

The Letter Of Paul To The Ephesians

*⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.
(Ephesians 1:7-10. ESV)*

Message 14

Strength In The Inner Man

August 18th, 2013

Ephesians 3:14-19

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Introduction:

Open your Bibles this morning to Ephesians 3:14. You will recall that two weeks ago we noticed that the Apostle Paul had started a prayer that he then did not finish. Look back at 3:1:

¹**For this reason** I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— (ESV)

Paul is going to start a prayer on the basis of what he has just said in chapter 2 but then as he hears himself speak and as he imagines his people hearing this he realizes he needs to set the table and so he begins a digression or a side bar. We preached on that sidebar two Sundays ago. Before Paul prayed for them he felt the need to connect what he had just said in chapter 2 with what he had previously said in the eulogy of chapter 1 which would form the theological basis for his prayer in chapter 3. He ended that sidebar with these words:

¹³So **I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering** for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:1-13. ESV)

Before Paul prayed this prayer for these people he needed them to understand that suffering is not the undoing of all that we believe about God. On the contrary, suffering is part of the process and suffering is our glory and our good. Having set that up, he now returns to the prayer he started in verse 1, notice the wording of verse 14:

¹⁴**For this reason** I bow my knees before the Father ... (ESV)

Right back to where he started in verse 1. Allow me to make a couple of observations from this flow before we dive into the actual words of Paul's prayer. The first one is this:

1. The more you know the better you pray.

Do you see that? This prayer only makes sense because of the theology Paul has just presented over the previous two chapters. In chapter 1 of this letter Paul used a key word – many scholars say it is the THE KEY WORD in Ephesians and summarizes the entire theological argument; it was the Greek word *anakephalaistos* which has the word *kephalaion* inside which means “head” or “principal thing”. The whole plan of God, Paul says is to bring everything in the universe back into orbit around the principal thing – that is God Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. Everything in the universe is going to be brought back into orbit around the Son. That's the big plan. That's where this is going. In chapter 2 Paul gets more specific and he says this big plan will result in people from every tribe and tongue – Jews and Gentiles – coming together in one family with Christ as head. The Gospel is going to destroy old divisions and make one new family, one new house with Christ as centre and foundation. That's the big theology that makes Paul's suffering and theirs seem small in comparison. If this is going there, then temporary suffering is not a problem. If God is bringing innumerable cosmic bodies back into orbit around Jesus we should expect the odd collision. You can't make an omelette without breaking a few eggs. Suffering is predictable and is part and parcel of the intended process. He says: “This is who God is and this is what God is doing now and in light of that I pray this for you”. Knowing more allows you to pray better.

Prayer warriors out there, if you want to pray better READ MORE. Read your Bible every day – do the RMM plan and read your Bible through every year. Do it. And after you've done that read some theology. Read John Murray's Redemption Accomplished and Applied, read Pilgrim's Progress, read John Stott's The Cross of Christ, read A.W. Tozer's The Knowledge of the Holy, read J.I. Packer's Knowing God, read R.C. Sproul's Chosen By God and tell me at the end whether you are praying at the same level of power. Know more, pray better.

Secondly, the flow of the letter up to this point suggests that:

2. Prayer is at the heart of Christian ministry and leadership

That's part of the point that Paul was making in his sidebar. He says that God is doing his big plan in bringing everything in the universe under the sole benevolent headship of Jesus Christ and Paul's ministry among the Gentiles is essentially an agent – an ordinary means of that plan being accomplished. Paul's life and ministry is caught up in the great plan of God and he executes that ministry in the activities of prayer and preaching. When he was there he preached, when he's away he prays. Preaching and prayer are the core activities – the ordinary means of Christian ministry. It has ever been thus. When the church was growing like gangbusters in Acts 6 the apostles began to be concerned that the food ministry would consume their focus and distract them from their calling. That can happen. Local mission is huge, it is demanding and it can swallow your church whole and they saw that and this is what they said:

³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. **4But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.**” (Acts 6:3-4. ESV)

Prayer and the ministry of the word – that is what leaders do. Let me tell you something, the most important hour in the week of this church is most likely Monday nights from 8:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Last Monday night at that time the elders gathered in my office to pray for the people of this church. It wasn't a Board meeting – we do that once a month, but three Mondays a month we gather to pray. We had 100% attendance at that meeting. Hear that. In the middle of summer on a Monday night 100% of your elders – 14 of 14 gathered in my office to pray for you. That's what leaders do if they are men under the Lordship of Jesus Christ caught up in the great plan of God's redemption. That's what Paul was doing here as he begins to pray for these churches.

Let me read to you now the substance of Paul's prayer. In terms of structure you will notice that there is a preamble, two petitions, a summary and then a benediction. We'll leave the benediction for next week and focus our attention this week on the prayer proper as it runs from verse 14-19. Hear then the inspired, inerrant and life-giving Word of the Lord:

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19. ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

The Preamble (Verses 14-15)

In terms of Paul's preamble in verses 14-15 I want you to notice two things. Notice firstly that little phrase:

I bow my knees... (v.14)

That is actually pretty significant. The normal posture for prayer in Bible times was standing up with the hands raised toward heaven. Very occasionally we see people bowing down as a gesture of particular reverence and humility. Look for example at Isaiah 45:23:

²³ By myself I have sworn;
from my mouth has gone out in righteousness
a word that shall not return:
'To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear allegiance.' (Isaiah 45:23. ESV)

Many scholars think that this is the very verse Paul is alluding to in verse 14 because it represents the Old Testament version of the Great Plan of Redemption that Paul mentioned in chapter 1 that is the basis for his prayer in chapter 3. Paul is saying: "When I consider the plan of God to bring all things under the Sole, Exalted Headship of His Son Jesus Christ according to the Word of Promise given 700 years before his birth – I fall to my knees in worship". Once again we see that in the Bible and in the life of Paul and I would suggest in the life of all true Christians – good theology drives us into prayer. The more Paul knew of God and his plan of redemption the more he was driven into reverent prayer and worship. Know more of God to worship and pray better.

Secondly notice that for Paul as for Jesus, the object of prayer was Father God. Paul says:

I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named... (v. 14b-15. ESV)

We mentioned this a few weeks ago but it is worth repeating: in the Bible the general pattern of prayer is that prayer is made TO the Father, BECAUSE of the Son WITH THE HELP of the Holy Spirit. So it is here. Specifically Paul says he is praying to the Father who is the source of all life and who commands the identity and destiny of all people. There is a play on words in the Greek that doesn't transfer into English in verse 14. The Greek word for "father" sounds like the Greek word for "descent" or "lineage". Paul is saying that he is praying to the Father of all life. He is praying to the Creator. He goes on to say that this Creator named all things. In the Bible to name something is to assign identity and destiny. Think of Jacob. He was called Jacob because he came out grasping his twin brother's heel and "Jacob" means "grasping the heel" or "usurper". This name describes his identity and his destiny – he was destined to supplant his brother as the heir of the promises. Later his name is changed to Israel which means "to strive with God". This described who he was and who he would be along with all who would follow in his line. To name is to assign identity and destiny. Here that. Paul is saying: "I am praying to the one who makes you who you are and who holds your future in his hands. I am praying to the Sovereign Creator God."

Christian prayer is prayer to the God who is there – the Sovereign Creator God. It is not prayer to God as we imagine him to be. That kind of prayer is nothing more than the idolatrous babbling of the nations.

Petition #1: Strengthened With Power (Verses 16-17a)

Look now at verse 16 as we meet the first of the two petitions in Paul's prayer. The Apostle prays that:

according to the riches of his glory **he may grant you to be strengthened** with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that **Christ may dwell** in your hearts through faith (v. 16-17a. ESV)

This is what scholars call a "syntactical parallel" meaning that Paul is saying one thing two ways. These are both infinitives and so Paul is not saying two things he is saying one thing by means of two parallel statements and you will see that if you look carefully at the phrases. In the first phrase he asks that they would be strengthened in the inner being and then in the second he asks

that Christ dwell in their hearts. In their inner beings is identical to in their hearts and being strengthened with power through his Spirit means the same as having Christ dwell powerfully within them. By saying it two ways Paul hopes to amplify and expand our understanding of his request. Let me give it to you in plain English. Paul is praying that they would be strong in their spirits by being fully indwelt of the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is a request for power but a specific kind of power. He is not asking for magic power. He is not asking that they be able to walk on water or call down thunder he is asking for spiritual power that comes from a constant and fulsome communion with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is the power that if given will answer the concern that Paul raised at the conclusion of his sidebar. The sidebar ended with these words:

¹³So **I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering** for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:1-13. ESV)

Paul is concerned that they not lose heart in his or in their suffering and so the first thing he prays for them is a full and transforming communion with the Spirit of Jesus Christ. This is a specific kind of strength toward a specific kind of end. Let me say a few things about this strength on the basis of the argument of this text:

1. This strength is given in response to suffering and need

Let me illustrate this pastorally. A dear lady in this church once came up to me with tears in her eyes and confessed that she was deeply afraid that if God ever took her grandchildren prematurely she would not have the strength to say as Job did: “The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” “How can I know”, she said, “if I would be strong enough to endure such a challenge?” Have you ever wondered that? The answer of course is that you can’t measure that kind of faith until you’re in that kind of trial. You can’t expect in times of peace and ease to look into your heart and find faith for the storm. That kind of faith is given when the winds are blowing and the seas are overwhelming the boat. God gives it when we’re in it. As a pastor I see this time and time again. I saw it last week in two different women in our church. I saw it in Karen Stevens. She came to church last week in a neck brace barely able to move her body and yet full of the joy of the Lord. Karen was in a terrible car accident just a few weeks ago that should have been her death and yet she was miraculously preserved. In the lobby last Sunday with tears in her eyes she told me that she literally FELT the

arms of the Lord around her in that accident. She felt Him! He was there and she said: “It was as though he swallowed me in his arms and kept me safely through.” She felt his presence in the hospital guiding her recovery and the intimacy of that experience literally oozed out of her as she spoke and gave witness. I saw that same strength in Veronica Cleavelly. I saw her praying with joy and faith over the body of her dying husband. I saw her testifying to nurses and visitors that God is good and greatly to be praised whether he should heal her husband or take him home. I saw her face the prospect of being a widow and a single mom to two young girls with dignity and courage and let me promise you that if you had asked her a year ago if she was strong enough in her walk to do any of that she would have laughed in your face. That kind of strength is given by God in the midst of the storm. You can remember it and you can keep it but you cannot conjure it. It comes as grace under fire.

2. This strength is given through the Spirit

Again, Paul is not introducing new theology, he is applying the theology he’s already given in pastoral prayer. Paul has already told us in chapter 1 that the Spirit is the means by which we participate in Christ. He is the seal – he seals to us what is ours in Christ. Christ is the sphere, the Spirit is the seal. Think of it this way: Christ is like the giant tank of grace. It’s all there for you – there is more there than you can ask for or imagine. The Spirit is like the hose that connects the tank to your heart and Christ and his graces flow into your inner being through the seal and means of the Holy Spirit. That is what is meant by “Spiritual power” in the New Testament – it is the grace of Christ flowing into our life freshly through the once and on-going work of the Holy Spirit.

3. This strength is equated with intimate, transforming presence

The first rule in interpreting the Bible is to let the Bible interpret itself. When we see a phrase or a word in the Bible we should look for a Bible passage that interprets that word or phrase. When we see the words “spiritual power” before we start defining those terms according to what we witness on the Miracle Network we need to look at how they are defined in the Bible. Here Paul defines “power through the Spirit” as being identical with Christ dwelling in our hearts. Let me translate that into street level English. In the Bible power is intimacy. In the Bible power is holiness. Later in this letter Paul will describe what happens when the Holy Spirit continually

fills us with the graces of Christ. He will talk about what that looks like in church, in marriage, in parenting and in the work place. In short, it looks like total transformation. It looks like Jesus alive in you in every sphere of human living. Paul is saying that when the Holy Spirit pumps grace into you two things happen: first you grow in your intimate vision and understanding of Jesus Christ. The second thing flows out of the first thing. As you see Jesus you change and become like Jesus. He says that more clearly in 2 Corinthians 3:18:

¹⁸And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)

This is the power Paul is talking about. A clear understanding of Jesus that results in gradual but wholesale transformation. Spiritual Power in the Bible is knowledge and holiness.

Petition #2: To Know The Love (Verses 17b-19a)

The second petition in this prayer is found in verses 17-19. Linguistically it flows out of the first petition as its logical consequence. Paul says: “When the grace and power of God meet you in storm and suffering I pray that it will result in your being:

being **rooted and grounded in love**, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge (ESV)

When grace flows into your storm, you are going to go deep and you’re going to grow up in the love of Jesus Christ. Did you hear that? He uses two metaphors here, one agricultural and one architectural: being rooted and being grounded. The second word there literally means “being built on a foundation” so what Paul is saying is: “When God gives you strength in your suffering you are going to go deep and you are going to grow up. You’re going to know things that cannot be learned any other way.”

And that my friends, takes us all the way back to where we started:

¹³So **I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering** for you, which is your glory. (Ephesians 3:1-13. ESV)

Suffering is not the enemy and it does not prove that God is asleep or that his promises fail.

Suffering isn't a detour – SUFFERING IS A SHORT CUT! Suffering gets you closer to the end towards which this is all heading. Suffering bends your knee and lifts your head. Suffering digs out the wax from your ear and softens the calluses of your heart and prepares you to see, to love, to bow, to grow, to glorify and to enjoy God forever.

Suffering is the place where the grace of God meets your deepest frailty and it is when you either tap out or you put down roots and grow up into a knowledge which cannot be attained through human striving. Do not lose heart in suffering; it is your glory.

Summary: Filled With The Fullness (Verse 19b)

Paul concludes his prayer by summarizing and pointing toward the ultimate end:

that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:14-19. ESV)

Suffering is gain and glory because suffering is shortcut because in it we see God better, he feels so much nearer, his voice is so much louder and our knees so naturally incline to bending and all of that, painful as it is brings us ever closer to the goal of our redemption – seeing God, face to face and being filled with all His fullness. One day that will happen. One day we will see him.

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴**They will see his face**, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5. ESV)

That's where this is going church and anything that gets us closer is not to be feared, despised or rejected.

Church listen to me, I'm not praying suffering for you – I don't want to and I don't need to. Jesus said: "In this world you WILL have tribulation" (John 16:33); what I'm praying is that in your suffering, in your tribulation you will not lose heart. I pray that you will be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit according to the riches of his glory. I pray that Christ would

be very present with you and that you would feel that presence and rest in it. I pray that it would change you, grow you and prepare you for all that is coming. I pray that you would go deep and grow up. I pray that you would refuse to curse the world with another generation of Christianettes who listen to sermonettes and who wither and wilt and cave under every temptationette because they have no root or depth in themselves. I pray that you would fix your eyes and steady your mind upon the Holy Love of God displayed pre-eminently in the cross of Jesus Christ. I pray that you would know the love of God in all its glorious fullness. That you would know it in its justice, that you would know it in its righteousness that you would know it in its mercy and that you would know it in its grace. I pray that you would know it and that one day soon you would be caught up into it and that you would see the face of God and serve before Him forever.

I pray that for you and I challenge you to pray that over your kids and over your grandkids. Don't just pray that God give your kids prosperity and safety. Pray that God would strengthen them with power in the inner man and grant unto God leave in your prayers to do that work in whatever way best serves his glory. Pray that they would go deep and grow up that they may shine as lights and bear witness to the Holy Love of God in the midst of a suffering and dying world in desperate need of a Redeemer. Pray that for your kids. Pray that for the sake of our City and for the glory of His Name in all the earth. This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.