

**Valley Bible Church**  
**Sermon Notes for September 23, 2018**

**A Prayer for Strength**  
**Ephesians 3:14-21**

I. Paul attends to supplication (3:14-15)

*14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,*

- First, let's be reminded of what prompts Paul to pray
  - We know Paul is prompted by something because he states, "For this reason"
  - This phrase reminds us to pick up where Paul left off at the beginning of chapter 3, when Paul had already said "For this reason"
  - "For this reason" in Ephesians 3:1 was reflecting back on the glorious truths for the church in chapter 2 as well as the high calling of the church
  - The glorious truth summarized is the mystery of Jew and Gentile being one in Christ
  - The high calling for the church was seen at the end of chapter 2
    - All members of the church (Jew or Gentile) are fellow citizens, members of the holy temple, and the dwelling place for God by His Spirit
  - After presenting these truths in chapter 2 and expanding upon these truths in chapter 3, Paul was moved to pray
- Second, look at Paul's purpose to pray
  - Paul then states, "I bow my knees before the Father,"
  - Paul was moved to pray in light of the theological truth of Jew and Gentile united in Christ
  - Prayer is a great response because of the difficulty of the task before the church
  - Paul's movement to pray shows his dependence upon God for all things
  - Paul's movement to pray is the best way Paul could act while in prison
  - Paul's very posture in prayer shows his dependence and worship of God
  - It reminds us of the words of the Psalmist
    - Psalm 95:6 "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!"
- Third, note the Person to whom Paul prays
  - Obviously Paul is praying to God
  - But Paul does not simply use the most common usual title "*Theos*" for God in this prayer
  - Paul calls Him, "the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,"

- Why does Paul use such a title for God in beginning this prayer?
  - I doubt you use this title for God every time you pray before a meal
- The task of seeing the church unified was largely upon Paul's mind
- Thus, He acknowledges God as the One Creator of all created beings
  - God is the Source from whom the human race came to be
  - He is the only One who can restore the human race to unity
  - God alone repairs the damage done at the Tower of Babel
  - The reason Paul, the church at Ephesus, and the church today can have hope of unity is because God is the Father of all

## II. Paul appeals for strength (3:15-19)

*16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

- Now we venture into Paul's specific appeals to God on behalf of the Ephesians
- We will see two prayer requests and a purpose or result that comes from each request
- Both these prayer requests focus on God strengthening the Ephesians
- First, Paul prays for the Ephesians to have strength to change
  - Paul begins by recognizing God as the only possible source of transforming strength and power
    - He began his request in verse 16 saying, "That according to the riches of his glory"
    - God's abundant glory is more than sufficient to do the unthinkable
    - The glory of God changed many people in Scripture (Moses, Isaiah, and even Paul)
    - The glory of God would provide the strength necessary to change the Ephesians
  - Paul advances to state the substance of this first request adding, "He may grant you to be strengthened with power"
    - The Ephesians needed to be strengthened in order to accomplish the task of unity before them
    - In order for Jew and Gentile to become one new man in Christ would require immense strength and power
    - Paul knew that God was more than able to provide the strength necessary
  - Paul clarifies the means by which the glorious strength of God can be made available to the Ephesians saying, "Through his Spirit in your inner being,"

- The power of God is in accord with His glory and through His Spirit
- Is the Holy Spirit able to provide the power and strength necessary for these Ephesians?
  - Acts 1:8 “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”
  - 1 Corinthians 2:4 “and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”
  - The Spirit is God Himself powerfully working in and through people
- Why does Paul pray for the Spirit to work inwardly and not outwardly?
  - Paul is praying for the Spirit’s work to be aimed at the heart
  - The heart is the epicenter of all change in a person’s life
  - True transformation can and does take place in the heart
  - Proverbs 4:23 “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”
  - 2 Corinthians 4:16 “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.”
  - Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
- The result of this change and sanctification that Paul prays for is found in verse 17
- Paul states, “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—”
  - Isn’t Christ already in believers?
    - John 14:20 “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”
    - Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me...”
    - Colossians 1:27 “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”
  - Paul is not praying for Christ to reside in the Ephesians for the first time
  - Paul prays that Christ may “dwell” in their hearts
    - The word for dwell (*katoikesai*) means “to settle down” or “be at home”
    - Thus, Paul is praying that the very Person of Christ might take form in the hearts and lives of the believers in Ephesus
    - The Spirit forms Christ in believers

- 2 Corinthians 3:18 “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”
  - Galatians 4:19 “my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!”
    - The Ephesians will need Christlike love to achieve the unity in the church demanded by those who are in Christ
  - Christlikeness will flow from the Ephesians as they exercise faith and the Holy Spirit works to transform them from inside to the outside
  - Thus, this first prayer request forms a clear Trinitarian emphasis
    - “Paul asks the *Father* (v. 14) that we might be strengthened through his *Spirit* (v. 16) so that *Christ* (v. 17) might dwell in our hearts through faith.”<sup>1</sup>
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- Paul’s second request for the Ephesians is that they would have strength to comprehend
  - “–that you, being rooted and grounded in love,”
    - Paul saw the Ephesian church as rooted and grounded in love
    - This statement is true of every believer
      - All believers are “rooted” and “grounded” in love because that is how they were saved by the love of God
  - “May have strength to comprehend with all the saints”
    - Paul’s second request is clearly stated here in verse 18
    - Paul prays that God gives the Ephesians the strength to comprehend
  - “What is the breadth and length and height and depth,”
    - Paul wants the Ephesians to know the four directional aspect of something
    - Paul does not really say what he wants the Ephesians to know
    - It is best understood to be love
      - Think of the immediate context
        - “–that you, being rooted and grounded in love,” - before
        - “and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” - after
      - Think of the context in Ephesians
        - God’s love chose and predestined us (1:4-5)
        - God’s love made us alive in Christ (2:4-5)
        - God’s love raised us up to heaven in Christ (2:4, 6)

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *Praying with Paul*, 163.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Martin Lehman (1868-1953).

<sup>3</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 489–

- God's love seated us with Christ in heaven (2:4, 6)
  - Think of the rest of the New Testament
    - God's love moved Him to send Christ to the earth (John 3:16)
    - God's love motivated Him to send His Spirit into our hearts (Romans 5:5)
- "And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,"
  - Thus, Paul's request is for the Ephesians to have the strength to comprehend the love of Christ
    - Interestingly enough, Paul prays for them to know the love of Christ that truly cannot be known
      - This shows just how amazing is the nature of Christ's love
  - "Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made;  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade;  
To write the love of God above  
Would drain the ocean dry;  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.  
  
O love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure—  
The saints' and angels' song."<sup>2</sup>
  - "The very fact that Christ's love expressed itself in his willingness to die on behalf of sinners is in itself beyond one's comprehension. The reality of Christ's love is overwhelming to all believers, from the point of conversion and continuing as growth in the knowledge of Christ progresses. No matter how much knowledge we have of Christ and his work, his love surpasses that knowledge. The more we know of his love, the more we are amazed by it."<sup>3</sup>
  - 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 "For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; 15 and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Martin Lehman (1868-1953).

<sup>3</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 489–490.

- “That you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”
  - The result of strength, comprehension, and knowledge would result in being filled with the fullness of God
  - God’s glory filled the Tabernacle at the end of Exodus
  - God’s glory filled the Temple after Solomon dedicated the temple
  - God’s glory fills the Person of Christ
    - Colossians 1:19 “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,”
    - Colossians 2:9 “For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,”
  - Now, God’s glory must fill the church
    - “Paul’s characterization of the church as the new temple (Eph 2:19–22) may have prompted him to use the language of fullness/filling here. Just as the glory of the Lord filled the temple under the old covenant, he earnestly prays that the divine glory will fill the new covenant temple.”<sup>4</sup>
  - How does God’s glory fill the church?
    - Through the church’s maturity and spiritual growth
    - Comprehending the love of Christ will lead to God’s glory in our growth
    - Ephesians 4:12-13 “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,”
    - “Hence, Paul’s prayer in this context is that they may know the love of Christ and in knowing this they might be filled with God’s moral excellence, perfection, and power.”<sup>5</sup>

### III. Paul adores the Savior (3:20-21)

*20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

- “Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think,”
  - Paul identifies God as the all powerful One who can do more than we give Him credit for doing
  - Is this our view of God?
  - Is this our faith every time we pray?
  - “Abundantly”

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<sup>4</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 219.

<sup>5</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 491.

- “The double prefix stresses ‘the highest form of comparison imaginable’ and could be translated ‘quite beyond all measure’ or ‘infinitely more than.’”<sup>6</sup>
- “According to the power at work within us,”
  - God does far more than we can imagine and the ability to do that work is through the resident Spirit that all believers contain
- “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus”
  - God the Father receives glory through Jesus Christ and the work of the Spirit in the church
  - This is the only time that a doxology like this mentions the church!
  - “As the church maintains its vital unity with Christ, becomes more like the Father in holiness, defeats the influence of the power of the supernatural enemies, fills the world with the good news of the Son resulting in its numerical growth, and offers continual praise to the Father, the church brings glory to God.”<sup>7</sup>
- “Throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”
  - The glory that belongs to God is eternal in light of all that He has done
  - The fact that He unites in the church what humanity once destroyed through their sin declares that He is worthy of praise for all eternity

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<sup>6</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, Ephesians, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 219.

<sup>7</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, Ephesians, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 220.