

Paul's Prayer – Eph 3:14-21

Ephesians 3:14-21

Text:

Eph 3:14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

Eph 3:15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Eph 3:16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner

being,

Eph 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in

love,

Eph 3:18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of

Christ,

Eph 3:19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of

God.

Eph 3:20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is

at work within us,

Eph 3:21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.

It is useful to step back and understand the situation into which occasional letters were written... in this case the following notes are included from Zondervan Expository Commentary –

Occasion and Purpose:

1. While Paul was under house detention in Rome, he enjoyed certain privileges, such as the freedom to receive a constant stream of visitors. Representatives of the Jewish community came to inquire about Christianity (Ac 28:22-23), and some of Paul's intimate friends were with him (e.g., Luke, Aristarchus, and Timothy). From time to time he received messengers from churches that he had started, one of whom was Epaphras (see Col 1:7; 4:12; Phm 23). This man seems to have been instrumental in evangelizing the Lycus Valley region during the Ephesian mission and founded churches in Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. Epaphras came to Paul in Rome to bring a progress report about these congregations. There was much to rejoice about, but he also told Paul about a virulent heresy that was threatening Christians in Colossae and perhaps others.
2. Tychicus, another friend of Paul and a native of Ephesus, was also with Paul at this time. He was about to leave for the province of Asia, and Paul took advantage of using him as a courier for Colossians. Also, Onesimus (a fugitive slave from Colosse) had been befriended by Paul at this time and had confessed Christ. He had defrauded his master Philemon, and Paul was anxious that he be pardoned and possibly released for Christian service. Paul therefore decided to send Onesimus along with Tychicus.
3. Before Tychicus and Onesimus left, Paul finished a third letter to take along—one that he sent to Ephesus and to all the churches founded as a result of his mission throughout Asia. As befits a letter intended for more general circulation, Paul did not deal with particular issues (as in Colossians). His aim was not to combat error and expose false teaching. Rather, it was more detached and therefore more exalted. He rose above the smoke of battle and captured a vision of God's sovereign plan that transcends the bitterness of controversy and the necessity for the church militant to fight incessantly for its very existence. Consequently, he treated his doctrinal themes more broadly in terms of the fellowship of Christians in Christ's body, the church, and the reconciliation of the entire universe to him. Yet Paul's objective was not purely inspirational. He sought to relate his vision to the practical demands of Christians living in a hostile society.

Theological Values:

1. Ephesians is above all a hymn of unity. Paul's conception of oneness in Christ extends beyond the church to include all creation. God's ultimate purpose is "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (1:10). Yet our Lord has been appointed as "head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:22-23). The corporate aspect of Christ's Savior hood and Lordship, adumbrated in other letters and particularly in Colossians, is here expounded more thoroughly.

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2. Unity was a topic of general interest in the first century A.D. The Stoic philosophers recognized an orderliness in the universe which they attributed to the cosmic Reason or Logos. The fact that much of the Mediterranean world was politically unified under the imperial government led to the vision of a universal commonwealth. At the same time the mystery cults, which were gaining in popularity as conventional religion declined, offered a certain sense of oneness in the common quest for deliverance from demonic forces and the achievement of personal integration.
3. In Ephesians Paul was able to demonstrate that this almost obsessive search for unity finds its ultimate goal only in Christ. It is he who represents the coordinating principle of all life. The ideal of world citizenship, cherished by the philosophers, is realized in the universal church. Human beings can be liberated from bondage to the principalities and powers that threaten their welfare only as they share the triumph Christ gained over them at the Cross (1:21; 2:2; 3:10-11; 6:12-13; cf. Col 2:15). Thus the distinctive theology of Ephesians is no academic abstraction. It was tuned to the contemporary mood of Paul's day, and in a deeply divided world today it still conveys a relevant word from God.

1. OBSERVATIONS:

- i. The preceding verses speak of Paul's troubles which he gladly accepts on their behalf. The suffering servant is the New Testament model for leadership that Jesus initiated with which Paul accepts gladly.
- ii. The preceding verses speak to conflict emerging throughout the church in the region, to which Paul stresses the primacy of unity in faith as presented in the gospel Paul has preached.
- iii. Paul initiates his prayer of intercession in the context of the unity in the Kingdom of God – both in Heaven and on earth. His specific focus in his prayer is to strengthen their faith through God's Spirit alive and acting in human hearts. Paul's emphasis is focused on the innerman, not the outerman.
- iv. The expected result of his intercession is the liberation of the riches we experience in God's Glory – this is power available now in His Spirit.
- v. The end result is not merely in the here and now – but rather it includes the future generations until eternity comes.

2. CONCEPTS:

- i. When you go to prayer before God... order Big! Anticipate God that will act. Anticipate great things in His people. Have confidence that God can do this. Paul is praying in faith for a future that hasn't yet arrived, but one he can catch a glimpse of.
- ii. The proper focus is on core issues in prayer. Paul has the mind of Christ and His heart as well... he is seeing in others what they cannot see in themselves. This is encouragement. He is praying for others to personally experience the fullness of Grace and Truth.
- iii. When you pray, you should always pray in confidence in the light of the unseen activity of the Spirit – this is done in faith. Most of what God does you won't see... you may never see. However, the reality is in the heart, which when ignited by the Spirit will change over time.
- iv. Pray in light of what you know to be true. God gives us a hope and a vision of where we are now in the greater hope of what will come. Pray for the realized present and the revelation of a hoped for future.
- v. Pray beyond what you know that can do – that which only God can do. This is praying big – it is getting caught up in what the Spirit is doing and hopes to accomplish in His people.

3. APPLICATIONS:

- i. Look beyond the obvious – pay attention to the subtleties. Encourage others to go there as well... vision is like a cold, you can only catch it from someone who has it. Small visions may be safer things that we know we can deliver. The point is to catch up with God and encourage what only He can deliver. Dream big.

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- ii. Note that you are deliberately partnering with God. We are warned in our earthly partnerships not to be unequally yoked... and this is good advice. However, we must realize that when we partner with God, He is the One who is unequally yoked. We pray out of our dependence upon Him.
- iii. Cultivate a passion for God and a love for others – a sincere concern and hope will shape how you do ministry for others. All of Jesus' ministry hinges on two components:
 - 1. The Great Commandment – love the Lord your God with all your strength, all your heart, and all your mind... and love others as you love yourself.
 - 2. The Great Commission – go into all the world preaching the Gospel and teaching them to be obedient... this is evangelism and discipleship – the two necessarily go together.
- iv. Always keep your eyes in the present and your hope in the future. This is part of living in the “now and not yet” of Grace.
 - 1. We never know what we can accomplish until we try. We'll never know the scope or impact we have until we see it in eternity. Often we get discouraged because we don't see results... we may never see results. But in faith believing we can keep on standing our ground and deliberately choosing to have an impact. We are responsible to witness and act in light of the knowledge and faith God has allotted us. He is responsible for the outcome.
 - 2. Do what you see that is set before you... NIV and NET Bible translate 1 Sam 10:7 as “do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.” The point is not necessarily to look for some esoteric or distant action to prove your faith... but rather to prove your faith in the environment you are in... and trust God to be in it and bless it. It is certain that Paul had no clue of the impact he would have on the spread and growth of Christianity.