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A Prayer That Lifts Our Souls

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

Introduction

1. How would you describe your prayer life?
 - a. Do you pray frequently?
 - b. Do you seldom pray?
 - c. Are you a person who doesn't pray at all?
2. If you pray, what is the content of your prayers?
 - a. Do you pray for the health and well-being of your family?
 - b. Do you pray for personal success in life?
 - c. Do you pray for God to be glorified in your life?
3. In the text read for us a moment ago from Ephesians 3, Paul prayed a prayer on behalf of the Christians in Ephesus.
4. He actually started the prayer in verse 1 of this chapter, but became distracted with other issues.
5. He finally came back to His prayer in verse 14, and prayed a very powerful prayer for the church.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you . . .” (Ephesians 3:14-16a).

6. As you read this prayer and think about what Paul asks God to do for the Christians in Ephesus, it lifts your soul.
7. I am committing myself to pray the contents of this prayer over the next year for each of you, and I hope you will pray it on my behalf as well.
8. If the Lord tarries His coming, and we are permitted to gather together at the

end of this year in this same place, I would like for each of us to consider how God has answered our prayers and how we have changed because of those answers.

9. With this in mind, let's look at what Paul asked God to do for the Ephesians and what I pray He will do for us.

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I. A Prayer For Inner Strength

A. OUR STRENGTH IS DERIVED FROM GOD'S WEALTH

“. . . that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory , to be strengthened with power . . .” (v. 16a).

1. How often have you or I prayed for God to strengthen one of the members of our church family so that they might recover from an illness and enjoy a whole life once again.
2. Just as that person needs to be strengthened physically, so each of us as God's children need to be strengthened inwardly so that we may receive the blessings which God desires for us.
3. There are two elements to this strengthening for which Paul prays — one is its source.
4. Our strength is derived from God's wealth — “the riches of His glory.”
5. Let me put this into perspective:
 - a. At present, Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, the online shopping service, has a net worth of 113 billion dollars.
 - b. He can enrich you up to his personal net worth.
 - c. If every person in the U.S. were to be enriched by him (328 million), each person would receive, \$344.51.
6. Today, you and I worship the One from Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things (Romans 11:36).
6. It is out of the abundance of “the riches of His glory,” something which is

limitless, that He strengthens us.

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B. OUR STRENGTHENING IS MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“. . . to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith . . .” (Vv. 16b, 17a).

1. The second aspect of our strengthening is the Holy Spirit.
2. Paul said, I pray that God “would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (vv. 16, 17a).
3. Paul speaks of this strengthening in 2 Corinthians 4:16, “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day.”
4. According to what Paul said earlier, in verse 7 of 2 Corinthians 4, you and I are “earthen vessels,” we are “jars of clay” (ESV, NIV84).
5. Through His Holy Spirit, God renews and empowers us for life.
6. Even though our physical bodies grow older, every day, we grow stronger and stronger within.
7. As one person said, “We are frail containers pulsating with divine power!”¹

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II. A Prayer For Love

A. A LIFESTYLE OF LOVE

“. . . and that you, being rooted and grounded in love . . .” (v. 17).

1. God’s strengthening of our inner man through His Holy Spirit, is so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians*, (Crossway Books: Wheaton, Ill., 1990), p. 115.

2. All of this is so that you and I might be “rooted and grounded in love.”
3. These two verbs, “rooted” and “grounded” are metaphors, one from agriculture, the other from architecture.
 - a. Love is the soil in which we are rooted and grow.
 - b. Love is also the foundation upon which our lives are built.
4. It is this love that God has revealed to us in Christ (Romans 5:8), and poured into our hearts through His Spirit (Romans 5:5).
5. It is this love which is the source of our salvation (John 3:16; Ephesians 2:4).
6. Our roots must continue to grow deep and spread wide in the soil of God’s love, even to the day of our death.
 - ❑ Can you say that your roots are continuing to grow in God’s love? Is it evident to those around you?

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B. OUR COMPREHENSION OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST

I pray “that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breath and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge . . .” (Vv. 18-19a).

1. How well do you know the infinite love of Christ?
2. Paul prayed that you and I may grasp just “how wide and long and high and deep . . . the love of Christ” is.
3. Christ’s love is . . .
 - a. *Wide* enough to embrace the world (John 3:16).

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”
 - b. *Long* enough to last forever (1 Corinthians 13:8).

“Love never fails.”

- c. *High* enough to take sinners to heaven (1 John 3:1,2).

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”

- d. *Deep* enough to reach the lowest sinner (Philippians 2:8).

“He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

4. This is something which Paul wants all of us to comprehend together.
5. Did you notice what He said at the end, he said that the love of Christ “surpasses knowledge.”
6. Even though such love is impossible to fully know, we must still make it our life’s devotion.
 - ❑ Do you devote time in your life thinking about and trying to understand his love? We see it in our Lord’s entrance into this world as a baby? We see it in His death, burial and resurrection? We experience it every single day of our lives.

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III. A Prayer For Fullness (v. 19b)

A. THE FULLNESS OF GOD

“. . . that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.” (v. 19b).

1. This is the fullness with which God fills Himself.
2. At least two other passages help to explain it:
 - a. “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him” (Colossians 1:19).

- b. “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete . . . ” (Colossians 2:9–10a).
3. How are we to understand this fullness?

B. AN ILLUSTRATION

1. In my last trip to El Salvador, my oldest grandson, Isaiah, and I had the opportunity to travel with our mission group to the Pacific Ocean.
2. As we all stood there, the power and majesty of that body of water impressed us all.
3. Imagine if I had taken a pint jar, stood at the edge of the ocean, and dipped it in the water as a wave came in.
4. I would fill that jar, but would make no dent in the total body of water before me.
5. “Because Christ is infinite, He can hold all the fullness of Deity!”²
6. When you or I dip the tiny vessel of our life into Him, we instantly become full of His fullness, but we do not diminish His fullness.
7. We can keep opening up to receive more of His fullness, and we will receive more.
8. It is never-ending!

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Conclusion

“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” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

² Ibid, p. 118.

1. This is Paul's prayer for us, and I hope it will be the prayer we pray for one another as this year progresses.
2. A prayer for strength, love and the fullness of God.
3. Paul ended his prayer with what is known as a doxology, a form of praise to God. (Quote vv. 20-21).
4. Through His power at work in our lives, God is able to do far more than any of us could ever ask or think, so let's ask Him this year to . . .
 - a. make us the church He wants us to be.
 - b. help us grow in faith and in number, even as the early church grew.
 - c. bring abundant glory to His name through this church.
5. If you are not a Christian today, do you realize all that could potentially be yours through Jesus Christ?
6. Why not start off this new year by turning away from the sin in your life and coming to Christ in obedient faith.
 - a. Confess Him as Savior and Lord. As Jesus said, "everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess Him before My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 10:32).
 - b. "Repent, and . . . be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).