



Ephesians

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For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Ephesians 3:14

This takes us right back to verse 3:1, which said –

“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—“

Prior to that, from verse 2:11 - 2:22 was a discussion on how the Gentiles had become partakers with the Jews in the commonwealth of Israel and were, like them, being built up into a holy temple in the Lord; “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” Immediately after those words came his first “For this reason.” After that, he wrote from 3:2 until 3:13 about how this was previously a mystery which was now revealed through him. With that parenthetical thought now complete, we are given the second “For this reason.”

As an emphasis as to how overwhelming it is that he has been granted this high honor he says, “I bow my knees...” The use of these words show a solemn type of prayer which indicates great humility while being awed at the work of God. It is certain that Paul wasn't bowing his knees as he either dictated the letter to a scribe, or wrote out the words himself. Therefore, the term is used in place of the emotion and act.

From this verse, some scholars conclude that kneeling is, “The usual, and the proper posture of prayer is to kneel... It is a posture which indicates reverence, and should, therefore, be assumed when we come before God. It has been an unhappy thing that the custom of kneeling in public worship has ever been departed from in the Christian churches.” Albert Barnes

There is no reason at all to come to this unfounded conclusion. Paul elsewhere writes that we are to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). It is without a doubt that he did not

expect the saints to stay on their knees at all times and simply pray their life away in that position. Rather, there are different positions one will assume at different times. One may pray as if speaking to God as a friend while driving their car. The same person may stand atop a mountain and raise his hands in a prayer of exultation at the majesty of God; shouting out with joy at the marvel he beholds. He may also fall to his knees in awe and in acknowledgment of his unworthiness of such a high honor being bestowed upon him – as Paul is doing here. Or he may fall flat on his face in a prayer of absolute mourning, anguish, or pain.

Paul's use of "I bow my knees" reflects his overwhelmed state at what has been granted to him, and the immense implications of what it means that the Gentiles will also share in the blessings of what God has done through Jesus Christ.

He finishes the verse with, "...to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." His overwhelmed prayer of what he has written about is directed to the first Person of the Godhead. He has chosen this form of address because it is through Jesus that the Father/son relationship is made for us. As He is the Father of Christ, we now too share in the son-ship of the Father because of Christ. For this reason, the prayer is made directly to Him. It is Christ upon whom the household of God is erected; a household of which we are a part.

This prayer does not in any way negate praying to or through Christ as is seen elsewhere in the NT. However, the terminology of the direction of our prayers should be based on the substance of the prayers. The substance of Paul's words of this verse are specifically shaped to be addressed to God, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" because of what they are referring to.

Life application: Let's not get legalistic in our prayer life.

...from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, Ephesians 3:15

In this verse, an immediate question arises. "Is 'from whom' speaking of the Father, or of Jesus?" Here is the previous verse included with this one –

"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..."

There is a subtle play on words in the Greek. "Father" is *pater* and the word rendered as "family" is *patria*. This may indicate Paul's connection between the two. However, it is through Christ that son-ship is realized. He is the Son of God, and through Him we are included as sons. Thus, the naming of the family does seem more likely to be from Christ. If so, the play on words is showing the connection to Christ, the Son of the Father, and to the family who

derives its name from Christ as well. It is hard to be dogmatic though. Either way, Jesus Christ is fully God, and so it doesn't change the overall intent of what is being said.

Whether from God, be it Father or Son, "the whole family in heaven and earth is named." What this means is that all of the saints, alive now or having passed on, share in the same family privileges. This includes Jew and Gentile, male and female, and without distinction to color, creed, or culture. Any and all who have called on Jesus are brought into the family of God through the work of Christ and are so named. A good example of this is the bringing of Ephraim and Manasseh as co-equals into the family of Jacob –

"And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine." Genesis 48:5

Such is true with any who are "in Christ." They are named by God as family members because of His work.

Life application: Although we must speak against heretical doctrine, and correcting bad doctrine is also a necessary part of our allegiance to the Lord, we need to remember that those who are truly saved are members of our one family. Let us endeavor to treat them as such.

...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man... Ephesians 3:16

The verse should be considered with the previous verses for context –

"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..."

The words, "that He would grant you" are speaking of God the Father mentioned in verse 14. There is a chiasmic structure to the words of these verses which seems to show that "from whom" of verse 15 is surely speaking of Christ –

Father
Christ
From Whom
That He
Riches of His glory
Strengthened with His might
Through His Spirit

This clues us into who Paul is referring to in each instance. And so, his prayer is a concern that the Father would grant something specific to those in Ephesus (and thus all who are the recipients of the epistle throughout the ages).

His next words, “according to the riches of His glory,” have a strong emphasis in them. They are speaking of what God has done through Christ. This term is used in the same way in Philippians 4 –

“And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:19

These “riches of His glory” are what can be seen through His workings in and through Christ, just as such riches can be seen through the physical creation. When we ponder the many things which God has done, we are pondering the riches of His glory. They are the open and visible manifestations of what He does to express Himself. And so Paul prays that these riches will be granted to his audience in order “to be strengthened with might.”

Again, this is a reference to the work of Christ. It is what was seen in his work, and it is that which is available through understanding the implications of that work. Christ prevailed over the law, over the horror of the cross, and over death itself. He never failed to please the Father in all ways. This is the strengthening that is being petitioned for us by Paul, and he asks that it come “through His Spirit in the inner man.”

He has now introduced the third member of the Godhead into Scripture once again. The Spirit of God is what will provide to us the strength which Christ possessed as we yield to God. Our inner man will be built up and strengthened as we rely wholly on God to direct us. This will only come about as we yield to Him through such actions as prayer, praise, study of the word, fellowship, and the like. But it is a process which can occur as we attempt to be more like Christ. This same sentiment is reflected in Paul’s words of 2 Corinthians 4 –

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward *man* is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, ¹⁸ while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which *are* not seen are eternal.” 2
Corinthians 4:16-18

Life application: Though we will never be perfect in this life, we should strive always to become more Christ-like at all times. Let us ever pursue the magnificence of what God did through Christ by applying His word to our lives.

...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, Ephesians 3:17

Again, context of the preceding verses is necessary to fully see Paul's intent –

“...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...”

In the preceding verse, he noted that we should be “strengthened with might through His Spirit. He now immediately returns to the second member of the Godhead, Christ. Paul asks that He “may dwell in your hearts.” Charles Ellicott notes that the indwelling of Christ “is not a consequence of the gift of the Spirit; it is identical to it.” This is supported by Jesus' words of John 14:16-20 –

“And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ “A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. ²⁰ At that day you will know that I *am* in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.”

The indwelling of Christ is directly equated to the indwelling of the Spirit; there is no connecting particle in the Greek. This means that, “Where the Spirit of God is, there also is Christ” (Bengel). And this is received “through faith.” There is an article in the Greek of these words – *dia tes pisteos*, or “through the faith.” Thus faith is the means of this occurrence. When we exercise faith, we are sealed with the Spirit of God and we thus appropriate all that Christ offers.

The verse ends with the notion that this appropriation of the work of Christ is what will cause us to be “rooted and grounded in love.” Two separate metaphors are combined into this one thought. The first is that of a tree's roots which bury deep into the soil. They hold the tree firm, but even more, they draw up the nutrients and water with which the tree may live. This is comparable to our own position in Christ. It is through Him that we may draw up all the riches of what God offers to His redeemed.

The second metaphor, is that of Being “grounded.” It is an architectural word which speaks of the laying of a foundation. It is the firm base upon which all else will stand. As Christ is the foundation (1 Corinthians 3:11), then it is He who is the full and complete support for all that we do in our Christian lives. Paul uses the same mixture of the tree and foundation terminology again in Colossians 2:6, 7 –

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,⁷ rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.”

Finally, the metaphor of this uniting of the roots and the foundation is said to be “in love.” This is certainly referring to the vertical love towards God in Christ as well as the horizontal love of the believer toward other believers. When a tree is rooted and reaches out its branches, it receives the sunshine by which it continues to grow in strength and vitality. This is the same concept which is being expressed for the believer concerning love. Our foundation is set, but our growth will only be fully productive as we are guided in love.

Life application: Christ is with us, dwelling in us, from the moment that we receive Him. God has done a marvelous thing for us through the Person of Jesus by reconciling us to Himself. And even more, He has not left us as orphans. Rather He continues to reside with us through His Spirit. The access is granted at any and all times if we will simply appropriate what He has given us. Let us yield ourselves to God at all times and open this fount of spiritual blessing.

...may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— Ephesians 3:18

This verse should be placed with the previous verse to get a fuller understanding of Paul’s intent –

“...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...”

He conditions the fourfold aspect of this verse on the point of “being rooted and grounded in love” of the previous verse. By being so firmly set, he petitions that we may then “be able to comprehend with all the saints...” It is a call for universal understanding. The Ephesians are being addressed, but the letter is inclusive of all believers. He petitions for Jew and Gentile alike to be able to comprehend “what *is* the width and length and depth and height...”

As the English, so in the Greek, an article only precedes the first of the four words – “the width and length and depth and height.” Because of this, Paul is giving the idea of infinite vastness; something actually unattainable. It expresses the totality of what he is speaking of. We are not to place our minds on one aspect of it, but of the entirety of it.

The question however is, “What is Paul speaking of?” There is no noun or pronoun given which indicates possession or close association to the words in this clause (a genitive). Some translations tie it directly to the next clause which speaks of “the love of Christ.” This seems likely on the surface, but why then didn’t he just say that? Charles Ellicott wisely notes –

“Various answers have been given; but as St. Paul has obviously of set purpose omitted all definition, leaving the phrase incomplete in absolute generality, no answer can be perfectly satisfactory.”

In other words, Paul purposefully left off what was on his mind, as if his words could not even describe what he was thinking of. It is as if he was writing to make a point about something; he then stopped, and simply stumbled over what he was trying to explain. And so he just left it unsaid. Thus, it is probably referring to the totality of everything that God has done for us in Christ – to include the wisdom behind it; the knowledge of what has been done and is to come; the love involved in the cross to redeem His people; the splendor of the resurrection; the fact that both Jew and Gentile are included in the plan; the word which has been given to explain it; the giving of the Holy Spirit to seal it upon our faith; and on and on and on.

Paul simply stopped, gasped, and then wrote about what is otherwise impossible to express. And then in essence he says, “I hope you will be able to grasp the infinite majesty of this redemptive process in all its varied aspects.”

How then can we comprehend what is incomprehensible? How can we apprehend that which cannot be seized? How can we attain to that which is out of reach? The answer is that we cannot, but we should strive to do so. Our highest joy should be searching out the mystery of God’s workings in and through His creation in order to redeem man. We should ponder the imponderable love of God. We should seek out God’s infinite wisdom, read His word, yield to His Spirit, and cling to Christ’s cross. This is what Paul would ask for us to do.

Life application: Fix your eyes on Jesus. All things come into clear and understandable (even if not fully attainable) terms when we do this.