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C0446 -- December 1, 2004 – Ephesians 3:20-21 – Praise for God’s Power

Last week, we looked at Paul’s prayer in 3:14-19. We almost finished the prayer. Today we will finish the prayer and the doxology at the end of Paul’s prayer as we close out the doctrinal portion of Ephesians, chapters 1-3.

Let’s review verses 14-19. In verse 14 Paul begins his prayer as normal with the words **for this reason**. The reason he’s referring to is the fact that believing Jews and Gentiles have been positionally united in one body. Now Paul prays that this positional unity will become an experiential reality. It was for this reason that Paul **bowed his knees before the Father**. Paul demonstrates the validity of prayer posture, taking a certain posture in prayer is highly underrated. It is very important in Scripture to respond to God in both body and spirit. Here Paul prays from his body and spirit. The whole man is involved in praying to God. Paul’s posture is that of a creature before his Creator, humbly bowing. The word **before** literally means face-to-face with the Father. In verse 15 Paul addresses the Father as the one who **named every family in heaven and on earth**. God is the creator of all and is therefore the creator of “family”. He names families two basic ways: *directly* and *indirectly*. *Directly* He named Adam the Son of God and Abram, Abraham. When God names *indirectly* he names two ways: (a) God names through the human father who names his own children: Abraham named Isaac (Gen. 21:3), David named Solomon (2 Sam 12:24) or (b) God tells the human father what to name his children: God told Isaiah what to name his child (Isa. 8:3), God told Joseph to name God’s Son, Jesus (Matt. 1:21, 25). So, God is the one who names every family. **on earth** refers to human families. **in heaven** refers to angels. God names them all because He is the creator of them all. God is still creating human families and therefore God is still naming families. This indicates that God is active in His creation and not standing aloof from His creation. He’s actively engaged in His creation but the creation is not a part of His being. Paul begins his prayer in v. 16 with the words **that He would grant you**, that is, the Ephesian believers, **in proportion to** or **according to the wealth of His glory**. **glory** is the summation of one’s attributes or simply, one’s essence. Paul is praying that God would grant to the Ephesian believers strengthened love in their inner man in

proportion to the **wealth of His glory**, which is infinite, immeasurable. Paul prays that the means by which this **strengthening** would occur is the Holy **Spirit** and the location where this **strengthening** would occur is **the inner man**. The **inner man** is the innermost part of man, the very core of the believer's being, the regenerate aspect of the believer. It is where Paul says the law of God finds agreement. The **inner man** can be strengthened. Therefore, Paul's prayer is concerned with our sanctification, our growth in the Christian life in knowledge of God's love and therefore toward unity with one another. Paul is hoping that through this prayer the inner man of the Ephesian believers will become a place where **Christ may dwell**. This word *katoikeo* means "down, to inhabit" or simply to take a deep seat in one's heart. Christ indwells all who believe in Him at the moment of belief. But the expression here is referring to a post-salvation **dwelling**. In other words, Paul's prayer is that they might be strengthened with power in the inner man so that there can be a deep indwelling of Christ by means of faith. Paul is praying that Christ may... "be at the very center of or deeply rooted in the believers' lives. Christ must become the controlling factor in attitudes and conduct. The "heart"...is the core of a person...the center of a person" where illumination, true worship, and obedience take place. When we are strengthened by power in our inner man, the very core of our being becomes a deep dwelling place of Christ. Christ becomes the core of every aspect of our lives. Our lives become His lives, lives in submission to Christ; lives that are not our own but His own, to be used for His glory to fulfill His plan in His time. My desire is to become a mighty sword in the hand of Christ. To be used in every way at every moment for God's glory. Paul interjects in v. 17b some positional truth. We are both grounded and rooted in love. Love is the substrate and at the time of salvation we were both **grounded and rooted** in that substrate. Remember, these were perfect in tense and passive in voice. The perfect tense means we were **grounded and rooted** at the moment of salvation with ongoing results, that is, we remain **grounded and rooted in love**. Once initiated in the love of Christ you can never be separated from the love of Christ (no loss of salvation). God is the source of all love, once grounded and rooted in God then you cannot be ungrounded or uprooted. This is positional truth. But then Paul goes back to his prayer for more spiritual aspects in vv. 18-19. v. 18 Paul wants us to **be able to comprehend...what is the breadth and length and height and depth** of the love of Christ. God's love is four-dimensional. We might ask "How wide is the love of Christ? How long is the love of Christ (time)? How high is the love of Christ (reaching to heaven)? How low is the love of Christ (to the depths of depravity)? Paul piles dimensional word upon dimensional word to emphasize the immeasurableness of the love of Christ. And Paul says this **comprehension** can only happen in association with **all the saints**. This is one reason we will all be together in heaven and not in isolated cubicles. In heaven there will be complete unity in doctrine and love. As for now there should be no lone ranger mentality. Christians need one another, we are not independent machines but an

interdependent organism with Christ as our head. If anyone thinks he doesn't need his Christian brother to grow in this comprehension of Christ's love, he is a fool. Love requires an object. How can an isolated brother have an object to love? Ephesians is about unity and love. Therefore, Paul prays that **all the saints**, not just the professional theologians would be able to comprehend the four-dimensional love of Christ. With the result that we might **know the love of Christ**.

gnonai te ten uperballousan tes gnoseos agapen tou Christou, “**and so to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge**,”. The word for **know** here is *ginosko* and refers to acquiring *theological* as well as *experiential* knowledge of **the love of Christ**. Interestingly, both of Paul's prayers in Ephesians so far have stressed knowledge. The object of knowledge is **the love of Christ**. **love** is seeking the highest good for the one loved. **the love of Christ** is described as **surpassing knowledge**. The word for **surpassing** is *huperballo* which means “over” “to throw” or simply “to overthrow” or “throw beyond”. In other words, Paul wants us to comprehend the love of Christ and to know the love of Christ but the love of Christ surpasses knowledge. How can this be? How can we **comprehend** and **know** something that **surpasses knowledge**? The biblical teaching is that we can know truly but not exhaustively. We can comprehend and know in part but we cannot comprehend and know completely. We can know what is revealed but we cannot know what has not been revealed. But it is important that Christianity teaches that what we do know...we know truly. In other words, we might say that when we know something truly then our knowledge corresponds exactly with God's knowledge at that point. God is not wholly beyond and unknowable. Human language is God's created tool to communicate true knowledge about Himself. But all that can be known of God is that which is revealed, the secret things belong to God, but what is revealed is for us and our children (Dt. 29:29). So, we can know in part the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge. Therefore, human knowledge cannot encapsulate the entirety of the love of Christ. God's knowledge does exhaustively know the love of Christ. But the love of Christ greatly exceeds human knowledge.

The very fact that Christ's love expressed itself in his willingness to die on behalf of sinners is in itself beyond one's comprehension. The reality of Christ's love is overwhelming to all believers, from the point of conversion and continuing as growth in the knowledge of Christ progresses. No matter how much knowledge we have of Christ and his work, his love surpasses that knowledge. The more we know of his love, the more we are amazed by it. Paul is not denigrating knowledge, for it is greatly emphasized in this epistle (1:9, 17, 18; 3:3-5, 9; 4:13; 5:17). He even

requests it in this very prayer (vv. 18, 19a), but here he wishes to stress Christ's love as that which is beyond human comprehension.¹

hina plerothete eis pan to pleroma tou theou, “in order that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God.” The *hina* introduces the final purpose of Paul's prayer which is that they **might be filled up to all the fullness of God**. This is similar to the ending of Paul's first prayer where he concluded by referring to *the fullness of Him who is being filled entirely* (Eph. 1:23). There Paul meant that God was filling Christ and Christ was filling the Church with God's moral excellence. Here Paul's prayer is aimed at filling that which is absent. Christians are complete positionally at the moment they are saved but experientially they are not complete. There is still growth and change that must take place. Here, **to be filled up to all the fullness of God** is to know experientially the love of Christ. The fullness of the Godhead is only in Christ and through Christ a believer is made complete (Col. 2:9-10). Positionally we have this divine fullness but Paul's prayer is that we might, as individuals, experientially realize this. That Christ loves us is a fact, but to experientially know God's moral excellence, His power, and His perfection will result in love between Jewish and Gentile believers.

Remember the context here and the main theme of this letter: unity of Jew and Gentile in one new man, the Church. Positionally, we were formerly enemies but now made one in Christ. Positionally, Jew and Gentile believers have been reconciled. But Paul is interested in more than mere positional unity. He is interested in the experiential unity of Jewish and Gentile believers. “This prayer paves the way for the practical outworking of their position in Christ, which is outlined in chapters 4-6 of this letter.”ⁱⁱ

3. The Ascription of Praise (3:20-21)

Paul's prayer ends with a doxology (praise) to God. These two verses are key to the transition from the doctrine of chapters 1-3 to the practical outworking in chapters 4-6. It therefore serves as a good conclusion of chapters 1-3 and a good introduction to chapters 4-6.

Greek Text 3:20 to (articleDMS) *de* (coordinating conjunction) *dunameno* (PMPartDMS) *huper* (preposition) *panta* (adjectiveANP) *poiesai* (VERB AAInf) *huperekperissou* (adverb) *on* (pronounGNP) *aitoumetha* (VERB 1PPMI) *he* (coordinating conjunction) *nooumen* (VERB 1PPAI) *kata* (preposition) *ten* (articleAFS) *dunamin* (nounAFS) *ten* (articleAFS) *energoumenen* (VERB PMPartAFS) *en* (preposition) *hemin* (1PPDP)

Translation 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do infinitely beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us,

to de dunameno huper panta poiesai huperekperissou nooumen aitoumetha he on, “**Now to Him who is able to do infinitely beyond all that we ask or think**”. Paul now turns from praying for the Ephesian believers to the God who is to be praised (shift signified by the conjunction *de*, which is adversative in force). An important element of prayer is praise to God. Too often, our prayers are full of petitions and lack praise to God for who and what He is and what he has done. We are to praise God for who He is. That is, we extol God’s character in prayer. The psalms are full of praise for who God is. God is also to be praised for what He has done (planning history, electing us, loving us, the plan of salvation, giving us His Son, food, shelter, water, flowers, breath, life, etc.). Paul’s overwhelming focus of praise in this verse is the power of God. Three words for “power” are used in this verse (*dunameno* [**able to**], *dunamin* [**power**], *energoumenen* [**works**]). These constitute what we call the **omnipotence** of God. The omnipotence of God is one of the incommunicable attributes of God which we will look at after we exegete these verses. *Incommunicable* attributes are those which are more difficult to communicate/understand because they are less similar to ordinary experience. *Communicable* are those attributes which are easier to communicate/understand because similar to ordinary experience.

One attribute of God stands out sharply in Ephesians 1-3. Can anyone guess what that attribute is? Omnipotence or the power of God. The power of God is the primary attribute of God emphasized in Ephesians 1-3 (cf. 1:19, 21; 2:2; 3:7, 16, 20). These verses are like hammer blows one after another. And really, the power of God is not just in these verses but underlies everything from 1:19 to the present verse! It was His power that raised Christ from the dead (1:20; out of the deaths). It was His power that seated Christ at His right hand (1:20; the position of power/authority). It was His power that put all things in subjection under Christ's feet (1:22). It was His power that gave Christ as head over all things to the church (1:22). It was His power that made us alive with Christ (2:5). It was His power that raised us up with Him (2:6). It was His power that seated us with Him in the heavenlies (2:6). It was His power that saved us (2:8). It was His power that made us as individuals, His works of art (2:10). It was His power that put to death the enmity between Jew and Gentile (2:16) and united believing Jews and Gentiles in one new man (2:15), the church, which is His body (1:22-23). It was His power that reconciled us to God through the cross (2:16). It is His power that is building us into a holy temple (2:21). It is His power that is building us together to be a dwelling of God the Spirit (2:22). It is His power that strengthens our inner man (3:16). It is this power that is toward you, that you have at your disposal.

The first word for power used by Paul here is the verb *dunameo* (the verb from which we get the English word dynamite). It refers to the *potential power* of God, not “working power,” but power that has the potential to do work (e.g., car battery). Second, Paul uses an adverb to modify this verb, it’s the Greek word *huperekperissou* (*huper* – above, beyond; *ek* – out of, from; *perissos* – superadded, exceedingly). Paul uses this verb three times in the NT (Eph. 3:20; 1 Thess. 3:10; 5:13). It is the “highest form of comparison imaginable.”ⁱⁱⁱ It is an immeasurable power. We might translate it “superabundantly” or “far more abundantly” or as I’ve translated it “infinitely”. God **is able to do infinitely beyond all that we ask or think**. God’s power is **infinitely beyond** anything **we** could **ask** for in prayer and infinitely beyond anything **we** could even conjure up in our minds. Hoehner says, “his ability far surpasses not only what we verbalize in prayer but also beyond our wildest imaginations.” You might ask yourself this question sometime, “can God do _____?” and you will never be able to fill in that blank with anything that can quantify God’s power. But it is even more than that. What this verse really means is that you could get together every human who has ever lived, is living now, and will live in the future as well as every angel, get them all together and have them contemplate this question, “can God do _____?” and all these billions and billions of persons will never be able to fill in that blank with anything that can quantify God’s power. It’s utterly beyond quantification (Gen. 18:14; “*Is anything too difficult for the Lord?*”). This is the kind of power that our God possesses, the kind of power that is inherent in His being. Doubtless these billions of persons could never come up with anything better than Isa. 40:9-31 (Read).

This is the kind of power that we are to praise God for. This is the same power that is toward us so that we can live the Christian life victoriously. This is why Paul says in Phil. 4:13 “*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*” (*endunamoo* - the one who empowers me). We have no power in and of ourselves, but we can appropriate His power. According to the next phrase His power lives within us.

kata ten dunamin hemin energoumenen en ten, “**according to the power that works within us**”. This is *kata* with the accusative (*according to* + direct object). *kata* with the accusative always denotes the standard or measure. Here it denotes the standard. That standard is **the power that works within us**. The second word for is **power** used here is the Greek noun *dunamin*, once again meaning potential power. Of course, this is referring to the **power** of the Holy Spirit in our inner man mentioned in 3:16. This is a personal power not an impersonal mechanical power. We might translate this **God is able to do infinitely beyond all that we ask or think, in proportion to the potential energy of the Holy Spirit that is presently working within us**. The third word for **power** is the Greek

word *energeo*, from which we get the English word “energy”. It is translated here as **works**. That’s a good translation although it is in the present tense so it means it is a repeated action (i.e., working). The Holy Spirit’s is **working** in us repeatedly as we rely on Him and His strength. The middle voice also stresses that this is not an impersonal power but the personal power of the Holy Spirit. The location of the Holy Spirit’s work is **in us**. Therefore, we are not to only praise God for His past workings of power but also for His present workings of power in us.

In this context, Paul is emphasizing that no human or angel could ever imagine that Jews and Gentiles could function together in one body. However, because of God’s infinite power of love in the life of each believer, Paul thinks this is entirely possible. This immense expression of God’s power demonstrates forcefully that God is the absolute Lord of history. If God’s power can call out Jews and Gentiles who are at enmity with one another and create unity between them, thus changing the entire course of world history then what can God not do?

Greek Text 3:21 auto (3PPPDMS) *he* (articleNFS) *doxa* (nounNFS) *en* (preposition) *te* (articleDFS) *ekklisia* (nounDFS) *kai* (conjunction) *en* (preposition) *Christo Iesou* (nounDSM) *eis* (preposition) *pasas* (adjectiveAFP) *tas geneas* (nounAFP) *tou aionos* (nounGMS) *ton aionon* (nounGMP), *amen* (transliteration).

Translation 3:21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever, amen.

auto he doxa en te ekklisia kai en Christo Iesou, “**to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus**”. **to Him**, to this God **be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus**. What does **glory** refer to? This is the last time **glory** is used in the Book of Ephesians so this is your last chance to get it down. **Glory** refers to the essence of one’s being, the summation of one’s attributes. In this context it refers to the “splendor” and “radiance” of God. Paul is giving glory to God because of God’s essential being, a practice we should all engage in when praying. Too often we just petition God, treating Him like a BIG Santa Clause in the sky! Our prayers should also involve praise for His essential being. Where is God to be praised? **in the church and in Christ Jesus**. Why is God to be glorified in the Church? Because that is where God’s power united believing Jews and Gentiles. Why is God glorified in Christ? Because Christ is the head of the Church. Apart from Christ there could be no Church. Christ was the one who fulfilled all the righteous demands of the Mosaic Law, therefore destroying (-) the enmity between Jews and Gentiles. And not only was the enmity destroyed (-) but reconciliation (+) occurred between believing Jews and Gentiles and between all believers and Christ. “Therefore, God is to be glorified in the

<u>Communicable</u>	<u>Similar Human Quality or Concept</u>
Sovereign	causation; authoritative convincing
Righteous	conscience, need for law
Just	moral judgment; dislike of evil
Loving	personal love
Omniscient	knowledge

Incommunicable

Omnipresent	geometry and space
Omnipotent	energy
Immutable	stability (in nature, personalities, etc.)
Eternal	time

Some Incommunicable Attributes.

1. The attribute of **omnipresence** means that God is completely present at every point in space and time (I Kings 8:27; Ps. 139:7-12; Isa. 41:10; Matt. 28:20; John 8:58). Our ability to imagine ourselves to be at some remote location is something like His omnipresence (e.g., where you were on your honeymoon, a desert isle). The creature concept of geometry and space is a finite replica of the Creator's spatial nature. It is something like God's omnipresence.

Nevertheless, His omnipresence is not identical to the creature concept of space/geometry. He is not partly here and partly there. Tozer recalls the experience of a Christian missionary to India:

Canon W. G. H. Holmes of India told of seeing Hindu worshipers tapping on trees and stones and whispering, 'Are you there? Are you there?' to the god they hoped might reside within. . . .God is indeed there. He is there as He is here and everywhere, not confined to tree or stone, but free in the universe, near to everything, next to everyone, and through Jesus Christ immediately accessible to every loving heart. [4]

2. The attribute of **omnipotence** means that God can do anything compatible with His character (Exod. 15:2-10; Ps. 33:6-9; 104; 136; Isa. 41:10; Jer. 32:17,27; **Eph. 3:20**; Rev. 19:6). The creature quality of energy is a finite replica of the Creator's energetic nature. Our experience of doing physical work and personally

influencing others is something like the His omnipotence.

Yet His omnipotence is not identical to creature energy. He never exhausts His energy and therefore never needs sustenance from outside Himself; His energy is not "conserved" at a set value.^v "God never gets tired".

3. The attribute of **immutability** means that God's character is forever perfectly stable. He is the fixed reference point for all trust, discussion, and measurement (Mal. 3:1-6; Heb. 6:17; Jas. 1:17). Note that this Quality refers to His nature, not to every statement He makes in the Word of God. For example, in Exodus 32:12, 14 and Amos 7:3,6, God threatens judgment from which He "repents" (changes His mind) in response to prayer!^{vi} Our experience of unusually stable personalities or of what are called "natural laws" and "constants" in science is something like the Quality of immutability. They are finite replicas of it.

Nonetheless, His immutability is not identical to creature stability, natural laws, and constants. His immutability is absolute, never to be changed. His immutability is also personal and not an impersonal abstract "law".

4. The attribute of **eternity** means that God has always existed; He has no beginning or end (Gen. 1:1 cf. John 1:1; Isa. 43:10; 44:6; Ps. 90:1-4; John 8:56-58; Rev. 1:8). Our experience of the longevity of history is something like the Quality of eternity. The quality of time or history is a finite replica of the Creator's eternal nature.

Eternity, obviously, also differs from time. God is never "hurried" through rapid historical events; He has had, as it were, all eternity to view what to us is a split-second occurrence. Moreover, He can experience at once all facts and interrelations of facts without becoming enmeshed in a temporal sequence of experiences.

Some Communicable Attributes.

The qualities of geometry, energy, constants, and time are not as personal as choice, holiness, love, and knowledge. Nor are the corresponding archetypical Qualities of God's nature quite so personal either. Let's go on, then, to those attributes more like us as creatures made in His image and therefore more communicable.

5. The attribute of **sovereignty** means that God personally wills His own nature within the Trinity. His self-will is at once necessary (because of His nature) and free

(undetermined by anything outside of Himself). He also wills the kind of creation and history that come to pass. Such will toward the creation is not necessary (didn't have to create) but is free (undetermined by anything outside of Himself). Chance is excluded for He is the ultimate cause of all things (Prov. 16:4; 21:1; Isa. 46:8-13; Rom. 11:36; **Eph. 1:11**). Our experience of causation in everyday processes around us is something like his sovereignty except that His "causation" is personal, not some impersonal process. Our experience of authoritatively convincing someone else to do something probably is closer to His Quality of sovereignty.

His sovereignty is not identical to the kind of "necessity" we observe in creature cause-effect. It cannot be modeled by a notion of physical law, of a robotic system, or by any other determinism. Impersonal determinism is the only way the pagan mind can picture total control because it excludes in principle an Infinite-Personal Creator and the Creator/creature distinction. Learn to rejoice in His sovereign nature without falling into this common trap!

6. The attribute of **holiness** means that God's character is perfectly *righteous* and *just*. By *righteous* is meant that His moral character is a flawlessly consistent law unto itself. He is the standard throughout the cosmos for what is right and wrong (Exod. 9:27; Jer. 12:1; Rev. 16:5-7). By *just* is meant that His attitude of judgment upon evil is uncompromising regardless of who might be involved (Deut. 4:24; Ezk. 18:4; Rom. 2:11). Our experience of conscience, moral judgment, dislike of evil, and need for law is something like His Quality of Holiness.

Yet holiness does not refer to an abstract moral principle beyond God's nature to which He Himself must adhere. He doesn't demand something because it is "right" in itself; something is "right" because it reflects God's nature. Nor does holiness refer merely to God's revealed demands as is often the case with Islam. It refers to His mysterious holy nature from which the demands come.

7. The attribute of **love** means that God gives to whom He loves. Only with the biblical Triune God can there be an eternal attribute of love in this sense. The Father eternally loves the Son (John 17:24). The Quality of love before creation had a wholly satisfactory object; the universe was not needed for God to gain an object to love. Because there is no such eternal object for love in a non-Trinitarian monotheism like Islam, Allah's love must be downplayed. Toward the creature God has revealed His love supremely in coming to this planet to redeem us (Exod. 20:6;

Deut. 4:37; John 3:16). In contrast, Allah remains safely "dirt-free" in heaven. Our experience of the personal and at times passionate love is a finite replica of His love.

The Quality of love, however, cannot be identical with the human quality of love. His love never is contingent upon the object. It never tires of expression. It never becomes a mere principle or a mere emotion.

8. Finally, the attribute of **omniscience** means that God has total knowledge of Himself as well as knowledge of all creature things, actual and possible (I Sam. 16:7; Matt. 11:21-23; Heb. 4:13; I John 3:20). His knowledge is immediate and perfect. Our experience of being aware that there is a standard of truth, that real knowledge must be somehow universal, that we know by coming to know our mental perceptions of reality, and that we can create in our imagination is something like the Quality of omniscience.

Nevertheless, like other divine attributes, His omniscience is not identical to human knowledge. His knowledge is its own standard of truth, is absolutely universal, is independent of perception and learning, and can cause the truths it knows.

ⁱ Hoehner, Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 490.

ⁱⁱ Hoehner, Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 491.

ⁱⁱⁱ BAGD 840.

^{iv} Hoehner, Harold, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 495.

^v The human body will "conserve" energy by regulating its metabolic status. Like a thermostat turns on and off, regulating a specific temperature so our bodies regulate themselves. This is what biologists call *homeostasis*. The human body tells itself to stop working out, running, etc., in order to conserve energy and protect itself from harm. God does not need to conserve energy. When God works there is no loss of energy. He can neither gain nor lose energy. God is pure energy. He therefore has no need to "conserve" energy.

^{vi} That God answers prayers fits well under the attribute of impassibility. That God has feelings and emotions but only responds out of those if He wills to. God cannot be hurt by His creatures or affected unless He wants to be.

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