

# Ephesians 3:18-19 Commentary

PREVIOUS

EPHESIANS - CHRIST AND THE CHURCH  
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NEXT

Ephesians 3:18 may be [able](#) to [comprehend](#) with [all](#) the [saints](#) [what](#) is the [breadth](#) and [length](#) and [height](#) and [depth](#), ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [hina](#) [exischusete](#) (2PPAAS) [katalabesthai](#) (AMN) [sun](#) [pasin](#) [tois](#) [hagiois](#) [ti](#) [to](#) [platos](#) [kai](#) [mekos](#) [kai](#) [hupsos](#) [kai](#) [bathos](#).

**BGT** **να** ξισχ σητε καταλαβ σθαι σ ν π σιν το ς γ οισ τ τ πλ τορ κα μ κορ κα ψορ κα β θορ,

**Amplified:** That you may have the power and be strong to apprehend and grasp with all the saints [God's devoted people, the experience of that love] what is the breadth and length and height and depth [of it]; ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** you may have the strength fully to grasp the meaning of the breadth and length and depth and height of Christ's love, ([Westminster Press](#))

**ESV** may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

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

**NET:** you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV** may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

**NLT:** And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. (NLT - Tyndale House)

**NLT (revised)** And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.

**Phillips:** may be able to grasp (with all Christians) how wide and deep and long and high is the love of Christ - (Phillips: Touchstone)

**Wuest:** in order that you may be able to grasp with all the saints what is the breadth and width and height and depth, ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** that ye may be in strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height,

**MAY BE ABLE TO COMPREHEND WITH ALL THE SAINTS:** [hina](#) [exischusete](#) (2PPAAS) [katalabesthai](#) (AMN) [sun](#) [pasin](#) [tois](#) [hagiois](#):

- **May be able to comprehend** - Eph 3:19; 1:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23; Job 11:7, 8, 9; Ps 103:11,12,17; 139:6; Isa 55:9; John 15:13; Gal 2:20; 3:13; Phil 2:5, 6, 7, 8; 3:8, 9, 10; 1Ti 1:14, 15, 16; 3:16; Titus 2:13,14; Re 3:21
- Ep 1:10,15; Dt 33:2,3; 2Chr 6:41; Ps 116:15; 132:9; 145:10; Zech 14:5; 2Co 13:13; Col 1:4
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:17b-19 Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

**ENABLED TO GRASP**

## THE UNGRASPABLE!

**(SO THAT YOU)** may be able ([exischuo](#)) to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth - I have added "**SO THAT**" because the first word in the Greek text is [hina](#) (see [Greek](#)) which functions to introduce a purpose clause but for some reason is left **untranslated** in most popular modern versions (NAS, ESV, NIV, KJV, RSV, NET, HCSB). This omission of [hina](#) makes it difficult to recognize this sentence as a purpose clause. The Amplified translates it **that** you have the power..." **Young's Literal** (always worth comparing although it not always easy to read and is based on the Textus Receptus so will have words not in modern Greek manuscripts) renders it "**that** ye may be in strength to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height." Let me encourage you whenever you see a **term of purpose or result**, pause to ponder asking at least what is the purpose or result. In context, when the Spirit strengthens us in the inner man and Christ dwells in our heart and we are rooted and grounded in love, Paul says the result is two fold - first we may be able and second (an clearly intimately connected to the first thought) is we may comprehend, a verb which means to grasp or seize. The question is to comprehend or grasp what? While this verse does not make it clear, the mention of love in Eph 3:17 and love in Eph 3:19 would strongly suggest that we might be able to comprehend this indescribable ("4 dimensional" so to speak - breadth, etc), incomprehensible love of Christ. And not just to comprehend it which almost sounds like an intellectual exercise, but more significantly to experientially know it (know in Eph 3:19 is ginosko - know by experience).

In most of the translations it is easy to pass over the important phrase **may be able** which is brought out more graphically in other translations like the Amplified which renders it "That you may have the **power** and be strong to apprehend and grasp." The ESV has may have strength which helps bring out our need for supernatural "strength" (of heart and mind) to grasp what Paul is getting read to state. The point is that only a supernaturally enabled mind (or heart) could even hope to begin to be able to grasp what he is going to say. Or stated another way the preface asking for **power** to grasp implies that divine enabling is essential. We receive this divine enabling by beseeching God to grant it to us.

**Eadie's** comment on [hina](#) would support the preceding flow of thought, explaining that "conjunction ([hina](#)) expresses the design which these previous petitions had in view (Ep 3:16, 17). Their being strengthened, their being inhabited by Christ, and their "having been rooted and grounded in love," not only prepared them for this special study, but had made it their grand object. By a prior (**ED**: I would add "supernatural") invigoration they were disciplined to it, and braced up for it—"that ye may be fully able"—fully matched to the enterprise." ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**Cole** also agrees writing that "The focus shifts in Eph 3:18, from **love** in general to Christ's love for us. The Greek verb translated, "**may be able**," ([exischuo](#)) means, "to have the strength." The verb translated, "comprehend," means, "to lay hold of or seize." So Paul is praying that we may have the power to lay hold of or comprehend the immensity of Christ's love for us, which, paradoxically, is beyond comprehension. ([Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#))

**Blaikie** - The subject to be comprehended is not only beyond man's natural capacity, but beyond the ordinary force of his spiritual capacity. The tiring to be grasped needs a special strength of heart and soul; the heart needs to be enlarged, the mental "hands of the arms" need to be made strong (Genesis 49:24). But the attainment is not impossible—it is the experience of "all the saints;" all God's children are enabled to grasp something of this. ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

Our English word **comprehend** carries the idea of mentally grasping something, while apprehend suggests laying hold of it for yourself. In other words, it is possible to understand something but not really make it your own. Paul's concern is that we **lay hold of** the vast expanses of the **love of God**. He wants us to live supernaturally in four dimensions. When God gave the land to Abraham, He told him to "walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it" (Genesis 13:17). Abraham had to step out by faith and claim his inheritance.

A similar principle is seen in Joshua, Jehovah declaring to Joshua that..

"Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, I have given it to you, just as I spoke to Moses." (Joshua 1:3+)

**THOUGHT:** Did you see the principle? God had already bequeathed it to Joshua, but Joshua would not fully realize the reality of what was his promised possession without obedience to God's call to step out. In Ep 1:3+ Paul declares God's promise to believers that we have been blessed with "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus". Beloved, has the "sole of your foot tread" on these promised spiritual blessings? Step out by faith, remembering that genuine faith equates with Spirit enabled, grace saturated obedience. What is it in which you repeatedly willfully refuse to obey God? If you have some "secret closet" that you have not "cleaned out" the Lord Jesus cannot be comfortable and "at home", settled down in your heart. So you will not even be able to "progress" to the treasures of Ephesians 3:18-19 until you "clean house!"

**Stott** has an interesting comment on **all the saints** - We shall have power to comprehend these dimensions of Christ's love, Paul adds, only with all the saints. The isolated Christian can indeed know something of the love of Jesus. But his grasp of it is bound to be limited by his limited experience. It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences. Yet even then, although we may 'comprehend' its dimensions to some extent with our minds, we cannot 'know' it in our experience. It is too broad, long, deep and high even for all the saints together to grasp. It surpasses knowledge. Paul has already used this 'surpassing' word of God's power and grace;<sup>4</sup> now he uses it of his love. Christ's love is as unknowable as his riches are unsearchable (verse 8). Doubtless we shall spend eternity exploring his inexhaustible riches of grace and love. ([The Message of Ephesians](#))

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**May be able** (1840) (**exischuo** from **ek** = intensifies the following + **ischuo** = to be strong, able - cf **ischus**) means to be eminently able, to have strength enough, to be quite able to do, to be in full strength, to be fully able. This compound word is one of the strongest Greek words for strength and signifies one completely capable of doing or experiencing something. **Marvin Vincent** writes that **exischuo** "occurs only here ([hapax legomenon](#)). The preposition **ex** has the force of fully or eminently. **Ischus** is strength embodied; inhering in organized power. Hence it is an advance on *dunamai* ([dunamis](#)) or **might** in Eph 3:16. Paul prays that the inward might or virtue may issue in ability to grasp. Compare Lu 14:30+ = ("not [ouk = absolutely] **able** [**ischuo**] to finish"); Lk 16:3+ = ("not [ouk = absolutely] **strong enough** [**ischuo**] to dig"); Acts 27:16+ = (we were scarcely **able** [**ischuo**] to get the ship's boat under control"; Jas. 5:16+ = ("The effective prayer of a righteous man **can** [**ischuo**] accomplish [[energeo](#)] much"), and see notes." The root verb [**ischuo**] is used to describe supernatural power or enablement in the famous passage "I **can do** [**ischuo**] all things through Him Who strengthens [[endunamoo](#)] in present tense] me." (Php 4:13+)

**Comprehend** (2638) (**katalambano** from **katá** = intensifies + **lambáno** = take <> English - **cataplexy** = condition characterized by a trance or seizure and of suspended animation and loss of sensation and of voluntary motion in which the limbs remain rigidly in whatever position they are placed) means literally to take eagerly or to seize and thus to make something one's own or to hold as one's own. **Katalambano** can mean to gain control of someone through pursuit. In secular Greek **katalambano** was employed to describe a fight against a strong opponent or sacking an acropolis, where strength was required to accomplish both tasks. Figuratively, **katalambano** means to "seize", grasp or apprehend with the mind, and thus to perceive or comprehend. The idea is of grasping mentally.

**Warren Wiersbe** adds that "The English words "**comprehend**" and "**apprehend**" both stem from the Latin word *prehendere* which means "to grasp." We say that a monkey has a "prehensile tail." That is, its tail is able to grasp a tree limb and hold on. Our word comprehend carries the idea of mentally grasping something; while apprehend suggests laying hold of it for yourself. In other words, it is possible to understand something but not really make it your own. Paul's concern is that we lay hold of the vast expanses of the love of God. He wants us to live in four dimensions. When God gave the land to Abraham, He told him to "walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it" (Ge 13:17). Abraham had to step out by faith and claim his inheritance. But we today have an inheritance in four dimensions: breadth, length, depth, and height. God's fourth dimension is love! (See [Be Rich - Ephesians: Gaining the Things That Money Can't Buy](#))

A believer cannot understand the fullness of God's love apart from genuine, Spirit-empowered love in his own life.

**With all the saints** - **Wuest** says that this phrase indicates "that this spiritual capacity is not limited to a few select saints, but is the common property of all those saints who are the recipients of the strengthening fullness of the Holy Spirit." ([Wuest Word Studies - Eerdmann Publishing Company Volume 1, Volume 2, Volume 3](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Saints** (40) (**hagios**) is literally holy one and refers to one set apart (sanctified) for a special purpose. **Hagios** describes every saint's position in Christ as set apart from that which is secular, profane, and evil and on the other hand dedicated to worship and service of God. We are **holy ones** both in character and conduct set apart by God to be exclusively His, dedicated to Him and manifesting holiness of heart and conduct.

**Hagios** was used throughout the NT to speak of anyone or anything that represents God's holiness: Christ as the **Holy** One of God, the **Holy** Spirit, the **Holy** Father, **holy** Scriptures, **holy** angels, **holy** brethren, and so on.

The Gentiles understood this term because among the pagans, **hagios** signified separated and dedicated to the idolatrous gods and carried no idea of moral or spiritual purity. The manmade gods were as sinful and degraded as the men who made them and there simply was no need for a word that represented righteousness! The worshipper of the pagan god acquired the character of that pagan god and the religious ceremonies connected with its worship. The Greek temple at Corinth housed a large number of harlots who were connected with the "worship" of the Greek god. Thus, the set-apartness or holiness of the Greek worshipper was in character licentious, totally depraved, and sinful.

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**Steven Cole** - "To be able to comprehend," or, "to have the strength to grasp" this immense love of Christ shows that it is not an easy or a humanly attainable goal. We must have God's power. And, as we will consider in a moment, this is not a one-time attainment, but a lifetime and even an eternal quest. We can never say, "I've arrived!" And, we will not grow towards this goal if we are not experiencing God's power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ is coming to dwell in our hearts through faith.

We have to be careful, because we all flatter ourselves by thinking, "I'm just a naturally loving person. The problem is all of these selfish, unloving people I have to live with! But me, hey, I'm just a naturally loving guy!" Nonsense! To become a loving person and to be able to grasp the love of Christ, you must die to self. To do that, you need God's power.

### **COMPREHENDING CHRIST'S LOVE IS THE NEED OF BELIEVERS.**

D. A. Carson (A Call to Spiritual Reformation [Baker/IVP], p. 191) points out that the remarkable thing about this prayer is that Paul "assumes that his readers, Christians though they are, do not adequately appreciate the **love of Christ.**" **It's not a prayer that we might love Christ more, although we should. Rather, Paul is praying that we might better grasp Christ's immense love for us.** While there is an intellectual side to this, it is not merely intellectual. Paul is praying that we who already know Christ's great love might come to experience it at **ever-deepening levels.**

**Every child of God knows the love of Christ in some way.** Probably when you first heard the Gospel, you heard John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Or, you heard Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." **Coming to know the great love of God in Christ is at the heart of responding to the Gospel.** Yet, while every true Christian knows something of Christ's great love as shown at the cross, we do not all know it to the same extent. Some are babes in Christ, who, like all babies, are quite **self-centered**. They assume that Christ loves them because they are so loveable! But as you grow in Christ, you begin to see how wretchedly sinful your heart was (**ED: WE NEED TO "REMEMBER" AS PAUL COMMANDED IN Eph 2:11+. PAUL "REMEMBERED" BECAUSE IN ONE OF HIS LAST WRITINGS HE CLASSIFIED HIMSELF AS THE CHIEF OF SINNERS! 1 Ti 1:15KJV**) and, apart from God's preserving grace, still is. **And yet, wonder of wonders, He still loves you!** You see examples in the Bible, such as Peter, who denied the Lord. And yet, the Lord still loved Peter and restored him. You grow deeper in Christ's love as you realize that He loves you in spite of all your failures and sins (**ED: Cf PETER'S COMMAND IN 2Pe 3:18+).**..

I was blessed to grow up in a home where my parents loved me and made me feel secure in their love. But I never appreciated how much they loved me until I held our firstborn in my arms. I felt this wave of love for her as I thought, "I would lay down my life to protect this helpless little one, who depends totally on me!" Then, it hit me, "That's how much my parents loved me!" And then I realized, "And God loves me far more than that!" **So comprehending Christ's love requires God's supernatural power, because it is not naturally discerned.** It is our need as believers, no matter how long we've known Christ, to know His love on an even deeper level. But, also...

### **COMPREHENDING CHRIST'S LOVE MUST HAPPEN IN COMMUNITY.**

Paul prays that we may be able to comprehend with all the saints this measureless love of Christ. Saints, of course, is a reference to all believers, not just to some superior believers. The word means, "holy ones," or those who are set apart from the world unto God.

There are at least two ways in which it requires all the saints for us to grow in our comprehension of Christ's great love. First, we grow in our own comprehension of Christ's love when we hear other believers tell of how He saved them and how He has sustained them through difficult trials. No one of us has even come close to experiencing the fullness of Christ's love, so we grow to appreciate it and comprehend it more as we hear the stories of His love toward others. Even if we could pile up all the stories of all the saints down through history, we'd still fall short of the depths of His love, but we'd be closer. That's a good reason to read Christian biographies. You gain a richer experience of His love.

A second reason that it requires all the saints to grow in our comprehension of Christ's great love is that the outworking or expression of His love comes to us through other believers. Quite often we grow in love when another believer demonstrates the love of Christ to us during a time of need. Sometimes, we grow in Christ's love when we have to work through relational difficulties with another believer. Any love that is merely theoretical and has not been forged in the fires of real life relationships is not tested. Genuine love must be worked out with people. That requires that we grow in forbearance, patience, kindness, and forgiveness. John Stott (cited by Carson, p. 198) writes, "It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God." So, the Christian life is rooted and grounded in love. Being built on love, we must have God's power to comprehend Christ's love with all the saints.

### **Knowing Christ's love is a never-ending process, because it is unknowable.**

Paul writes (Eph 3:18-19), that we may be able to comprehend "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge...." It is a deliberate paradox. We can know something of His great love, and it is definite knowledge, not just speculation. But, in another sense we can never know it completely, because it is unfathomable.

Throughout eternity we will never come to the place of saying that we know all that there is to know of Christ's great love for us.

The measurements that Paul gives emphasize the immensity of Christ's love. You can go left or right, forward or backward, or up or down as far as you can, and you still haven't explored all that there is to know of Christ's great love. While Paul probably did not have anything in particular in mind with each dimension, many writers have expounded on the various aspects of it. ([Ephesians 3:16-19 Heavenly Geometry](#) and [Ephesians 3:16-19. Measuring the Immeasurable - Notes](#)) goes into great detail on each of these dimensions. Lloyd-Jones devotes an entire chapter to it - see transcript [Ephesians 3:18-19 Breadth, Length, Depth, Height](#)

Briefly, we can consider that the **breadth** of Christ's love encompasses a great multitude that is beyond number, consisting of people from every nation and tribe and people and tongue (Rev. 7:9). It also takes in every concern of every child of God in every age. No care of ours is beyond the breadth of His love.

The **length** of Christ's love extends from eternity to eternity. We have already seen (Eph. 1:4-5) that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." It is an eternal love that will not let us go!

The **height** of His love lifts us up to our exalted position of being seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). His eternal purpose for us is that we will be holy and blameless, lifted far above the temptations here below that so easily beset us.

The **depth** of His love caused Him to leave the glory of heaven and His exalted position there and come to this earth to be born as a baby. It moved Him to go to the extreme suffering of the cross, where He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). It reached all the way down to where we were in our sin. Although we were rebels and enemies of God, the love of Christ redeemed us from the slave market of sin and made us heirs with Him. As Charles Wesley wrote, "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

We can never get to the end of such immense love! We need to ask ourselves, "Am I growing more and more to know this unknowable love of Christ?" Do I know His love experientially more today than I did a year ago? ([Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#))

## WHAT IS THE BREADTH AND LENGTH AND HEIGHT AND DEPTH: ti to platos kai mekos kai hupsos kai bathos :

- **What is the breadth...** - Romans 10:3,11,12
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:17b-19 Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

## DIVINE DIMENSIONS OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST

**What is breadth, length, height, and depth** - Although it does not specifically state what these measurements represent, from the context many commentators interpret this as a reference to the **love of Christ**, which is immeasurable.

Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding, (Ro 5:20; Ep 1:7-8)

Ransomed souls, the tidings swell;

Tis a deep that knows no sounding (Ro 11:33)

Who its breadth or length can tell? (Ep 3:18-19)

On its glories,

On its glories

Let my soul forever dwell.

--John Kent (1766 - 1843)

([Play the vocal by Matt Foreman](#))

**Peter O'Brien** notes that "Paul asks first that his readers might comprehend with all the saints what is the **breadth, length, height, and depth** (v.18b). This request is made without any mention of an object of these four dimensions. Does this formula stand for the dimensions of the cosmos? Or the inexhaustible greatness of some object? And what is the relationship of this formula to the

second element of the petition, namely, that the readers might know the **love of Christ**?... (after surveying the major contenders for the object of this phrase O'Brien writes that) Although it is not possible to be certain, on contextual grounds a reference to the love of Christ is preferable." (See [The Letter to the Ephesians](#))

**A T Pierson** once wrote that Paul "treats the love of God as a cube, having breadth and length, depth and height. The reason is that the cube in the Bible is treated as a perfection of form. Every side of a cube is a perfect square, and from every angle it presents the same appearance. Turn it over, and it is still a cube—just as high, deep, and broad as it was before." (**Comment:** As someone has also noted the Holy of Holies was cube-shaped, so is the New Jerusalem, and so is the love of God!)

**Morris** comments that "The love of Christ is thus four-dimensional, with **'depth'** and **'height'** considered as separate dimensions. Since the **height** of the universe is also infinite (Isaiah 55:9), this suggests the time dimension. "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love," God says, "therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jeremiah 31:3). ([Defenders Study Bible](#))

**F. B. Meyer** writes that "There will always be as much horizon before us as behind us. And when we have been gazing on the face of Jesus for millenniums, its beauty will be as fresh and fascinating and fathomless as when we first saw it from the gate of Paradise."

**Ryrie** expresses these dimensions as follows "The love of Christ includes all, extends from eternity to eternity, seats us in the heavenlies, and reaches down to our alienated position." ([The Ryrie Study Bible](#))

**James Montgomery Boice** offers the following illustration writing that "In the last century, when Napoleon's armies opened a prison that had been used by the Spanish Inquisition they found the remains of a prisoner who had been incarcerated for his faith. The dungeon was underground. The body had long since decayed. Only a chain fastened around an anklebone cried out his confinement. But this prisoner, long since dead, had left a witness. On the wall of his small, dismal cell this faithful soldier of Christ had scratched a rough cross with four words surrounding it in Spanish. Above the cross was the Spanish word for "height." Below it was the word for "depth." To the left the word "width." To the right, the word "length." Clearly this prisoner wanted to testify to the surpassing greatness of the love of Christ, perceived even in his suffering." ([Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary](#))

**Stott on breadth, length, height, and depth** - Yet it seems to me legitimate to say that the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters), 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven. Or, as Leslie Mitton expresses it, finding a parallel to Romans 8:37–39: 'Whether you go forward or backward, up to the heights or down to the depths, nothing will separate us from the love of Christ.' Ancient commentators went further. They saw these dimensions illustrated on the cross. For its upright pole reached down into the earth and pointed up to heaven, while its crossbar carried the arms of Jesus, stretched out as if to invite and welcome the whole world. Armitage Robinson calls this a 'pretty fancy'.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps he is right and it is fanciful, yet what it affirms about the love of Christ is true. (See [The Message of Ephesians](#))

### [Take the World, but Give Me Jesus](#)

by Fanny Crosby ([Play hymn](#))

O the height and depth of mercy!

O the length and breadth of love!

O the fullness of redemption—

Pledge of endless life above!

**Expositor's Bible Commentary** interprets this passage as "The apostle is simply telling us that the love of Christ, exemplified in his magnanimity to the Gentiles, is too large to be confined by any geometrical measurements. It is wide enough to reach the whole world and beyond (Eph 1:9, 10, 20). It is long enough to stretch from eternity to eternity (Eph 1:4, 5, 6, 18; 3:9). It is high enough to raise both Gentiles and Jews to heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:13; 2:6). It is deep enough to rescue people from sin's degradation and even from the grip of Satan himself (Eph 2:1, 2, 3, 4, 5; 6:11, 12). The love of Christ is the love he has for the church as a united body (Eph 5:25, 29, 30) and for those who trust in him as individuals (Eph 3:17). (See [The Expositor's Bible Commentary](#))

**Blaikie** - No genitive (**ED:** "breadth of what?, etc) being given, it has been a difficult point to settle to what these dimensions must be held to be applicable. ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

**Barnes** agrees writing "The apostle evidently meant to express the strongest sense of the greatness of the love of the Redeemer, and to show, in the most emphatic manner, how-much he wished that they should fully understand it." ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

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**Steven Cole** - **Knowing Christ's love is a never-ending process, because it is unknowable.**

Paul writes (Eph 3:18-19), **that we may be able to comprehend "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to**

**know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge....**" It is a deliberate paradox. We can know something of His great love, and it is definite knowledge, not just speculation. But, in another sense we can never know it completely, because it is unfathomable. Throughout eternity we will never come to the place of saying that we know all that there is to know of Christ's great love for us.

The measurements that Paul gives emphasize the immensity of Christ's love. You can go left or right, forward or backward, or up or down as far as you can, and you still haven't explored all that there is to know of Christ's great love. While Paul probably did not have anything in particular in mind with each dimension, many writers have expounded on the various aspects of it. ([Ephesians 3:16-19 Heavenly Geometry](#) and [Ephesians 3:16-19. Measuring the Immeasurable - Notes](#)) goes into great detail on each of these dimensions. Lloyd-Jones devotes an entire chapter to it - see transcript [Ephesians 3:18-19 Breadth, Length, Depth, Height](#))

Briefly, we can consider that the **breadth** of Christ's love encompasses a great multitude that is beyond number, consisting of people from every nation and tribe and people and tongue (Rev. 7:9). It also takes in every concern of every child of God in every age. No care of ours is beyond the breadth of His love.

The **length** of Christ's love extends from eternity to eternity. We have already seen (Eph. 1:4-5) that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will." It is an eternal love that will not let us go!

The **height** of His love lifts us up to our exalted position of being seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). His eternal purpose for us is that we will be holy and blameless, lifted far above the temptations here below that so easily beset us.

The **depth** of His love caused Him to leave the glory of heaven and His exalted position there and come to this earth to be born as a baby. It moved Him to go to the extreme suffering of the cross, where He who knew no sin was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21). It reached all the way down to where we were in our sin. Although we were rebels and enemies of God, the love of Christ redeemed us from the slave market of sin and made us heirs with Him. As Charles Wesley wrote, "Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

We can never get to the end of such immense love! We need to ask ourselves, "Am I growing more and more to know this unknowable love of Christ?" Do I know His love experientially more today than I did a year ago? ([Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#))

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#### **QUESTION - [What does it mean to comprehend the "breadth and length and height and depth" in Ephesians 3:18?](#)**

**ANSWER** - In Ephesians 3, Paul expresses his desire and prayer for the believers in Ephesus. Part of what he prays for is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you . . . may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17–19, ESV). Paul here is explaining that, although he was suffering for the sake of the [gospel](#) (verses 1, 13), it was worth it if they could only grasp the magnitude of Christ's love for them.

The Greek word translated as "comprehend" or "understand" implies more than a mental understanding. It literally means "to take hold of something and make it one's own." In order for the Ephesian Christians to truly understand the "love that surpasses knowledge," they needed to go beyond hearsay. This kind of comprehension is experiential. It requires us to take hold of a truth and define ourselves by it. Paul was encouraging them—and all saints everywhere—to meditate on what it means to be fully loved by God for the sake of Christ. He wanted them to grasp [God's love](#) in all its fullness; to know "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

Jesus had already defined love as it was demonstrated by both Father and Son. Of Himself He said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15:13). Of the Father He said, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3:16). God's love is all-encompassing, far exceeding our ability to comprehend. Its breadth and length and height and depth are staggering. It requires meditation, soul-searching, and honesty in order to draw near enough to God to comprehend His nature (James 4:8). And that was what Paul urged them, and all Christians, to do: consider the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ for His church. Later in his epistle, Paul again alludes to the love of Christ when he urges husbands to love their wives in the same way Christ loves the church (Ephesians 5:25–27).

Paul's use of dimensional language to describe the love of Christ suggests a vastness to Christ's love. The Redeemer's love for His people is so great, of such magnitude, as to be almost beyond comprehension. The four-fold description of length-width-height-depth carries with it shades of Psalm 103:11–12, which also uses dimensional language:

"For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;  
as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

There is absolutely nothing at all that can separate us from the love of God in Christ (Romans 8:38–39). When we learn to bask in that love (1 John 3:1), celebrate His delight in us (Psalm 37:23), and rest in His faithfulness (Psalm 136:1), we enjoy relationship, not religion. Only a relational God could love us so much that we can barely comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of it. [GotQuestions.org](http://GotQuestions.org)

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**Breadth** (4114) (**platos** from **platus** = broad) is a measurement of width or extent from side to side and is used figuratively to refer to great expanses. Breadth means something of full width or of comprehensive quality.

**Gilbrant** - Classical Greek and Septuagint Usage - **Platos** is a noun used in classical Greek, the Septuagint, and the New Testament with the common meaning "width." It is used a number of times, literally and figuratively, to indicate the great extent of something. The "width of the earth" may refer to a large army filling the horizon. Habakkuk pictures a Babylonian army which "sweep(s) across the whole earth" (1:6, NIV). In addition, platos may be a flat expanse. Twice Proverbs refers to the commandments or the ways of the Lord which should be written on "the plate (table) of the heart" (Pr 7:3; 22:20, Septuagint only). (See the verb [platuno](#)) Similarly, John sees Satan and the forces of Gog and Magog marching "across the breadth of the earth" (Revelation 20:9NIV).

New Testament Usage - John used **platos** twice in describing the immensity of the New Jerusalem, whose height and length are the same as its width, that is, it is an exact cube (Revelation 21:16). Jesus referred to the gate which is wide (adjective **platus**), thus easy to pass through, leading to destruction (Matthew 7:13). It is used figuratively by Paul concerning the great extent of Christ's love: wide, long, high, and deep (Ephesians 3:18). ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

**Liddell-Scott** - πλάτος (A) [ ], εος, τό, (πλατύς) breadth, width, σώματος Simon.188, etc.: abs., τ π. or π., in breadth. Hdt.1.193, 4.195, X.Oec.19.3; ση μ κός τε π. τε Emp.17.20.

b. Math., breadth, i.e. the second dimension, ν μήκει κα π. κα βάθει Pl.Sph.235d, cf. Arist.Ph.209a5; κατ π., opp. κατ μ κός, κατ βάθος, Id.Cael.299b26, Mete.341b34.

2. plane surface, Pl.Pl.284e, Lg.819e; μεγέθους τ π δύο [συνεχς] π. Arist.Metaph.1020a12.

3. latitude, whether terrestrial or celestial, Str.1.4.2, Cleom.1.4, 2.4, Ptol.Alm.2.12, Vett.Val.30.12.

4. metaph., plane, ν τ ψυχικ π. Procl.Inst.201.

5. plane of flat fish, Arist.HA489b33; flat of the tail, ib. 549b1; flat part of the body of the fishing-frog, Id.PA695b15.

6. extension, breadth of a subject, Gal.1.316; ο κ λίγον τ π. Id.11.738.

II. metaph., range of variation, latitude, π. χριν Plot.6.3.20; γίεια π. χρι Gal.6.12. cf. 11.737.

III. with Preps., ν πλάτει in a loose sense, broadly, Posidon.ap.Stob.1.8.42, Str.2.1.39, D.H.Comp.21, EM673.24; opp. κατ' κρίβειαν S.E.M.10.108; ς ν π. Sor.1.24 (but πεπί ν ν τ π. λέγομεν which we will discuss in detail, D.L.7.76); also π πλάτει ληνίζειν talk loose Greek, Phld.Po.2.9; κατ πλάτος λέγεσθαι to be said loosely, Chrysipp. Stoic.2.164, cf. Sor.1.6.21.

IV. = πλατύτης 3, Demetr.Eloc.177.

V. π. καρδίας, of Solomon, width of knowledge, LXX3Ki.2.35a.

VI. ργυρίου πλάτη, prob. = τετραδράχμα, IG9(1).189.15 (Tithora, ii A.D.), cf. RN1935.1 (Delphi, i B.C.); cf. πλότος.

**Platos** - 3x - Eph. 3:18; Rev. 20:9; Rev. 21:16.

**Uses in Septuagint** - Gen. 6:15; Gen. 13:17; Gen. 32:25; Gen. 32:32; Exod. 25:10; Exod. 25:17; Exod. 26:16; 1 Ki. 2:35; 1 Ki. 6:2; 1 Ki. 6:3; 1 Ki. 6:6; 1 Ki. 6:20; 1 Ki. 7:2; 1 Ki. 7:27; 2 Chr. 3:4; 2 Chr. 3:8; Ezr. 6:3; Neh. 8:1; Prov. 7:3; Prov. 22:20; Isa. 8:8; Ezek. 40:5; Ezek. 40:7; Ezek. 40:8; Ezek. 40:11; Ezek. 40:13; Ezek. 40:19; Ezek. 40:20; Ezek. 40:42; Ezek. 40:48; Ezek. 41:1; Ezek. 41:11; Ezek. 41:12; Ezek. 42:2; Ezek. 42:4; Ezek. 43:16; Ezek. 48:10; Dan. 3:1; Dan. 9:25; Hab. 1:6; Zech. 2:2; Zech. 5:2; Eph. 3:18; Rev. 20:9; Rev. 21:16

**Length** (3372) (**mekos**) is a measurement of length, the longer dimension of something and is used figuratively in Eph 3:18..

**Gilbrant** - **Classical Greek** - Found in Greek literature from Homer onward, mēkos has several usages. It is used of space when referring to the length of a club or the height of a wall or the length as opposed to the depth of something. It is also used of time when referring to speech (e.g., a long speech). When describing size or degree it is translated "greatness" or "magnitude." In addition, it was used of longitude. The first line of

a body of troops in close array is described by this term (cf. Liddell-Scott).

**New Testament Usage** - In its only New Testament occurrences (Ephesians 3:18 and Revelation 21:6) *mēkos* takes on the meaning of space and is translated “length.” Paul spoke of linear space, the “length,” as he prayed for the Ephesians to know the full magnitude of Christ’s love (Ephesians 3:18). John, as he described the heavenly city of Jerusalem (Revelation 21), spoke of it as “foursquare”: “The length is as large as the breadth (platos [3974])” (verse 16). Then, when he measured it, he added a third dimension: “The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal” (verse 16). ([Complete Biblical Library - Incredible Resource](#))

**Liddell-Scott** - *μκος*, Dor. *μκος* Archyt.1: εος, τό:—length, of a club, τόσσον ἤν *μκος*, τόσσον πάχος so large was it in length, so large in thickness, Od.9.324; φιλότης ση *μ. τε* πλάτος τε Emp.17.20, cf. Hdt.1.181, etc.; *ς μκος* Id.2.155; *ες τ μκος* LXXGe.12.6; *ν μήκει κα πλάτει κα βάθει* Pl.Sph.235d, cf. Gorg.3, Arist.Ph.209a5; *π μκος* lengthwise *π μ. κτασις* Id.HA504a15, al.; *κατ μκος* Id.Mete.387a2; *μ. δο* A.Fr.378, Hdt.1.72, etc.; *πλο* Th.6.34; *μκος* *δике* threw a long distance, Pl.O.10(11).72: *πλ. μήκη κα βάθη κα πλάτη* Pl.Pl.284e, cf. Iamb.Comm.Math.26; *τ μεγάλα μ. great lengths*, Pl.Pr.356d.

b. height of a wall, Ar.Av.1130; of persons, stature, Od.20.71; *μκος* in height, 11.312; *ες μ. αξάνεσθαι* X.Lac.2.6.

c. generally, *μήκει* in linear measurement, Pl.Tht.147d, cf. 148a; linearity, one-dimensional magnitude, opp. *πίπεδον, βάθος*, Id.Lg.817e: in Arith., in the first power, Theol.Ar.3, 4.

2. of Time, *μ. χρόνου* A.Pr.1020; *ν μ. χρόνου* S.Tr.69; *ν χρόνου πιν ς μήκεσιν πλέτοις* Pl.Lg.683a; *μ. λόγου*, *μ. τ ν λόγων*, a long speech, A.Eu.201, S.OC1139; *ν μήκει λόγων διελθε* ν Th.4.62; *μκος* at length, *επέ μοι μ. , λλ σύντομα* S.Ant.446.

3. of Size or Degree, greatness, magnitude, *λβου* Emp.119; *μκος* in greatness, *οικεν λλ , μ. οδ ν δον* S.Ant.393.

4. longitude, Str.1.4.5, Cleom.2.1, Ptol.Alm.2.12, Vett.Val.260.5, etc.

5. in Prosody, length, opp. *βραχύτης*, Arist.Po.1456b32, D.H.Comp.15: *πλ. , μήκη κα βραχύτητας* προσ κτε Pl.R.400b.

6. first line of phalanx, Ascl.Tact.2.5. (From same Root as *μακρός*. Hence *μήκιστος*, Sup. of *μακρός*.)

**Mekos** - Eph. 3:18; Rev. 21:16

**Mekos in Septuagint** - Gen. 6:15; Gen. 12:6; Gen. 13:17; Exod. 25:10; Exod. 25:17; Exod. 25:23; Exod. 26:2; Exod. 26:8; Exod. 26:13; Exod. 27:1; Exod. 27:9; Exod. 27:11; Exod. 27:18; Exod. 28:16; Exod. 30:2; Exod. 36:9; Exod. 38:18; Exod. 39:9; Deut. 3:11; Jdg. 3:16; 1 Ki. 6:2; 1 Ki. 6:3; 1 Ki. 6:20; 1 Ki. 7:2; 1 Ki. 7:6; 1 Ki. 7:27; 2 Chr. 3:3; 2 Chr. 3:4; 2 Chr. 3:8; 2 Chr. 3:11; 2 Chr. 4:1; 2 Chr. 6:13; 2 Chr. 24:13; Prov. 3:2; Prov. 3:16; Prov. 16:17; Jer. 52:22; Ezek. 40:7; Ezek. 40:8; Ezek. 40:18; Ezek. 40:20; Ezek. 40:21; Ezek. 40:25; Ezek. 40:29; Ezek. 40:33; Ezek. 40:36; Ezek. 40:42; Ezek. 40:47; Ezek. 40:49; Ezek. 41:2; Ezek. 41:4; Ezek. 41:12; Ezek. 41:13; Ezek. 41:15; Ezek. 41:22; Ezek. 42:2; Ezek. 42:4; Ezek. 42:7; Ezek. 42:8; Ezek. 42:11; Ezek. 43:16; Ezek. 43:17; Ezek. 45:1; Ezek. 45:3; Ezek. 45:5; Ezek. 45:6; Ezek. 45:7; Ezek. 46:22; Ezek. 48:8; Ezek. 48:9; Ezek. 48:10; Ezek. 48:13; Ezek. 48:18; Ezek. 48:21; Dan. 4:12; Dan. 9:25; Zech. 2:2; Zech. 5:2

**Height** (5311) ([hupsos/hypsos](#) from *húpsi* = high, aloft) means elevation.

**Depth** (899) (*bathos*) from *bathus* = deep) means a part that is far from the outside or surface and metaphorically in this verse conveys the senses of profoundness, inscrutability or abstruseness.

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**Elisabeth Barrett Browning** wrote “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways. I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach.”

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**D DeHaan** - My wife and I were traveling through northern Texas on Interstate 40, and we pulled off at a rest stop. On a metal sign was a description of the area. One sentence caught my eye. It read, “Traveling the high plains of Texas is an experience in immensity.” How true! Stretching out as far as the eye could see was the vast open space of land and sky. (Ephesians 3:14-21 is in the highest plane and the most immeasurable immensity!)

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However only God loves us with infinite dimensions and to an endless degree!

**The Love of God**

by Frederick M. Lehman ([Play Hymn](#))

The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell,  
It goes beyond the highest star and reaches to the lowest hell,  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave His Son to win:  
His erring child He reconciled and pardoned from his sin.

When years of time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,  
When men, who here refuse to pray, on rocks and hills and mountains call,  
God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong:  
Redeeming grace to Adam's race—the saints' and angels' song.

**Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made,  
Were ev'ry stalk on earth a quill and ev'ry man a scribe by trade  
To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole tho stretched from sky to sky.**

(see note below regarding this stanza)

O love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure—  
the saints' and angels' song.

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The story behind the words in this famous hymn is as follows...

The lyrics are based on the Jewish poem Haddamut, written in Aramaic in 1050 by Meir Ben Isaac Nehorai, a cantor in Worms, Germany; they have been translated into at least 18 languages. (As the story is told) One day, during short intervals of inattention to our work, we picked up a scrap of paper and, seated upon an empty lemon box pushed against the wall, with a stub pencil, added the (first) two stanzas and chorus of the song...Since the lines (3rd stanza from the Jewish poem - beginning "Could we with ink the ocean fill...") had been found penciled on the wall of a patient's room in an insane asylum after he had been carried to his grave, the general opinion was that this inmate had written the epic in moments of sanity.

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## An Ocean Of Ink

To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. — Ephesians 3:19

Today's Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-19

The words of the hymn "The Love of God" capture in word pictures the breathtaking magnitude of divine love:

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.

These marvelous lyrics echo Paul's response to the love of God. The apostle prayed that believers might "be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Eph. 3:18-19). In reflecting on these verses about God's love, some Bible scholars believe "width" refers to its worldwide embrace (John 3:16); "length," its existence through all ages (Eph. 3:21); "depth," its profound wisdom (Rom. 11:33); and "height," its victory over sin opening the way to heaven (Eph. 4:8).

We are admonished to appreciate this amazing love. Yet as we expand our awareness of God's love, we soon realize that its full measure is beyond our understanding. Even if the ocean were filled with ink, using it to write about the love of God would drain it dry. By: Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

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**F B Meyer** writes the following devotional entitled "The Dimensions of God's Love" in "**Our Daily Walk**"

THE DIMENSIONS of the Love of Christ!

It is broad as humanity, "for God so loved the world";

the length God's love had no date of origin, and shall have none of conclusion. God is Love, it continueth ever, indissoluble, unchangeable, a perpetual present tense.

Its height--as the Flood out-topped the highest mountains, so that Love covers our highest sins. It is as high as the heaven above the earth.

Its depth--Christ our Lord descended into the lowest before He rose to the highest. He has touched the bottomless pit of our sin and misery, sorrow and need. However low your fall, or lowly your lot, the everlasting arms of His love are always underneath.

The Apostle talks by hyperbole, when he prays that we may attain to a knowledge of the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. We cannot gauge Christ's love, but we can enjoy it. Probably the only way to know the love of Christ is to begin to show it. The emotionalist, who is easily affected by appeals to the senses, does not know it; the theorist or rhapsodist does not know it, but the soul that endeavours to show the love of Christ, knows it. As Christ's love through you broadens, lengthens, deepens, heightens, you will know the love of Christ, not intellectually, but experimentally (1John 4:11, 1John 4:12; 1John 4:20, 21).

But you say, "there are people in my life whom I cannot love." Granted, but you must distinguish between love and the emotion or feeling of love. You may not be able to feel love at the outset, but you can be willing to be the channel of Christ's love. I cannot love, but Christ is in me, and He can. Is it too much to ask that all this should be realized in ourselves and in others? No, because God is already at work within us by His Holy Spirit, and He is able to do infinitely beyond all our highest requests or thoughts. Ask your furthest, think your highest, and the Divine Love is always infinitely in advance.

**PRAYER** - We thank Thee, O God, for the infinite love which Thou hast given us in Jesus Christ. We have no measure for its heights and depths, its breadths and lengths. Teach us with all saints to know more because we love more. AMEN.

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The Puritan [Thomas Brooks](#) writes devotional thoughts on Ephesians 3:18, 19 ...

Stand still and admire and wonder at the love of Jesus Christ to sinners—that Christ would rather die for us than for the angels. They were creatures of a more noble extract and in all probability might have brought greater revenues of glory to God; yet that Christ should pass by those golden vessels and make us vessels of glory—what amazing and astonishing love is this! This is the envy of devils and the admiration of angels and saints.

The angels were more honorable and excellent creatures than we. They were celestial spirits; we, earthly bodies, dust and ashes. They were immediate attendants on God; we, servants of his in the lower house of this world and remote from his glorious presence. Their work was to sing hallelujahs, songs of praise to God in the heavenly paradise; ours, to dress the Garden of Eden, which was only an earthly paradise. They sinned only once and only in thought, as is commonly thought, but Adam sinned in thought by lusting, in deed by tasting, and in word by excusing. Why didn't Christ suffer for their sins as well as for ours? Or, if for any, why not for theirs rather than ours? We move this question not as being curious to search your secret counsels, O Lord, but that we may more admire the love of Christ, that surpasses knowledge.

The apostle, in admiration of Christ's love, affirms it to surpass knowledge—that God, who is the eternal Being, should love the human when it had scarcely a being (Pr 8:30-31), that he should be enamored with deformity, that he should pity us when no eye pitied us. Such was Christ's transcendent love that our extreme misery could not abate it. The deplorableness of our condition only heightened the flame of Christ's love. It is as high as heaven—who can reach it? It is as low as hell—who can understand it? Such is his perfect, matchless love to fallen people. That Christ's love should extend to the ungodly, to sinners, to enemies who were in rebellion against him (see notes Romans 5:6; Romans 5:8; Romans 5:10)—yes, not only so, but that he should hug them in his arms, lodge them in his bosom, dandle them on his knees—is the highest refinement of love (Isa 66:11-13).

That Christ should come from the eternal bosom of his Father to a region of sorrow and death (John 1:18); that

God should be made flesh, the Creator made a creature (Isa. 53:4); that he who filled heaven should be cradled in a manger (John 17:5); that the God of strength should be weary; that the judge of all flesh should be condemned; that the God of life should be put to death (John 19:41); that he who had the keys of hell and death should lie imprisoned in the sepulchre of another, having in his lifetime nowhere to lay his head nor, after death, to lay his body (John 19:41–42)—and all this for fallen, miserable human beings—is beyond the thoughts of created natures. The sharp, the universal, and the continual sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, from the cradle to the cross, above all other things speaks out the transcendent love of Jesus Christ to sinners. That matchless wrath of an angry God that was so terribly impressed on the soul of Christ quickly sapped his natural strength, yet all this wrath he patiently underwent that sinners might be saved and that he might bring “many sons to glory” (Heb. 2:10).

Oh, wonder of love! Love is submissive, it enables to suffer. So it was love that made our dear Lord Jesus lay down his life to save us from hell and to bring us to heaven. Oh, love unspeakable!

Christ's love is like his name, and that is Wonderful (Isa. 9:6), so wonderful that it is above all creatures, beyond all measure, contrary to all nature. It is above all creatures, for it is above the angels and therefore above all others. It is beyond all measure, for time did not begin it, and time shall never end it; place does not bound it, sin does not exceed it, understandings cannot conceive it. And it is contrary to all nature, for what nature can love where it is hated? can forgive where it is provoked? can offer reconciliation where it receives wrong? What nature can heap up kindness on contempt, favor on ingratitude, mercy on sin? And yet Christ's love has led him to all this, so that well may we spend all our days in admiring and adoring this wonderful love and be always captivated with the thoughts of it.

**Ephesians 3:19** and to [know](#) the [love](#) of [Christ](#) which [surpasses knowledge](#), that you may be [filled](#) up to [all](#) the [fullness](#) of [God](#) ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [gnonai](#) ([AAN](#)) [te ten hyperballousan](#) ([PPPMSD](#)) [tes gnoseos agapen tou Christou](#), [hina plerothete](#) ([2PAPS](#)) [eis pan to pleroma tou theou](#).

**BGT** γν να τε τ ν υπερβ λλουσαν τ ς γν σεως γ πην το Χριστο , να πληρωθ τε ε ς π ν τ πλ ρωμα το θεο .

**Amplified:** [That you may really come] to know [practically, through experience for yourselves] the love of Christ, which far surpasses mere knowledge [without experience]; that you may be filled [through all your being] unto all the fullness of God [may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself]! ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**Barclay:** and to know the love of Christ which is beyond all knowledge, that you may be filled until you reach the fullness of God himself. ([Westminster Press](#))

**ESV** and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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

**NET:** and thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. ([NET Bible](#))

**NIV** and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

**NLT (revised)** May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

**NLT:** May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God. (NLT - Tyndale House)

**Phillips:** and to know for yourselves that love so far beyond our comprehension. May you be filled though all your being with God himself! (Phillips: Touchstone)

**Wuest:** and to know experientially the love of the Christ which surpasses experiential knowledge in order that you may be filled up to the measure of all the fulness of God. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** 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 KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST WHICH SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE: gnonai (AAN) te ten huperballousan (PPPMSD) tes gnoseos agapen tou Christou:**

- **To know the love of Christ**- Ep 3:18; 5:2,25; John 17:3; 2Cor 5:14; Gal 2:20; Phil 2:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12; Col 1:10; 2Pe 3:18; 1Jn 4:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14
- **Which surpasses knowledge** - Phil 1:7
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:17b-19 Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

## KNOWING THE UNKNOWABLE!

**And to know ([ginosko](#)) the love ([agape](#)) of Christ which surpasses ([huperballo](#)) knowledge ([gnosis](#))-** These are "deep" verses as shown by the fact that **Martyn Lloyd-Jones** devotes ten messages to these verses (The Unsearchable Riches of Christ pp. 181-301) You can [listen to the mp3's here](#). Paul wants the readers to be empowered so as to **know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. Love of Christ** refers to Christ's love to us. Human love to Christ could not be described in these terms. Note that this is not a petition that the believers might love Christ more, as important as that is but rather that they might understand in the experiential dimension (cf [ginosko](#)) Christ's love for them. He is not referring to their knowing as simply a mental exercise or simple intellectual reflection. Paul wants them to be empowered so as to grasp the dimensions of that love in their own experience. The paradox of course is that he prays for them to experientially know the unknowable, which parallels "breadth and length and height and depth" (assuming that those parameter also refer to the love of Christ which as discussed above is difficult to state with dogmatism). The phrase **surpasses knowledge** parallels "**the unfathomable riches of Christ**" (Ep 3:8+)

As **O'Brien** explains regarding the **love of Christ** - 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, P. T. The Letter to the Ephesians. W. B. Eerdmans. 1999](#))

**Paxson - "To know the love of Christ."** We can know that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. We can know the faithfulness of His love as manifested in countless ways every day of our lives; its tenderness as it comforts us in suffering and sorrow; its fellowship as it shares with us everything it possesses; its patience as it forgives us the seventy times seven. We can also daily add to our knowledge of the love of Christ as we company with Him in prayer and in the the study of His Word; as we fellowship with other saints who know and experience deeply the love of Christ; and as we enter more fully into the fellowship of his sufferings, "filling up on our part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ for his body's sake" (Colossians 1:24). (Scroll to page 49 - [The Wealth, Walk and Warfare](#))

Paul wanted them to experience the love of Christ, which in its fullest extent surpasses human knowledge. Thus the idea is that in this knowledge there is a personal involvement with the "**love of Christ**", to know by experience the unknowable!

**Vincent** writes that "**to know**" ([ginosko](#)) means "Practically, through experience; while apprehend marks the knowledge as conception.

**Moule** on the **love of Christ** - Who "loved the Church, and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25); "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). See further Romans 8:35, with Ro 8:39; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Revelation 1:5.—The context favors the chief reference here of these sacred words to the Lord's love for the true Church, without excluding, what cannot be excluded in the matter, His love, and the sense of it, for the individual saint. ([Ephesians 3 Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Moule** on **surpasses knowledge** - knowledge of every sort, spiritual as much as intellectual. Here is an Object eternally transcending, while it eternally invites, the effort after a complete cognition. Forever, there is more to know....a passage glowing with the highest truths in their loveliest aspects. For a similar phrase, cp. Php 4:7. ([Ephesians 3 Cambridge Bible for Schools and](#)

## [Colleges\)](#)

**Boice** asks a reasonable question "If it **surpasses knowledge**, how are we to grasp or know it? There are two answers. First, although we cannot exhaust the love of Christ by our knowledge, we can nevertheless know this love truly. It is the same with the knowledge of God generally. We cannot know exhaustively, but we can know truly. So although, in the same way, we cannot know all of Christ's love for us, we can know that what we perceive as Christ's love is truly love. The love of Christ that we know at the beginning of our Christian life is the same love that we will know (though more fully) at the end. Second, we are to grow in our awareness of that love, particularly through the routine hardships, sufferings, and persecutions of life. Here is where the matter of the dimensions "wide and long and high and deep" comes in. ([Boice, J. M.: Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary](#))

"It passeth knowledge, that dear love of thine,  
My Jesus, Saviour; yet this soul of mine  
Would of thy love in all its breadth and length,  
Its height and depth and everlasting strength,  
Know more and more."

**Paxson** - "**Which passeth knowledge**." But there is a love of Christ that is knowledge-surpassing. The expression of Christ's love is knowable, but the essence of it is unknowable. We can never know the love that paid the cost of leaving His eternal home in the Father's bosom in the heavenly glory and of coming to a world that rejected and crucified Him. We can never know the knowledge-surpassing love that voluntarily emptied itself of its inherent glory and was made in the likeness of men and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. We can never know the love that on Calvary's Cross suffered the anguish of heart compressed in that cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We can only confess our utter inability to comprehend such love and tell Him that it makes Him unspeakably precious to us, more precious than anyone or anything in heaven or upon earth. We can respond with a love for Him that sweeps our life clean of all counter-loves and that leads us to go to the uttermost limit of our capacity in adoration of and devotion to Him. (Scroll to page 49 - [The Wealth, Walk and Warfare](#))

### [It's Just Like His Great Love](#)

by Edna R. Worrell

A Friend I have, called Jesus,  
Whose love is strong and true,  
And never fails how e'er 'tis tried,  
No matter what I do;

I've sinned against this love of His,  
But when I knelt to pray,  
Confessing all my guilt to Him,  
The sin-clouds rolled away.

O, I could sing forever of Jesus' love divine,  
Of all His care and tenderness for this poor life of mine;  
His love is in and over all, and wind and waves obey,  
When Jesus whispers "Peace, be still!" and rolls the clouds away.

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**Know** (1097) (**ginosko**) conveys the basic meaning of taking in knowledge in regard to something or someone and speaks of knowledge that goes beyond the merely factual and into the realm of the experiential. By extension, the term frequently was used of a special relationship between the person who knows and the object of the knowledge. It was often used of the intimate relationship between husband and wife and between God and His people. **Moule** on **know** - An aorist verb, expressing a new and decisive development of knowledge, knowledge of the spiritual kind, the intuition of the regenerate spirit, realized in its own responsive adoring love. ([Ephesians 3 Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Love** (26) (**agape**) is unconditional, sacrificial love which God is. It is love which is commanded in believers, empowered by His Spirit, activated by personal choice of one's will, is not based on one's feelings toward the object of one's love and is manifested by specific actions (see 1Cor 13:4-8 for a succinct list of these actions)

**Surpasses** (4138) (**huperballo** from **hupér** = above + **ballo** = cast) literally means throwing beyond the usual mark and figuratively referring to a degree which exceeds extraordinary, a point on an implied or overt scale of extent. Expressing a degree beyond comparison. Extraordinary, extreme, supreme, far more, much greater, to a far greater degree. To transcend. Immeasurable. It is cast into a totally different realm where the normal faculties of rational apprehension are incapable of functioning.

## Liddell-Scott

1. to overshoot, outdo, surpass, prevail over
2. to go beyond, exceed
3. absolutely to exceed all bounds
4. to go on further and further, *"he went on bidding more and more"*
  - to pass over, cross mountains, rivers, etc.
  - of water, to run over, overflow

**TDNT** - This verb, having an original sense of "to throw beyond," means "to go beyond," "to stand out," "to excel," or, censoriously, "to transgress the proper measure." The noun means "excess" or "supreme stage or measure."

**Huperballo** - 5x in 5v in NAS - Take a moment and observe the following 5 uses for the entity or attribute which is modified by huperballo. Interesting.

2 Corinthians 3:10 For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory because of the glory that **surpasses** it.

2 Corinthians 9:14 while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the **surpassing** grace of God in you.

Ephesians 1:19 and what is the **surpassing** greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might

Ephesians 2:7 so that in the ages to come He might show the **surpassing** riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:19 and to know the love of Christ which **surpasses** knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

**Huperballo** is found only in the NT and in the apocryphal writings (not the non-apocryphal writings) - 2 Macc 4:13, 24; 7:42; 3 Macc 2:23; Sir 5:7; 25:11

**Vincent** makes the apt observation: Compounds with **hyper** (huper), over, beyond, are characteristic of Paul's intensity of style, and mark the struggle of language with the immensity of the divine mystery, and the opulence of divine grace.

**Ralph Earle** writes on Paul's use of the prefix "**hyper**"...

A glance at the Englishman's Greek Concordance or Moulton and Geden's Concordance to the Greek Testament will show that of 25 compounds with **hyper** in the NT, **16** are found only in the Pauline Epistles and others are used mainly by Paul. They reflect the apostle's strong personality and his almost frustrated desire to seek to express in words the inexpressible greatness of God's grace. This sense of the inadequacy of language to convey spiritual truths is even more prominent in the Greek text than in English translation. Paul is struggling to say what cannot be said. It is utterly impossible to put the fullness of divine reality in human language, to compress the infinite into what is finite. That is why one cannot receive the full impact of the meaning of the Word of God except as the Holy Spirit illuminates his mind to understand it. Just so, Paul struggled to express the great thoughts with the words which so weakly convey them. It is with words that we have to deal. But our goal is always to get behind those words to the meaning. Biblical interpretation is the most challenging, demanding task that anyone can undertake. The sincere student, and especially preacher, of the Word of God will seek to use all the human tools he can get hold of—study of the original Greek and Hebrew, the best reference works available, the studies made by careful scholars. The minister who fills his shelves only with canned sermons and popular "how-to" books is not true to his calling. What he needs is spades with which to dig out eternal truths. Above and beyond all this he needs the Holy Spirit's help and guidance. (Earle, R. Word Meanings in the New Testament)

**Knowledge** (1108) (**gnosis**) is the content of what is known. It describes the comprehension or intellectual grasp of something. It refers to experiential knowledge or knowledge gained by experience (as contrasting with intuitive knowledge that one has innately). As an aside **gnosis** was the characteristic word of the **Gnostics**, one of the most formidable enemies of the Church of the second century. The Gnostics claimed a superior knowledge peculiar to an intellectual caste (they are still "alive and well" in 21st century Christianity!)

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Who can fully grasp the dimensions of God's great love for us? Yet the Scriptures teach that we are to have a growing awareness of divine love. Love is the very heart and essence of God, not only for the lovely but for the vilest of sinners. Christ did not die merely to display God's love—He died because God is love (1 John 4:8). If the New Testament teaches us anything, it teaches us about God's love in searching for lost men. Becoming a Christian in a very real sense is simply putting ourselves in the way of being found by God—to stop running from His loving pursuit.

As we mature in the Christian faith, we begin to realize that every situation that comes our way is an opportunity for God's love to be made more evident in our lives. Once we realize this, our attitude changes dramatically toward suffering people as well as toward ourselves when we are called to suffer. Then even during those times when our spiritual fervor declines and our devotion to God subsides, despite these shortcomings, God's love remains unfailing—continually working for our eternal good. ([Osbeck, K. W. Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions. Kregel Publications](#))

### **O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus**

by Samuel Francis ([Play Hymn](#))

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!  
Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!  
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love  
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest above!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from shore to shore!  
How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!  
How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them all His own;  
How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from the throne!

O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!  
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!  
O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heaven of heavens to me;  
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!

**THAT YOU MAY BE FILLED UP TO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD: hina plerothete (2PAPS) eis pan to pleroma tou theou:**

- **That you may be filled up** - Ep 1:23; Ps 17:15; 43:4; Matthew 5:6; John 1:16; Colossians 2:9,10; Revelation 7:15, 16, 17; 21:22, 23, 24; 22:3, 4, 5
- [Ephesians 3 Resources](#) - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries
- [Ephesians 3:18-21 The Fullness of God, Part 4](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 The Christian Turn-on](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:14-21 Experiencing the Power of Christ](#) - John MacArthur
- [Ephesians 3:17b-19 Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#) - Steven Cole
- [Ephesians 3:20-21 God is Able!](#) - Steven Cole

**That you may be filled up** ([pleroo](#)) **to all the fullness** ([pleroma](#)) **of God** - **That** ([hina](#)) introduces a purpose clause which depicts the grand purpose and result. (See terms of purpose or result) **Filled up to** - to the measure or standard of. Paul's prayer to the Father reaches its climax in this final, summarizing request. Thus we note that as believers are strengthened in the inner man through the Spirit and Christ dwells comfortably at home in their hearts through faith and they know in a personal, experiential way more of the immeasurable love of Christ, based on these spiritual dynamics, believers will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

**Moule on filled up** - The idea is of a vessel connected with an abundant source external to itself, and which will be filled, up to its capacity, if the connection is complete. The vessel is the Church, and also the saint. It may be only partially filled; it may be full—every faculty of the individual, every part of life and circumstances, every member of the community, “ful-filled with grace and heavenly benediction.” And this latter state is what the Apostle looks for. ([Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Moule on up to the fullness** - The "fulfilling" is to be limited only by the Divine resources. Not, of course, that either Church or soul can contain the Infinite; but they can receive the whole, the plenitude, of those blessings which the Infinite One is willing and able at each moment to bestow on the finite recipient.

Just as a balloon inflates when we blow into it, so the Bible (and our obedience to the truth it reveals) deepens and expands our capacities so that we are filled increasingly (progressive sanctification), like an expanding balloon, with the fullness of God. When we are filled with His fullness (which will never end for God is infinite!), we will begin to love like Him, we will begin to give like Him, we will begin to reach out to the lost like Him, etc. What a glorious way to live -- surely this is life abundant! Why are believers not praying this prayer in our churches and our families? We have not His fullness I fear because we ask not. If you are a pastor reading these words, I challenge you to test God to answer this earth shaking prayer in your local church. What would happen in your church if you and your people committed to praying this prayer for the next 365 days, not in mechanical repetition, of course, but from the heart with a sense of desperation, pleading for God's power, love and fullness. I think God tells us what would happen. He says...

Test Me now in this if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. (Malachi 3:10)

And this is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him. (1John 5:14-15)

God will answer this prayer from His children and will do so exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we can ever ask or think!

**Of God** - O'Brien explains that "The genitive of God is subjective and thus refers to God in all his perfection, including his presence, life, and power. That fulness or perfection is the standard or level to which they are to be filled." ([The Letter to the Ephesians. W. B. Eerdmans. 1999](#))

**Vincent** - Fulness of God is the fulness which God imparts through the dwelling of Christ in the heart; Christ, in Whom the Father was pleased that all the fulness should dwell (Col 1:19-note), and in Whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9-note).

**Moule on all the fullness of God** - i.e., as in Colossians 2:9 (and see note on Ephesians 1:23), the totality of the Divine riches, whether viewed as Attributes as in God, or Graces as in us; whatever, being in Him, is spiritually communicable to the saints, the "partakers of Divine nature" (2Peter 1:4). The believing reader will find inexhaustible matter in such a phrase for thought, prayer, and faith. ([Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#))

**Boice** commenting on filled to **fullness** - The phrase "**fullness of God**" can be either of two grammatical constructions. It can be an objective genitive; in that case, the fullness of God would be the fullness of grace God bestows on us. Or it can be a subjective genitive; in that case, the fullness would be God's own fullness, that which fills himself. Because of the preposition eis, which means "unto," it seems that the second is to be preferred. Overwhelming as the petition may be, Paul seems to be praying that we (and all other Christians) may be filled up to or unto all the fullness that is in God Himself. How can this be? **Ironside** found it so impossible that he changed the meaning to suggest that some of the **fullness of God** is to be in us like some of the ocean in an empty shell. I think that falls short of the idea. Here is the highest rung of the ladder, the highest step of the stairs. We are to be filled with all God's **fullness**, an infinite thing. But then, we have all eternity (an infinite time) to be so filled. I think Paul is praying that we will be filled and filled and filled and filled and filled—and so on forever, as God out of His infinite resources increasingly pours Himself out into those sinful but now redeemed creatures he has rescued through the work of Christ. ([Ephesians: An Expository Commentary](#))

**Sam Storms** on **fullness of God** - See Eph. 4:13. God's "**fullness**" = his moral perfections or excellencies, as well as his empowering presence; i.e., all that God is as God. "That fulness or perfection is the standard or level to which they are to be filled" (O'Brien, 265). What does that do to our low expectations of what is available to us in this life? But with what are we to be filled? The "power of God?" The "love of Christ?" "The Spirit?" Certainly, but there is more in Paul's mind. Note well: they are to be filled by God, "and presumably if they are to be filled up to the fullness of God, it is **with this fullness** [emphasis mine] that they are to be filled" (Lincoln, 214) ([Ephesians 3:14-21](#))

**John Eadie** - "**All the fulness of God**" is all the fulness which God possesses, or by which He is characterized... The pleroma—that with which He is filled—appears to be the entire moral excellence of God—the fulness and luster of His spiritual perfections. Such is the climax of the prayer...The whole **fulness of God** can never contract itself so as to lodge in any created heart. But the smaller vessel may have its own fulness poured into it from one of larger dimensions. The communicable fulness of God will in every element of it impart itself to the capacious and exalted bosom, for Christ dwells in their hearts. The difference between God and the saint will be not in kind, but in degree and extent. His fulness is infinite; theirs is limited by the essential conditions of a created nature. Theirs is the correspondence of a miniature to the full face and form which it represents...The apostle prays for strength, for the indwelling of Jesus, for unmovable foundation in love, for a comprehension of the size and vastness of the spiritual temple, and

for a knowledge of the love of Christ; and when such blessings are conferred and enjoyed, they are the means of bringing into the heart this Divine fullness. ([Ephesians 3 Commentary](#))

**Blaikie** on **filled with all the fullness of God**; that is, that ye may be filled with spiritual grace and blessing to an extent corresponding to all the fullness of God. Though the finite cannot compare with the infinite, there may be a correspondence between them according to the capacity of each. There is a fullness of gracious attainment in every advanced believer that corresponds to all the fullness of God; every part of his nature is supplied from the Divine fountain, and, so far as a creature can, he presents the image of the Divine fullness. In the human nature of Christ this correspondence was perfect: "In him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily;" in the soul of the believer there may be a progressive movement towards this fullness. No higher view can be conceived of the dignity of man's nature, and the glorious privileges conferred on him by the gospel, than that he is susceptible of such conformity to God. Who can conceive that man should have attained to such a capacity by a mere process of evolution? "So God made man in his own image;" and in Christ man is "renewed in righteousness and holiness after the image of him who created him." ([Pulpit Commentary](#))

**Wayne Barber** on **filled with the fullness of God** - In other words, everything that fills God fills me and controls me and satisfies me. I am living in a realm now that I didn't know was possible. I am loving people I didn't think were lovable. I have put up with people who used to give me a fit. I am handling circumstances like never before. God, what is going on inside of me? God says, "You haven't seen anything yet. Keep on trusting Me. I have other levels I want to take you to. Walk in the fullness of what I have to offer you." That is it. That is the Christian life. Paul is praying that all of God would dominate all that you are. In other words, that all of God would dominate all of you. I picked that word "**dominate**" very carefully because the word "**filled**" implies dominate. The Greek word is **pleroo**. It is the word that means "to be filled to the brim." If you fill a glass of water and fill it to the brim, that's **pleroo**. It is filled full. There is no room for anything else. There is the implied meaning of satisfaction. You have a satisfied glass if it is full of water. What is a glass for? To be filled up. When you put the liquid to the top it must be satisfied. Nothing else is needed to satisfy the glass. So in light of Paul's prayer, Paul is saying when we are empty of sin and we are empty of self and filled up with the fullness of God, then we begin to understand what satisfaction is all about. There is also the implicit meaning of **dominance**. Whatever fills a person **dominates** that person. What are you filled with? What is coming out of your life? Look at your life. Are you filled with fear and jealousy or are you filled with the Holy Spirit of God? ([Ephesians 3:16-19: A Prayer for Fullness - 5](#))

**Wiersbe** on **fullness** - The **means** of our fullness is the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18+), and the **measure** of our fullness is God Himself (Ep 4:11-16 see **notes** Ep 4:11; 4:12; 4:13; 4:14; 4:15; 4:16). It is tragic when Christians use the wrong measurements in examining their own spiritual lives. We like to measure ourselves by the weakest Christians that we know, and then boast, "Well, I'm better than they are." Paul tells us that the measure is Christ, and that we cannot boast about anything (nor should we). When we have reached His fullness, then we have reached the limit. In one sense, the Christian is already "made full in Christ" (Col 2:9-note; Col 2:10-note, where "complete" means "filled full"). Positionally, we are complete in Him, but practically, we enjoy only the grace that we apprehend by faith. The resources are there. All we need do is accept them and enjoy them. Paul will have more to say about this fullness (Ep 5:18-21-see notes Ep 5:18; 19; 20; 21) (See [The Wiersbe Bible Commentary:](#))

**John Phillips** tells the story of D L Moody and the **fullness of God** - God Himself is the source of our enablement. We are to be progressively filled, right up to the measure of God's fullness. This truth is beyond all understanding. Yet Paul prayed that we might experience the fullness. D. L. Moody did. He rarely spoke of his experience because it was too sacred, but it is recorded in his biography. He had been walking the streets of New York City, oblivious to the crowds and traffic, wrestling with God about a claim God was making on his life. Suddenly he gave in and felt an overwhelming sense of God's presence sweep over him like waves. He went to a friend's house, declined the offer of a meal, and asked for a room where he could be alone. Time passed. He was alone with God in a way he had never known before; he was filled with the fullness of God. At last Moody cried out to God to stay His hand, for he could take no more. After that experience his ministry was never the same. An anointing on him surpassed all that had gone before. If ever there was One who was filled with all God's fullness, it was the man Christ Jesus. Of course, even when He lived on earth He never ceased to be God. But He accepted life on our terms, and as a man was always filled with God's fullness. There was never a time—as a babe, as a boy, as a man—when He was not filled with the Spirit. Jesus was not anointed for His ministry until John baptized Him in the Jordan and the Spirit came down on Him, but He was always filled with the Spirit. John 3:34 says, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."...When Paul prayed that we might be filled with all of God's **fullness**, he was praying that in our character, in our conduct, and in our conversation, we might be like Jesus. What then, in human terms, was the secret of Jesus' life? Obedience! "Lo, I come," He said, "(in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God" (Hebrews 10:7). He "became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). Imagine for a moment that we tiptoe into the garden of Gethsemane. We creep past Peter, James, and John, who already are asleep. We see Jesus staring aghast into the cup of suffering that our sins have filled. We see the sweat and blood on His brow. We hear Him say, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matthew 26:39). In the garden we have learned the secret to being filled with the fullness of God; the secret is obedience. (See [Exploring Ephesians & Philippians: An Expository Commentary](#))

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**You may be filled up** (4137)(**pleroo**) means to be filled (plural and passive voice = saints acted on by outside force) to the brim (a net, Mt 13:48, a building, Jn 12:3, Acts 2:2, a city, Acts 5:28, needs Phil 4:19). It means to make complete in every particular and so to cause to abound. It means to furnish liberally diffusing throughout and pervading thus taking possession of and ultimately controlling the one who is "filled up".

Note that **filled up** is in the **passive voice**, which some writers have referred to as the "divine passive", indicating that it is God Who brings about the action in this case of filling the believer up.

**Fullness** (4138) (**pleroma** from **pleroo**) describes the full measure of something with an emphasis on completeness.

Paul wrote "For in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made **complete** (**pleroma**), and He is the head over all rule and authority." (Col 2:9-note; Col 2:10-note)

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**Steven Cole** - Do you find that spending consistent time alone each day with the Lord in the Word and in prayer is a difficult duty, not a joyous delight? Is your spiritual life often dry and routine? Are you often defeated by temptation and sin? At the risk of being overly simplistic, I believe that all of these problems stem from a common source: You do not know experientially the love of Jesus Christ as deeply as you should. A young man who has just fallen in love doesn't regard spending time with his new love as a difficult duty! He doesn't think, "I really should spend time with her today but, nah, I think I'll skip it." Why not? Because he is motivated and captivated by love. He rearranges everything else in his schedule to make time to be with her. Such love is a powerful force that literally changes your life. It motivates you in ways that you do not understand. But, as we all know, it's one thing to fall in love, but it's another thing to sustain it and cause it to grow deeper over the years. It doesn't run on autopilot! It requires focus and effort. The same is true with regard to knowing the love of Christ. You come to know it at salvation, but you've got to work at growing to know Him (**Ed**: While I understand what Cole is saying, I submit that our "working" absolutely must be a response to His Spirit's working in us giving us the desire and the power) and His love in deeper and deeper ways....

#### **Knowing Christ's love results in spiritual maturity.**

The top rung of the ladder (to use Spurgeon's phrase) is, "that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God" (3:19). "The fullness of God" probably refers to the perfection of which God Himself is full. Paul is praying that we will attain to spiritual perfection, having all that God is fill us to overflowing. As our capacity to receive it grows, He keeps filling us again and again. The idea of fullness implies total dominance or control, so that God perfectly controls our minds, our emotions, and our will. Paul uses similar language in Ephesians 4:13, where he says that the goal of the ministry is that "we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

Can we ever attain such perfection in this life? The greatest of the saints have all lamented on their deathbeds that they are miserable sinners, saved by God's grace alone. They all have been quick to admit their many remaining faults and shortcomings. But, as Paul states (Rom. 8:29), God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. We know that He will accomplish His purpose for all of His elect. As John tells us (1 John 3:2, 3), "We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." So we should join Paul (Phil. 3:14) in pressing "on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

#### **Conclusion**

D. A. Carson (ibid., p. 196) points out that just as a loving home is required for children to grow to personal maturity, so we must come into the knowledge of Christ's great love for us, in His household, the church, if we are to grow to spiritual maturity. Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote (ibid., p. 219), "Indeed, our chief defect as Christians is that we fail to realize Christ's love to us." He adds (p. 223), "How important it is that we should meditate upon this love and contemplate it! It is because we fail to do so that we tend to think at times that He has forgotten us, or that He has left us."

If you were to ask the apostle Paul, "What motivated you to give up everything for Christ and the gospel? How could you endure all that you did for Christ and keep going?" I believe you would see tears well up in his eyes and he would answer, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. 2:20). He might add (Rom. 8:38-39), "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Live there and you will grow to spiritual maturity! ([Knowing the Unknowable Love of Christ](#))

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**Ruth Paxson** writes that this section is "To Ensure the Plenitude of Christ's Life in Us"

3:19 (R.V.). "That ye may be filled unto all the fulness of God."

**"That."** This fourth petition is the final fruitage and the climax of the strengthening by the Spirit in the inner man, as it introduces the ultimate purpose of God in the realization of our wealth and the goal towards which He has been steadily working.

**"Ye may be filled."** Is not this word "filled" (Eph 5:18), with the kindred words "fill" (Eph 4:10), "filleth" (Eph 1:23), and "fulness" (Eph 3:19; 4:12), the keynote of Ephesians? Is this not the objective in the realization of God's deepest desire both for the Church in its corporate capacity and for the individual Christian? Does God not clearly state the ultimate goal for the Church, that it shall come "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ"?

The Holy Spirit strengthens us in the inner man that Christ may dwell in every corner and cranny of our lives, thus emptying us of self and enthroning Christ in us as a living reality. He strengthens us that we may comprehend ever more fully the measurable love of Christ expressed in salvation, and that we may know the unknowable love that made Him our Saviour, thus making Christ so precious to us that we are satisfied in Him. But Satan is always at work to destroy the work of the Spirit and to win us back to allegiance to himself. There is but one safeguard to his cunning wiles; to be filled with Christ that all such temptation be resisted, and that we may in all things and at all times be more than conquerors.

**"All the fulness of God"** -- the grand, glorious sum total of all that God is. There is nothing conceivable beyond the fulness of God. It is all the divine perfections of the Godhead as expressed in Christ.

Colossians 2:9. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

This is the doctrinal meaning of the fulness of God, but what does it mean tangibly and practically in relationship to the Church and to the Christian? Is it not just all that vast wealth stored in Christ out of which God draws for the achievement of His purpose (Eph 3:11); the fulfillment of His good pleasure (Eph 1:9); the carrying out of the counsels of His own will (Eph 1:11); the manifestation of the riches of His grace and glory (Eph 1:7; 3:16); the working of His mighty power (Eph 1:19); the expression of the richness of His mercy and the greatness of His love (Eph 2:4)? Is it not also those unsearchable riches in Christ which the saint appropriates for the satisfaction of every Spirit-inspired desire; for the supply of every need of the spirit, soul and body; for the sustenance of life on that highest plane in Christ in the heavenlies, far above all; and for the strength to stand and to withstand in the warfare with Satan?

How can we ever hope to become the recipients of the fulness of God? The very thought is overwhelming. Let Scripture answer and let us not sin against God through unbelief.

Colossians 2:10 (R.V.). "Ye are made full in him."

John 1:16. "Of his fulness have all we received."

Are we not beginning to see more clearly why Paul writes of the unsearchable riches of Christ? At the same time are we discouraged because we have appropriated so meagerly of our wealth, and seem to have so little evidence of this plenitude in our lives?

Perhaps there has been the reception of a measure of that fulness, but this petition is that we "may be filled unto all the fulness of God." Who could ever measure up to such a standard as this? Why, then, should we offer this petition?

**"Filled unto."** What comfort that word unto gives and what hope it inspires within us! Yet what a challenge to possess our possessions in Christ and to realize our wealth to the full! There is no limit placed upon the plenitude that may be ours except that which we ourselves make. For we shall be filled according to the measure of our emptiness, our thirst, our appropriation, our capacity, and our communion with the fountainhead.

Daily we may be "filled unto" -- a process continuous but never completed while we are here on earth. But one day the process will be perfected, and we shall be filled full when we together with all other saints "come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." (The Wealth, Walk and Warfare of the Christian)

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In **Morning and Evening** C H Spurgeon writes...

The love of Christ in its sweetness, its fulness, its greatness, its faithfulness, passeth all human comprehension. Where shall language be found which shall describe his matchless, his unparalleled love towards the children of men? It is so vast and boundless that, as the swallow but skimeth the water, and

diveth not into its depths, so all descriptive words but touch the surface, while depths immeasurable lie beneath. Well might the poet say,

"O love, thou fathomless abyss!"

for this love of Christ is indeed measureless and fathomless; none can attain unto it. Before we can have any right idea of the love of Jesus, we must understand his previous glory in its height of majesty, and his incarnation upon the earth in all its depths of shame. But who can tell us the majesty of Christ? When he was enthroned in the highest heavens he was very God of very God; by him were the heavens made, and all the hosts thereof. His own almighty arm upheld the spheres; the praises of cherubim and seraphim perpetually surrounded him; the full chorus of the hallelujahs of the universe unceasingly flowed to the foot of his throne: he reigned supreme above all his creatures, God over all, blessed for ever. Who can tell his height of glory then? And who, on the other hand, can tell how low he descended? To be a man was something, to be a man of sorrows was far more; to bleed, and die, and suffer, these were much for him who was the Son of God; but to suffer such unparalleled agony-to endure a death of shame and desertion by his Father, this is a depth of condescending love which the most inspired mind must utterly fail to fathom. Herein is love! and truly it is love that "passeth knowledge. " O let this love fill our hearts with adoring gratitude, and lead us to practical manifestations of its power.

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**Immortal Love, Forever Full**

by John G Whittier

Immortal love, forever full,  
Forever flowing free,  
Forever shared, forever whole,  
A never ebbing sea!

We may not climb the heavenly steeps  
To bring the Lord Christ down;  
In vain we search the lowest deeps,  
For Him no depths can drown.

But warm, sweet, tender, even yet,  
A present help is He;  
And faith still has its Olivet,  
And love its Galilee.

The healing of His seamless dress  
Is by our beds of pain;  
We touch Him in life's throng and press,  
And we are whole again.

Through Him the first fond prayers are said  
Our lips of childhood frame,  
The last low whispers of our dead  
Are burdened with His Name.

O Lord and Master of us all,  
Whate'er our name or sign,  
We own Thy sway, we hear Thy call,  
We test our lives by Thine.

The letter fails, the systems fall,  
And every symbol wanes;  
The Spirit over brooding all,  
Eternal Love remains

Be filled. What great things man can hold!  
Filled with God. What exaltation!  
Filled with the fulness of God. What must this be?  
Filled with all the fulness of God. What more can be imagined?

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## **The Bulldog and the Sprinkler**

I pray that you . . . may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3:17, 19

Today's Scripture & Insight: Ephesians 3:14–21

Most summer mornings, a delightful drama plays out in the park behind our house. It involves a sprinkler. And a bulldog. About 6:30 or so, the sprinklers come on. Shortly thereafter, Fifi the bulldog (our family's name for her) arrives.

Fifi's owner lets her off her leash. The bulldog sprints with all her might to the nearest sprinkler, attacking the stream of water as it douses her face. If Fifi could eat the sprinkler, I think she would. It's a portrait of utter exuberance, of Fifi's seemingly infinite desire to be drenched by the liquid she can never get enough of.

There are no bulldogs in the Bible, or sprinklers. Yet, in a way, Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 reminds me of Fifi. There, Paul prays that the Ephesian believers might be filled with God's love and "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." He prayed that we might be "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (vv. 18–19).

Still today, we're invited to experience a God whose infinite love exceeds anything we can comprehend, that we too might be drenched, saturated, and utterly satisfied by His goodness. We're free to plunge with abandon, relish, and delight into a relationship with the One who alone can fill our hearts and lives with love, meaning, and purpose. By: Adam R. Holz ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

How does the experience of plunging into waves at a beach symbolize the immensity of God's love for you? What barriers do you think potentially keep you from experiencing His love?

God, thank You for Your infinite and satisfying love. Please help us to know and experience the love You have for each one of us.

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**G Campbell Morgan** wrote the following thoughts on the phrases "The Love of Christ...the fullness of God" in Ephesians 3:19...

Here are two great phrases. They occur in one of the Apostolic prayers for the saints. In that prayer the ultimate desire is that they should "know the love of Christ," in order that they "may be filled unto all the fulness of God." The idea, then, is that the knowledge of "the love of Christ" brings to the soul the experience of "the fulness of God."

To be "filled unto all the fulness of God" is to find the ultimate experience of life. Where this is so, there is no true desire of the soul unsatisfied, no power of the soul undeveloped or idle. The true meaning of life is discovered, and that not as an ideal seen but unrealized, but as an actual experience. It is eternal life; it is perfection; it is satisfaction. How then can it be attained? By the knowledge of the love of Christ, for in that there is the very fulness of God; and so wonderful is it, not only as a vision, but in its power, that to know it is to be transformed by it into the likeness of itself. To the finality of this knowledge and experience we have not yet attained; but if we know anything of the love of Christ, we know something of the filling of this fulness of God. That is the story of the beginning, the process, and the consummation of true Christian experience.

The love of Christ captures our hearts, and the life of God produces rest and quietness. The love of Christ is progressively interpreted to us by the Spirit, and the fulness of God brings us more and more into the joy of life. At last we shall come to full apprehension. Then we shall come to a final perfection in the final fulness of God. (Morgan, G. C. Life Applications from Every Chapter of the Bible)

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**Our Daily Bread** devotional "**Deeper Than The Deep Blue Sea**"...

Several hundred miles off the coast of Guam is the Mariana Trench, the deepest place in the ocean. On January 23, 1960, Jacques Piccard and Donald Walsh climbed into a submersible vessel and were lowered into the cold, lonely darkness. Their descent into the deep, which set the world record, has never been repeated.

The depth of the ocean is mind-boggling. The Mariana Trench is nearly 7 miles down. The water pressure at

the bottom of the trench is 15,931 pounds per square inch. Yet there is life. Walsh saw flat fish on the ocean floor, surviving despite the pressure and the darkness.

For most of us, it's hard to fathom just how deep the Mariana Trench is. But much more difficult to comprehend is the love of God. Paul was hard-pressed to describe it, but he prayed that his readers would be able somehow to grasp "the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18).

The reason we can never reach the depths of God's love is that it is infinite—beyond measure. If you ever feel alone and unloved, that you've sunk to the depths of dark despair, think about Ephesians 3:18. God's love for you is deeper than the Mariana Trench! —Dennis Fisher ([Our Daily Bread](#). Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

I have a Friend whose faithful love  
Is more than all the world to me;  
It's higher than the heights above,  
And deeper than the boundless sea. —Anon.

You're never beyond the reach of God's love.

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### Our Daily Bread devotional "God's Great Love"...

God's love for us is so deep that we have a hard time comprehending it. It reaches down to us through the darkness of this sinful world, even though we are hopelessly undeserving. The Bible says that before God created our planet, He had decided to display the depth of His love for us through His Son's death on the cross (1 Peter 1:20; Revelation 13:8).

In my imagination I look back over time and see the Lord raising mountains to majestic heights, cutting valleys for flowing rivers, and stretching out vast plains. I envision Him creating the mighty oceans and beautiful lakes. Then I see Him pause and reflect on the goodness of His creation. He gazes at that part of the world where His Son will be born. He knows that Jesus will be rejected and crucified. With a sweep of His hand He could obliterate the world and spare His Son from the agony of the cross. But He doesn't.

Because of God's love, the Son came to earth and was slain. On Calvary He died to pay the penalty for our sins. In John 3:16 we read, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Oh, how great is God's love for us! —D C Egner ([ibid](#))

Thinking It Over

What is your response to God's love? Have you  
confessed your sin and accepted His forgiveness?

Are you living in grateful obedience to Him?

**Eternal life is made possible by God's eternal love.**