

Paul begins, *"For this reason I bow before the Father..."* (3:14) He is referring back to what he has already told us.

For what reason? Why is this prayer so important?

Sydney has a traffic problem. It is a mess. There are bottlenecks, delays and gridlocks but our political parties have a plan! There are going to build new metro lines, new light rail lines and new toll roads. Just elect us they say and it will all be fixed! Well, maybe not!

This world is in a mess; sin, greed, conflict and injustice. People ignore God and worship idols but God has a plan. Paul has already told us.

⁹ *God made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, ¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ. (1:9-10)*

His "will", his "good pleasure", he "purposed". We see that God has a plan, a plan to create a unity of everything under Christ's rule, to create harmony and justice for all.

We see that we are included in God's plan

¹¹ *In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will. (1:11)*

We also saw:

⁸ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (2:8-10)*

God prepared our good works, a plan that includes us. We were recreated in Christ to be part of God's plan. Our good works play a part in God's plan.

Pauls has told us, ¹⁹ *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (2:19-22)*

God's plan is to build a new community. In Paul's time it was a community uniting Jews and Gentiles. Today God is uniting people of many races and languages in his church. He is bringing unity out of a broken and divided world. We are like a holy temple with God dwelling in our midst. We are a temple to display God's glory.

¹⁰ *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, ¹¹ according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. (3:10-11)*

God's "intent", his "purpose", his plan is for the church to display God's wisdom. We aren't just saved to say hallelujah I'm going to heaven. We are saved to be part of God's plan. We have a calling to be part of God's plan.

In Chapter 4 Paul begins, *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.* (4:1-3)

We are called to unity, to love, to peace. The rest of the letter spells out how this will affect every part of our lives.

Have you ever watched the pole vault? You see how high the bar is – way up! It looks impossible to jump that high. Joy and I watched Australian Athlete Tatiana Gregorieva pole vault in 2000 at the Australian Olympics. It was amazing to see how she would run up with her pole, then jump and the pole would flick her over the bar to win a silver medal.

She could do that but there is no way I could get near the bar.

Perhaps as we look at what it means to be holy we feel the same thing. When we hear all the don'ts: don't have any lust, evil desires, greed, anger, slander, filthy language, lies, stealing, cheating, get rid of sexual immorality, impurity, and so on.

Then we hear all the do's: do show compassion for others, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgive others, love God with all your heart, love your neighbour as yourself, love your spouse, honour your parents, bring up your children, read your Bible, say your prayers, go to church, tell your friends about Jesus, use your gift to serve.....

The demands may seem impossible. We are told all sin is serious. It seems the bar is just too high. Like pole vault! We may feel I can't make it.

So we come to Paul's prayer. He says, *"For this reason I bow before the Father..."* (3:14). The reason is the high calling we have received. We need this prayer. We need God's help.

2. Paul prays that we will know God's power

¹⁶ *I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.* (3:16-17)

No pole vaulter could reach the bar on her own. Wouldn't she look silly running up and trying to jump without the pole? She would get nowhere near the bar! She needs the pole to lift her to those heights.

There is no way we can overcome sin or serve God in our own strength. We can't do God's works by ourselves. We depend on God working in us by his Spirit. So Paul prays that we will be strengthened by God's power.

Christ dwelling in our hearts means Christ controlling our lives. It can only happen with God's help.

Paul has already talked about God's power.

¹⁸ *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know ... ¹⁹ his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength ²⁰ he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.* (1:18-20)

It was God's power that raised Christ's dead body from death to life, God's power that gave him the rule over everything. That power is at work in us. We need to take confidence not in ourselves but in God's power in us.

In the last chapter Paul says, ¹⁰ *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.* (6:10-11)

God's power is available to us by the armour he has given us. We need to clothe ourselves in that armour. Prayer is part of that process, depending on God in prayer and praying for each other as Paul prays for the Ephesians.

3. Knowing Christ's love

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (3:17-19)

My daughter Jo was involved in fatal accident with motorcyclist. She charged with negligent driving occasioning death and she had to go through all the court process to clear herself. It was a very traumatic time for her. One thing she held onto was words of the children's song:

Wide, wide as the ocean, high as the heavens above,
Deep, deep as the deepest sea is my Saviour's love.

Those words come from this passage. Paul prays that they will know the full dimensions of Christ's love. To know that we are loved like this is a great strength when facing traumatic times in life.

We can also know that Christ still loves us when we fail him. He doesn't disqualify us when we don't reach the bar. His love is still as deep as ever. We are saved by grace and sustained by grace. We are forgiven and given new strength to do better.

Paul prays that we will know Christ's love... *...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*, in other words that our lives will be transformed, that we will progress to be more and more like God himself.

For this we need more than a head knowledge of the facts. We need to have a real experience of Christ's bottomless love. Paul says this love, *"surpasses knowledge"*. We can never fully grasp the extent of Christ's love. It is an ongoing process of gaining a deeper appreciation of what it means.

My question is, how are you going? How are you working to *grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ*? Is it part of your prayers? Are you seeking more than head knowledge as you read Bible? Do you give time to reflect and take it in? To know that we are truly, deeply and unconditionally loved is a life transforming insight.

When we experience a love like that we can't help but love God and our neighbour, reflecting the love we have experienced.

God can do it.

Can it happen? Can we really be transformed so Christ rules in our hearts? Can we really know Christ's love so that we are filled to the measure of the fullness of God?

Yes it can. Paul gives glory to the God who can make it happen.

²⁰ *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,* ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.*

(3:20-21)

God is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

The church may sometimes look weak, or even a failure. We may feel weak or a failure. But God's wisdom is shown in what he is doing through the church. He is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.

I don't know about solving Sydney transport problems! But God will fulfil his plans. He is at work among us. Be encouraged. The outcome doesn't depend on our strength but on God's mighty power.