

Sermon Notes & References
A Pastor's Prayer
Ephesians 3:14-21
August 17, 2008

- A. Introduction
 - 1. what should be our priorities
 - a. in life?
 - b. in prayer
 - 2. Why ('for this reason (cause)') is Paul praying?
 - a. Ephesians 1:3-14
 - b. Ephesians 2
- B. The Prayer's Opening 3:1, 14-15
 - 1. How is Paul personally involved in this prayer?^A
 - 2. To whom is the prayer addressed?^B
 - 3. How does he consider those prayed for?
- C. Petition 1: Strength 3:16
 - 1. its source?
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^A See Acts 20:36-38
^B Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7; Exodus 4:22; John 1:12; Matthew 6:6, 9

- 3. its imparting?^C
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- D. Petition 2: Union 3:17a
 - 1. about Christ's indwelling^E
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 - 1. prayers for temporal things^H
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^C Acts 1:8, Zechariah 4:6
^D Romans 7:22, 2 Corinthians 4:16
^E John 15; Revelation 3:20
^F Romans 8:35ff; John 13-17
^G Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 4:13, Romans 8:29
^H Matthew 6:9-13, 25-32; Galatians 6:2; 1 Peter 5:7; Philippians 4:19

—{1}. **Ephesians 3:14-21** **A Pastor's Prayer**

A. Introduction

1. at the moment we are very aware that this is an Olympic year
 - a. many are getting up early or staying up late to see some of the contests taking place, to see who will win
 - b. the exploits of Michael Phelps are really astounding
 - c. listening to the sports casts for news on Canada we hear
 - (A) tones of deep discouragement
 - (B) and much hand-wringing
 - (C) that Canada's medal count is still 0-0-0 (at the time of the writing this message – perhaps now a little better)
 - d. even we Christians can get so enthused with a sports spectacle that we forget the priorities in Paul's words: *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but *only* one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."* (1 Corinthians 9:24-25)
 - e. what about our priorities in prayer?
2. how do we pray? ... for what do we ask?
 - a. sometimes our prayers are very childlike – not in the faith they show, but in the requests we make – concentrating on temporal things rather than eternal verities
 - b. even our spiritual requests often seem to relate rather to what we think God should do than in seeking God's will
 - c. we have just read Paul's prayer: let's single out *some of the things for which Paul does not pray*: —{2}.
 - (A) *not for health, wealth, nor success; as pleasant as these may be, they may not advance the plan of God*
 - (B) *not that the work be easy, the opposition be light: if these do not forward His goal fo saving lost mankind*
 - (C) *not for leadership skills or brilliant strategies; though useful cannot compensate for missing spirituality*
 - (D) *in fact, not for circumstances or any external items*
 - d. but rather for God's work in the believer

3. Paul's prayer, his second in this letter, and similar to his first, begins with the phrase 'for this reason,' showing that it takes its context from what precedes in the letter
 - a. the first, or larger context, is all that God has done in the planning and provision of salvation, chapters 1 and 2
 - (A) from chapter one:
 - (1) verses 3-6 describe God's plan, His ordaining of salvation from before the foundation of the world
 - (2) in verses 6-8, God executed redemption in Christ, freely forgiving our sin by grace
 - (3) in verses 9-13, God revealed his future, eternal plan for those who hope and trust in Christ
 - (4) in verse 13, God sent forth His gospel message that brings this life through faith
 - (5) and verse 14, that He has placed His Holy Spirit within us as a pledge of this inheritance
 - (B) and then from chapter 2
 - (1) verses 1-10, the radical change from death to life in the believer occasioned by His grace
 - (2) and from the remainder of the chapter
 - (a) our new relationship and access to God
 - (b) our reconciliation gained by the cross of Christ
 - (c) our part in the 'one new man', the church
 - (d) and our place in the household of God
 - (C) **Paul is praying for his people in the church on the basis of all that God has done for them**
 - b. then there is the second context of Paul's prayer, the more immediate one,
 - (A) the one which concludes his interjection of verses 2 through 13 of this third chapter
 - (B) one which reveals what his readers are feeling, "Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory." (Ephesians 3:13)
 - (C) **Paul is praying for his people in the church because of their current trend to lose heart**
4. what should we learn from today's text?
 - a. Paul, in praying as a pastor for the people of the church or churches he has planted, prays for their
 - b. strength – a strength found in the indwelling Holy Spirit
 - c. union – a communion with the indwelling Lord Jesus Christ
 - d. love – based on realizing the immensity of the Christ's love
 - e. filling – with all the fullness of the Triune God
 - f. our purpose: that you and I may know how to pray for the work of God, for Christ's church, and for one another

- B. The Prayer's Opening 3:1, 14-15
1. Let us re-read the opening verses, but going back to verse 1:
 - a. ¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—
 - b. then omitting the parenthetical interjection, not because it is not important, but because we have already looked at it over the past month; , going on with verses 14 & 15:
 - c. ¹⁴ ¹ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father {some MSS add: of our Lord Jesus Christ}, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name,
 2. There are three highlights in these verses to be noted
 - a. 1. Paul's personal involvement in this prayer
 - b. 2. The character of the God He is addressing
 - c. 3. The relation of the Ephesians to the God
 3. Paul's personal involvement in this prayer
 - a. I do not know about you, but I know that I find myself often distracted in prayer; and what is it that distracts us – not outside noises of traffic or people moving about – but because our minds turn to thoughts of other things in which we are heavily involved – it could be work, it could be the home, it could be people we know – and these take over our interest and attention
 - b. but note the single-mindedness of Paul, the pastor, here
 - c. he is a prisoner not of Nero but of Jesus Christ
 - d. the purpose of his bondage – not on account of misdeeds – but rather for their benefit and betterment; for their sake
 - e. 'I bow my knees' – whether he fell on his knees as he wrote this prayer or whether this describes his habitual posture as he prayed on their behalf, we are left to guess
 - (A) it seems that the more usual posture of prayer was that of standing, one of respect to God – just as was done when the Scriptures were read in the synagogue – this is how Jews pray today at the wailing wall in Jerusalem
 - (B) but bowing the knees as an expression of earnestness and deep humility is found in both the OT and NT
 - (1) in Acts 20:26-38, as Paul parted from the elders of Ephesus, they knelt, prayed, wept, embraced, kissed and grieved – all showing deep earnestness
 - (2) Christ did so also in the garden of Gethsemane

(C) **Paul was deeply involved as he prayed**

4. The prayer is to God as Father

- a. God is Father in three senses, all of which may be seen to be involved in the words in these verses.
- b. God is Father in the eternal relationship that subsists between God the Father and God the Son, who is our Lord, Jesus Christ. This relationship is unique, one of eternal love and unity, and which is beyond our experience.
- c. God is the Creator Father – as angels are called the ‘sons of God’ (in Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7)
- d. God as the Redeemer Father
 - (A) referring to redeemed Israel as His son (Exodus 4:22)
 - (B) a term applied to those receiving Christ (John 1:12)
 - (C) and it is in this last sense that Jesus taught us to come to God in prayer, “But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees *what is done* in secret will reward you. ... Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ...’ (Matthew 6:6, 9)
 - (D) **Paul prays as a child to his heavenly Father**

5. Those prayed for are of great value to God

- a. they are part of the every family on earth and in heaven
- b. that special family of God which constitute God’s people
- c. of saints below and saints above
- d. the Gentile church of this pastor Paul for which he prays, with all their foibles, faults and failures, are a precious part of God’s family, the people of God, of great worth to God
- e. **Paul prays recognizing God’s care for these people**

C. Petition 1: Strength 3:16

1. the petitions in this prayer are progressive

- a. each builds upon the previous
- b. this progression is shown in the Greek in two ways: by a conjunction which is translated ‘*that, so that, in order that*’ and by the infinitive form of the verb indicating purpose, result or consequence and rendered ‘*to, that*’
- c. time may preclude me from pointing that out each time, but keep this progression in mind as go through this prayer

2. "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,"
 - a. this is the first enumerated purpose of Paul's prayer; that the church of God may live by the power of God; Paul's answer for people of Christ's church becoming discouraged and disheartened is that they be given spiritual power
 - b. first let it be noted that spiritual power is never by human effort; it does not arise from, nor is it limited by, our physical frame – which is but dust – and capacities
 - c. next the strength for which Paul prays is 'according to the riches of His glory' – when something accords to something else it means the two agree – if you lay a piece of work on its pattern and they are in accord, they agree in every way
 - (A) the riches of His glory is not just God's power
 - (B) but every one of His perfections
 - (C) the strength and power Paul asks for believers is godly strength and power; one that glorifies God, not man
 - d. how is this power to be imparted and infused: it is 'through His Spirit' – the Holy Spirit of God is the communicator of all spiritual power – Jesus said "but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses ..." (Acts 1:8 NAS) and in the OT Zechariah was told, "... Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts." (Zechariah 4:6 NAS)
 - e. to where is this power imparted? – now note, this is very important – it is to the 'inner man' – the inward man is contrasted to the outward man in the NT and the inward man is the seat of 'spiritual life, the product of the almighty power of the Spirit of God' ^{–{3}}: as clearly seen in passages as
 - (A) "For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man," (Romans 7:22 NAS95)
 - (B) "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16 NAS95)
 - (C) this power is only the regenerate, those born again
 - f. **Paul's pastoral prayer is for power for a redeemed people**

D. Petition 2: Union 3:17a

1. "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; ..."
 - a. the next step in this progression
 - (A) that for which the strengthening of power prepares us
 - (B) is the indwelling presence of the Lord Jesus Christ

2. 'Wait, pastor,' you may ask, 'doesn't Jesus indwell us from the moment we are saved? Isn't that what we learned in Sunday School as children – "Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart Lord Jesus, come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart Lord Jesus."
 - a. Yes, indeed He does; the union with Christ begins when we are by the Holy Spirit buried with him in baptism and raised with him to newness of life – that is what we later testify when we are baptised in water – but from that union there is an important and subtle difference here.
 - b. John 15 gives repeated warnings of the need for abiding in Christ for the disciple of Christ
 - c. Revelation 3:20 – you know it, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." is addressed, not to unbelievers, but to lukewarm Christians
3. this difference turns upon the use of heart in the Bible
 - a. when the Bible speaks of the heart, its not talking about it the way we do, either as a physical organ or of love, but as the centre of a persons feeling, thinking and willing; it is the conscious aspect of a person
 - b. so the contemplated result of the strengthening with the power through the Holy Spirit, is an increasing realisation that Jesus Christ is resident within us – not a sojourn, a dropping by for a few moments on Sunday morning, but that He has taken up a settled above, a lifetime freehold residence – this should be in our constant consciousness
4. yet, like the church addressed by Christ in Revelation 3:20, we need to answer the door – the means of answering is faith
 - a. that 'the just shall live by faith' does not simply apply to the matter of coming to salvation
 - b. but that our life is to be one of daily trust in Christ
 - c. **Paul prays that his people may walk in daily communion with the indwelling Lord Jesus Christ by faith**

E. Petition 3: Love 3:17b–19a

1. "^{17b} ... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, ..."
- a. with these verses I am faced with a problem – in the few moments which we have left together this morning, how can I begin to describe the Love of Christ – His love for us – that you may know this

beyond-knowledge love He has?

- (A) we could read again together, as we did a few weeks ago, those great words from Romans 8: 35ff: [‘Who will separate us from the love of Christ?’](#)
- (B) we could take a little longer and read chapters 13-17 of John’s gospel, describing Jesus’ encouraging words on His last evening with His disciples beginning with those words, [“Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” \(John 13: 1 NAS95\)](#) & ending with His final high-priestly prayer for his followers both then and now
- (C) we could assign interpretations to the dimensions of the love of Christ, and the imaginations of the various students of the Bible have run riot in this fashion
- (D) and we could multiply words without end, and yet, and yet, never begin the communicate Christ’s love is

2. to apprehend (probably a better translation than comprehend) the love of Christ; but to begin to grasp what it encompasses, it is first of all necessary to have the experience of that love

- a. that we be [‘rooted and grounded in love’](#) – a first century expression applicable to a person, a business, a kingdom – securely settled and deeply founded
- b. and, when we are settled securely in the love of Christ then we can begin to apprehend just what it is
- c. In the valleys in the British Columbia interior, often all you can see are the mountains right next to you. So it is with the love of Christ: when you first believe, you see that part that brought you salvation. A few years ago we climbed drove up Mount Baldy and then climbed to the peak. There we could look out and count seven ranges of mountains, each further and dimmer than the previous, but clearly there, clearly existing, clearly mountains. So as you climb, as it were, into the love of Christ you will see a further and further aspects of that love.
- d. **Paul’s prayer is that we get climbing**

F. Petition 4: Filling 3:19b

1. [“... that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.”](#)

- a. the destiny of the Christian is not some mediocre plain, somewhat above the valleys but way below the mountain heights – it calls us to the very summit – it is measured by the perfections of God Himself: hear the Scriptures ...
 - (A) [“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” \(Matthew 5: 48 NAS\)](#)
 - (B) [“until we all attain ... to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness](#)

of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13 NAS)

- (C) “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;” (Romans 8:29 NAS)

2. In Christ the fullness of God dwells; so far as Christ dwells in us, the fullness of God is in us. In that indwelling lies the possibility of our growing in moral excellence on to the very limit of all that is God Himself. That they might be strengthened in the inner man so as to have Christ’s living and abiding presence in them, and be lifted thereby to the comprehension of His love and personal knowledge of that which yet surpasses all knowledge, and at last be filled with all spiritual excellence even up to the complete perfection that is in God Himself – this is the sweep of What Paul in his prayers desires for these Ephesians so late sunk in heathen hopelessness and godlessness. –^{4}.

a. **Paul prays for this summit of God’s filling God’s people**

G. Conclusion

1. should we pray asking for the physical needs of others?
 - a. for restoration of health of those who are sick?
 - b. for the finances of those in such need?
 - c. that someone is able to get a job?
 - d. that a student pass a course?
 - e. Yes, certainly ... the model prayer Jesus gave to us includes that request, ‘Give us this day our daily bread’
 - f. we are told to “Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)
 - g. and Peter’s instruction is “casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)
2. but all of these things may be taken as given and granted
 - a. Matthew 6:25-32
 - b. “And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:19)
 - c. for the greatest needs of the church of Jesus Christ and for those who comprise it are spiritual rather than physical
 - d. it is for these that Paul prays and that we should also pray
 - e. that God’s people may
 - (A) realize the strength found in the indwelling Holy Spirit

- (B) have communion with the indwelling Lord Jesus Christ
- (C) love as they realize the immensity of the Christ's love
- (D) and be filled with all the fullness of the Triune God

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ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
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2. Adapted from ‘Big Country,’ by Rev. Jay Herndon — Kerux sermon #12637
3. ‘Commentary of the Epistle to the Ephesians’ by Charles Hodge, *in loc*
4. Expositor's Greek Testament, *in loc*, Ephesians 3:19