stresses love, while the two perfect passive participles depict the notions of progress and the resulting state. Love is the soil in which believers are rooted and will grow, the foundation upon which they are built. Here the agapē in view is the love of God revealed in Christ and poured into his people’s hearts by the Spirit (cf. Rom. 5:5, 8; 8:35-39). Already in Ephesians God’s love has been shown to be the source of our salvation (2:4; cf. 5:2, 25), while later in this prayer Christ’s love is specifically mentioned (v. 19). God’s love in Christ provides the motivating power that enables believers to love others, and this prayer significantly anticipates the exhortations of the following chapters (cf. 4:2; 5:2). Those who are strengthened by the Spirit and in whom Christ dwells will have their lives rooted and grounded in love.”* [O’Brien, 260]

WHOSE LOVE? — ‘THE LOVE OF GOD’ — “But is it divine or human love? In favour of the former is the lack of reassurance which human love would provide; in v. 19 Christ’s love is clearly in view; the salvation of believers issues from God’s love and not human love; if human love is meant it might imply that love was a pre-condition of salvation; if a human quality was to be expressed ‘faith’, following on from the earlier part of the verse, would have been more appropriate.... [If] our analysis of the construction of the passage is correct it seems necessary to decide in favour of divine love.” [Best, 343] *“That ye being rooted — Firmly established — as a tree is whose roots strike deep, and extend afar. The meaning is, that his love should be as firm in our hearts as a tree is in the soil, whose roots strike deep into the earth.... And grounded — founded — as a building is on a foundation. The word is taken from architecture where a firm foundation is laid; and the meaning is, that he wished them to be as firm in the love of Christ, as a building is that rests on a solid basis.”* [Barne’s Notes on NT]

WHOSE LOVE? — ‘THE BELIEVER’S LOVE’ — *“Love is the fundamental principle of the new age, of Christian existence in general and not just of Christian character. As in Paul’s hymn to love in 1 Cor 13, love is to be seen as God’s love embodied in Christ and mediated by the Spirit, but also as the power that moves believers to love others with no expectation of reward.”* [Lincoln, 207] “[M]ost think it has reference to the believer’s love, or as some label it, ‘the grace of love.’ This makes reasonably good sense because of the lack of a defining genitive and because the next verse mentions love with the defining genitive (‘the love of Christ’). This appears to clarify that these two verses are speaking of two different aspects of love. Having said this, it must be realized that, even after salvation, this grace of love does not have its source in human beings, but in God. Christian love always has its source in God’s love.” [Hoehner, 482f] “The firmness and constancy which our love ought to possess are pointed out by two metaphors. There are many persons not wholly destitute of love; but it is easily removed or shaken,

because its roots are not deep. Paul desires that it should be *rooted and grounded*, — thoroughly fixed in our minds, so as to resemble a well-founded building or deeply-planted tree. **The true meaning is, that our roots ought to be so deeply planted, and our foundation so firmly laid in love, that nothing will be able to shake us.**” [Calvin, Ephesians] “The love in which we are to be rooted is not the love of God or of Christ toward us, but either brotherly love or love as a Christian grace, without determining its object. It is that love which flows from faith, and of which both God and the brethren are the objects. It is for the increase and ascendancy of this grace through the indwelling of Christ, till it sustains and strengthens the whole inner man, so that the believer may stand as a well-rooted tree or as a well-founded building, that the apostle here prays.” [Hodge, 131]

v. 18 — that ye may be in strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, (YLT) — ἵνα ἐξισχύσητε καταλαβέσθαι σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ βάθος καὶ ὕψος [hina ezischusēte katalabesthai sun pasin tois hagiois ti to platos kai mēkos kai bathos kai hupsos] — **SECOND PRAYER REQUEST (SECOND ‘HINA CLAUSE’)** — “This second request presupposes and builds upon the first: Paul desires that, as his readers are strengthened by God’s Spirit and indwelt by Christ so that they are rooted and grounded in love, ‘they might be empowered to grasp with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of God which surpasses all knowledge.’ It is obvious that only God himself can import this knowledge to Paul’s readers: not only is he the one whom the apostle petitions, but also the preface to the request (‘that you may have the power to grasp’) implies that divine enabling is essential.” [O’Brien, 260f] “The ἵνα [hina, ‘in order to’] clause here assumes that of v. 16 and takes it further; *though underpinned by love believers need a fuller understanding of that love.*” [Best, 343]

may be fully able, may have the full capacity — ἐξισχύσητε [ezischusēte] — “The strong compound ἐξισχύειν [ezischuein] = to be eminently able, to have full capacity, occurs only this once in the NT and is rare in ordinary Greek.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK NT, 315] This word “carries the nuance of the ability to attain an objective, here that of comprehending something or grasping it for oneself.” [Best, 343] “The empowering or enabling (and this is the only time this particular compound verb is found in the NT) necessary for comprehension is the sort which comes from being strengthened by the Spirit, indwelt by Christ, and rooted and grounded in love.” [Lincoln, 208] “[It emphasizes] the difficulty of comprehending the vastness and magnitude of the intended object.” [O’Brien, 261] “Without being strengthened by the Spirit in the inner man, without the indwelling of Christ, without being rooted and grounded in love, it is impossible to have any adequate apprehension of the gospel or of the love of Christ therein revealed. The apostle, therefore, prays that his readers may be thus strengthened, ‘in order that,’ with all saints, they may be able to comprehend the truth of which he speaks.” [Hodge, 131]

to grasp, comprehend, perceive, understand — καταλαβέσθαι [katalabesthai] — ‘to grasp, comprehend, perceive,’ is found elsewhere in the NT in Acts 4:13; 10:34; 25:25. “The word ‘comprehend’ conveys to the English reader the idea of ‘understand.’ The Greek word means ‘to lay hold of so as to make one’s own, to seize, take possession of.’ One could translate ‘apprehend,’ in the sense of mentally grasping some idea or truth.... Paul prays that the saints might apprehend, not merely comprehend. One might be able to understand something without having a grasp of the full implications of that thing.” [Wuest, 89f] Most of the translations of which I compared translates this word ‘comprehend’ (Tyndale NT, Geneva, KJV, YLT, RSV, NKJV, NASV, ESV) while a couple versions translate it as ‘apprehend’ (RV, ASV) and the NIV translates it as ‘to grasp.’

together with all the saints — σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις [sun pasin tois hagiois] — **LOVE WITHIN THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS —** It is also a communal knowledge shared [with all the saints], and this whether [the word ‘hagios’] means only believers or includes also heavenly beings. Since we learn from other people, knowledge is generally communal; that is especially true of love whose nature can only be grasped through interaction with others. The true understanding of Christ’s love is not then an individual experience but takes place in the community.” [Best, 344] “Growth in the individual believer cannot occur in isolation but must be accomplished in context with other believers. Furthermore, true growth cannot occur by association with only certain believers, ones preferred because they are of the same socioeconomic, intellectual, or professional status. Paul prays that it might be accomplished in association with all the saints.” [Hoehner, 486] “The disclosure of this mystery is the heritage of all the people of God: it is fitting that they should have an intelligent appreciation of it. There may be the further thought that the deep things of God are more likely to be apprehended by his children in fellowship one with another than in isolation. The idea that spiritual illuminations is most likely to be received by followers of the solitary life has been widely held: Paul does not appear to have favored it ether for himself or for his Christian friends.... Barth observes that the principle applies to the biblical commentator, who should not ignore what his predecessors have thought and said on the same texts.” [Bruce, 328] This is a strong testimony of one of the reasons for Christ establishing churches and the NT’s emphasis upon the importance of our assembling together as believers. It is easy to love ‘in theory’ — but it is different when we rub shoulders with one another. Cp. 1 Peter 4:8:

‘Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.’ (NIV)

This does not mean that as we love others, God overlooks our own personal sins. Rather because we love one another, we overlook sins and personality differences which may rub us the wrong way for the sake of the other person and unity within the body of believers.

AVAILABLE TO ALL BELIEVERS — “This gift of spiritual comprehension is contemplated further as to be possessed and exercised [to all the saints], not as a matter of private experience, the peculiar faculty of some, or an exceptional bestowment like the rare privilege of visions, but as a gift proper to the whole community of believers and one in which these Ephesians might share together with all God’s people.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK NT, 315]

what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height — τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ βάθος καὶ ὕψος [ti to platos kai mēkos kai bathos kai hupsos] — **THE VASTNESS OF THE LOVE OF GOD** — “A single article governs the four nouns implying that they are to be taken as a unit and not interpreted separately.... Since actual physical measurements cannot be in mind the phrase must be interpreted metaphorically. But what metaphor is involved?” [Best, 344] Ernest Best then goes on to state the obvious place to begin looking for the meaning is the OT but states there are no real parallels. He then states several possibilities in the Greek culture of the time has been suggested but none is to be found there, with the exception of a fourth-century ‘magical papyrus’ but even that does not contain strict parallels. After listing some possible interpretations, he concludes: “It is difficult to argue for any of these from the immediate context which is that of love (v. 19), and with the majority of commentators we take this to be the reference. Paul had already moved in the direction of relating love to height and depth (Rom 8.39). The love will be that of Christ or of God. This love is without limits and ultimately immeasurable.” [Best, 346] “Although it is not possible to be certain, on contextual grounds a reference to the love of Christ is preferable.” [O’Brien, 263] “The words ‘breadth, length, depth, and height’ have no particular significance except to give the general idea of the vastness of the love of Christ. This love is His love for us, not ours for Him.” [Wuest, 90] “But the terms length, breadth, depth, height are introduced with no other purpose than the simple and consistent one of setting forth the surpassing magnitude of Christ’s love for us. The power to comprehend that love in its utmost conceivable grandeur and its furthest-reaching relations is what Paul prays God to grant his Ephesians.” [Salmond, Expositor’s GK NT, 315] “It is the love of Christ, i.e., his love to us, which passes knowledge. It is infinite; not only because it inheres in an infinite subject, but because the condescension and sufferings to which it led, and the blessings which it secures for its objects, are beyond our comprehension. This love of Christ, though it surpasses the power of our understanding to comprehend, is still a subject of experimental knowledge. We may know how excellent, how wonderful, how free, how disinterested, how long-suffering, how manifold and constant, it is, and that it is infinite. And this is the highest and most sanctifying of all knowledge. Those who thus know the love of Christ towards them, purify themselves even as he is pure.” [Hodge, 133]

FOR THOSE INTERESTED: FURTHER READING OF VARIOUS OTHER INTERPRETATIONS — “In what is, for the modern interpreter, a puzzling formulation, the object of the comprehension desired for the readers is described simply in terms of the four dimensions. Is this a formula for the dimensions of the cosmos? Or do these dimensions merely stand for all the aspects, the inexhaustible greatness of some other object, and if so, what? Or has perhaps what was originally a formula for cosmic dimensions now been transferred to this other object?” [Lincoln, 208] Lincoln continues to list some of the interpretations given by others:

- the four dimensions have been equated with the four arms of Christ’s cross; but while Christ’s death is mentioned to have both vertical and horizontal dimensions in 2:14-16, the one place the cross is mentioned (2:16) is not treated as a symbol in its own right.
- the four dimensions symbolize the heavenly Jerusalem which mentions the length, breadth, and height (cp Rev 21:16; Ezek 48:16); but a specific reference to the heavenly Jerusalem seems unprepared for and out of place in this verse.
- the four dimensions do feature in magic texts and is often pointed out by commentators, but it should not be forgotten that these magical texts are probably to be dated in the fourth century.
- building upon the four arms of the cross, some focus on the love of Christ as shown on the cross and therefore interpreted as the space filled by this love of Christ, that is, the church; but ‘that you might be empowered to grasp the Church as the space filled by the love of Christ’ is hardly a straightforward reading of the text.
- the four dimensions refer not just to Christ but to the whole fulness of salvation given in Christ; but while this has some attractive points to its argument, it fails to explain why the particular language of the four dimensions are used or why Paul did not find it necessary to add ‘of salvation’ or ‘of the mystery’ in his formulation.
- Per Lincoln, ‘an explanation that does better justice to the language of the four dimensions is that which notes the frequent use of this terminology or similar terminology in cosmological contexts and claims that the dimensions should retain their cosmic connotations here.’ [Lincoln, 210] One author is quoted as follows: ‘He wants his readers to understand everything worth understanding, all mysteries, even the dimensions of the universe. But the one thing that matters is to know the love of Christ.’ The main difficulty for this however is that Paul would even be concerned to pray for his readers’ knowledge of the dimensions of the universe, even if it was a preliminary to a greater concern.
- the four dimensions could refer to the wisdom of God and not love as others suppose. Even some believing the object is love concedes there are a number of parallels cited the reference to the four dimensions are rhetorical and serves to point to the wisdom or knowledge that God reveals. “This can be seen in Job 11:5-9, one of the few parallel passages that actually mentions all four dimensions: ‘But oh, that God would speak, and open his lips to you, and that he would tell you the secrets of wisdom! For he is manifold in understanding.... Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? It is higher than heaven — what can you do? Deeper than Sheol — what can you know? Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.’ The same holds true [of the Jewish Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus 1:3], ‘Who can find out the height of heaven, and the breadth of the earth, and the deep, and wisdom?’ Cf. also Job 28:12-14, 21, 22; 1 Enoch 93.11-14; 2 Apoc. Bar. 54.1-4. The purpose of such texts is not to speak about the dimensions of the universe but to speak of the infinite dimensions of Wisdom. [One Bible student] asserts that whereas the Stoics would say that, in contemplating the universe, one knows God, these texts indicate that it is impossible to know the universe entirely, and even if one could, one would still not know Wisdom, whose dimensions are infinite. If the

mention of the dimensions in such texts is meant to conjure up the vastness of God's Wisdom, might it not be that [Paul] has in view not actual cosmic dimensions but the metaphorical dimensions of the infinite Wisdom of God, which he has earlier in the chapter described as multifaceted (3:10)? ... Paul, in Rom 11:33-36, had already spoken of the incomprehensibility of God's Wisdom, using the term 'depth' before breaking into a doxology, as [he] does here in vv 20,21." [Lincoln, 211f]

● To Lincoln, the only other plausible explanation "... emphasizes that since the four dimensions are governed by only one article in the Greek they are to be treated as a unity, a totality which evokes the immensity of a particular object, and that object is not made explicit until the next and parallel clause, namely, the love of Christ.... So, on this view, the breadth and length and height and depth simply register the dimensions of the real object of comprehension.... This interpretation that sees the all-embracing love of Christ as expressed by the four dimensions can claim some support from earlier Pauline material, since in Rom 8:35-39 two of the dimensions are mentioned in close association with the love of Christ. Its major advantage ... is that it is able to provide an explanation from the immediate context which also clarifies the development of thought in the passage.... In fact, on this interpretation the sequence, which moves from the notion of being rooted and grounded in love (v 17b), to that of being empowered to grasp (v 18a), to the vast dimensions and incomprehensibility of love (vv 18b, 19a), itself illustrates the all-encompassing nature of the love about which it speaks." [Lincoln, 212ff]

"What is the object in view in the mention of these dimensions? It is left unnamed. Hence the many conjectures on the subject; e.g., that it is the Christian Church, the work of redemption, or the mystery previously noticed, the mystery of the Cross, the love of God, the wisdom of God, love, all that God has revealed or done in us and for us. But the context naturally suggests the love of Christ, that being the supreme theme and the one which is immediately set before us in express terms." [Salmond, Expositor's GK NT, 315]

v. 19 — to know the love of the Christ — γνώαι τε ... ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ [gnōnai te ... agapēn tou christou] —

"Paul wants the readers to be empowered so as to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. This petition is remarkable, for although the apostle has said much in chapters 1-3 about his readers being in Christ, he assumes that they do not adequately appreciate Christ's love. Also, God's almighty power is needed to grasp its dimensions; hence he prays for power to enable them to understand how immense it is. This is not a petition that they may love Christ more, however important this might be; rather, that they might understand Christ's love for them. Further, their grasping this cannot be simply a mental exercise. Clearly, it is personal knowledge, and, although it undoubtedly includes insight into the significance of God's love in the plan of redemption, it cannot be reduced simply to intellectual reflection. Paul wants them to be empowered so as to grasp the dimensions of that love in their own experience." [O'Brien, 264] "Believers need to grasp the intensity with which Christ loves them ('the love of Christ' is not their love for him but his love for them as in 5.2, 25).... Elsewhere and with various images Paul attempts to explain the extent of Christ's love and of God's: that love extends to sinners (Rom 5.6), overcomes all obstacles (Rom 8:35ff), constrains believers (2 Cor 5.14). [Paul] has in mind here its effects on believers; when love rules their lives they are able to face up to the moral duties which [Paul] is about to lay on them in the remainder of the letter." [Best, 347]

TO KNOW BY EXPERIENCE — "The words 'to know' ... speaks of knowledge gained by experience." [Wuest, 90] "To know – Practically, through experience; while *apprehend* marks the knowledge as *conception*." [Vincent, Word Studies in NT]

THIS IS WHAT GOD WANTS US TO KNOW — *"Almost all men are infected with the disease of desiring to obtain useless knowledge. It is of great importance that we should be told what is necessary for us to know, and what the Lord desires us to contemplate, above and below, on the right hand and on the left, before and behind. The love of Christ is held out to us as the subject which ought to occupy our daily and nightly meditations, and in which we ought to be wholly plunged. He who is in possession of this alone has enough. Beyond it there is nothing solid, nothing useful, — nothing, in short, that is proper or sound. Though you survey the heaven and earth and sea, you will never go beyond this without overstepping the lawful boundary of wisdom."* [Calvin, Ephesians]

that surpasses knowledge — τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως [tēn hyperballousan tēs gnōseōs] — "Paradoxically, the request is that they may know the love of Christ that *surpasses knowledge*. The earlier expression, 'what is the breadth and length and height and depth', focused on the vast dimensions of Christ's love. Now, by means of a more specific equivalent, its immensity and incomprehensibility are brought to the fore." [O'Brien, 264] *"This love surpasses knowledge, gnōsis, 'experiential knowledge.' That is, no matter how much the saint experiences of the love of Christ, yet there are oceans of love in the great heart of God that have not been touched by his experience. One is reminded of the words of that saint of old who penned the following lines on the walls of his cell regarding the love of God; 'Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.'" [Wuest, 90] "A similar expression occurs in another Epistle: 'the peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.' (Philippians 4:7) No man can approach to God without being raised above himself and above the world. On this ground the sophists refuse to admit that we can know with certainty that we enjoy the grace of God; for they measure faith by the perception of the bodily senses. But Paul justly contends that this wisdom exceeds all knowledge; for, if the faculties of man could reach it, the prayer of Paul that God would bestow it must have been unnecessary. Let us remember, therefore, that the certainty of faith is knowledge, but is acquired by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, not by the*

acuteness of our own intellect.” [Calvin, Ephesians]

PAUL IS NOT DENIGRATING KNOWLEDGE — “*The wording of this prayer, however, does not suggest any disparagement of knowledge. After all, Paul regarded revealed knowledge as essential for the Christian life (vv. 18, 19; cf. 1:17, 18). Rather, to speak of Christ’s love as ‘surpassing knowledge’ means that it is so great that one can never know it fully. We can never plumb its depths or comprehend its magnitude. No matter how much we know of the love of Christ, how fully we enter into his love for us, there is always more to know and experience. And the implication, in the light of the following words, is that we cannot be as spiritually mature as we should be unless we are empowered by God to ‘grasp the limitless dimensions of the love of Christ.’*” [O’Brien, 264] “This prayer in no way denigrates knowledge. As elsewhere in the letter (cf. 1:9, 17,18; 3:3-5, 9; 4:13; 5:17), revealed knowledge is of utmost importance to [Paul] and it is something that he desires as a primary goal for his readers’ growth, requesting it twice in this prayer (v 18 and v 19a). It is simply that the supreme object of Christian knowledge, Christ’s love, is so profound that its depths will never be sounded and so vast that its extend will never be encompassed by the human mind. That which it is absolutely necessary to know, in fact, surpasses knowledge. There is a note of ultimate mystery about the divine intervention of which Christ’s love is the manifestation, yet, ... ‘the attempt to know the unknowable is a paradox which is at the heart of all true religion.’” [Lincoln, 213] “This love goes so far beyond any ordinary scheme of measurement that it cannot be fully understood; it surpasses knowledge. [Paul] neither depreciates knowledge here as if he were attacking an early form of gnosis nor compares love and knowledge; if he were doing the latter, knowledge would come off as badly as every other virtue with which love might be compared (cf 1 Cor 13); in a sense love and knowledge are incomparable since the knowledge is human and the love divine. Knowledge is of course necessary, otherwise revelation could not be appropriated (1.9; 3.3ff) nor love understood. Yet Christ’s love can never be fully grasped either intellectually or existentially.” [Best, 347]

WORDS FROM A HEART OVERFLOWING — “There *seems* to be a slight contradiction here in expressing a wish to know what cannot be known, or in a desire that they should understand that which cannot be understood. But it is the language of a man whose heart was full to overflowing. He had a deep sense of the love of Christ, and he expressed a wish that they should understand it. Suddenly he has such an apprehension of it, that he says it is indeed infinite. No one can attain to a full view of it. It had no limit. It was unlike anything which had ever been evinced before. It was love which led the Son of God to become incarnate; to leave the heavens; to be a man of sorrows; to be reviled and persecuted; to be put to death in the most shameful manner — ON A CROSS. Who could understand that Where else had there been anything like that? What was there with which to compare it? What was there by which it could be illustrated? And how could it be fully understood? Yet *something* of it might be seen, known, felt; and the apostle desired that, as far as possible, they should understand that great love which the Lord Jesus had manifested for a dying world.” [Barne’s Notes on NT]