# Ephesians

Ephesians 3:14-21

## Introduction

This section of Ephesians comes as the culmination of the first three chapters. After this, as with many of his letters, Paul moves into practical mode as he lays out for us the need for unity, the gifts of Christ to the church, how to live as Christians, the model of marriage as an image of Christ and the church, the household codes and, finally, spiritual warfare.

In this section, we hear Paul’s prayer for the young Christians in Ephesus – a prayer he began in v.1 of chapter 3, before he got distracted with his wonderful description of God’s mystery – the Church! And what a prayer it is!

Paul, of course, was writing this letter from prison (4:1). Before we get to grips with Paul’s actual prayer, let us consider Paul as he was praying. What was Paul’s situation? We know that he wrote this letter to the Ephesians while he was in prison. We also know that he was sometimes chained to his Roman guard, and that he was troubled with an eye problem.

We can also ascertain that he didn’t have a colour television in his cell, or three square meals a day, neither would his cell have been heated. In 2 Timothy 4:13, Paul instructs Timothy to bring the cloak which he left with Carpus at Troas, and in v.21 he implores Timothy to do his utmost to get to him before winter.

What do we read of this dear saint? “I’m on my knees praying for you!” Nothing, physical, spiritual, mental or emotional ever prevented Paul from continually praying for the Churches and the people he loved!

So, let us consider his prayer in detail.

## The Fatherhood of God

Firstly, he affirms the fatherhood of God over all humanity. This is important. According to the creation narrative, everyone is made in the image of God. We are all carriers of his glory and his representatives in the earth. The fact that humanity is in rebellion and has become corrupted does not mean that the divine intention has subsided. Thus, our aim in bringing people to faith is to get them back on track with God’s divine destiny for them – to represent his image on the earth and to steward it on his behalf.

Life on this earth is not about the pursuit of happiness, riches, possessions, experiences, or anything else. Those things are by-products at best and distractions at worse from our main purpose. Life on this earth is about fulfilling our calling in God until he returns to renew the whole of creation and bring it once more back into subjection to his benevolent rule. And we are part of God’s means of doing that.

## Strengthened with power

Next, he prays that these young Christians will be strengthened with power through the Spirit, out of God’s glorious riches, in their inner being.

Our inner being is where our mind, our emotions and our will reside. In other words, Paul is praying that these Ephesians will have the inner determination to follow through on their commitment to Christ. Remember, in 2:1-10, Paul laid out, not only that they were ‘saved by grace through faith’, but also that they were saved for good works. Paul is thus praying that from that starting point of grace, they will fulfil all that God has for them.

It is said that a preacher needs to inform the mind, stir the emotions and move the will. Any preaching that does not do all three will be short-lived in its results. If we infirm the mind only, we give people a lot of knowledge but without the need to do anything with it; if we stir the emotions only, people may initially respond, but will not have the rationale for continuing, and, when emotions change, may not continue what they have begun. It is out of knowledge and passion that the will is moved to actually do something.

Paul’s prayer is that these Ephesians will be strengthened in all of these areas so that they will begin to follow through on their commitment to Jesus and will start to see the Lordship of Christ, that he spoke of in chapter 1, and the manifold wisdom of God being revealed in the church, that he spoke of earlier in chapter 3, being seen amongst them.

## Christ may dwell in your hearts

He goes onto say that the purpose of this strengthening is so that ‘Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith’. When people become Christians, we sometimes talk of them ‘inviting Jesus into their heart’, which is based on this verse. However, Paul is here talking to Christians. So what is he saying here?

Essentially, he is saying that we need more than just an intellectual response to Jesus. The place where he needs to be is living in our emotions as well. In other words, all that we do needs to flow out of our love for Jesus. Every decision that we make, every goal that we set – all needs to be motivated by love for Jesus. That is the emotion that needs to be stirred within us, and it is that love that will motivate us to fulfil our commitment to him and his purposes.

## Rooted and established in love

Next he says that it is this love that has caused us to be rooted and established. This is a plant analogy. If we want a plant to grow and become strong, it needs good roots and it needs a good environment in which it can be established – soil, water, light, etc. Paul is saying that the environment in which our faith will grow strong is in the soil, water and light of God’s love.

Our faith is a product of his love for us that sent Jesus to the cross to win us. Romans 5:8 says, ‘But God demonstrated his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’ Our response to that love should be to love him and serve him in return. It is that mutual love that will cause us to grow up and be strong.

## Power with God’s people

So, having established that all of this works by love, Paul prays that they, along with all of God’s people, may be able to grasp the dimensions of God’s love: how wide, long high and deep.

‘Jesus love is very wonderful….’

I think if we begin to grasp how vast is the love of God, we will not sit grumbling when things don’t go right for us. We will not blame God when things go wrong. We will not get resentful towards God when life does not work out the way we wanted it to.

How much does God love us?

Well firstly, even though humanity rebelled against him, he did not blot us out, but instead began a rescue plan to redeem and restore his rebellious creation. He did so, knowing that it would cost the life of his son. In coming to earth, Jesus left his throne of honour and glory and came to be a servant to model how we are to live. He died the death of a criminal and he descended into Hades. He did all of this for one reason and one reason alone – because he loves us.

Further, even though we have received that love, we, too, often still rebel against him. But he continues to show grace and mercy towards us and forgives us and restores us.

The greatest picture of the love of God Jesus ever gave us was in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). To understand that parable we need to know a little of the culture into which it was spoken.

When the younger son asked for his inheritance, he was in fact wishing that his father was dead. He was treating him with complete contempt. He was disregarding all of the traditions of the fathers and the provision of the Law for the ongoing generations by using up his inheritance selfishly upon himself. This is a picture of what humanity has done with the world and we find ourselves in a desperate state ‘eating the husks given to the pigs’.

On realising his sorry state, the son returns to the father expecting nothing to be given him except perhaps a job amongst the servants.

Instead, we have the picture of the father seeing his son ‘a long way off’. This tells us that the father was watching and waiting for the son to come over the horizon. Then he does something that no self-respecting Jewish father would do – he picked up his skirts and ran towards his son, threw his arms around him, kissed him, gave him a cloak, sandals and a ring for his finger, and prepared a banquet for him.

The love of this father for his son is a small picture of the love of God for us. Even though we deserve nothing from him, having lived in rebellion, instead he has welcomed us into his family, given us robes of righteousness to wear, poured out upon us blessing upon blessing, grace upon grace, and none of this because in the slightest we deserved it.

Grace really is ‘God’s riches at Christ’s expense.

May we grasp this ‘love that surpasses knowledge’ and live in the good of it.

## The Fulness of God

Paul concludes this prayer by praying that the Ephesian Christians may be ‘filled to the measure of all the fulness of God’. This is mind-blowing! His desire is that they might reach the maximum of their capacity of all that God has for them.

Are you at capacity? Do you have more room for God to fill you up or to make you more like Jesus? God wants to maximise your capacity so that, as you go around, you are just like Jesus and are demonstrating his love to all you meet.

Later on in the letter, in chapters 4 & 5, he lays out what this looks like practically, but for the moment he tells us that all of this flows out of an understanding of the love of God.

## Doxology

Paul concludes his prayer with a doxology.

‘Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.’

In the first part of this conclusion, Paul makes a very clear statement: ‘your God is too small!’ Paul gives us the truth – God is greater than all we confront. He is able to do more than we can ask or imagine.

1 Samuel 17: 33-37.

Here David is confronting an enemy far greater and battle experienced than he. David demonstrates his victor mentality. Saul’s voice is the voice of reason. Saul sees the issue from Goliath’s perspective, but David sees the issue from a victor’s perspective. His focus is not on the enormity of the issue confronting him, but on the fact that God is on his side and that he is able to do immeasurably more….

As Frederick Douglass (American author) said *One and God makes a majority*!

For each one of us, the truth is that

* God is on our side. ‘If God be for me, who can be against me’
* He has already defeated the enemy, triumphing over him through the cross.
* He has laid down his life for our salvation – that is testimony to the fact that he is on our side.
* Paul declares in Ephesians 3:20 that God is able to do ‘superabundantly’ beyond, not just our ability to ask, but above that which we can imagine and that power is at work within us.

We are victors today, not through anything we have done or can achieve, but because Jesus has already done everything necessary to make us victors.

As we grasp this truth, we will begin to see that God loves us and wants us to triumph even in adversity. He is bigger than all we confront and he is on our side.

God bless.