

## Power to Know God’s Knowledge-Surpassing Love that Results in Faith, Fullness and Hope

by Jeff Kuester

Ephesians 3:14-21 references a very specific key to the Christian life that may have been largely overlooked and unappropriated, resulting in many who have lost hope, peace, and joy. Before the disclosure theory reference to numerous “walk and stand”<sup>1</sup> imperatives in the second half of his letter to the Ephesians, which begins with the seemingly impossible directive to live a life worthy of the calling<sup>2</sup>, Saint Paul concludes the first “sit” half of the letter with a prayer (or the completion of the prayer began in chapter 1) in Ephesians 3:14-21 that reveals critical aspects of an essential key to accomplishing any of those imperatives (emphasis added):

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with **power** through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have **power**, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

The emphasized key, expressed as a common thread throughout the passage, is a very particular type of power, and Paul reveals here and in other passages a number of important aspects of this particular type of power. In addition, and in the continuing spirit of various theological traditions, including the liberal protestant theological tradition that attempts to apply historical and modern scientific understandings to Scriptural hermeneutics, this paper also examines the continuing applicability of receiving and appropriating this specifically described power of God that is essential to live of an authentically Christian life that is beyond imagination, to the ultimate glory of God forever.

Verse 14 begins with “[f]or this reason,” necessitating an understanding of the referenced reason. Paul previously used the same words in 3:1, and since verses 2-13 are generally understood to form a parenthetical grammatical digression<sup>3</sup>, we must actually look to chapter 2 to determine the reason to which Paul refers. While Paul could have been simply referring to the access referenced in 2:18 that we all have to the Father through one Spirit, most interpretations are in line with the MacDonald commentary in the Roman Catholic tradition, which states:

---

<sup>1</sup> Nee, Watchman. *Sit, Walk, Stand: The Process of Christian Maturity* (Kindle Locations 56-63). CLC Publications.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. 4:1.

<sup>3</sup> Williamson, Peter S.. *Ephesians (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture)* (p. 85). Baker Publishing Group.

Ephesians 3:14 takes up the thought that was interrupted at 3:1. The same introductory formula is repeated: *toutou charin* (because of this, for this reason). “This” refers to the description of the unity of Jew and Gentile in 2:11-22, which has been accomplished through Paul’s preaching. ... The prayer takes up many elements of the intercession found in 1:16-23. The usual Jewish position for prayer was standing (*e.g.*, Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13), but prostration is not unknown in the Bible. Gentiles might have associated it especially with the stance one must adopt before a king (Thurston 117). ... To bow down on one’s knees is more closely associated with homage or worship than prayer in the other occurrences of the expression in the Pauline corpus (*e.g.*, Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10), but intercessory prayer and homage probably go together in this text (Lincoln [1990] 202).<sup>4</sup>

Thus, an initial aspect of the setting of this prayer is that Paul kneels, as if to a King (and in fact, the King of Kings to whom he and every believing human has been granted access through the death of the King’s son), which evidences Paul’s opinion that this prayer is an important prayer. Furthermore, the digression of verses 2-13 reminds the reader, among other things, that he considers this reason to be so important that he has been imprisoned by Christ for the sake of the audience Gentiles, in order to share the mystery of unified access that had so long been hidden. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, as emphasized by the doxology of v. 21, in case there was any doubt, the kneeling of Paul evidences his understanding that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, alpha and omega, the prayer begins and ends with a recognition of God’s glory, reminding the Ephesians readers (and us, as with the remainder of the prayer) that there is in a sense a continual vertical circle in our relationship with God that must be repeated over and over. Whatever is in the prayer itself must begin and end with glory being given to God, completing the circle. Lather, rinse, repeat. There should be no “been there, done that” approach, or “I’ve matured past that” perspective.

Then, rather than simply referring to God in the majestic sense that would typically be associated with kneeling, Paul contrastingly refers to God as Father and further emphasizes the familial relationship with a twist on words applicable to every family in heaven and on earth in verse 15<sup>6</sup>. Consequently, Paul is unable to understate the significance of how important it is for us to understand the significance of the filial relationship we have with God, and he addresses God as Father three times in chapter 1 and once in chapter 2, providing further support to the notion that we need to understand our identity and unity with God from this perspective. John similarly exclaimed, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”<sup>7</sup> Jesus himself, in modeling our prayers to God, begins with “Our Father in heaven, hallowed by your name,”<sup>8</sup> reminding us both of our filial relationship and of the glory due him, the beginning of wisdom. Christ also reminds us of the

---

<sup>4</sup> MacDonald, Margaret Y.. *Sacra Pagina: Colossians and Ephesians* (Kindle Locations 6890-6900). Liturgical Press. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 9:10.

<sup>6</sup> Hoehner, Harold W.. *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2002) 474.

<sup>7</sup> 1 John 3:1.

<sup>8</sup> Matt 6:9.

importance of understanding that we are not just God's children, but God's beloved *little children*<sup>9</sup>, which provides the heart-level, completely trusting foundation of belief for the remainder of the prayer. Our understanding of this identity is also expressed well by Packer as follows:

If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. "Father" is the Christian name for God. (*Evangelical Magazine* 7, pp. 19-20)<sup>10</sup>

For how many people who claim to be followers of Christ does the thought of being God's child really "prompt and control" their "whole outlook on life"? If Packer is correct, and the number of people is small, this concept has been greatly overlooked and therefore provides great opportunity for real spiritual growth in Christendom today.

Paul continues in 3:16-17 by requesting that out of his (the Father's) glorious riches (also translated as riches of his glory)<sup>11</sup>, "he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." In this passage, without yet defining what the power actually is, Paul explains several aspects of this power, including the source of the power (the Father), whether it is valuable (from his riches), first effect of the power (we are strengthened), how the power comes to us (through the Spirit), where the power goes (into our inner being), and second result of the power (Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith). By first defining that the power is from God, Paul makes it clear that this power is not from ourselves or from any other person or thing on earth. Could the degree to which we care about the opinions of others be indirectly proportional to the degree to which we have received this power from God? Don Miller put it this way,

Here's a thought that haunts me: What if we are designed as sensitive antennas, receptors to receive love, a longing we often mistake as a need to be impressive? What if some of the most successful people in the world got that way because their success was fueled by a misappropriated need for love? What if the people we consider to be great are actually the most broken? And what if the whole time they're seeking applause they are missing out on true intimacy because they've never learned how to receive it?<sup>12</sup>

The rich value of this power also cannot be understated since it is the power to do everything in our lives that would be glorifying to God. The ESV translation says that this power is from the riches of his glory. Paul explains in 2 Cor 3:7-18 that the ministry of the Spirit

---

<sup>9</sup> Luke 18:15-17.

<sup>10</sup> Packer, 226-227.

<sup>11</sup> Eph 3:16 ESV.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Miller, *Scary Close: Dropping the Act and Finding True Intimacy* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2014) 6.

is glorious, producing more endless glory than the glory Moses received when was in the presence of God, so much so that the earlier glory was considered to be no glory at all. In this context, Paul is also making the distinction that temporal earthly riches are not riches at all, which is in line with his admonition that the love of money is the root of all evil<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the power of money and the reliance upon it is not true power and does not provide real hope. Christ himself contrasted service to God with service to, of all things, money,<sup>14</sup> so this is definitely an important distinction for Paul to have made. Moreover, many have considered Paul's treatment of God's riches in Ephesians (1:7; 3:8; 3:16) to be so important that it is the very theme of the entire letter of Ephesians:

Ephesians has been given such titles as the believer's bank, the Christian's checkbook, and the treasure house of the Bible. This beautiful letter tells Christians of their great riches, inheritances, and fullnesses in Jesus Christ and in His church. It tells them what they possess and how they can claim and enjoy their possessions. ... No Christian, therefore, has reason to be spiritually deprived, undernourished, or impoverished. In fact, he has no reason not to be completely healthy and immeasurably rich in the things of God. The Lord's heavenly resources are more than adequate to cover all our past debts, all our present liabilities, and all our future needs—and still not reduce the heavenly assets. That is the marvel of God's gracious provision for His children.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, the riches of this inheritance can instill real hope. What if every time we are anxious or fearful, lacking the will *power* to do or say the right thing or love someone else more than ourselves, it is because we have not properly or completely received this invaluable power from God's riches? When life has us down or when our suffering keeps us looking down instead of looking up, it can be even more difficult to not get angry and lash out to other people, perhaps this is when we need this power the most. In this context, receiving this particular type of power could be more valuable than anything for which we could possibly pray.

Paul's words also indicate that the first effect or result of his power is that we are strengthened.<sup>16</sup> In other words, one could conceive of the receipt and transmission of power that has no discernable long-term effect on the conduit, such as a steel pipe receiving and directing water, or a power cable receiving and directing electrical power. Many Christians may view themselves in this manner, simply receiving the love of God and immediately directing it out to other people. Another common analogy is that Christians are mirrors, simply reflecting the love of God. However, Paul says here that this particular power also "strengthens" us, so to continue the metaphor, we are at least in a sense "living" conduits of this power since we are also affected by it. As discussed below, the metaphor can actually be extended ever further with the help of modern scientific understandings.

---

<sup>13</sup> 1 Tim 6:10.

<sup>14</sup> Matt 6:24.

<sup>15</sup> MacArthur, John. *Ephesians MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, Moody Publishers, 1986), Kindle Edition, Location 59.

<sup>16</sup> Ep 3:16.

Next, we see that the power is received through the Holy Spirit. As Packer explains so well, it is the exclusive work of the Holy Spirit to wake us by opening the eyes of our heart<sup>17</sup> and keep us awake to understand our true identities as children of God, in double witness<sup>18</sup> with our spirit in Romans 8 (emphasis added):

For the vital truth to be grasped here is that the Spirit is given to Christians as “the Spirit of adoption,” and **in all his ministry to Christians he acts as the Spirit of adoption**. As such, his task and purpose **throughout** is to make Christians realize with increasing clarity the meaning of their filial relationship with God in Christ, and to lead them into an **ever deeper** response to God in this relationship. Paul is pointing to this truth when he writes, “Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8: 15 KJV). “God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying [that is, prompting you to cry], ‘Abba, Father’” (Gal 4: 6 KJV). Just as adoption itself is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for unifying, the New Testament view of the Christian life, so a recognition that the Spirit comes to us as the Spirit of adoption is the key thought for unlocking, and the focal thought for integrating, all that the New Testament tells us about his ministry to Christians. From the standpoint provided by this focal thought, we see that his work has three aspects. In the first place, **he makes and keeps us conscious**— sometimes vividly conscious, always conscious to some extent, even when the perverse part of us prompts us to deny this consciousness— that we are God’s children by free grace through Jesus Christ. This is his work of giving faith, assurance and joy. In the second place, he moves us to look to God as to a father, showing toward him the respectful boldness and unlimited trust that is natural to children secure in an adored father’s love. This is his work of making us cry “Abba, Father”— the attitude described is what the cry expresses. In the third place, he impels us to act up to our position as royal children by manifesting the family likeness (conforming to Christ), furthering the family welfare (loving the brethren) and maintaining the family honor (seeking God’s glory). This is his work of sanctification. Through this progressive deepening of **filial consciousness** and character, with its outworking in the pursuit of what God loves and the avoidance of what he hates, “we are transformed by the Spirit of the Lord in ever-increasing splendour into his own image” (2 Cor 3: 18 Phillips).<sup>19</sup>

Paul also points out that our “inner being” is the locale of this strengthening with power by the Holy Spirit. Just as the eyes of heart are to be opened in Eph 1:18, it is not the rational mind or ourselves generally that is to be strengthened with this specific power, but our inner being. It is important to note that this inner self “requires renewal which it undergoes day by day and is not synonymous with the ‘new self’ (Eph 4:24; Col 3:9ff.). The relationship is better understood by seeing the inner self strengthened to approximate the new self more closely.”<sup>20</sup> In addition, this power is important in our inner man because, as we are instructed in Psalm 4:23, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Consequently, because

---

<sup>17</sup> Eph 1:18.

<sup>18</sup> Packer, 255.

<sup>19</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973) 248-249.

<sup>20</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Power and Magic: The Concept of Power in Ephesians* (Eugene, OR, WIPF and Stock Publishers, 1989) 88.

everything we do flows from our heart, which must be renewed day by day<sup>21</sup>, it is very important that the Holy Spirit provide ongoing power in this area since it *flows* to affect and effect everything we do, which would include the fruit of our lives and all our ability to “walk and stand” as later instructed in chapters 4-6.

A focus on changes to the inner man that automatically and desirously flows into outer man actions is a central aspect of the modernly overlooked practice of Pietism.

In other words, the Pietist ethos — stemming from the early and original Pietist movement ... focused on heart Christianity. It was the “religion of the heart” or what early Pietist leader Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705) called “the inner man.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps even as a result of a strategy of the enemy, the very understanding of the word Pietism today is associated many of the worst attitudes and actions of Christianity, including “holier-than-thou” spiritual attitudes, religious legalism, withdrawal from improving society<sup>23</sup>, and works justification. Nevertheless, referencing the writings of others, Olson writes in an earlier article that many of the presently discussed themes of our passage were actually part of the central ethos of historic Pietism:

[German historian Hans Schneider indicated about the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Pietists] Pietists evidenced a “shared identity”: “They considered themselves to be children of God, ‘comrades in Christ,’ and addressed one another as brothers and sisters. As a group,” he argues, “they all spoke the same language.” That common language was about being “awakened” inwardly, spiritually through the Holy Spirit.

...

For all the Pietists, holy living was extremely important, but it was never to be treated as drudgery or coercion; in order to be “holy” it had to flow naturally from a transformed temperament—what Scottish Puritan preacher Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) called “the expulsive power of a new affection.” For Pietists, the affections, often referred to as the “heart,” guide and direct the will. The heart of a truly converted person *wants* to serve God with holiness of life and devotion even though perfection is eschatological.

...

According to Spener and all Pietists, the gospel aims at transformation of the inner man; it is not enough for the outer man to confess doctrines correctly or practice charity or engage rightly in sacraments and liturgy. If the inner man of the person is not transformed by the Word and Spirit, all those activities of the outer man, though performed to perfection, are useless.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> 2 Cor 4:16.

<sup>22</sup> Roger E. Olson and Christian T. Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015) 3.

<sup>23</sup> Olson, Introduction.

<sup>24</sup> Roger E. Olson, “Reclaiming Pietism”, Patheos, (March 16, 2011)  
<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2011/03/reclaiming-pietism/>

With regard to the referenced “expulsive power of a new affection”, another modern author picked up on a similar notion in history that provides additional insight into the action-controlling nature of this type of power:

Over a hundred years ago in the Deep South, a phrase so common in our Christian culture today, *born again*, was seldom or never used. Rather, the phrase used to describe the breakthrough into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was “I was seized by the power of a great affection.” These words described both the initiative of God and the explosion within the heart when Jesus, instead of being a face on a holy card with long hair and a robe with many folds, became real, alive, and Lord of one’s personal and professional life. *Seized by the power of a great affection* was a visceral description of the phenomenon of Pentecost, authentic conversion, and the release of the Holy Spirit. The phrase lent new meaning to the old Russian proverb, “Those who have the disease called Jesus will never be cured.”<sup>25</sup>

The Pulpit Commentary from the 19<sup>th</sup> century provides other helpful insights into the inner man as used in this verse, particularly with respect to our innate inability to consciously influence it, making it sound more like what modern psychology refers to as our unconscious:

The inner man is the seat of influence, but with us it is the seat of spiritual feebleness. Most men may contrive to order their outward conduct suitably; but who has control of the inner man? Faith, trust, humility, love, patience, and the like graces which belong to the inner man, are what we are weakest in, and what we have least power to make strong. In this very region it is sought that the Ephesians might be strengthened with might by the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is available for this very purpose for all that ask him.<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, who has control of the inner man? Modern psychologists have spoken to this very issue, including Dr. Timothy Wilson, a psychologist at the University of Virginia:

When [Freud] says . . . that consciousness is the tip of the mental iceberg, he was short of the mark by quite a bit—it may be more the size of a snowball on top of that iceberg. The mind operates most efficiently by relegating a good deal of high-level, sophisticated thinking to the unconscious, just as a modern jumbo jetliner is able to fly on automatic pilot with little or no input from the human, “conscious” pilot. The adaptive unconscious does an excellent job of sizing up the world, warning people of danger, setting goals, and initiating action in a sophisticated and efficient manner.<sup>27</sup>

Likewise, commenting on Dr. Wilson’s perspective, Dr. James K. A. Smith, professor of philosophy at Calvin College where he holds the Gary & Henrietta Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology & Worldview, comments as follows:

---

<sup>25</sup> Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 1990) 181-182.

<sup>26</sup> Spence-Jones, H. D. M. (Henry Donald Maurice), 1836-1917, editor. *The Pulpit Commentary*. New York : London :Anson D.F. Randolph; Kegan Paul, Trench, 1883.

<sup>27</sup> Timothy Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 6–7.

At one point Wilson wagers that only about 5 percent of what we do in a given day is the outcome of conscious, deliberate choices we make, processed by that snowball on the tip of the iceberg that is human consciousness. The rest of our actions and behaviors are managed below the surface, by all sorts of learned yet now unconscious ways of intending and navigating the world. Psychologists refer to these acquired, unconscious habits as “automaticities,” for the same reason Aristotle called them “second nature”: because these are ways that we move in the world without thinking about it. The language of automaticity isn’t meant to reduce us to machines or robots; it’s meant to describe how we acquire ways of navigating the world that become built in, so to speak.<sup>28</sup>

So, we as Christians should recognize that we are *not* as in control of our heart-felt beliefs as we might assume. The harsh reality is that the most basic tenets of the Christian faith, the “right answers” to all religious questions, are not actually believed by our hearts if our actions are not consistent with what we say we believe because, after all, *everything* we do flows from our hearts, as Psalm 4:23 assures us, and as the true Pietists held to be important. We know this to be true, as author Geoff Dyer puts it, “Your deepest desire is the one manifested by your daily life and habits.” Yet, we repeatedly deceive ourselves into thinking that we can believe one thing and actually do another, and that this is somehow even appropriate because we can use the “flesh is weak” spiritual scapegoat. After all, as said by Ludwig Wittgenstein, perhaps the greatest philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, “Nothing is so difficult as not deceiving oneself.”<sup>29</sup> The truth is that our heart simply does not often believe what we tell it to believe, and the Holy Spirit is the only one who actually can fix this. Unfortunately, it is often only through a dramatic spiritual and psychological event that supernaturally overwrites the learned and long-reinforced patterns, the out-of-reach erroneous automaticities.

Returning to our passage, we see the second “result” of this process of receiving this particular type of power from the Holy Spirit, namely, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, based on the text, faith itself is in some way a result of receiving a particular type of power from the Holy Spirit in our inner being. Since we know from Colossians 1:4-5 that faith in God and love for others “spring” from hope, and from Galatians 5:22-23 that faithfulness and love are “fruit” of the spirit, it stands to reason that the indwelling of Christ in our heart through faith would indeed be a result of the power of God through the Holy Spirit, in accordance with the Reformed tradition, while at the same time being proper subject matter for a prayer to God as evidenced by this prayer. In addition, and in accordance with the Pietist tradition, rather than pray for fruit of the Spirit directly, and much less try to make ourselves better at producing poor semblances of the fruit of the Spirit to be seen by others, we should be earnestly praying for this particular power from the Holy Spirit so that all of the fruit of the Spirit would naturally spring from the hope created by that power.

Continuing the prayer, “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power” Paul reminds the Ephesians that they are “rooted and established” in love. This

---

<sup>28</sup> Smith, James K. A.. *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (pp. 34-35). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Beale, “Wittgenstein’s Confession” *New York Times*, September 18, 2018

<sup>30</sup> Eph 3:17.



may very well be the “first love” spoken by Jesus about that church in Rev 2:4, even though the church was good at finding false doctrine (Rev 2:2). When Paul instructed Timothy regarding the believers at Ephesus, they had apparently not yet overcome the false doctrine problem, but more importantly, Paul reminds them in 1 Tim 1:5-7:

<sup>5</sup>The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup> Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. <sup>7</sup> They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

One could therefore argue that even after we have been rooted and established in love from God so that we have faith for Christ to dwell in our heart and to love other people (Col 1:11), we are prone to forget that love and engage in meaningless talk, despite successful efforts to root out false doctrine, because we do not “know” what we are other confident in affirming. This cognitive dissonance between “knowing” and “confident affirmation” is exactly what Paul later prays about, and it is explicitly related directly to the particular power for which Paul is praying.

Just before Paul finally defines the exact type of power at issue in this prayer, he references one final parenthetical, “together with all the Lord’s holy people.” Paul reminds us that the power for which is praying is not limited to a particular group of Christians, but all believers. In fact, one could argue that in the moment, Paul is expanding his prayer outside the bounds of the readers of the letter and praying that all believers, everywhere, and possibly for all time, have the particular power for which he is praying.

In verses 18-19, Paul finally defines the power for which he has been praying to be the power, “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.” In one sense, Paul is paradoxically praying for us to know that which is unknowable, which should fascinate us and fill us with wonder, which Aristotle said is the beginning of wisdom. Just as the peace referenced in Phil 4:7 transcends our understanding because it guards our hearts and minds, we are able to “grasp” and “know” this love that surpasses knowledge because, as we saw in verse 16, it is in our inner being that we receive the power to grasp and know this love, and this is only through the work of the Holy Spirit, which can be in response to prayer.

Paul was aware of a danger, especially in the churches of the Greek world, of a faith that depended simply on intellectual knowledge (cf 1 Cor. 1:22; Col. 2:18; 1 Tim. 1:4; 6:4). This was the supreme weakness of Gnosticism. He is not so much arguing, however, against an approach to faith in Christ which is barren because it is merely intellectual. Rather he shows again and again that his own line of approach is totally different. He realized that ‘true knowledge’, the knowledge of God, ‘is unattainable without love’ (Scott). If there is no love, the Spirit of Christ is not present, and there can be no understanding. John 7:17 and 15:9-17 express this same fact by showing that understanding comes where there is obedience, which is the fruit of love. The impossibility of holding the faith of Christ without love is one of the great themes of 1

John. In fact these verses give two reasons why understanding proceeds of necessity from love.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, there is much that can be said about the next result of this power in this passage, which further reflects on the nature of the power and of the Holy Spirit, which is “that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” First, the fullness of God is spoken of as something that “fills” us, as water might fill a vessel. Paul also refers to this notion in Eph 1:23 by telling us that the church is Christ’s body, “the fullness of him who fills everything in every way,” and in 5:18 that we are to be “filled with the Spirit.” Christ himself went into the wilderness “full” of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) and returned “in the *power* of the Spirit” (Luke 4:14).

Phrases like “filled with the Spirit” and “baptized in the Holy Spirit” hold many connotations in Christendom, particularly in the Pentecostal tradition, but also including in the Catholic Church:

The experience of being “baptized in the Holy Spirit” expands our capacity to know, love, and serve God. Our faith becomes more courageous, filled with greater joy, purpose, and power. It is more than the power to become Christian or to live in holiness. It is the power by which Christians engage in wonderful acts of service for God’s kingdom with the strength of the Holy Spirit that comes to us through charisms. It is an experience that manifests differently with each person, as the Spirit wills. Some Christians believe that for this experience of the Holy Spirit to be truly manifested in a person’s life, a person must experience the gift of tongues. The Catholic Church does not hold this view. Many may indeed receive the gift of tongues, but that is not a litmus test for being baptized by the Holy Spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Packer also spoke previously of such experiences, noting as follows:

Naturally, such Christians feel they are missing something vital, and they ask anxiously how they may close the gap between the New Testament picture of life in the Spirit and their own felt barrenness in daily experience. Then, perhaps, in desperation they set themselves to seek a single transforming psychic event whereby what they feel to be their personal “unspirituality barrier” may be broken for good and all. The event may be thought of as the “Keswick experience,” or “full surrender,” or “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” or “entire sanctification,” or “sealing with the Spirit,” or the gift of tongues, or (if we steer by Catholic rather than Protestant stars) a “second conversion,” or the prayer of quiet, or of union. Yet even if something happens which they feel able to identify with what they were looking for, they soon find that the “unspirituality barrier” has not been broken after all, and so they move on restlessly to something new.

---

<sup>31</sup> Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 1989) 111.

<sup>32</sup> Paul S. Ragan, *Gift of the Holy Spirit: What Every Christian Should Know About the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: St. Luke’s Publications, 2014) 43.

Many are caught in these toils today. What help is needed here? we ask. The light shed by the truth of adoption on the ministry of the Spirit gives the answer.<sup>33</sup>

As mentioned above regarding the Pietist, there is an “expulsive” nature to any “filling.” Consequently, if old incorrect thought patterns are not expelled from our identities by the overwhelming power of the Holy Spirit to know in our heart how loved we are as a child of God, there has not been a filling. In addition if there has not been a transformative effect on our actions, there has not been a heart change since all actions flow from our hearts. In that vein, Christ said of whoever believes in him, “Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water,” and John made certain we understood that Christ said this “about the Spirit.”<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, it was prophesied in Jeremiah 2:13 that “My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” Allowing others to define us, rather than believing who the Spirit says we are, may function as cracks in our cisterns (or pulling our branch from the vine) that prevent us from being “filled with the Spirit,” unless there is an overwhelming filling, such as through a second Baptism or similar overwhelming event.

The final verses in our passage include a doxology that reminds us of the importance of being given the *power* to have a heart-filling knowledge of just how much our Heavenly Father loves us. More specifically, Paul concludes his prayer, “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.”<sup>35</sup> This is the most hope-inspiring portion of the prayer since it taps into our imagination about the future and reminds us that the glory of God is at stake and is the purpose of the entire prayer. Of course, it is significant that Paul ties God’s ability to work in our lives to this particularly type of power that is at work within us. This same particular power to understand, in our heart, through the Holy Spirit, how very much we are loved, is apparently what releases God’s power in our lives to accomplish more than we ask or imagine. This is indeed an important key to living the Christian life because it is how we remain “in Christ”, having our adopted identity be the center of our existing, i.e., how we believe God sees us when considering us. We are able to “walk and stand” in chapters 4-6 because we “sit” in this identity, and the walking and standing automatically flow like living waters out of us, like fruit at the end of the branch that is firmly grafted into the vine through the commonality of unconditional love for a beloved child that is fully received and creates a complete, filled-to-the-measure connection since the love of God has nowhere else to go except to create fruit and flow through us to other people.

When Paul wrote about this particular *power*, there was of course no understanding of electrical power. Nevertheless, some have theorized that analogies might be made to this type of power:

The power of the Holy Spirit can be likened to electricity and the Sacrament of Baptism to the attachment of electrical lines from a central Power Plant to our homes (to our

---

<sup>33</sup> Packer, 247-248.

<sup>34</sup> John 7:38-39.

<sup>35</sup> Eph 3:20-21.

lives). The connection of our homes to the Power Plant does not, of itself, give rise to an ongoing flow of power within us. Great resources of power may be available to us, but until the right switches are turned on, the power does not flow. The disciplines of a holy life are the means by which we access the Spirit's sanctifying grace, the power that lights each room and circulates fresh air, the power that dispels darkness and mustiness, the power that restores within the likeness of Christ. As we surrender each aspect of our lives to Jesus, one by one, they become electrified with the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we are baptized in the Holy Spirit, it is as though a more intense current of power flows through us. It is the Spirit's charismatic grace empowering the appliances in various rooms, bringing forth new and surprising calls to service.<sup>36</sup>

One might argue that "disciplines" are in reality more like "fruit" and are better understood as the results of the flow of the particular power discussed herein, nevertheless the metaphor may be useful for other reasons.

There are parallels in mathematical models for quantities and potentials as represented by Ohm's law for electricity, Poiseuille's law for hydraulics, and Fourier's law for thermal. More specifically, the flow rate of water in a pipe has been analogized to the flow rate, or amperage, of current in a conductor, and resistance can be viewed both as a substance with less conductivity and as a narrowed pipe. At the time of Paul, it was known that water flowed, and that the power of that flow could be harnessed for work.<sup>37</sup> The Roman engineer Vitruvius apparently had the first technical description of a watermill, dated to 40/10 BC, and the device was fitted with an undershot wheel so that power was transmitted via a gearing mechanism. Consequently, concepts of water force, resistance and power may have been known to Paul, giving support to the idea that our resistance to accepting God's power of love may be allowed by God to act as a limit on our ability to receive and appropriate that power.

We also know today that where there is less resistance, where connections are more solid, and where there is a potential drop, power flows more freely. Thus, as discussed, if we resist the work of the Holy Spirit, if our identity is not secure as a child of God such that we remain in Christ, or if we profess ourselves wise and views ourselves not in need as "little" children, power flows much more slowly. Similarly, power can be stored in devices like capacitors and batteries, yet current can leak out in faulty components or connections, resulting in loss of power such that the storage devices never actually get full. The views of other people, the fears of this world and the deceitfulness of wealth (like the thorns in the Parable of the Sower<sup>38</sup>) work to prevent us from ever being "filled" with the Spirit.

In conclusion, just as Paul prayed in our passage, we should ask our Heavenly Father for this very specific power through the Holy Spirit to help us know in our heart just how much he loves us, as his little children, all for the Glory of God. Then, we may be filled to the measure with the fullness of God, and we may experience more than we can even imagine, leading to hope and production of all the fruit of the Spirit.

---

<sup>36</sup> Ragan, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Wikander 2000, pp. 373f.; Donners, Waelkens & Deckers 2002, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> Matt 13:22.