

Ephesians 3:14-21
Paul's Prayer for Power
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In our passage for today, Paul is praying that Christians will experience the tremendous power of Christ in their daily lives. This is so very important because this is such a powerful and effective means of glorifying God and confirming the gospel. Do you want to demonstrate to people that the gospel is true? Then live in the power of the gospel through your faith relationship with Jesus. Through the power of Jesus, bear the fruit of the Spirit. When someone hates you, bear the fruit of love. When circumstances are harsh, bear the fruit of joy. When life is in turmoil, bear the fruit of peace. When problems persist, bear the fruit of patience and longsuffering. When things get chaotic, bear the fruit of self-control. Demonstrate the tremendous power of Jesus in your daily lives, and your life will be a persuasive testimony to others that the gospel is true.

We will today look at Paul's prayer for God to give spiritual power to the Christians at Ephesus. We will look at the posture of prayer, the Patron of prayer and the petitions of prayer.

We will begin by looking at the posture of prayer. There is no official posture for prayer. The Bible mentions different postures for prayer, and the most common one is simply standing before God. In our passage for today, Paul tells the Ephesians that he bows his knees to God the Father. Paul here uses a posture of prayer to communicate both the fact that he is

praying and the attitude with which he is praying. Bowing the knees symbolizes a petition made in the spirit of humble submission, and that is certainly the spirit in which we should approach God in prayer. The Bible does not mandate any particular posture in prayer, but kneeling before God is certainly one option.

First, the posture of prayer, and then our second point, the Patron of prayer. By the term "patron," I am referring to the one we pray to. A patron is someone who supports a writer or an artist or an institution such as a museum. God the Father is certainly the one who supports Christians, and He is the one to whom we come seeking support in our prayers. The term "patron" also seems appropriate because it is related to the Greek word "pater," which is the word translated "Father" in our text.

Paul here says that he addresses this prayer to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus taught us to address His heavenly Father as our heavenly Father. To use the language of our Shorter Catechism, we draw near unto God in prayer with all holy reverence and confidence, as children to a father able and ready to help us. As Christians, God is our Father not only by creation but also by redemption. God is our Father legally because He has adopted us as joint heirs with Christ. God is also our Father in that through the miracle of the new birth, God has restored the image of God within us. This restored image is a distinguishing family trait of the family of God, and we as God's children now have that family trait. In all these senses, God is our Father in Christ Jesus.

Paul here comments that the whole family in heaven and on earth has been named for God the Father. Paul is here using a play on words. The Greek word for "family," which is "patria," is derived from the Greek word for "father," which, as I said earlier, is "pater." Some translations have here "every family in heaven and earth" and others have "the whole family in heaven and earth." Both translations of the original Greek are possible, and both translations express truth. One translation is a reference to all families, and the other translation is a reference to the entirety of one family. I believe the translation "the whole family in heaven and earth" is the translation more consistent with Paul's flow of thought here. We now have confident access to God because we are a part of one very special family, the household of God. I believe that the whole family which Paul is here referring to is the church universal, which includes both the church triumphant in heaven and the church militant on earth. Every Christian is a part of the family of faith, and that is another reason we can approach God in prayer with a confident boldness.

Paul begins his prayer with this description of God, and Paul ends his prayer with another description of God. These two descriptions of God are like a pair of bookends, one before and one after Paul's prayer. Paul begins his prayer with this description of God which emphasizes fatherhood and family, a description of God which encourages us to approach God boldly with the expectation that God is willing to grant us an audience even as a father is willing to listen to his children. This bookend stresses the willingness of God to answer our prayers. Paul ends his prayer with a description of God which emphasizes God's

great power, a description of God which encourages us to approach God humbly with the expectation that God is able to grant our requests because of His great power. This bookend stresses the ability of God to answer our prayers. God is both able and willing to help us, and both are necessary if we are to receive God's help.

Paul's description of God as the one who is able to help us is found in verse 20 of our text. After praying his prayer for them, Paul then assures the Ephesian Christians that God is indeed able to answer that prayer. In fact, God is able to answer every prayer they might ever ask. Beyond that, God is able to answer any prayer they might ever imagine. In fact, God is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond anything that they could ask or even think about asking. And the proof that this is true is the mighty power of God which is already at work in their lives. The God who has brought them from spiritual death to life and from spiritual alienation to citizenship has the power to answer their prayers. God may deny a prayer request because it contradicts His all wise wisdom or His all pure holiness or His sincere love for us in Christ. Yet God will never deny a prayer request because we have asked for something beyond His power and ability. When we pray, we approach our heavenly Father who is also the Sovereign King of the universe. The God we pray to has both a sovereign ability and a fatherly willingness to grant our requests.

We have considered the posture of prayer and the Patron of prayer. Next I want to consider the four petitions which Paul prayed. These petitions are all prayers for growth in the grace

and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Yet each of the four petitions is different and affords its own insights. I have subheadings for these four petitions: empowered, indwelt, informed and entirely filled.

Our first subheading is empowered, and Paul's first petition is recorded for us in verse 16, where Paul prayed "that [God] would grant [the Ephesian Christians], according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man." Paul here prays that God through the work of His Holy Spirit will infuse spiritual strength into the Christian's inner man. What Paul here calls the inner man is not a second little person living inside us. No, Paul is here referring to our inner humanity, that non-material part of our being which we call the heart and mind and soul and spirit and through which we have our conscience existence. Even as the Spirit came upon Sampson under the old covenant and imparted strength to his outer man, Paul is praying that the Spirit will come upon the Christian in a new fullness and impart strength with might to his inner man. The Spirit is a fire, and may the Christian not quench the Spirit but instead be filled with fiery zeal for the Lord. The Spirit is a river, and may the Christian bear fruit like a tree planted by rivers of water. The Spirit is the divine breath which gives life, and may the Christian have life and have it more abundantly. The Spirit is a wind which blows where it wills, and may God's Spirit blow within the Christian's heart and fill him with His power like wind filling the sails of an ocean schooner.

Paul prays that God will answer this pray according to His glorious riches. An answer to this prayer that is proportionate to

God's glorious riches will be a mighty answer indeed. God is rich in mercy. God is rich in grace. And God possess an infinite supply of that unique wealth which alone is sufficient to ransom us from our bondage to sin. I am referring to the immeasurable merit, the infinite worth, the incalculable value of the atoning work of Jesus Christ. We are redeemed not with corruptible things such as silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot or blemish.

Our second subheading is indwelt, and the second petition in Paul's prayer, recorded for us in verse 17, is "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; ..." This second petition explains how the Holy Spirit empowers us. The key is faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit puts us into a mystical union with Jesus, and our faith in Jesus is our conscious experience of that union. The stronger that union, the stronger our faith in Christ. Through this union, there is, as Paul said in Ephesians chapter one, some mysterious sense in which we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies. There is also, through that same union, some mysterious sense in which Christ dwells in us here on earth. Christ in His localized physical body, in His humanity, is in heaven at the right hand of God the Father. The physical body of Christ will not again be on earth until the second coming. Yet we are in a mystical union with Jesus through faith, and this is the source of our salvation and our life and our power.

When Paul prays that Christ will dwell in the Ephesian Christians through faith, I believe Paul is praying that their faith in Christ will grow and that they will thus increasingly experience the powerful effects of Christ's living in them. To

use the language of Galatians 2:20, Christ lives in the Ephesian Christians, and Paul is praying that the life which they now live in the flesh, may they increasingly live by faith in the Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them.

You know, it would be a bit hypocritical for us to pray this prayer regarding ourselves, to pray "may Christ dwell in our hearts through faith," and then to neglect those means which God uses to strengthen and confirm our faith, especially the preaching of the word, the partaking of the Lord's Supper and prayer. It is our responsibility as Christians to make diligent use of these in faith. Yet when we fulfill this responsibility and we grow spiritually, we should not congratulate ourselves. Rather we should give thanks to God because behind it all, God was working a work of sovereign grace which we have done nothing to deserve. Salvation is all of grace from first to last.

Our third subheading is informed, and Paul next prays that the Ephesian Christians will come to a greater knowledge of Christ and the gospel. Now before Paul prays this petition for greater knowledge, he refers to the Ephesian Christians as rooted and grounded. I think that is important. I believe the basic point here is that you have to believe in Jesus before you can really understand Him. Some people say that they are not going to believe in Christ until they understand Him. They've got it backwards. That is like saying that they are not going to go near the water until they learn how to swim. It doesn't work that way.

Paul says that the Ephesian Christians are rooted and grounded. Paul is here first using the figure of a plant which has a good

root system to support it. The plant with a good root system survives the storm which threatens to uproot it and survives the drought which threatens to wither it. Paul combines this with the figure of a building built on a good foundation. The house built on the rock survives the wind and the waves of the storm. Of course, we are rooted in Christ, the Root of David, and we are grounded on Christ, the solid Rock. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11). We are rooted in Christ and grounded on Christ through faith, and that faith manifests itself through love. Our faith in Christ works through love and bears the fruit of love. The Christ in whom we believe motivates us and enables us to love God with all our heart, soul, strength and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. Paul is saying that he knows that the Ephesian Christians are rooted in Christ and grounded on Christ through faith because he has seen their Christian love.

After stating that he regards the Ephesian Christians as rooted and grounded in love, Paul prays his third petition. Again, our third subheading is informed, and Paul here prays that God will give the Ephesian Christians a new and greater comprehension of the gospel. I believe this is a comprehension which we can have only if we are indeed rooted and grounded in Christ. The world and even the demons can know the facts of the gospel intellectually and can even give intellectual assent to them. Yet they know without knowing and see without seeing and hear without hearing. There is a level of comprehension and a kind of comprehension which the world does not have because such knowledge is spiritually discerned.

Let me try to illustrate these two levels of knowledge. There are two ways you can know a dolphin. You can stay in your dry world and examine pictures of the dolphin in a book. Or you can jump into the sea as a scuba diver and swim with the dolphin and experience life with the dolphin in the dolphin's wet world. Paul is praying that the Ephesian Christians will have more and more of this "scuba diver" knowledge of Christ, a knowledge of Christ which we can have only if we are living in Christ's world through faith. This is a comprehension which includes but goes beyond a head knowledge of the facts. This is a comprehension that is rooted in faith and informed by faith, a comprehension which only true Christians can have and which all true Christians do have.

Back in Ephesians chapter two, Paul described the people of God in this age as a living temple. Consistent with that description, Paul now prays his prayer for their increased comprehension using architectural dimensions. Paul prays,

17b ... 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--

Each one of these architectural terms can be related to some truth about salvation which Paul has already taught in this epistle. May the people of God grasp the width of the new covenant temple. Its width encompasses both Jew and Gentile. May the people of God grasp the length of the new covenant temple. It goes back to eternity past when God the Father chose to save the elect in Christ Jesus. May the people of God grasp

the depth of the new covenant temple. Jesus reached down to the elect when they were in the depths of depravity and dead in trespasses in order to save them. May the people of God grasp the height of the new covenant temple. In our salvation, we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies.

Paul goes on to say that to comprehend these gospel dimensions is to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. How do we know that which passes knowledge? How do we know the unknowable? There are two senses in which we can do this. First, we can know truths truly even when we cannot comprehend them fully. We can know the love of Christ with our creaturely minds, even though we can never fully comprehend everything about it. We cannot fit Christ entirely within the confines of our creaturely cranium. We can know Christ but we will never intellectually master our Master.

We can also know Christ and His love for us in non-intellectual ways. We can know Christ personally as we know ourselves and as we know others with a knowledge that is not strictly head knowledge. We can know Him not only in our minds but also in our hearts.

Our fourth subheading is entirely filled, and Paul's fourth and last petition is "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." As we are spiritually strengthened, as we spiritually mature and grow, we are more and more filled with human versions of divine attributes such as love and holiness and wisdom and justice and truth. We are more and more conformed to the image of Christ in His humanity.

Paul literally prays that the Ephesian Christians may be filled with all the fullness of God. This is a goal which we will never fully reach. We will be growing toward that goal for eternity. We will be forever traveling toward that horizon. When this life is over, we will be made perfect in holiness, but that does not mean that there will be no more challenges. Even a sinless person can mature and grow and improve. We will never be bored in the age to come. We will always be stretching and being filled with more and more of the fullness of God.

Let me close with a questions. Do you have the power of Christ? If you have the life of Christ, then you have the power of Christ. But remember that this power can and should grow and develop over time. Pray for God to strengthen you through the Spirit in the inner man. And take advantage of the means of grace which God uses to build up our faith. Take full advantage of the word, sacraments and prayer. If we are indeed true Christians in whom Christ lives through faith, how can we reasonably do anything else?

Let us pray:

Father, we thank You for all that we have in Christ. We know that we can't be any more justified than we already are, but our sanctification has just begun. In regards to our sanctification and in regards to the saving gift of a new heart and life, give us more and more, O Lord, of that which You have already given to us. Strengthen and confirm our faith in Christ so that we may be increasingly empowered, indwelt, informed and filled. In Jesus' name. Amen.