
The Challenging Prayer for Spiritual Power

Ephesians 3:14-21

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We have some funny, odd, and at times, perplexing views of prayer.

The book opens with Paul's prayer for spiritual perception. Now he turns to praying for spiritual power. How does this prayer align with our own praying?

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Why this text here? Why is this a concern of Paul's? I think there are three very relevant reasons we should listen carefully to this prayer.

We need spiritual strength in the inner person, our souls, the same way we need physical strength in the outer person, our bodies. Without spiritual strength, we will shrivel up and become weak, vulnerable to doubts, temptations, idols, sin.

We use spiritual strength, not to accomplish great spiritual feats, but to grow in faith, in believing truth in practically obedient ways. As we work through this text, notice what the spiritual power is for – how is it being used.

We grow in spiritual strength in the context of union with God and community with believers. God has primarily designed to give us all we need in Him and through others.

Now, let's take up this prayer. As we hear Paul pray, let us ask ourselves two questions:

Do I pray like this for people?

Do I think I need what God provides as shown in this prayer?

Its Posture - Bowing before God (v.14-15)

More than just a statement that he is praying. Paul shows us his inward approach when he prays.

With Personal Humbleness (v.14a)

Outward physical position indicates inward spiritual bent. Prayer is meant to be a conversation with God. But we are not coming to an equal. He is not our buddy. He is in fact the God of the universe. So we come with humbleness. We bow our knees. Now we may not do that physically when we pray, but it is the right posture to assume.

In a Family Relationship (v.14b-15)

The Bible teaches us about prayer using many analogies.

We come to God in prayer as a subject before his King. We come as petitioners seeking good from our King's grace and generosity.

We come to God in prayer as a bride to her groom. We come as those seeking companionship with the one we love and who loves us.

We come to God in prayer as a son before his Father. We come as those who are children with a Father who loves us enough to care and to chasten us.

That God as our Father means He is:

The object of our prayer - We pray to God, the Father. This is the consistent language of the Bible and the New Testament in particular. It is not intended to exclude praise and communion with Christ and the Spirit. But the primary emphasis for our praying is to speak to God, the Father.

The pattern in our families - We understand our spiritual relationship to God in human terms. This is God's design. He is a family. He is a Father who has a Son He loves. And so, we are families. He has created families, not just to have a way for us to relate to Himself, but because He is actually a family and we are reflections and images of the great Divine reality.

Prayer then is a way of expressing and experiencing our relationship with God. I want to say something so obvious because over the years that wasn't quite so obvious to me. The same way that I relate to my wife and to you through talking, sharing, asking, speaking I relate to God.

Its Petition - Enabling by God (v.16)

I marvel at the distance between the praying of Paul and ours. It is not merely a matter of the Paul writing inspired Scripture. It is a fundamental difference in his thinking about how to pray and what to pray for people.

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

The Measure of its Giving

Granted according to His glory__ - what an amazing phrase this is. Paul is effectively saying, "May God grant to you what I am asking in proportion to the vast riches and wealth of His glory, his supreme magnificence."

The Means of its Enabling

Grant you power to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit.

Do we expect or think we need this for our own growing up in knowing Christ? In other words, are we actually aware that we are really weak in ourselves, desperately in need of the Spirit's strengthening power?

Have we replaced the work of the Spirit with spiritual techniques? In other words, if I took all the techniques I live by as a Christian, could an unbeliever do them as well and have largely the same effects in his life? Or is there a fundamental difference in that the way I live demands strengthening power by the Spirit?

Do we value it so much that it takes precedence in our praying for others?

Does our faith cling to the glory of God as the measure by which God will grant this to us and to others?

The Manifestation of its Working

This strengthening work of the Holy Spirit is in the inner man, the inner person. You are made of a physical part, the body. You are also made of an immaterial part, the soul. This is your inner person, the spiritual part of you. God designed you to be a body-soul complex. Your body is not alien to you – it is a part of God's design. Your soul is a part of you. To deny the existence of a spiritual, inner person is to live in a lie, a myth, a fantasy.

Again, the analogy of food giving strength in and to the body helps us. The Holy Spirit who indwells us as believers sustains the inner person as we believe what God's Word says. We take in food. We have bodily mechanisms which convert food to energy. Our body uses that energy to do what it does. We take in truth. We believe the truth we take in. The Spirit uses it to strengthen us so that we will see be sustained and will grow spiritually.

What do we need this strengthening for?

Its Purpose - Experiencing of God (v.17-19)

This might seem like a strange way to put it. But I find that most Christians are trying to experience God without knowledge. And those who learn the error of this, soon are merely gaining knowledge without pursuing God Himself.

¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Indwelling by Faith (v.17a)

Christ would settle down and be at home in our hearts by faith. He is not talking about "Christ in you" as a matter of salvation; rather, that our inner selves would be the kind of dwelling God is comfortable in.

Apprehending of Christ (v.17b-19a)

Comprehending the greatness of the surpassing love of Christ requires that we have deep roots in love. It requires that, in love, we work together and make corporate efforts together to grow in this knowledge. This apprehension, this understanding is more than just a knowledge about Him. It is an intimate involvement with Christ.

Fullness of God (v.19b)

What are we to make of these words? What does Paul mean? It seems to me that "being filled up to all the fullness of God" means that the standard of knowing God personally and intimately and truly is set by God; in fact, it is that fullness that God has in Himself. God's self-knowledge is a person, the Lord Jesus. The more that we are enabled by the Spirit to know God and His love, that knowledge will be the Lord Jesus.

Its Praise: Exalting God (v.20-21)

Maybe the reason we do not pray like this is because we do not praise like this. I am utterly convinced that there is a transforming power in God exalting praise.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

His Surpassing Greatness (v.20)

God is more than able to do what verses 16-19 are asking and expecting from God. Be careful not to lift this sentence out of its context. God is able to do more in us than we ever ask or think. We cannot limit the power of God. *Even when we don't understand or don't ask, God is able to do what He has aimed to do.*

His Everlasting Glory (v.21)

Here is the reason God exists; here is His chief end - to glorify and enjoy Himself. Since that is so, it is also our chief end. Does the way you think about salvation, sanctification, the church and prayer all inevitably drive you to magnifying God's glory?

Reflect and Respond

For those of you who are not believers, there is sentence here for you. God dwells in your heart by faith. Believe what He says and He will take up residence in you through the Holy Spirit. Believe today.

Christians, pray this prayer. Pray it for yourself. Pray it for others. Pray it for the glory of God.