

A Powerful Prayer

Ephesians 3

- 14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,
16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,
17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height;
19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,
21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Wow! What a prayer! Verse 20 has always fascinated me. **“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”** Let me ask you, is God doing exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think in your life and in our church? I tell you what, that’s the kind of relationship with Jesus that I want. That’s the experience I want for our church.

That kind of church is one that brings glory to God, **“to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”** (3:21). If we want to find ourselves in the reality of verse 20 where our life and church are so powerful that they bring glory to Christ, we have to start with the prayer of verses 14-19.

What a prayer! It will take us a while to work our way through what Paul prays for this Ephesian church. Stop for a moment and let’s remember where Paul is as he prays this prayer. Paul is in prison, you see him mention that in 3:1, **“For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles;”** and again in verse 13, **“Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.”** Paul does not want the Ephesian believers to lose heart, to become discouraged. Paul has spent the first three chapters of this letter instructing the believers, reminding us who we are in Christ. Now he prays that they will get it, and live it.

I. Why Paul Prayed. (3:14).

Verse 14 says very clearly, **“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

What reason? Remember, he started this prayer in verse 1. Paul starts the prayer in verse 1, then stops and puts a parenthetical pause for 12 or 13 verses. Then he picks it back up in verse 14. He says in verse 1, **“For this reason I,**

Paul. We can figure out what the reason is if we go back to chapter 2. There are some things he has told them in chapter 2 that he wants them to understand. He wants them to not just mentally know them, but he wants them to live in the reality of those things. Look at 2:5. He says,

" even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

We have been made alive in Jesus Christ by God's grace. Go down to verse 10:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."

We are new creations, God's masterwork of grace, so that we could live out the Christ-life in our daily walk with Him. Drop down to verse 19:

"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God."

We are God's family, all of us together, because Christ has broken down the barriers that divided us and made peace through His cross. Then Paul sort of wraps it up in verse 22 before he comes into verse 1 of chapter 3. He says,

" in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."

Having reminded ourselves of all that, what is the reason Paul prays? He could easily be saying, *"You know that I am a prisoner, and suffering for you, but don't lose heart because you are God's dwelling on this earth, made alive in Jesus Christ, His workmanship, a part of His family! Don't be discouraged! I'm a prisoner and I'm not discouraged! I'm praying for you!"*

Paul has spent three chapters telling the people at Ephesus who they are in Christ and the spiritual riches they have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he says, since you are God's dwelling on this earth, for this reason, I bow my knees before the Father. He is trying to tell them, *"I am just praying that all I taught you can start becoming reality as you walk and live the Christian life."*

Do you realize who you are and what you have in Jesus Christ? Have you been listening all these weeks? Is it starting to sink in? Maybe you don't realize what you have, or maybe you do, but you are not living in the reality of what that means on a day by day basis. Paul says, *"For this reason, I don't want you to just know it. I want you to live in it, in the reality of what I have just taught you."*

II. How Paul Prayed. (3:14).

"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A. Posture of Paul's Prayer (3:14).

First of all, we see the posture of Paul's prayer. He says, **"I bow my knees to the Father."**

What is significant about bowing your knees? Is that the only way or the best way to pray? I ran across a humorous poem called:

THE PRAYER OF CYRUS BROWN
"The proper way for a man to pray,"

Said Deacon Lemuel Keyes,
"And the only proper attitude
Is down upon his knees."

"No, I should say the way to pray,"
Said Rev. Doctor Wise,
"Is standing straight with outstretched arms
And rapt and upturned eyes."

"Oh, no; no, no," said Elder Slow,
"Such posture is too proud:
A man should pray with eyes fast closed
And head contritely bowed."

"It seems to me his hands should be
Austerely clasped in front.
With both thumbs pointing toward the ground,"
Said Rev. Doctor Blunt.

"Las' year I fell in Hodgkin's well
Head first," said Cyrus Brown,
"With both my heels a-stickin' up,
My head a-pinting down;

"An' I made a prayer right then an' there--
Best prayer I ever said,
The prayingest prayer I ever prayed,
A-standing on my head."
(Sam Walter Foss)

You don't have to kneel down every time you pray. It does not mean that you are any more or any less spiritual than somebody else if you are standing and they are kneeling. In looking into this study, I found several places in Scripture where they stood with their hands raised to heaven, just as humble in their hearts as anyone is who kneels or bows down before the Father. But when they bowed down, it signified something, it showed the attitude of their heart.

What does bowing our knees signify?

1. Humble Submission.

Bowing our knees before the Father signifies, first of all, a humble submission to a higher authority. It shows that the one who bows down and prays is in the presence of the ultimate authority. Turn to Psalm 95:1-6. This shows you the attitude of someone who comes before the Father. This is what you realize about Him.

- 1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.**
- 2 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.**
- 3 For the LORD is the great God, And the great King above all gods.**

4 In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also.

5 The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land.

Since He is all of these things and since He is absolutely sovereign and has absolute authority, it says in verse 6,

6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker.

7 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand.

Kneeling is the humble attitude of a person who recognizes how great God is. The bowing of the knee is a sense of submission to a higher authority. You are saying, "God, whatever you want is what I want."

That is what bowing the knee means. You can do that in whatever position you are in as long as your heart is overwhelmed with who it is you are talking to.

2. Intense Passion.

Secondly, it signifies an intense passion in prayer. When a person will fall down on their knees, it is a picture of intensity, of passion. In Ezra 9:5-6, Ezra was appalled and heart-broken over hearing of the intermarriage of the Israelites with the pagan neighbors.

5 At the evening sacrifice I arose from my fasting; and having torn my garment and my robe, I fell on my knees and spread out my hands to the LORD my God.

6 And I said: "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens.

Ezra fell down on his knees and stretched out his hands in confession to the Lord on their behalf. He was very intense, very emotional, very involved with what he was doing.

In Daniel 6:10 we see Daniel praying in the days of King Darius. The king liked Daniel, but he made a mistake. He listened to his commissioners and his satraps when they said, "**make a firm decree, that whoever petitions any god or man for thirty days, except you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions,**" (Dan 6:7). The king forgot all about Daniel. When Daniel heard that the King had made the decree it says in Daniel 6:10, "**he went home. And in his upper room, with his windows open toward Jerusalem, he knelt down on his knees three times that day, and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as was his custom since early days.**"

There was an intensity in Daniel's prayer. He realized the severity of the situation, the seriousness of it, and it drove him to his knees.

In Acts 20:36 we find one of the most emotional, intense and passionate times of Paul. He had called the elders of Ephesus, the very church that he is writing to in the book of Ephesians, the one he warned about watching out for the savage wolves and false doctrine. We find him on the island of Miletus. He gets the elders together, and it says, "**he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him,**" (Acts 20:36-37).

Paul knelt down and prayed with them all. They cried and wept over him. It was a very serious moment. So the whole posture of prayer sometimes is not in what your body is doing. It is in what your heart is doing before God. Sometimes it helps us to kneel so that we can remember the attitude of humility and intensity with which we need to pray. Wherever you are, if your attitude is filled with awe and submission and you are intensely concerned and God has burdened your heart, that is what it means to bow your knees before the Father.

This is not some trite prayer he prays in prison. This is something that is deeply, intensely burned into his heart. He wants these people at Ephesus to be able to live it out in front of the people. So there is passion. There is submission. There is awe, and there is emotion. Paul's prayer posture then is very clear. It is an attitude of his heart.

B. The Person to Whom Paul Prays (3:14).

Secondly, I want you to see the person to whom Paul was praying. He says,

"I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

When I say "person," we know that this is God in three persons. And all three persons of the triune God are involved in our prayer. We pray to God, the Father. We pray through God, the Son, Jesus Christ, in His Name. We pray with the prompting and help of God, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus taught us to pray to the Father. Our Heavenly Father cares about us. We are of His household. We are of His family.

"I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

What family is Paul talking about? The word, "family," there is literally "fatherhood." It means those who are related to the Father. Who is this family? It has to be the same family Paul was talking about in the rest of the letter. In 1:5, Paul said that by Jesus Christ we have been adopted as sons. In 2:19 he said that through Jesus Christ we are all members of God's household, His family.

There are a lot of liberal teachers out there who say that this verse teaches that God is everybody's Father in a spiritual sense and therefore, everybody, universally, has been saved already. That simply cannot be true. The Bible is very clear. When it comes to God's spiritual family, there are two fathers. There is God, and there is Satan, the devil himself. If you will look with me in 1John 3, I will show you that. 1 John 3:10 talks about the children of God: **"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother."** There is a distinction here from being the offspring of Satan and the spiritual offspring of God through Christ.

Look in John 8:39. We find it again. Here Jesus is talking to the Pharisees and some of the religious Jews:

39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham.

40 "But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this.

- 41 **"You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father; God."**
- 42 **Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.**
- 43 **"Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.**
- 44 **"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.**

If you are born again by the Holy Spirit because you have believed in Jesus, you have God as your spiritual Father. If not, the devil is your spiritual father. There is a sense in which God is Father of all creation. How can we say that? In the sense that nothing was created except that He created it. But when it comes to a spiritual family, you have to be born again and be birthed into that family.

Back to Ephesians 3, Paul is praying to God the Father, from whom the whole spiritual family of God in heaven and earth gets its name. Every believer, whether in heaven or on earth, can claim God as their Father. They have free access to Him through the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Ephesians 2 tells us, believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, are a part of God's household. So we see Paul posture in prayer, and we see the person he is praying to. He is not talking to the father of people who aren't believers. This is family talk.

III. What Paul Prayed. (3:16-19).

Paul makes four requests for the church. These build on each other. He prays for:

1. Inner Strength. (3:16)

"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man"

2. Indwelling of Christ (3:17)

"that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;"

This is Jesus being at home in your life and in our churches.

3. Incomprehensible Love (3:17-19)

"that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge"

4. Fullness of God (3:19)

"that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

And we will study these more closely next time. But Paul believes his prayer will encourage the Ephesian believers so that they will not lose heart. When we

consider that God will answer that kind of prayer, “**according to the riches of His glory**,” we can get up and face the day. We can go boldly before the throne of God, we can find strength to help in time of need.

Folks, we have a reservoir of riches of wealth, spiritually, which God has given us in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul intensely says, "Oh, God, don't let them walk out with heads filled with information. God, let them walk out understanding they have these riches. Let them be strengthened in the inner man with power. Let these riches be a part of the source of their strength in their walk."

You may find out this week that you have lost your job. You may find out this week that someone has done you wrong. You may find out you have an incurable disease. Someone you love may be going through deep distress. Where are you going to be strengthened?

Paul is saying, go to the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ, in Him is the reservoir of what you are looking for. Let the Spirit of God with power strengthen you in the inner man. Let these truths get down deep inside of your life that you become different.

When that happens, all of a sudden people see a difference in your life. You are living in a way that is on a higher plane than what you lived before. In other words, don't just sit and soak. Grab hold of the fact that you have got all the wealth that ever could be, spiritually, in the Lord Jesus Christ. Learn how to tap into it. Learn how to draw it out. It is in your account. It is in your name. The Lord Jesus lives in you. When you have your problems, run to Him.

Learn to be strengthened according to the riches that He has given you in Christ Jesus.