

Paul's Prayer No. 3 – Praying for Power – Ephesians 3: v. 14-21.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—

¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Introduction

This is the third study of Paul's prayers in the New Testament. So far we have learnt many things from the way that Paul prayed. He prayed specifically for the Churches that he was concerned about.

From his prayer for the Church in Colossae we learnt that it is good to pray that our lives might be pleasing to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul gave us 4 characteristics of what a life pleasing to the Lord Jesus looks like.

1. A life pleasing to Jesus is a life that is bearing fruit in service for Jesus. Paul cannot imagine any Christian being pleasing to Jesus without good works in service to Him.
2. Paul was not satisfied that a Christian should stand still in their spiritual life, they must always be seeking to grow in their knowledge of God. Growth comes from obedience to God's word. A growing Christian is always an obedient Christian.
3. A life pleasing to Jesus is a life that displays great patience and endurance when you go through suffering. To suffer is not popular, but Jesus is pleased when we turn to Him in times of suffering and don't turn away from Him.
4. When Christians joyfully give thanks to the Father they live a life pleasing to Jesus.

In Paul's prayer for the Church in Philippi he prayed that the Christian's love may grow more and more in knowledge and discernment.

Paul was concerned that their love was true Biblical love, not a love that ignored sin.

Paul also prayed that the fruit of "Righteousness" might be displayed in our lives.

God's fruit flowing through us to His glory.

We now come to our third study of Paul's prayers. This is contained in Ephesians chapter 3: v. 14-21.

This is probably the most popular and most well-known of Paul's prayers.

There are two main petitions that come out of his prayer.

1. That God might strengthen us with power through His Holy Spirit in our inner person.

2. That we might have power to grasp the limitless dimensions of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The first thing we need to do is to understand v. 14. If we do we will get the context of Paul's prayer and the reason for it.

In v. 14 Paul says "For this reason, I bow my knees.... (In other words he prays)

We have to ask ourselves, for what reason does Paul pray ?

Well the reason Paul prayed is connected to what Paul had previously said beforehand, in chapter 3.

Please note the first verse of chapter 3. It says "for this reason....."

It appears that Paul was just about to pray this prayer when he halted and decided to clarify something about the apostolic ministry and its relationship to the Church.

So therefore in order to discover the reason for the prayer we must go back further than chapter 3 to chapter 1-2.

In chapter 1-2 Paul praises God for bringing lost Jews and lost Gentiles into one new community. God accomplished this through the work of Jesus on the cross.

Jesus died on the cross to bring sinful man back into a right relationship with God.

Then Paul concludes his message in v. 19-22 of chapter 2.

¹⁹ Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*,

²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

So the reason for Paul's prayer is that he is praying in line with what he knows of God's will for them.

It is wonderful to pray for ourselves and other people and know that we are praying in line with God's will.

When we start to do this we soon discover at least these 3 things.

1. God is more interested in our Holiness than our comfort.
2. God delights in the purity and sincerity of His Church rather than the well-being of its members.
3. God shows Himself more clearly to men and women who obey Him, and enjoy His Company through prayer. This is in contrast to men and women who spend an unnecessary amount of time in their jobs, families, human relationships, and very little time with God.

Paul is saying at the outset that the essential values of the gospel must shape our prayers.

It is a question of "Seek ye first the kingdom of God..... And then God will add to our lives the things that we need. (Matthew 6: v. 33)

When God comes first, we don't need to worry about our needs.

He will wonderfully provide for them.

The first thing we learn about Paul's prayer is that they are in line with God's purposes.

The second thing we learn about Paul's prayer here is that it is addressed to His Heavenly Father – v. 14.

We have already learnt that Jesus taught His disciples to pray "Our Father who art in heaven.....

In the ancient world that Paul lived in, the father was not just the person who looked after his family, but he was the person who gave out favors and ruled the clan or family unit.

The God who Paul approached in prayer was not just the powerful almighty God, but he was related to Him, through the precious blood of Jesus.

It is the same for us if we know and love the Lord Jesus as our own personal savior.

Quote Matthew 7: v. 7-11.

⁷ "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Paul dares to approach His heavenly Father knowing that He is a Father who knows how to give good gifts.

So Paul's prayer really starts in v. 16.

That God might strengthen us with power, through His Holy Spirit in our inner person.

Paul's first petition is for power. It appears from Paul's other writings that he is regularly praying for power. In chapter 1:v.19 Paul prays for God's mighty power to be working in us.

The important thing to notice is that the power that Paul prays for is to be dispensed by the Holy Spirit. In the N.L.T. it says of v. 16 "I pray from His glorious unlimited resources, He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit"

Paul prays that this power will strengthen the inner man. What exactly does he mean by that?

The clearest picture of what Paul means here can be found in 2 Corinthians chapter 4: v. 14-18. (NLT)

¹⁴ We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus,^[d] will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. ¹⁵ All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are^[e] being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

Paul's body was his outer man, which was wearing away. His inner man is what is left, after his outer man has wasted away.

So Paul is praying for God's mighty power to strengthen the inner life inside ourselves.

This is the part of us that controls our character and prepares us for heaven.

It is what is left when you die, before your resurrected body.

You might ask the question “What is the purpose of this prayer?”

Paul tells us in v. 17 “that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith...”

Wait a moment; I thought that when I trusted Jesus to save me from my sins that He took up residence in my heart. Yes you are right He did. However the word that Paul uses here that is translated by the word “dwell” is a very strong one in the Greek.

Paul prays that Jesus Christ will take up residence and make our heart His home.

Let me illustrate what Paul means by this word.

Imagine that you buy an old house in the Japanese countryside. The roof is leaking, the kitchen is so old it is falling apart, the bedrooms are painted black, the shoji looks like a dirty giraffe, with brown spots everywhere, and the “Tatami Matt” is full of weeds that are growing well.

You move into the home with your young bride, it is all you can afford to buy. You start work right away and mend the leaking roof. Gradually little by little you replace the kitchen with a nice new modern one completely built in with all the modern appliances.

You get new shoji with beautiful patterns of Japanese Birds, you replace all the old Tatami Mats with new Tatami Mats. The bedrooms get wonderful new wall paper and a coat of fresh paint and it all looks lovely.

You come home after a few years when all the work is finished and say “This is a lovely house, I like living here...”

It wasn't much of a home when you moved in, but now you like to live there.

It is a bit like that when Jesus takes up residence in our heart by His Holy Spirit.

Jesus comes in and starts cleaning up our life so that He can say, “I like living here.”

Paul was praying for the Christians in Ephesus that Jesus might like living in their hearts.

Paul was praying that the Holy Spirit might clean up the lives of the believers so that He would be comfortable living in them.

It takes a lot of power to change a life, it takes the almighty power of God to clean up our lives so that Jesus is comfortable living in us.

The N.L.T. puts it like this in v. 17 “Then Christ will make His home in your hearts as you trust in Him” (This is a good translation from the original Greek)

So Paul prays that the power of God will so work in our lives that it will become a suitable place for Jesus to live. That is a wonderful prayer to pray for all of us.

It is a costly prayer because we will need to co-operate with the Holy Spirit who will work in our lives to make changes.

Sometimes co-operating with the Holy Spirit can be as simple as saying “ I don't want to do this anymore, please help me to stop.”

A Housewife discovered from a medical magazine how bad coke and other carbonated drinks were bad for her young children. She spoke to her husband and they discussed the problem together. They agreed to stop drinking coke and carbonated drinks themselves but how were they going to explain this all to their 5

year old daughter who loved coke. They didn't realize that their daughter was listening from behind the curtains. She came into the room and said "Mummy I don't like coke anymore." The problem was solved.

Sometimes that is all that it takes to clean up our lives, to agree with what God's word says and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to obey.

Paul's second petition was that we might have power to understand the limitless dimensions of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. (v. 18-19)

Paul's prayer here is also for power. However it is power for a different purpose. It is power to fully understand the immeasurable love of Jesus Christ. The width, length, depth and height of the love of Jesus.

It is not that Paul doesn't understand that Christians know something about the love of Jesus. However Paul wants the believers in Ephesus to have a "DEEPER" understanding of the love of Jesus.

Paul is not just talking about intellectual understanding here. Yes that is important but Paul is suggesting that our hearts need to fully grasp God's love.

"Asaph" in Psalm 73: v. 25-26 in the N.L.T. says this "Whom have I in heaven but you?

I desire you more than anything on earth. My health may fail, and my spirit may grow weak, but God remains the strength of my heart; He is mine forever."

The Psalmist had the assurance about 2 important things..

1. The Psalmist understood something deep about the love of Jesus. He understood that life is journey. If you know and love Jesus, that journey is towards Heaven. We are not citizens of this earth, whatever our passport might say, we are citizens of heaven.

Our right to enter into Heaven has been settled through the precious blood of Jesus.

2. The Psalmist tells us that his understanding of God was not just a head knowledge, his heart was overflowing with God's love.

Paul tells us that we need God's power in order to fully understand His love. Therefore Paul prays for that power.

There is an old hymn that tries to capture something of God's love. It was written by:

George Wade Robinson (1838-1887)

The first verse goes like this;

Loved with everlasting love

Led by grace that love to know;

Spirit, breathing from above,

Thou hast taught me it is so.

O this full and perfect peace!

O this transport all divine!

In a love which cannot cease

I am his, and He is mine.

If you read Christian life stories you will discover that many people who have sought to discover more of the love of Jesus have found it to be an overwhelming experience.

R.A. Torrey , a Christian writer earnestly sought God's face and one day while he was reading the scriptures and praying he was so overwhelmed with a profound consciousness of God's love for him that he began to cry and cry and couldn't stop. Eventually he asked God to show him no more of His love; he couldn't bear to take anymore.

I became a Christian at the age of 15. It was a real experience and I believed the gospel message. However I slowly drifted away from attending Church and mixing with Christians. About 10 years later I became very dissatisfied with my life and starting to telephone a Christian Counseling service. This led to me attending a Church. On the first Sunday the pastor preached a message from Luke Chapter 15. This was the story of the lost son.

I felt God speak to my heart that morning and I repented of my sins and asked God to forgive me. I experienced an overwhelming sense of God's love and forgiveness to me. I wept for a long time. It may have been over 1 hour. However what I can say is that I truly discovered the depths of God's love that morning.

You too can know God's love in a deep and personal way.

Maybe it is for the first time, maybe like me you have back slidden in your life, maybe you are facing personal problems and want to know that God really does care about your situation.

Whatever you situation you can come to Jesus today and ask Him to help you with that need.