

Ephesians 3:14-21

Ephesians
Filled With God's Fullness

If you ever want to know where somebody's priorities lie, try listening to their prayers. If they don't pray at all, or they only pray when a disaster strikes, you can figure that God's not on their priority list.

If they pray, but all their prayers are formal and memorized, they might be religious, but their priorities don't revolve around an intimate relationship with God.

If they pray like they know God but all their prayers center on health and material things you can see that their prime concern isn't spiritual.

You can learn a whole lot about a person by listening in on their prayers.

We pray about what concerns us, and we're evidently not very concerned about those things that we don't include in our prayers.

With that in mind, the prayers in the Bible become very significant. The prayers show us the character and the heart of the people doing the praying.

In the letter to the Ephesians, which we've been studying, there's two prayers listed, one in chapter one, which we've already seen, and one in chapter 3 that we're going to look at today.

Both of these prayers give us a pattern. Both of them expose us a little different mindset about prayer and priorities than we usually have.

Praying for physical well being, financial issues, safety, and protection are all legitimate things which should be a regular part of a Christian's prayer life.

And yet, what we're going to see today is high priority prayer but it doesn't touch on any of these physical things.

Ephesians is a book of riches. It tells us our inheritance, our wealth, what we possess in Christ as believers.

The whole purpose of the first 3 chapters is to instruct and enlighten us to that wealth. God wants everyone who has trusted in His Son to know who they are and

what resources they have so that the commands that are going to come up in chapters 4, 5, & 6 will be possible for us to carry out.

Now, this prayer that we're going to look at today is not just a repetition of the prayer we saw back in chapter one. There's an obvious and distinct and purposeful difference between the two.

The prayer in chapter one was for enlightenment. This one's going to focus on enablement. It's not so much a matter of knowing this time as it is being.

It's kind of grabbing on to what God has for us by faith and making it a vital part of our lives. God is saying, "I want you to get your hands on your wealth, realize how vast it is and start to use it. I want you to begin by understanding my awesomeness."

Open your Bibles to Ephesians chapter 3 pg 1039

I. Understanding God's Awesomeness Will Bring Us To Worship

As we begin in verse 14 of Ephesians Chapter 3 we find the author, who was an apostle named Paul, beginning the introduction to his prayer with a phrase he used 13 verses ago. He says... **Read vs. 14**

Back in verse 1 of this chapter Paul had written "for this reason" but then instead of following through with his prayer, he had digressed to challenge these first century Christians not to get discouraged because he was thrown in jail for his faith.

Verse 2 through 13 are like a parenthesis talking about God's plan and purpose, and then in verse 14 the Apostle picks up his train of thought.

So, here's the question. What is it that drives Paul to prayer? The main theme that he's been expounding is the purpose of God in the world.

God is working to bring all things under the headship of Jesus Christ and blesses us through His grace when we become members of His body, or His church, through faith in Christ.

So the cause of Paul's prayer is the truth that he's already understood from God. That's why the Bible and prayer always have to go together. It's in the Bible that we

find out what God's purpose and will is, then our prayers are to be molded and based on God's revealed will.

And so Paul is saying, because I understand what God is doing in his church I bow my knees before him in prayer.

It might not seem so significant to us to think of someone bowing their knees to God in prayer, but remember, Jewish men normally stood up to pray.

If you've every seen pictures of the wailing wall in Jerusalem you've seen crowds of men standing at the wall, swaying and rocking on their feet while they read their prayers. No one kneels.

That's how Paul, a first century Jewish man, would have traditionally prayed. But for some reason he changed his posture. There are a few occasions where the Bible records people kneeling to pray and each one is a very deeply moving incident.

When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane Luke 22:41 he knelt down and prayed.

I think that its safe to conclude that this man was very deeply moved at this point. Moved because of his knowledge of God working his life and in the life of all believers. God's awesomeness causes Paul to worship.

I like Stuart Briscoe's comment at this point in his commentary on Ephesians. He says, "This I find to be very challenging. How rare it is for people to be driven to their knees by nothing other than a consideration of what God has said.

When's the last time you fell to your knees in prayer before God just because you were struck with the beauty and the power of God's working in your life?

Briscoe goes on to say - "In many instances it is impossible to get people to be alert to what God is saying even when they take the time to come out to church. They give the impression that the whole thing is something of a bore, and their ill-disguised yawns and barely concealed glances at their watches after the first 20 minutes of the sermon show that what ever else is happening they will not be sinking to their knees when the exposition is complete."

And then just in case you think, "Boy, he's pretty hard on congregations" he writes,

“As a preacher of the Word, I also search my own heart concerning my attitude to the things that God has shown me and wonder so often how I can be so little moved by the immensity of his grace and the majesty of his cosmic plan.”

Ephesians is all about the cosmic plan of God. How is it that we can be so indifferent, so apathetic towards such glorious, dynamic truth about this awesome God we serve?

May God grant us the attitude of Paul.

He bows his knees “to the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom...” **Read vs. 15**

Now if you were reading this letter in Greek as Paul wrote it you’d quickly pick up on a play on words that he uses.

The “father” in verse 14 is *pater*

The “family” in verse 15 is *patria* (We talk about paternity cases)

These words are obviously derived from one another. “The father from whom all fatherhood derives its name.”

The father in heaven is the ultimate example of fatherhood. The perfect example. He’s totally committed to the growth and maturity of his children. He’s approachable at any time and at any place.

A really huge part of understanding the awesomeness of God is understanding the fatherhood of God.

As God loved and responded to Jesus Christ, God loves and responds to us who are in Christ. And here’s Paul, drawn by the divine fatherhood. He loved to talk to the Father because he knew that God was concerned and God was available.

Of course not everybody has had a good experience with their father. Some people never knew their father. Some people kind of wish they didn’t know their father.

Don’t judge God the Father by your father. God is unique. He’s the only one who’s the perfect father.

Now that's the introduction to this prayer.

Now that Paul's laid some important groundwork he proceeds to actually pray the substance of his prayer.

There are four requests in Paul's prayer, but they aren't isolated or unattached.

They're like steps. Each one provides the basis for the next. He prays that the inner man would have spiritual strength, which will, in turn, lead to a deep experience with Christ. This deeper experience will enable believers to get a hold of God's love, which will result in their being filled with all the fullness of God.

- I. Understanding God's Awesomeness Will Bring Us To Worship*
- II. Understanding God's Awesomeness will Give Us A Passion To See Him Known In All His Fullness*

The first request is found in verse 16, when Paul asks... **Read vs 16**

Now these requests are going to be unique, they are going to be a bit lofty, and they are going to sound just a little bit abstract.

Because of that, there's a temptation to just pass over these verses as if they couldn't possibly be true for us. We think maybe for Paul, the super Christian. Maybe for Jesus, the Son of God. But for just plain old me, they're just not possible.

And yet, as we read through here I want you to remember that Paul is making this request for the average guys in the church at Ephesus.

He's not saying, "I pray this for your pastor, or elders, or leadership team." This is for all of us. And notice he asks according to the riches of God's glory. The words "according to" show proportion.

When I was going to college I worked pumping gas in Hollywood, Fl. And occasionally a very wealthy individual would come in (there were lots of those around that area) and when I was finished pumping the gas, cleaning the windshield and checked the oil one of these fellows would flip me a quarter and say, "Here son, buy yourself a cigar." (Which is ironic since E. Regensburg and Sons was our family cigar business for decades.)

But they were giving me out of their riches, but they weren't giving to me according to their riches.

Every year Forbes magazine publishes it's annual list of the 400 richest Americans. This year was a first. All the people on the list were billionaires. Their combined net worth was \$1.25 trillion.

Now if the number 1 guy on the list, William Henry Gates III, who is worth \$53 billion gives you a blank check and says "make it out for any amount you need," that's according to, or in proportion to, His riches. And that's the way God deals with us.

Each of these requests apply to us. Each one of these things are possible for our own lives. This is high priority for Paul to pray for other Christians because God is able to answer according to his riches.

But, what does it mean to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man?

In the Bible the inner man is the spiritual part of a person. In Chapter 2 we were told that all of us are by nature spiritually dead and separated from God.

When we receive Jesus Christ as Savior there's a spiritual birth that takes place. There's a new creation that takes place within us that enables us to communicate with God. But that inner person needs to be strengthened.

In Galatians 5 we're that the "inner person" the spirit, and the "outer person" our body of flesh with its desires are in conflict with each other.

Whoever's the strongest is going rule our life. That's why its vital that we be strengthened with God's power through his Spirit.

When Jesus was here on earth, walking on the planet as a man, He did everything in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Book of Acts is a history of the church and if you read through the book you'll find 59 references to the Holy Spirit. It's the person of the Holy Spirit that strengthens and empowers us to live for Christ.

There is no excuse for Christians to walk around defeated with their chin on the ground.

Now you might say, “Ed this all sounds so abstract, so pie in the sky.” To be strengthened by God’s spirit in the inner man. How does it work?

As you go through the New Testament you find some unique events taking place.

At one point Paul sang in prison with a bleeding back. At one point he returned to a city where he just suffered a stoning. Here’s a guy who’s whole life becomes one crisis after another and he keeps plugging away for God.

How could anyone be so resilient and persistent in the midst of unbelievably difficult and dangerous circumstances?

Because while his physical body was experiencing pain, his inner self was being renewed. While life and strength were being sapped from the outer, the Holy Spirit was pouring His life into the inner. That’s the kind of real, tangible, practical, strength the Holy Spirit gives. And that’s what Paul prayed for in the Ephesian church.

What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit strengthen the inner person? It means that our spiritual faculties are controlled by God, and that we’re exercising them and growing in the Word.

It’s only when we yield to the Holy Spirit and let him control the inner man that we succeed in living to the glory of God.

This means feeding the inner man the truths of the Bible, praying, worshiping, practicing loving obedience.

This is the only thing that’s going to get you through the problems of life with God’s viewpoint. If you go day after day without standing on His Truth, sooner or later you are going to run into something that’s more than you can handle and your going to collapse. How vital this is to be strengthened in the inner man.

The 2nd request that Paul makes for the Ephesians is for depth. He writes in verse 17 of Ephesians... **Read 17**

Now at first that might seem like a strange request. These people are believers in Jesus Christ. That means that Jesus Christ lives within them.

Colossians 1:27 says that our glory is “Christ in you.” The Bible says our bodies are the temple of God. Jesus Christ comes to live in us through the Spirit.

So then why this prayer?

Well the real key is found in the word “dwell.” It’s the translation of a Greek compound word *katoikeo*. The verb *oikeo* means “to live as in a house.” This is *oikeo* with the preposition *kata* which means “down.”

The word actually means “to settle down, to be at home.” Not just live, but dwell.

The heart in the Bible is the center of our beings. Heart has to do with our minds and especially our will.

And what Paul is praying is that Christ might truly be at home at and settle down in the lives of believers. Not just like one who is living there temporarily as a guest, but as part of the family.

The prayer is that there’d be a natural, intimate relationship between Jesus Christ and His children.

Remember Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord. And the only way He can ever be settled down in your life is if your life is yielded to his Lordship.

So by faith we are to appropriate what Christ has provided for us. We rely on him to live his life in and through us.

And let me just say this - please don’t take this verse or one like Revelation 3:20 out of context and tell those who have not yet received Christ that they need to ask Jesus into their heart to be forgiven of their sins.

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus gives this invitation. He says, *Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.*

Revelation 3:20 is talking about fellowship with Christ. Jesus is saying these words to a church. He’s speaking to the Christians there and what He’s saying is, “You think your walking with me but your not. You’ve become indifferent to me. But I’m

standing at the door of your church, of your meeting place, just waiting to step in and have fellowship with you. He says, "I'll come in to him," not "into him."

Both Ephesians 3:17 and Revelation 3:20 are just amazingly precious verses for Christians. Don't rob them of their true meaning by telling people that they need to ask Jesus into their heart to be saved. No one was ever saved by simply asking Jesus into their heart or their life. They might have coupled those words with personal faith and been saved but why risk confusing people?

It's completely possible for person to pray words like, "Jesus come into my heart," or "God take control of my life" and not have any concept of what it means to trust Jesus Christ.

God indwells our bodies as a result of salvation but his indwelling doesn't cause our salvation.

Be careful of sharing an unclear message with people that might produce a religious response (like yea, I know I messed up my life, and now I want God to straighten it out) without a clear understanding in their minds of the gospel. The invitation is *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be save.*

Paul makes it very obvious and very clear that these are believers to whom he is writing, and his prayer is that they, along with you and I, might have Christ at complete peace and totally settled in our hearts.

Not just a surface relationship but an ever deepening fellowship.

Now the 3rd of these requests, and notice how they build one upon another, is that believers might comprehend something.

Picking back up in verse 17b Read 17b-19

Why does Paul pray that Christ would control and strengthen us? So that we'd be filled with all the fullness of God.

When the Holy Spirit has empowered you inwardly and Jesus Christ is dwelling peacefully and naturally in control of your heart you will have deep roots, a firm foundation in love.

And when you're at that point, and here's the heart of his request, you'll be able to comprehend the width, the length, the depth and the height and to know the love of Christ.

But there's a problem with the word "comprehend."

"To comprehend" something is to know and understand it. The Greek word that Paul uses *katalambano* means "to seize," "to possess as one's own."

You can understand something without really making it your own, can't you?

There is a tendency for us approach biblical truth like we do fireworks on the 4th of July.

We read the Bible or we listen to a sermon and we say "Ohh, that's great. Ahh, I really like that. That's exciting."

There's some really amazing heavenly truth that can flash before you when you get into the Bible. But when the sermon's over or the Bible study winds down it's like we pack up our blankets and go home. Show's over!

This Apostle's prayer is that that would never happen to us but that we'd apprehend the love of Christ in all its dimensions and not just appreciate it, but make it ours personally.

The love of Christ is "broad" enough to encompass everybody on the planet. It's "long" enough to last for eternity, "deep" enough to reach the lowest sinner, and "high" enough to exalt him to heaven.

Apprehend that and you'll know the love of Christ that passes knowledge. What a paradox!

In its fullest sense we can't know the love of Christ. It's too overwhelming. It's too vast. It surpasses our knowledge. it's way bigger than our puny intellect can fathom.

And yet, in another sense we can know it and we can live in it and by it. We appropriate God's love in its fullness even though it surpasses what our little brains

can take in.

No believer in Jesus ever has to worry about having inadequate spiritual resources to meet the demands of life.

There's no doubt about it, we're going to feel inadequate. There's going to be plenty of times that we're going to say, "I can't do this."

But if we look to God for spiritual strength, and spiritual depth, we'll be able to get our hands on all the resources of God's love and grace. No wonder Paul told the Philippians "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

And so what's the result of all this? What's the fourth and final step in Paul's prayer?

The end of verse 19, *"That you may be filled with all the fullness of God."*

Nature hates a vacuum. It always wants to fill it in with air or water or whatever is around. A vacuum is an unnatural state. The same is true in our lives.

Believe me we're going to try to fill our lives with something and if it isn't God then it's going to be something temporary that never really satisfies.

Please don't relegate this last petition of Paul to your file of Paul's unrealistic requests. Please don't say, "This is for someone else, it can't possibly be true for me in my life."

Remember again, Paul is praying this for a group of average Christians living in 1st century Asia, who had a lot less chance for biblical input than you and I do.

They didn't have Bibles in book form. They didn't have most of the New Testament because it wasn't complete.

The average person couldn't afford their own personal copy of the entire Old Testament. They didn't have radio programs, messages on CD and podcasts, Christian book stores, Bible study books, and yet Paul believed that they would be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now you might wonder how could this be? How would a human being contain God in His fullness?

In Paul's letter to the Colossians he told them that "In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Now in Ephesians we learn that Christ lives in us.

If Christ is the fullness of God then we're filled with God's fullness when we're filled with Christ. In Jesus Christ dwells all the fullness of the godhead because all the attributes, or characteristics of God, are found in Jesus Christ.

If Christ lives in us and we're strengthened by the Holy Spirit, and enabled to grasp Christ's love, then we can be filled with the characteristics of God.

God wants us to be filled with the character and the attitude and the disposition of Jesus Christ. And this prayer is that within the limits of our own beings, the living God might show his love and power and wisdom and grace.

And then finally just to make absolutely certain that there aren't any lingering doubts about the realism of this prayer, Paul concludes with a doxology.

The word "doxology" comes from 2 Greek words.

Doxa means "glory" and *lego* means "to speak."

Doxology means speaking about the glory of God. Giving praise to God for who he is.

- I. *Understanding God's Awesomeness Will Bring Us To Worship*
- II. *Understanding God's Awesomeness Will Give Us A Passion To See Him Known In All His Fullness*
- III. *Understanding God's Awesomeness Will Cause Us To Exalt Him*

Read vs 20-21

We read over this prayer and we say "Man, I am so far from God's ideal that there is no way this prayer could have any chance of being fulfilled in my life."

And then Paul reminds us that the God of the universe can do exceeding abundantly (infinity) more than we would ever ask, or ever think.

According to His power that's now working in us. And ultimately He gets the glory, for ever and ever through his church.

There's no question about what Paul really counted as important in life, is there? He

had an eye for what was lasting, what was eternal, what really mattered.

Are you joining in this great doxology? Have you looked at the possibilities that are open for you in Christ as this very moment? And have you prayed for yourself and others and asked for strength and depth and apprehension and fullness.

Is God real to you? And is His glory your ultimate priority?