

Ephesians 3:14-21 Answers Paul's Powerful Prayer

Overview:

The letter to the saints in Ephesus can be divided into two parts:

Chapters 1-3 are theological (doctrine/belief); chapters 4-6 are practical (duty/behavior)

Chapters 1-3 concern the Wealth of the Believer; chapters 4-6 concern the Walk of the Believer.

Introduction: Prayer should be a very important aspect of any believer's life. The book of Acts records that the early believers devoted themselves to prayer. The powerful prayer that Paul records here in 3:14-21 shows the vital necessity of each of us praying for the other.

**** What are the elements of this prayer Paul prayed for the Gentile believers (3:14-19)?

(Write on board). Elements of the prayer Paul prayed for the Gentiles include that they would:

- a) Be strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner being, 3:16.
- b) Have Christ dwell in their hearts through faith, 3:17a.
- b) Be grounded and rooted in love, 3:17b.
- c) Be strengthened to comprehend the breadth, length, height and depth, 3:18.
- d) Know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, 3:19a.
- e) Be filled with the fullness of God, 3:19b.

This is a mighty prayer! It would be good to pray this for someone else. It is a prayer of enablement. Paul's first prayer was that they would know their power. This second prayer is that they would use their power.

1. Paul started with "for this reason" (3:14), the same as in 3:1; for what reason? See 3:1, 2:11-22. This prayer in Ephesians 3 was prayed as a direct result of the truth of **2:14-16** (read aloud). The reason was the truth of God's purpose to bring the Gentiles into His kingdom, making Jew and Gentile into one new man. Paul began a thought in 3:1 but got sidetracked and did not come back to it until 3:14. "For this reason" (3:1, 14) Paul gave thanks to God. The first paragraph (3:1-13) is a parenthetical remark. (It is good to know that I am not the only one who ever got distracted!).

2. What is the significance of Paul bowing his knees when he prayed this (3:14)? See Psalm 95:6. Jews often stood in prayer. Scripture records Abraham standing to pray, David sitting before the Lord and Jesus on his face in prayer (McArthur, p. 101). In another place Paul said he wanted men to lift up holy hands in prayer.

Bowing shows an attitude of submission and reverence.

ESV **Psalm 95:6** Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!

Kneeling can also reflect great emotion and passion, as when one is appalled, broken hearted or overcome with concern. Paul was so moved by the truth of the revealed mystery that he fell on his knees in prayer.

3. In this prayer, Paul went to God as the Father (3:14). What aspects of God's character are brought out by approaching Him as Father (3:4)? It brings out the fact that God is approachable, a loving heavenly Father who cares for us. Those who believe in Jesus are in a family relationship with God.

Balance: Contrary to pop theology, we are not "all God's children". For instance, Jesus declared the devil to be the father of the unbelieving Jewish leadership in ancient Judea. The Father can only be approached through faith in Jesus.

ESV **John 14:6** . . . No one comes to the Father except through me.

4. Why do you suppose Paul brought out the aspect of "every family" in 3:14? See Revelation 5:9. Perhaps Paul brought this out because every family (every people group) is included in God's worldwide plan of redemption (not just the Jews).

ESV **Revelation 5:9** . . . by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation . . .

Who is the family "in heaven" (3:14)? Perhaps this refers to saints already in glory. Part of the Apostle's Creed is, "I believe in the communion of the saints", that includes the saints in heaven (Hendriksen, p. 170).

Riches: Paul prayed this prayer "according to the riches of His glory" (3:16). In materialistic Western societies it is much more difficult to appreciate spiritual riches than it is material riches. Spiritual riches are not as obvious (MacArthur, p. 104).

— **Strengthened in Your Inner Being** —

5. What does it mean to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being (3:16)? See 2 Corinthians 4:16. The inner man is the real you, the core of who you are. This is where your spiritual life exists and where God starts when he changes you from the inside out.

ESV **2 Corinthians 4:16** . . . Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

The Holy Spirit is a work in the lives of believers, strengthening us to remain in the faith, to endure hardships or persecutions, to resist temptation, to live lives of obedience, etc. There is a doctrine called the perseverance of the saints, but it really ought to be called the perseverance of the Holy Spirit within the saints.

— Christ Dwelling in Your Heart Through Faith —

6. Paul was writing to believers in whom Christ already dwelt. What then did Paul mean when he prayed that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith (3:17)? See *John 14:23*. The issue here is not the fact of Jesus' presence but the quality of Jesus' presence. There is a booklet called "My Heart Christ's Home" in which the author points out that in order to make himself at home, Jesus will need to clean out/up every room of your house, even the secret hidden sin closets (MacArthur).

Word Study: "Dwell" (3:17) is from *katoikeo*; *kata* means down and *oikeo* means to inhabit a house. It is the idea of settled down, making one's self at home. Christ indwells every true believe, but He may not really be at home in your life if there is weak faith and habitual sin there too.

Example: Both Abraham and Lot are declared by Scripture to be righteous men. However, whereas the Lord in person, along with two angels visited Abraham prior to the destruction of Sodom, the two angels (without the Lord) went to see Lot in Sodom to warn him to leave. Perhaps God felt more at home with Abraham than Lot? (MacArthur, p. 106).

The more you walk by faith, the more Christ is at home in your heart. The issue here is not salvation but sanctification.

ESV John 14:23 . . . If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Do you have all of Jesus you want? Is He really dwelling in your heart or just standing inside the front foyer?

7. Try to separate cause from effect in Paul's prayer (3:14-19). Based on the ESV, if the first "cause" is being strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner being (3:16), then is the next bit in 3:17a cause or an effect? Why? It is an effect. The key are the next two words, "so that" (3:17); these words suggest an effect or a purpose. Based on the wording of the ESV, the purpose of the strengthening is "so that" Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

— Rooted and Grounded in Love —

8. Another aspect of Paul's prayer mentions being "rooted and grounded in love" (3:17b). Why is love such an important aspect of the Christian's life (3:17)? See *John 13:34*, *1 Peter 1:22-23*, *Romans 5:5*, *1 John 4:8*. The Dutch sometimes joke, "If ya ain't Dutch, ya ain't much". Similarly, Scripture is very clear that if we don't have love, we are in fact nothing. People don't care how much you know; they want to know how much you care.

ESV John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

ESV 1 Peter 1:22-23 . . .love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again . . .

Word Study: “love” (3:17) is from *apapé* and although *apapé* and *philé* overlap each other in meaning, *apapé* tends to denote more of a decision rather than a feeling, a conscious commitment to the benefit of the other person being loved. It is an attitude of self-sacrifice for the other person.

What we are dealing with here is a supernatural phenomenon.

ESV **Romans 5:5** . . . God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

ESV **1 John 4:8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

The words “rooted and grounded” suggest a tree with roots and a building with a foundation. In both examples there is stability and a solid support (Hendriksen, p. 172). Love is to be the basis from which we operate.

9. Is being rooted and grounded in love (3:17) a cause (as in 3:16) or another effect? Why?
First, notice that it is a parenthetical remark. The words “that you” (3:17) denote an effect but go with the information in 3:18, to wit: “that you . . . may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth” (3:18).

It is possible that being rooted and grounded in love (3:17) is another result of being strengthened with power through the Spirit in the inner man and in turn leads to comprehending the breadth and length and height and depth.

Possible Structure: The cause is found in 3:16 and two effects are found in 3:17-18 (as indicated by two occurrences of the word “that”).

— **Strength to Comprehend the Breadth, Length, Height, Depth** —

10. What is it that is being measured in 3:18 (breadth, length, height, depth)? Paul did not specify; he probably was writing so fast he left it out! It seems to refer to God’s love, mentioned in the previous verse (3:17) and in the next verse (3:19).

Normally only three dimensions (H,W,D) are used in measurements. Why are there four here?
Perhaps this is a measurement of that which is beneath the surface (that one cannot see).
Perhaps four dimensions are given because it is supernaturally comprehended.

11. Why is strength needed to comprehend the breadth, length, height and depth (3:18)?
God’s love is so awesome and deep that we need spiritual strength to comprehend it.

—To Know the Love of Christ —

12. Paul wrote that the love of Christ surpasses knowledge (3:19). How can you know something that surpasses knowledge? Since the love of Christ surpasses knowledge, Paul must have wanted them to a sort of charismatic experience of Christ's love. It is one thing to read about Christ's love; it is quite another to experience it. This is would a post-salvation experience. Love is a supernatural attitude.

Example: A person does not have to understand electricity in order to be shocked by it!

13. These Gentiles were already believers and already saved. In what sense did they need to know the love of Christ (3:19)? The first step is to experience God's love through a salvation experience. The next step is a deeper experience of God's love, wherein you are overwhelmed by love as surely as you were overwhelmed by grace when you were saved. This can be ours! As James said of wisdom, ask in faith without doubting (1:6).

14. Is the information in 3:19a (to know the love of Christ) cause or effect? The word "and" connects it back to the information in 3:18, which was an effect, making 3:19 arguably yet another effect.

Structure: The cause is found in 3:16 and arguably three effects are found in 3:17-19, as indicated by the two occurrences of the word "that" in 3:17 and the word "and" in 3:19.

— Filled With All The Fullness of God —

15. What cause and effect is evident with 3:19? Knowing the love of Christ causes the effect of being filled with all the fullness of God.

16. What does it mean to be filled with all the fullness of God (3:19)? *See ahead to 4:13, 5:17.* It refers to total dominance. If you are filled with rage you are controlled by it (your lose your temper, you fly off the handle). If you are filled with joy you are happy; you smile, you sing. If you are filled with God, you are dominated by Him. To be filled with all the fullness of God is to be like God in our character, overflowing with love.

Prayer Summary: The inner strengthening of the Spirit leads to the indwelling of Christ which leads to overflowing love which leads to God's fullness in us (MacArthur, p. 111).

Trinity: Here we read of the fullness of God. Later on in this letter, Paul wrote of the fullness of Christ and then of being filled with the Holy Spirit. We see all three members of the Trinity in this process (God the Father, Christ and the Spirit). The Trinity is also evident in 3:14, 16, 17.

****** With what blessing did Paul end this chapter (3:20-21)?** Paul ascribed glory to God the Father.

17. How did Paul describe God's ability in 3:30? God is able to do "far more abundantly" than all we ask or even *think!* You may have heard someone say something like, "There were more people than I could shake a stick at" (that would be a lot of people!). Similarly, Paul says God has ability far beyond what we can even *think!* We don't have a clue!

Exactly where is God's power at work (3:20)? The power at work in us is that same power that is more than we can ask or think! Don't pray according to your need, pray according to God's ability!

God is able and willing for His Spirit to strengthen our inner being, for Christ to dwell in our hearts, for us to be filled with God's fullness, for us to comprehend the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love.

18. How would you explain what Paul meant by glory (3:21)? It originally meant to have a high opinion of someone or to cause others to have a high opinion.

19. What does it mean for there to be glory to God "in the church" (3:21)? We, the church, are to glory God. Over every existence as His worshippers is to the praise of His glory. It is the same glory that is "in Christ Jesus" (3:21).

Westminster Catechism: Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Part of this glory shone when Jew and Gentile were made to co-exist together in the church, experiencing and living out the love of Christ.

So What?

20. What did you learn about prayer from Paul's prayer (3:14-19) that you had not thought of before?

21. Which part of Paul's prayer do you need more of in your life?

Let's pray! (Spend any remaining time in group prayer).

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

Teacher's note: These lessons are based on the ESV and are designed for 45 minute sessions. If you can hand out or email out each lesson's questions a week in advance it will encourage people to think about the passage during the week. Covering each question in class will give importance to the questions and give incentive for the class to spend time preparing for the discussion.

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