

Series: Ephesians: *The Christian Mystery and Mission*

Week 10

CDOBC – beginning on 2/6/11

Title: “Paul’s Power Prayer”

Ephesians 3:14-21 ~ April 10, 2011

OBJECTIVE: To help believers understand the power and love of God in their life.

Announcements

- Welcome / guests – communication cards
- VBS Sign-ups continue today
- Baptism May 22nd
- Baby / Child Dedication May 8th – Mother’s Day

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 3:14-21

Opening prayer

All in the family vs. 14-15

All in the family TV show – Archie, his wife Edith couldn’t have been more different from each other. Then there was their daughter, Gloria, and her ex-husband, Mike, also known as “Meathead”. What a mix of characters!

Did you ever look at the rest of your family and think how you arrived with this group? That was the joke when I was growing up since at the time, I was the only one with blond hair. I was also more of an extrovert than my parents or my brother...then there were the grades in school which also accentuated the differences I had with the others.

Some Christians have that same feeling when they come to church. They sit in church and look around at the others here – and they feel like they’re different than everyone else...and maybe they are! Or, maybe you’re a Christian that doesn’t like crowds, so coming to church is a bit uncomfortable because you would rather be alone or in a much smaller group(see Heb. 10:25).

Now these two examples of not fitting in are more positive in nature than the things the Apostle Paul was dealing with in the first century. He was dealing with the severe hatred and segregation of races and nationalities that was causing great pain and division in the church.

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father...

“For this reason” – refers back to chapter 2 and what he had revealed regarding the new unity that the Jew and Gentile now have in Christ. Gentiles were formerly “...excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.”(2:12). Paul tried to begin this wonderful prayer in 3:1, but was diverted by the Holy Spirit to repeat the reality of the unity every believer has in Christ, which is the great mystery of the church.

Now Paul is able (vs. 14) to begin his prayer for the Ephesian believers – and he begins stating his posture before God the Father in this prayer. There is no right or wrong posture for prayer, but most Jews would pray standing up – with their arms raised up and their palms facing up. The most important thing is not your physical posture, but the posture of your heart.

However, there are many prayers recorded in Scripture that have the person standing, sitting, kneeling, and lying face down. Paul’s posture here of kneeling indicates Paul’s recognition of God’s majesty and sovereignty. Just as one would bow or prostrate themselves before a king, Paul bows down before the Lord in prayer. His posture also demonstrates his passion – the urgency of his prayer. What he has just talked about in chapter 2 – how Christ has “...destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...” between Jew and Gentile, Paul realizes how difficult it will be for the Ephesian believers to apply this truth in their life – for the two groups to become unified. So often, we may know the truth of

God's Word, but applying His truth to our life is a greater challenge than learning it!

Paul knew they will face enormous pressures both from outside the church and from within the church – to return to the old, sinful attitudes toward one another. So Paul is on his knees before God, begging and pleading on their behalf.

Vs. 15 – “from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.”

This verse takes us right back to the truth of chapter 2 and vs. 1-13 of chapter 3. Whether they were of Jewish lineage – or from a Gentile lineage – when they came to Christ, they were now in a new family – the family of God. They have a new Father, and they have a new name not of earthly origin, but one of Heavenly origin – the name of Christ.

They were now “...members of God's household...”(2:19) – through their faith in Christ, they were all in the same family now.

God's strength and power in daily life vs. 16-17a

(Read vs. 16-17a)

His first request is that out of “His glorious riches” – that God would strengthen and empower us through His Spirit. Have you ever prayed for something – and when God answered your prayer, you wanted a ‘re-do’ on your prayer because you realized that you asked for too little? You probably lacked the faith that God could answer your small request – and when He did and it seemed so effortless for Him, you realized you short-sold yourself. I would submit that Paul does not short-sell his prayer for you here. He begins at the top – and asks God to answer his prayer “...out of His glorious riches...”. How much does God have? Is there a limit to the wealth or the riches of God? No – so Paul asks that God would do these things out of His limitless riches!

“...strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being...”

The word for strengthen is in the passive voice in the Greek, meaning that God would strengthen us – we are not strengthening ourselves. However, we must desire God to strengthen us – we must be willing to be strengthened. Being strengthened in the power of God is not in our own flesh – but through the Holy Spirit – and it occurs in our “inner being”. What does Paul mean by this? William Barclay says the Greeks understood the inner being as referring to one of three things. It could refer to human reason, our conscience, or to our will. (The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians, The New Daily Study

Bible, by William Barclay, p. 150-151)

The strengthening Paul prays for here is not a physical strength, but a spiritual strength that we need to obey Christ. He knew the Ephesians (and us) would be tempted to sin not only by following the desires of the flesh – but also the temptation to fall back into the hatred and segregation of others.

“...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”

At first reading, since we know the people Paul was writing to were believers in Christ, this seems like an unnecessary repetition because Christ would have already resided in their hearts due to their initial faith. The Bible clearly teaches that each believer, at the moment of their conversion, receives the Holy Spirit and is in Christ – adopted into the family of God, sealed with the Holy Spirit, etc. (see Eph. 1). So what is Paul describing here? In Greek, the word he uses which is translated “dwell” has the idea of being welcomed into someone’s home. James Montgomery Boice says that this is something the Christian *“...grow(s) into as Christ takes stronger and fuller possession of every corner of their lives...The prayer is that Christ might settle down in their hearts and control them as the rightful owner.”* (Ephesians, An Expositional Commentary, by

James Montgomery Boice, p. 110)

Paul is praying not only that we would have faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sins(this is assumed), but that we would truly

allow God to strengthen us and empower us through His Spirit – so that our life would be transformed into a place where Christ is residing always. There is a big difference between a believer who is trusting Christ for their salvation, but not trusting Christ with their daily decisions – and a believer who is allowing the strength of God and truth of God to guide their actions and attitudes each day.

A life established by Christ's love vs. 17b-19

(Read vs. 17b-19)

Paul mixes his metaphors here – “rooted” is from the world of botany, and “established” (‘grounded’ NASB, KJV) is from the world of architecture. What do these metaphors mean?

“rooted” – roots serve two primary purposes. **First**, it’s through the roots of a plant that it gains nourishment and water. **Second**, the roots reach down deep into the soil and hold the plant firmly in place. So, Paul is praying that we will put our roots deep into the love of Christ and be fed by His love and stabilized in the storms of life by His love.

“established” (“grounded”) is from architecture, and refers to a strong foundation. A good foundation is vital for the strength of the entire building. Earlier, in 2:20 Paul referred to the “...foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.” The thought here in 3:17 is similar – but the emphasis is on the love of Christ.

Paul then asks that we would have the power – with all the saints (all believers – not special believers) – to *know what we can't know!* Paul gives us a paradox here – to emphasize the greatness of God's love. He emphasizes the knowing of God's love through experience in the first term he uses, and knowledge or understanding of God's love with the second term he uses. If you are a believer, you have experienced the love of God through

Christ – Rom. 5:8 – “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Yet at the same time, we can't understand his love for us! Why He loves us we don't know – His love for us doesn't make sense – but we know He does because of Christ and His death on the cross! The description or dimensions of God's love that Paul gives in vs. 18 is his way of describing it's immensity – that God's love cannot be contained...it is everywhere and you can't be anywhere on this planet that His love can't reach you! Many preachers over the centuries have attached meaning to the dimensions – John Stott has the best meaning I have seen:

“...the love of Christ is ‘broad’ enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jew and Gentiles), ‘long’ enough to last for eternity, ‘deep’ enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and ‘high’ enough to exalt him to heaven.” (John Stott, quoted in Ephesians, An Expositional

Commentary, by James Montgomery Boice, p. 111)

“...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

This is an amazing statement by Paul. “May be filled” is conditional – something that might happen. To understand this verse, it's important we understand that in Christ the fullness of God dwells in Him. Col. 1:19 “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Him...”

So, for Paul to ask God that we would be filled with the fullness of God is another way of encouraging us to be completely focused on Christ and our relationship to Christ. As believers, we are ‘in Christ’ and Christ is ‘in us’.

Praising God's greatness and generosity vs. 20-21

(Read vs. 20-21)

This is one of the great benedictions in the N.T. After discussing our unity in God as our Father, after asking God to strengthen His children so their life can be transformed into a comfortable place

for Christ, Paul then asks that we would be rooted and established in love and that we would know the unknowable love of God in all its magnitude. After scaling to the spiritual heights of these things, and thinking of the fullness of God in us...he naturally speaks of the great things God can do more than we can ever imagine.

Do you ever limit God? Do you ever limit what God can do in your life – in your family – in this church?

Our problem, spiritually, is often connected to a low view of God's interest in us and His interest in working amazing and miraculous things in our life.

In the end, Paul focus' our thoughts on the church – and how God is glorified in the church. He also includes Christ because the glories of the church are directly connected to Christ – and we will glorify God forever in heaven because of the work of Christ in and through the church.

Application

Admit your sins to God.

Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins.

Choose / Commit to following Christ each day.

Move beyond your salvation – and live with the strength and love of Christ.

Closing Prayer

Transition to New Member Welcome