

EXPOSITION OF EPHESIANS

Message #11

Ephesians 3:14-21

Just this past week the Presbyterian denomination made a decision that they were not going to support Israel or stand up for Israel. That reminded me of something that happened to Donald Grey Barnhouse, the famed Presbyterian preacher.

Donald Grey Barnhouse was visiting Dallas Theological Seminary and a question and answer time was held at the end of his lecture. One of the students asked Dr. Barnhouse this question: “Dr. Barnhouse, how do you justify your continued presence within the Presbyterian denomination in light of the apostasy into which it has fallen?” Barnhouse responded by citing Revelation 3:2 and saying that as a Bible teacher, he believed he needed to stay to strengthen the things that are ready to die. Dr. Barnhouse was a great Bible teacher but he made a mistake with Revelation 3:2 because that was written to a true church and not an apostate church. Furthermore, men like Lewis Sperry Chafer and J. Gresham Machen left the very denomination in which Barnhouse remained.

It has been estimated that nearly 90% of religious people are in some denomination. Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said he did not believe that one could stay in a denomination and understand God’s truth in a deep way. The denomination is interested in promoting the dictates of the denomination and not a thorough understanding of God’s Word.

I believe that if more believers actually got down on their knees and prayed, asking God to allow them to grow deep in their knowledge of Him and His Word, they would leave every denomination and seek out a church where they would be carefully instructed in the Scriptures. I know this has happened to many of you and I know this did happen to me.

One of the fatal mistakes that many Christians make is that if God wants to do something He will do it with or without our prayers. However, the Scriptures are clear that God has designed a system whereby He is moved by prayer. The statement “you do not have because you do not ask” is perfect proof of that reality (James 4:2).

If we want to grow deep in our relationship with God and in our understanding of God’s grace, we need to pray and ask God. If we want to grow deep in our understanding of the Word of God, we need to pray and ask God. There are times when we need to literally get down on our knees and ask God for the ability to grow deep in our knowledge of Him. If ever you want proof of this, all you have to do is to study the prayers of Paul, especially in a book like Ephesians.

We come now to a second prayer that is prayed by Paul for Grace Age believers. We may recall that his first prayer was for a deep grasp of the Word of God and the grace of God (1:16-19). This second prayer comes after he has just revealed amazing grace doctrine. I like what Dr. Warren Wiersbe said, **the first prayer is about enlightenment and this second prayer is about enablement** (*Be Rich*, p. 81).

What motivated Paul to actually get down on his knees and pray for the church is not what you would normally think or expect. He does not pray for anything material. He does not pray for more numbers. He does not pray for bigger offerings. He does not pray for more programs. He does not pray for more volunteers. He does not even pray for more evangelism.

What he prays is that every believer may come to a deep understanding of the amazing relationship he has with God through the grace of God and through Jesus Christ.

PAUL GOT DOWN ON HIS KNEES AND PRAYED THAT EVERY BELIEVER IN THE CHURCH WOULD COME TO COMPREHEND THE FULL DIMENSIONS OF THE GRACE RELATIONSHIP HE HAS WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

We may observe from **verse 14** that because Paul had been singled out as the apostle who would unlock the doctrine of God's grace, he bowed his knees before God who is the Sovereign God and Father of all and prayed.

Now there are a variety of postures revealed in Scripture in which people prayed: Abraham stood and prayed (Gen. 18:22); Solomon stood and prayed (I Kings 8:22). David sat and prayed (I Chron. 17:16) and Jesus fell on His face and prayed (Matt. 26:39). Paul got down on his knees and he prayed. In fact, there is a prediction that there will come a day when "every knee shall bow and every tongue will highly exalt Jesus Christ" (Philippians 12:10). Paul is reverently and willingly bowing before God the Father to pray for Grace Age believers, which includes us.

There is a huge controversy right now concerning a Bible that is designed to be user friendly to the Muslims. It was to eliminate references to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Woe to any who want to tamper with the Trinity because it clearly shows up in all of Scripture. It is true that in the O.T. God is rarely referred to as Father in only 15 of 1448 references. But in the N.T. God is addressed as Father 245 out of 413 references. Obviously God wants us to realize in this Grace Age that He is God the Father and Jesus Christ is God the Son and the Holy Spirit is God the Spirit.

Now the emphasis of this prayer is that Paul got down on his knees to pray to God the Father who is the Father of "every family" in heaven and on earth (**3:14-15**). **The family to whom Paul is referring is the family of God or the Grace Age Church (2:18-19).** In other words, Paul is bowing before God the Father who is the Father of His entire Church family, those already in heaven and those of us still here on earth. The Church is one big family of God and here on earth we are only separated from the rest of our family by death or rapture. Paul is bowing his knees before the Sovereign God who formed His family in this age of grace.

Now there is some debate about how many things Paul actually prays for. There are three hina (ὅτι) clauses (16, 18, 19) or "so that" clauses that clearly would present three main requests:

REQUEST #1 – Paul prayed that God would strengthen every believer on the inside. **3:16-17**

Now this first request is jam packed with theological truths that really zero in on important doctrine. There are several observations we want to make:

(Observation #1) - Spiritual strength is a grant from God. **3:16a**

Do not overlook this point. Spiritual strength and development comes from God and is a grace grant from God. Spiritual strength and development does not come from us nor anything we physically do. In fact, our physical strength is on the decline. Paul said in II Corinthians 4:16, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.” Every day God is prepared to give us spiritual strength, but we need to pray for it.

Our normal inner heart and mind is not normally spiritually strong. In fact, we are naturally weak, fickle and unstable. To become spiritually strong means God must enable us and empower us and that is exactly what Paul prays.

(Observation #2) - Spiritual strength is a grant that originates from the riches of the glory of God. **3:16b**

Now what this reveals is that there is potentially a lot of power available for every one of us. God stands ready to grant us spiritual strength and power according to His heavenly wealth and glory. Paul did not want believers having just a little power, just enough to get by; he wanted them displaying tremendous power so they could be productive.

(Observation #3) - Spiritual strength is a power that comes by the Holy Spirit. **3:16c**

Now notice where spiritual power is derived, through the Holy Spirit. The more we yield to the Holy Spirit the more powerful we will become. The more we yield to the Holy Spirit the more power God will grant to us.

Paul wanted every believer to be an active demonstration of the power of God. No believer needs to ever lack the power he needs to grow strong and deep, because God has given every believer His Spirit.

There are two Greek words used for power here: “strengthened” (δυναμει) and “power” (κραταιω). The first word “strengthen” refers to power, ability and capability and the second word “power” refers to strength and power that comes through exercise. You do get stronger in any discipline the more you exercise.

So Paul’s prayer is that we will exercise the power and strength we have by means of the Holy Spirit. Paul’s prayer is that we will be a strong Holy Spirit-empowered demonstration of grace. The agent that enables us to become a powerful strong believer is the Holy Spirit.

(Observation #4) - Spiritual strength takes place inside a person. **3:16d**

Now the strength Paul is speaking about is not physical strength, but an inner strength. The inner man refers to the inner heart and mind of a believer. I have seen believers in a hospital room physically shot but spiritually strong. Real spirituality is not external, it is internal.

(Observation #5) - Spiritual strength results in a continual heart faith in Jesus Christ. **3:17a**

The word “indwell” is somewhat of a rare word. It means to settle and inhabit and indwell (G.Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, pp. 241-242). The prayer is that we may enjoy more and more of Jesus Christ in our life in our inner man to the point that our own hearts, minds and wills would be totally controlled by Jesus Christ. Paul is praying that we would be so spiritually strong in our hearts and minds and wills, that Jesus Christ would be permanently settled in every thing we think, say and do. Now we know that sinless perfectionism is impossible. But apparently it is possible to be so Christ-controlled that He accomplishes everything He wants with us and through us. It is possible that His desires and goals become ours.

This is all applied by faith. So as the believer continually believes and applies the Scriptures, Jesus Christ continually maintains a continual relationship with the believer. When one is growing deep and strong, one will have a deep, developed faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ will become the controlling factor of the believer’s life by faith. Christ will be so at home in a believer’s heart and mind that they will live in close fellowship together.

(Observation #6) - Spiritual strength results in us being rooted and grounded in love . **3:17b**

Now the word “rooted” is an agricultural term and the word “grounded” is an architectural term. Paul prays that the roots and the foundation of our spirituality will grow so deep that love dominates our lives and our church. A true spiritual church loves all people equally. It doesn’t matter about the race or the social status or the economic status. In a spiritually strong church people are loved.

The reason was so that Jesus Christ could dwell in hearts by faith. It is a real deep understanding of God’s Word that realizes our relationship with God is by faith and not by vision or sight of works. Grace is a real “faith based operation.”

REQUEST #2 – Paul prayed that God would let us comprehend the magnitude of our grace relationship with Him. **3:18**

Now before we tackle this, I want to point out that true spirituality is interested in comprehending God’s truth. Paul is praying for a strong grasp at a very deep level. What this tells us is that if we are to truly have a deep spirituality, we must have a deep grasp of God’s Word. Deep spirituality demands careful thought. In fact, as one writer observed, **biblical Christianity is a thinking man’s religion.**

It doesn’t take any brains to fall down on the ground five times a day and face the east. It doesn’t take any brains to make the sign of a cross. It doesn’t take any brains to raise your hands and wave them or stand up and sway back and forth. It doesn’t take any brains to clap to some band. However, **to comprehend biblical Christianity and God’s grace requires careful thought.**

Paul prayed that every believer “all the saints” would have the capability and strength to carefully understand and comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of something.

Now many students have read this verse and wonder what exactly are we to grasp the breadth, depth, height and width of? Well the dimensions listed here would be in contextual reference to a building and since the people who comprise the Church in the Grace Age are the building, Paul is praying that we will grasp the magnitude and the dimensions of the grace relationship we have with God that is rooted and grounded in His love.

If we put this into an Ephesians' context, the **breadth of God's grace/love** would be the incorporation of all sinners, both Jews and Gentiles in Christ to form the Church.

The **length of God's grace/love** would be we were chosen from before the foundation of the world and that choice goes on forever in the ages to come. In other words the length of grace is from eternity past to eternity future.

The **height of God's grace/love** would be the fact that we are already citizens of heaven and are seated high in heavenly places.

The **depth of God's grace/love** would be the depths of our sin and depravity which left us dead in our relationship with God heading to hell.

The love and grace of God is wide enough to reach the whole world; it is long enough to stretch from eternity to eternity; it is high enough to actually seat sinners both Jews and Gentiles in the heavenlies and it is deep enough to raise depraved sinners heading for hell under the power of Satan to the highest levels for the glory of God.

Paul is praying that we will come to understand the full magnitude of what has happened to us in grace.

REQUEST #3 – Paul prayed that we would know the love of Christ. **3:19**

By virtue of the fact that this grace love surpasses knowledge indicates that we will never know this completely. How does the love of Christ surpass knowledge? The answer is by first hand experience. Knowledge is critical to understanding the love of God, but it is practical experience that really surpasses knowledge.

I doubt any of us here begin to grasp how much Jesus Christ loves us. He loved us when we were deep in sin enough to die for us to save us and He loves us so much that He wants to actually permanently fellowship with us forever.

Think about this with all of your personality quirks and problems—Jesus Christ loves you and lives in you. When we fail or sin, think about this, Jesus Christ loves you and wants to forgive you and use you. Paul prays that we would experience that love.

When we begin to grasp grace and we begin to grasp the love of Christ, we begin to be full of God and not ourselves. To be full of God means we are not full of ourselves. We are focused on God's Word, God's love and God's grace. God in our intellect and our emotions and our will.

What a prayer. As Paul brought the doctrinal section to a close, he broke out into a doxology. One commentator said you could regard this doxology as a conclusion to the whole book. In **verses 20-21**, Paul praises God.

Praise Part #1 - Paul praises God because God's ability to answer our requests is greater than our ability to ask requests. **3:20**

God's capacity to meet our needs in any area exceeds anything we can ask in prayer or even conceive in our minds. We cannot ask God for too much, ever. We cannot ask God for His help, His wisdom, His forgiveness or His grace too many times. God is able to do far above and beyond all we ask or even think.

Why? Because He has a power working in us that would enable us to become powerful people.

Praise Part #2 - Paul praises God and Jesus Christ in that He is to receive the glory in the church and the generations to come. **3:21**

When one is truly spiritually deep, one realizes God and Jesus Christ are to be glorified in the church and in all generations.

Notice where it is that God will be praised and glorified "in Christ Jesus." If anyone from any generation is to glorify God, they must be "in Christ." How does one get into Christ? Paul has already answered that: "For by grace you have been saved by faith..."