

# Breadth and Length and Depth and Height

"On this behalf, I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you, the nations ... On this behalf am I bowing my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, after Whom every kindred in the heavens and on earth is being named, that He may be giving you, in accord with the riches of His glory, to be made staunch with power, through His spirit, in the man within, Christ to dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, having been rooted and grounded in love, should be strong to grasp, together with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and depth and height -- to know the love of Christ as well which transcends knowledge -- that you may be completed for the entire complement of God." (Ephesians 3:1 and 14-19).

Dimensions in four directions, and, if considered as expressed from a centre, then in six! To what do these words "breadth and length and depth and height" refer ? They have been variously related to love, to the present economy and to power. Whilst each of these has a necessary connection, and cannot be divorced from consideration or effect, yet none seems to be fully satisfactory.

The phrase occurs in one of the two prayers of the Ephesian epistle, and it expresses the extent of something which it is most desirable for the saints to grasp, for it has a direct bearing on the object to which the prayer leads.

## THE PRAYER FOR ABILITY

This prayer is addressed to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may be giving power ... to be staunch ... that you ... should be strong to grasp ... what is the breadth and length and depth and height. But the next clause does not define that to which these terms apply: it rather introduces a complementary subject also requiring ability - to know the love of Christ. This is to be "as well" as getting hold of the dimensions of the matter concerning which the prayer is being made.

The love of Christ certainly has magnitude, yet it is described by words which intimate it to be beyond our comprehension. His love transcends knowledge, and it too requires the gift of power and staunchness to enable even such apprehension as we are capable of at present. The terms before us do, however, demarcate extent which comes within our knowledge, though it be necessary to have distinct ability given. The clause regarding the love of Christ is almost a parenthetical thought before stating the logical conclusion to which the prayer leads. In short, the two features each contribute to the aim of the prayer, which is, that the saints may be completed for the entire complement of God.

## THE CONNECTION OF THE PRAYER

To perceive that to which this description is related, we must go back to verse fourteen of Ephesians three: "On this behalf": and since we here have a repetition or resumption of what is commenced in verse one, we are led back still further. Shall we not therefore, discover the real connection in the end verses of chapter two and so link up with the actual statements from which the prayer arises ?

Nor must we ignore the first two chapters, for they have detailed the three items of the present economy, as well as also introducing the Secret of Christ. The prayer, commenced in verse one of chapter three, was interrupted in order to summarise and enumerate in particular from the broad aspects set out in the prior chapters. The leading point of this digression is in verse one, the stewardship of God's grace given to Paul for the nations. Its connection with the Secret of Christ is instanced, followed by the three items describing the salient character of the Secret Economy. The joint allotment, the joint body, and joint participation, now become features of the stewardship to the Nations. To these we have to add the fact that they eventuate into blessing among the celestials. In brief, this is the exact position and though each feature is distinct, yet they all mould to the ultimate.

## THE BASIS OF THE PRAYER

It is after detailing the above through chapters one and two that a consequence is drawn in chapter two, verses nineteen to twenty-two. The saints of this economy, called together by the evangel of God's glory, are,

by the conclusion, shown the outcome from joint participation: it leads them to a relationship with God's government, family and temple. The particular point is made that, in this regard, those called through Paul's ministry are being built together for God's dwelling place in spirit.

Is it not to this latter that the four terms of extension are related? Do they not figure the grandeur of God's dwelling place to which the saints are thus connected, and also intimate the inclusiveness of the ultimate results to God? Truly we are for the outcome of His transcendent love: the fruit of this economy, distinct as it is, is not merely for our blessing, but for God's glory in the universe. This achievement God is fashioning by His power directed by His love.

To discern the extent of God's dwelling which is being erected through the ministry to the Nations, is great and most desirable: to see it as an integral to the Secret of Christ is to perceive deeply into the glory of our Lord. The first prayer was for a wise and revealing spirit to enable realisation regarding our allotment : now the prayer is for power to lay hold of the immensity and present scope of that resulting from God's grace by this Ministry to the Nations.

### **A UNIVERSAL OUTLOOK**

As we gain insight into the expressiveness and connections of the four dimensional terms, we begin to understand the universal outlook which really lies around the Ephesian Epistle. Because it is so specific as regards our own blessings we are far too apt to limit our apprehension, and so we cloud out of our minds the larger extent to which the Epistle is committed, especially in respect of its relation to the Secret of Christ. Moreover, failing to appreciate that the present economy must also have its connection with all God's activities, even those limited to the earth, we are cramped in our discernment of the breadth and length and depth and height of the dwelling which God now builds. At the same time we tend to miss its future association with the wider home building which God has before Him and instanced in the end verses of Ephesians two under the figures of family and temple. In fact, beneath all this lies the intention of God to reconcile the universe.

### **GOD'S PRESENT ACTIVITIES**

The measurements of God's present activities include saints from both Israel and the Nations, and whilst there is joint participation within and among these, the august dwelling place God now builds is also for eventual joint participation with the whole family of God. If we perceive the extent indicated by the terms gathered together in the phrase before us, can we ever seriously acknowledge or entertain anything but one body ? Do not the exclusive notions become corrected by the inclusive nature of these words ?

The Ecclesia of which Christ is the Head has the great extension signified by breadth and length and depth and height, and it requires staunch ability to grasp its inclusiveness amidst the chaos which holds the saints as they are carried about by human caprice shown in the winds of teaching.

### **THE OBJECT OF THE PRAYER**

A realisation of the extensive prospect around the outcome of this Secret Economy is one of the most potent factors to complete us for the entire complement of God. That we are to come to such glory is barely appreciated. We have gleaned God's glory in Christ Jesus as His complement, but we follow all too hazily that we should now have the adult stature of Christ's complement, in our conduct, and much less do we recognise that we are for God's complement in its entirety. This ideal relationship which should and will exist between God and ourselves, as His creatures associated in Christ Jesus, has not struck forcibly into our hearts. Apart from the saints, God's creatures deny or defy Him: there is no harmony between Him and them, but ultimately they will, in combination with the whole universe, be in accord with Him and make one harmonious whole. Such accord is the object of the present grace, an accord which admits all the called and justified of God to joint participation with each other as God's dwelling place, and also with every kindred of God's family. Within God's complement there must and will be the fullest harmony, both toward God and toward the creature element. There can be no division in His complement: nothing less than the fullest unity can be in that ultimate. For us to perceive this means our appreciation of the breadth and length, depth and height, in which should now function the harmony corresponding to the grace of this economy. And this ought to be a prior

exhibition of God's ultimate in His creatures, and which is termed the entire complement of God.

It is only as we exhibit that we are God's complement that we are able to exemplify the position agreeable to God making known to the sovereignties and authorities among the celestials His multifarious wisdom. This wisdom is building a dwelling place for God such as the universe has not seen hitherto, and of such grand proportions as are indicated by the terms before us: it is not a meagre structure. The Secret Economy is producing the Ecclesia which is Christ's body, and, as such, these sovereignties and authorities recognise us, but they also view us as an increment, integral to the whole, figuring what God will achieve in the eons through Christ Jesus.

### **LOVE GIVES VALUE TO KNOWLEDGE**

To have knowledge of what God is doing is good, but we must also see it as the outcome of His love, and of Christ's love. Unless our understanding is co-extensive with the subjective knowledge of His love, then our situation is vain. We must ever realise that His love transcends our apprehensions, and hence, however near perfection our grasp may be it is not an absolute measure of what He will do. He is able beyond our apprehending. Further, His love, experienced in our heart and mind, will generate that true spirit which will characterise His complement. Though it be almost inconceivable for us to comprehend the truth and glory of His economy, yet we should ever pray the prayer, not simply for power to be staunch to grasp, *but also to know the love of Christ*. This will keep our mind in equipoise and joy, for we shall see all as from Him, even the ability to grasp.

The details of this prayer agree with and augment the necessity here being mentioned. The power to be staunch accords with His glorious riches. These are in Christ Jesus, and are set forth in the Ephesian letter. This power enables Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith, and roots and grounds us in love. These are features which should be the same in all saints of this economy: none are excluded. The measurements in this prayer have such capacity that they are intended to indicate how thoroughly embracing is the ministry to the Nations. The conceptions behind the grace Paul dispensed have none of the narrowness of Israel's position.

E. H. Clayton

"Grace and Truth" granted permission  
to Martin Lee ([GoodNewsGospel.info](http://GoodNewsGospel.info))  
to copy and distribute this document.