

## Ephesians 3:16-19, pt. 2

December 6, 2009

“Lord, teach us to pray”

- That should be our desire as we study some selected prayers in the NT

Last week we began to look at this prayer of the apostle Paul as found in Ephesians 3

- Let's turn there again this morning

### Let's read Ephesians 3:14-21

We know that Paul begins to pray for these believers back in chapter one

Paul prays that these believers would know three things (1:18-19a)

- The hope of His calling
- The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints
- The surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe

On this last thought of God's power, his prayer is interrupted as he contemplates God's power

- God's power to raise Christ from physical death
- God's power to raise sinners from spiritual death
- God's power to unite believing Jews and Gentiles into the Church

He won't resume that prayer until 3:14-21

- We began looking at this prayer last week

This prayer has three overall petitions

- Be strengthened by God's power (3:16-17a)
- Be grounded in God's love (3:17b-19a)
- Be filled to God's fullness (3:19b)

Last week we looked at this first petition...

#### I. Be strengthened by God's power (3:16-17a)

<sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;

Paul prays for these believers to “be strengthened with power through His Spirit”

- This isn't self-help
- This is crying out for power that can only come through God

The specific agency of this power is the Holy Spirit of God

- He empowers believers for service
- He helps us when we are weak

This empowering takes place “in the inner man”

- Paul is not concerned with externals and temporal needs at this time

His mind is consumed with spiritual matters that affect “the inner man”

- That part of us that is spiritual
- The real us – the “new man”

Once again, Paul challenges us to realign our priorities with God’s priorities

- So often our prayers revolve around physical matters
  - o These are things that are destined to perish
  - o These are the matters of lesser importance

But as Paul sits in a Roman prison cell, his priorities are in the right place

- He prays for the inner man of these believers to be strengthened with power

[17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith](#)

The apostle also prays for Christ to make His home in their hearts

- This isn’t to say that Christ’s coming into the heart of these believers is different than the Spirit’s empowering
- This takes place at the moment of conversion

This prayer is that we would willingly allow Christ to take over more areas of our lives

- Being conformed to His image

What Paul is praying is that we would realize the tremendous responsibility it is to be a Christian

- To think that Jesus Christ indwells our hearts should have enormous consequences in our thinking

It should affect

- Our choices and decisions
- Our family behavior
- Our personal conduct and holiness

Paul’s first petition is that we would be strengthened by God’s power...

- His second petition is for them to...

## **II. Be grounded in God’s love (3:17b-19a)**

[and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,](#)

Paul uses two (2) analogies

- One is from the world of agriculture
- The other is from the world of architecture<sup>1</sup>

First, Paul uses a lesson from the world of agriculture

- To be “rooted” is to be planted, like a tree

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians*, 116

Unless a plant is placed in the right soil, it will not grow properly

- Paul says that the proper “soil” for the believer is love
- We are to be like a tree, with firm roots “deep and wide into the soil of love”<sup>2</sup>

This reminds me of Psalm 1:1-3, “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.”

- The righteous man is grounded
- He is compared to a tree that has stability

Second, Paul uses a lesson from the world of architecture

- To be “**grounded**” is to have a solid foundation
- It implies having a strong base

It is the same word used of the man who built his house on the rock (Mt 7:25)

- God Himself will see to it that we are established (1 Pet 5:10)

In the original language, the words “**in love**” are actually placed first in the sentence

- This was done to provide extra *emphasis*
- A more literal understanding would be “in love, being rooted and grounded...”

You see, it is as Christ lives at home in our hearts that we begin to understand His love

- We will begin to see that God displays His own love in us and through us<sup>3</sup>

Let’s read what Christ told His disciples, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

This love that God has is *agape* love

- *Agape* love does not depend on feelings or circumstances
- *Agape* love is love from the will, not emotions
- Husbands, you are to *agape* your wife
- *Agape* love is selfless giving
- *Agape* love is a declaration of commitment

1 John 4:10, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins”

“Love is the soil in which believers are rooted and will grow, the foundation upon which they are built.”<sup>4</sup>

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth

Paul asks the Lord to give to these believers the ability to grasp the great love of Christ

- This same word “**comprehend**” is used elsewhere in the NT of how a demon seized control over its victim (Mk 9:18)

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary: Ephesians*, 107.

<sup>4</sup> Peter O’Brien, *The Pillar NT Commentary: Ephesians*, 260

So this isn't an intellectual, ethereal type of comprehension

- This is a real, heartfelt understanding of God's love for us
- And this can only take place as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit

This comprehension of God's love is not just for a few

- It is for "all the saints"

The "one another" passages are how we should practically demonstrate and display our love for one another

- The Church is a Body and a Family that exists to glorify God
- It also exists to serve one another

The love of Christ is so awesome that it is beyond human comprehension and description

- Paul speaks here of its breadth, length, height, and depth
- It is simply beyond imagination!
- It is beyond explanation!

No believer will ever exhaust the concept of love

- It is limitless
- It is beyond our ability to grasp and experience

### 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge

Paul wants these believers to "know the love of Christ"

- This isn't merely an intellectual knowledge
- The word for "know" here is a word for *experiential* knowledge

1 John 4:19, "We love, because He first loved us"

- The only way that you and I can love is because Christ's love motivates us!

Notice that Paul is not talking about the love that we have for the Lord

- He is speaking of the love that God has for us
- *This is a love that cannot be explained...it must be experienced*

Someone once asked Louis Armstrong, the famous jazz trumpeter, to explain jazz

- He responded, "Man, if I've got to explain it, you ain't got it."<sup>5</sup>

It is very easy to talk about the love of Christ

- We can even sing about the love of Christ
- We can go a step further and teach the facts of the love of Christ to others

But the issue is not talking, singing, or teaching about the love of Christ

- It is personally experiencing the love of Christ
- Growing in appreciation for God's love

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<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, 109.

## which surpasses knowledge

The love of Christ – not our love for Christ – “surpasses knowledge”

- It implies a far-reaching and exceeding love

It is interesting to note that Paul prays that the believers might know that which is beyond human comprehension!

So far, Paul has mentioned two petitions

- Be strengthened with God’s power
- Be grounded in God’s love
- The third and final petition is...

### **III. Be filled to God’s fullness (3:19b)**

#### that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God

After we have been empowered by God’s power and grounded in God’s love, the apostle asks that we “may be filled up to all the fullness of God”

This filling is not something that we can do

- Otherwise, the Text would read, “that you would fill yourselves up”

No, Paul uses a passive tense of the verb to signify that it is God who performs this action

- As you and I are empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christ remodels our lives from within
- As we see this process, we stand in awe of the amazing love of Christ
- As you and I continue to experience the love of Christ, God begins to fill us with His fulness

To be filled means to be dominated and controlled

- This comes full circle in this prayer
- That God would so fill us with Himself that He is our controlling desire

Paul does not, however, suggest that mortal man can attain to the level of Divinity, found in Christ<sup>6</sup>

- He is praying, however, that we would be more and more mature
- That we would be more and more Christ-like
- That we would be more and more sanctified

Let’s compare three verses in Ephesians

- 1:23, “**which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all**”
- 3:19, “**and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God**”
- 4:13, “**until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ**”

The Church already shares in the fullness of God

- Yet Divine enabling is needed in order for the Church to be all that she is called to be!<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *Bible Study Commentary*, 83

<sup>7</sup> O’Brien, 265.

This is a prayer for maturity!

- How does this take place?

Simple!

- We are empowered by the Holy Spirit in the inner man
  - o We have no excuse for feeling weak and powerless
  - o We have the Divine resources at our disposal
- We are grounded in the love of Christ
  - o We should live in a perpetual state of awe as we meditate upon God's love for us
  - o That love should motivate us to love others
- We are filled to the fulness of God

Do you see how all three of these petitions are linked together?

- They are progressive, building on one another

As if this prayer isn't enough, Paul ends on a note of great praise for God

- Let's look briefly at this doxology in 3:20-21

In this doxology, Paul brings the first three chapters to an apex

- God has blessed every believer with every spiritual blessing
- God's power has raised Christ from physical death and believers from spiritual death
- God has included both Jews and Gentiles into the Church so that there is spiritual equality

The only proper response to all of this is praise!

**20 Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think**

Only God could achieve such a mighty plan as has been set forth in Ephesians 1-3

- It is appropriate that the praise is given exclusively to Him!

Way back in chapter one of Ephesians, Paul prayed that believers would know "the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe" (1:19a)

- Paul ends his prayer in the same way that he began it!

God's power is so far beyond anything that we can ever ask

- Your greatest prayer falls way short of God's greatness

God's power even surpasses what we can think!

- Amazing!

Someone has written the progression like this:

- God is able to do all that we ask
- God is able to do all that we ask or think
- God is able to do above all that we ask or think
- God is able to do abundantly above all that we ask or think
- God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think

according to the power that works within us.

Here we are again, talking about God's power

- That has been the theme throughout this entire book, hasn't it?

The same power that is working within every believer is the same power that raised Christ from the dead!

- This power, Paul says, is "works within us"

We may not see this power, but it is working

- That is why Paul prayed that this Divine empowering takes place "in the inner man"

21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

The only One who can receive such credit and glory is Christ

- As the Westminster Confession states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever"

This glory takes place "in the Church"

- This great organism that brings spiritual equality and blessings to every believer
- It is through the family of pardoned rebels that God's glory is magnified!

"The Church is the sphere of the outworking of God's purpose on earth"

The glory of God found in the Church cannot be separated from the glory of God found in Jesus Christ

- The family of believers would mean nothing if it were not for their Head, Jesus Christ
- It is in Him that we have our very existence!

How long should the praise of God be told?

- Forever and ever!
- For all of eternity!

Amen.

In the OT, people responded with "Amen" to a number of unique situations:

- To confirm a curse
- To accept a blessing
- To associate oneself with a doxology<sup>8</sup>

What does the word "Amen" mean?

- It literally means "It is so"
- I agree
- May it be

What a prayer!

- A prayer for God's power to be on display in our lives

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<sup>8</sup> O'Brien, 269.

This is definitely a prayer that we should incorporate into our praying

**In chapter 1, praise led Paul to prayer**

- **Here in chapter 3, prayer led Paul to praise!**