

**Slide 1**

# **Kneeling Before The Father**

## **EPHESIANS 3:14-21**

### **Introduction**

1. In the previous lesson we saw where Paul was about to start his second prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians 3:1.
  - a. However, he interrupts himself when describing himself as "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles."
  - b. Lest they be troubled at whatever tribulations he endured as a prisoner (Ephesians 3:13), Paul stresses the fact that:
    - 1) His apostleship to the Gentiles (even with its tribulations) was a gift to him through the wonderful grace of God - Ephesians 3:2-7.
    - 2) His purpose was to "preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" - Ephesians 3:8-11.
    - 3) That in Christ he had "boldness and access with confidence through faith" in Christ - Ephesians 3:12.
2. Having completed his brief interruption, in Ephesians 3:14-21 Paul now continues with his second prayer for the Ephesians (the first having been in Ephesians 1:15-23 ).
3. The phrase "For this reason..." (Ephesians 3:14; also 3:1) indicates that Paul expresses his prayer in response to those things mentioned earlier, such as:
  - a. The wonderful salvation we have received by God's grace through faith - Ephesians 2:1-10.
  - b. The work by Christ on the cross whereby Gentiles can now become

"fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise" (*Ephesians 2:11-22; 3:6*).

[With gratitude in his heart for God's grace toward the Gentiles, Paul now prays on their behalf, starting with...]

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# I. Paul's Preparation (14-15)

## A. BOWING THE KNEES (v. 14)

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father . . ." (*Ephesians 3:14*, NASB95).

### 1. Kneeling in prayer

- a. In this prayer, Paul "bows the knee", a posture in prayer commonly found throughout the Scriptures (cf. *Luke 22:41; Acts 9:40; 20:36; 21:5*)
- b. However, there does not appear to be an "official posture" when it comes to prayer...
  - 1) Solomon "stood" when he prayed to dedicate the temple (*1 Kings 8:22*).
  - 2) David "sat" before the Lord when he prayed about the future of his kingdom (*1 Chronicles 17:16*).
  - 3) Jesus "fell on His face" when He prayed in Gethsemane (*Matthew 26:39*).
- c. It isn't the posture that we need to pick up on, but the fact that Paul *is praying . . . for them*.
  - 1) Paul's prayer is not haphazard or accidental. It is deliberate.
  - 2) It isn't a thoughtless or casual prayer, but a prayer of reverence, of worship and adoration.

### 2. "Before the Father"

- a. For those who are Christians, God is “our Father” (Matthew 6:9).
- b. Because we are His children, we can cry out to Him “Abba! Father!” (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

**Slide 3****B. THE ONE ADDRESSED (v. 15)**

“... from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”  
(Ephesians 3:15, NASB95).

1. In his sermon to the philosophers of Athens, Paul stated that “The God who made the world and all things in it . . . gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:24, 25b, 26a).
2. So it is, that God, “the Father,” is the Creator of all living beings — their existence and significance depend upon Him.

[To the Father, then, Paul addresses his prayer. We can divide this prayer into three parts, each part indicated in the Greek by the word *iva* (that, in order that). Each part is like a step on a staircase leading to the next step.]

**Slide 4****II. Paul’s Petition (16-19)****A. THAT WE MAY BE STRENGTHENED BY THE SPIRIT (16-17)**

“that He 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; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,” (Ephesians 3:16–17, NASB95)

1. Paul had mentioned earlier about God's power "toward us who believe" (1:19).
2. Now he prays that the Ephesians might be "strengthened with might".
3. Such strength is "according to the riches of His glory".
4. God's strength is administered
  - a. "through His Spirit"
    - 1) God's Spirit
    - 2) The same Spirit, which according to Paul in 1:17, imparts wisdom and revelation so that his readers (and we as well) may know God better.
  - b. "in (lit.,into) the inner man"
    - 1) This is a phrase which is unique to Paul in the New Testament (Romans 7:22; 2 Corinthians 4:16).

"For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man," (Romans 7:22, NASB95)

"Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." (2 Corinthians 4:16, NASB95)
    - 2) When Paul uses this phrase, he speaks of "the interior of our being . . . the seat of personal consciousness . . . the seat of our moral being."<sup>1</sup>
    - 3) "It is the focal point at the centre of a person's life where the Spirit does his strengthening and renewing work"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 695-96.

<sup>2</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, (Pillar New Testament Commentary, Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI) p. 258.

- 4) It is that part of us which according to Paul "is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16).
5. But the purpose of our "strengthening" by the Spirit is twofold . . .
  - a. First, that "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."
    - 1) To the degree God strengthens (by the Spirit) our "inner man", so it is said that Christ Himself dwells within our hearts.
    - 2) Thus the Spirit is the instrumental agent by which Christ indwells us as Christians.
    - 3) Back in Ephesians 2:22 we saw how the Spirit is means by which God inhabits His church

"in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." (2:22)
  - b. Second, that they may be "rooted and grounded in love"
    - 1) One work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is to instill the love of God in the heart (cf. Romans 5:5;Galatians 5:22)

"and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." (Romans 5:5)
    - 2) When strengthened by God through the Spirit in the inner man, we become "rooted and grounded in love."

[Strengthened by God through His Spirit, so that Christ is dwelling in our hearts and we are well-established "in love", the next step is ...

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**B. THAT WE MAY COMPREHEND THE LOVE OF CHRIST (18-19A)**

“... that you ... 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" (*Ephesians 3:18-19a*, NASB95).

1. "may be able..."
  - a. The word "able" means "to be fully able; to be strong enough"
  - b. Thus the prayer for strength in the first part of the prayer (3:16).
2. "...to comprehend"
  - a. I.e., to understand, to grasp
  - b. As Paul says later in verse 19, "to know..."
3. It is the "love of Christ" that Paul is praying that we be strong to grasp...
  - a. He wants us to know everything about this wonderful love ("breadth and length and height and depth")
  - b. But this love of Christ is something which "surpasses knowledge!"
    - 1) How is it possible for us to "know" the love of Christ, if it "surpasses knowledge"?
    - 2) Only in the sense that no matter how much we learn about Christ's love, even with the strength which God's Spirit provides, there is always much more to grasp!
    - 3) "...there is a real knowledge of Christ's love possible to us, a knowledge that is capable of increase as we are the more strengthened by power in the inner man, while a complete or exhaustive knowledge must ever remain beyond our capacity." (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, W. Robertson Nicoll, editor, vol. 3, p. 316)

[It is only as we begin to know the love of Christ "which surpasses knowledge" that we are beginning to experience the last step for which Paul is praying...]

**C. THAT WE MAY BE FILLED UP TO ALL THE FULLNESS OF GOD (19B)**

“that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19b, NASB95)

1. This is the objective, the goal, of all that Paul has previously said.
2. We begin to be filled with "all the fullness of God"..
  - a. This happens as God (i.e., the Father) strengthen us with power(v. 16b).
  - b. He accomplishes this through His Spirit (i.e., the Holy Spirit) who dwells in our inner man (v. 16b).
  - c. It is also through the Spirit that Christ (i.e., the Son) dwells in our hearts through faith (v. 17a).
3. With the help of the all members of the Godhead, then, the more you and I begin to comprehend this incomprehensible “love of Christ,” the more we are "filled".
  - Here we have the petition that Paul makes on behalf of the Ephesians..
    - That they be strengthened by the Spirit of God
    - So they can comprehend the love of Christ
    - And thus be filled with all the fullness of God — that they might ‘be all that God wants them to be’

[Paul has no doubt that God is "able" to fulfill his petition. Look at how he closes the prayer...]

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**III. Paul's Praise (20-21)****A. GLORY TO GOD, FOR WHAT HE IS ABLE TO DO! (20)**

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly [exceeding abundantly] beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,”

(Ephesians 3:20, NASB95)

1. Paul has just finished asking the Father for spiritual blessings of extraordinary value, including the request that the Christians at Ephesus might be “fulled up to all the fullness of God.”
2. Has Paul asked for too much?
3. No. It is impossible to ask for too much because the Father’s giving exceeds their capacity to ask or even imagine.
4. Thus Paul praises the Father because God's "ability to do" is...
  - a. "exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (NASB77) (**far beyond our imagination!**)
  - b. "according to the power that works in us" (cf. 1:19; 3:16)
    - 1) “the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe” (1:19)
    - 2) “to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man” (3:16)

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### **B. GLORY TO GOD, IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS FOREVER ! (21)**

“to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:21, NASB95)

1. Paul sees "the church" as the means by which much glory can be given to God
  - a. The church is the masterpiece of God’s grace (2:19).
  - b. It is the realm of His presence and authority (1:22, 23; 2:22).
  - c. It is the instrument through which His wisdom is made known to the spiritual powers in the heavenly realm (3:10).
2. It is also “in Christ” that glory is given to God



- a. As Christians we are “in Christ” (1:3).
- b. “Every spiritual blessing” is given to us “in Christ” (1:3).
- c. God kindness toward us has been expressed “in Christ Jesus” (2:7).

## **Conclusion**

1. Do we desire to give God glory “forever and ever”?
  - a. We ought to, in view of all things we have considered in Ephesians 1-3.
  - b. If so, then it must be "in Christ Jesus," and that can be only as we...
    - 1) Come to know the love of Christ which “surpasses knowledge”.
    - 2) Allow ourselves to "be filled with all the fullness of God".
2. How can we be sure to be filled with all the fullness of God?
  - a. If we are already Christians we follow Paul's example and start with prayer.
  - b. If you aren't a Christian, the first step is to become a child of God (cf. Galatians 3:26-27).

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)