

Introduction

Last month in our walk through Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians we looked at the first half of **Chapter 3** where Paul reminded the believers in Ephesus of his calling to explain the long hidden mystery that the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ was also intended for the Gentiles not solely the Jews. Paul has already spoken of the spiritual blessings that they had received in Christ; of their being made truly spiritually alive in Christ and how they were united with others, including Jews, in the family of Christ. Having done all that in the earlier parts of the Epistle he opens **Chapter 3** in **3:1** with the words "*For this reason ..*" as if he is about to say something important. Strangely he then interrupts himself with details of his calling and ministry.

Having finished his own interruption in **3:13** Paul then moves on in **3:14-21** to bring a prayer which he again begins with those words in **3:14** "*For this reason ...*" On returning to his original thoughts Paul now brings us the prayer itself.

There is no doubt that Paul cared deeply for the believers in Ephesus and he demonstrated that love and care by staying with them for over two years. We learn from **Acts 19:1** that when he arrived in Ephesus Paul met some disciples and spoke to them about baptism before beginning his ministry in his usual way by speaking in the synagogue for three months (**19:8**). Luke helpfully tells us in **19:9** that "*some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way.*" Consequently Paul moved on to the lecture hall in Tyrannus (**19:9**) where he continued to preach and teach for two years such that "*all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.*" (**19:10**).

It is Paul's love and care that is behind this prayer for the Ephesians in **3:14-21**. This is in fact the second prayer in the Epistle with the first coming in **1:15-23** and which also begins "*For this reason ...*"

Part 1 – Posture for Prayer

As we consider this prayer let me start by asking what posture you adopt or should adopt for prayer. Is there anything we should know about this important part of praying? Here in **3:14** we see that Paul kneels before his heavenly Father, a position which demonstrates humility. Now whilst posture is important it is not mandated or decreed in Scripture since there are other postures mentioned. The most common is standing and in **Luke 18:10-12** we see a Pharisee standing to pray although not humbly. In those verses Jesus teaches the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector and tells us, "*Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men — robbers, evildoers, adulterers — or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'*" The Pharisee does not set a good example of how to pray and is certainly not in line with how Paul prays on this occasion. In **Genesis 18:22** we also see Abraham standing to pray. However in **1 Chronicles 17:16** we see David sitting to pray. In **Psalms 95:1-6** we see the Psalmist bowing down and kneeling in prayer whilst in **Matthew 26:39** we see Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane lying face down on the ground to bring His prayer to God. I suggest that whilst these verses show that there is no one right position to adopt for prayer, the most important attitude to adopt is one of humility.

Part 2 – Family

Paul is kneeling before God Who is our Father. God is the Father of all believers, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, and they are described as members of His family. Here in **3:15** believers are described as “*his whole family*” whilst in **2:19** they are referred to as “*God’s household*”. Paul talked of God’s family in **2:11-22** where he described the Gentiles as being “*fellow-citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household*” (**2:19**). As I’ve mentioned before the NLT version of that verse changes the words “*God’s household*” to “*God’s family*”. Families are special and although there are undoubtedly difficulties from time to time they tend to remain together, love one another and support one another. God’s family is no different but has the added benefit of having Christ at the centre. In this prayer Paul is praying to God “*from whom his whole family ... derives its name*”. That name is “*children of God*” and it only applies to those who have come to faith in Christ; it does not apply to non-believers. Now whilst we may all have been created by God until we do come to faith in Christ we are not “*children of God*” and therefore not part of His family. It is when we come to faith in Christ that we gain access to God our Father something which we know from **1:5-6** was all predestined by God. Christ is the One Who binds the family together regardless of each member’s background. Membership of this wonderful family of God is open to all who come to faith in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Part 3 – Trinity

Many of you may have heard of the idea of the three in one God known as the Holy Trinity. Whilst there are no direct references to the Trinity in Scripture a close reading clearly confirms such a thought. It is based on God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit being a three-in-one God. Unfortunately whilst there is no single verse in Scripture that refers to them as the Trinity the idea is made clear in **4:4-6** where Paul tells us “*There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*” Now here in **3:16-17** we also see mention of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit together in the same two verses. Just look carefully at what Paul says: “*I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*” In **3:16** the words “*he*” and “*his*” refer to God the Father. Paul wants the Ephesian believers to be strengthened with power through God’s Holy Spirit and then in **3:17** he prays that God the Son, that is Christ, may dwell in their hearts. Personally I find those thoughts to be quite awe-inspiring and they take some thinking about.

The major thought of **3:16-17** is the indwelling of Christ in our inner being or hearts and Paul wants believers to be strengthened out of the Father’s glorious riches to achieve that. Once again we see mention of God’s riches and we need to understand that God has enormous resources that He wants to make available to us as we grow in our faith. To grow fully we need to be indwelt by Christ and we need to be strengthened for that to happen. When Paul talks in **3:16** of the believers’ “*inner being*” he also means their “*hearts*” which he refers to in **3:17**. Paul described this indwelling in **Galatians 2:20** when he wrote: “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*”

Like any good Pastor Paul wants believers to grow in their faith and for that to happen they need Christ to dwell in their hearts. Paul gives us an example of this in **Colossians 1:19**

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where we learn that “*God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him*”; that is, all the fullness of God Himself dwelt in Christ. Later in **Colossians 3:16** we read that we should “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*” In addition to those thoughts I’ll remind you that John opens his Gospel with those glorious words “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” (**John 1:1**) The Word John is referring to is Jesus Himself Who came to live among us and then die on Calvary’s cross to pay the price for our sins. It is He Who Paul wants us to draw nearer to by having Him dwell in our hearts and thus lead us to a closer relationship with God. We can only do that by opening our hearts and minds to Christ and allowing Him to fully take over.

Part 4 – Love

I firmly believe that everything God does for us and all of His family is based on love; that is His prime motivation. In his first Epistle the Apostle John makes it very clear when he says that “*God is love*” (**1 John 4:16**). Earlier in his Gospel John had given us one of the most famous and most quoted verses in Scripture when he said: “... *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” (**John 3:16**) Later in his Gospel John quoted the Lord’s words when Jesus said to His disciples: “*Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*” (**John 15:13**) Those verses most definitely illustrate just how much God loves us; He was prepared to sacrifice His only Son that all who placed their faith in Him would be forgiven their sins and have everlasting life. That is why Paul prays that they would be “*rooted and established in love*” (**3:17b**).

Now, I don’t know much about gardening, I most certainly don’t have green fingers; however, I do know that seeds need to be sown, take root and produce the flowers, salad or vegetables or whatever they are intended to produce. After they have been sown seeds need to be nurtured so that they take root and become established; their roots then grow and anchor the new plant firmly in the ground. Some seeds such as acorns can grow and become mighty oaks whilst others may simply wither away. Those seeds that do become established and develop firm roots are like the seed of love that is sown in our hearts when we come to faith in Christ.

Paul had similar thoughts on our being rooted in our faith in his Epistle to the Colossians where he said: “*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*” (**Colossians 2:6-7**). Although Paul doesn’t mention our being rooted in love in those verses, the late theologian and preacher John Stott does suggest in his Commentary on Ephesians that “*Love is to be the soil in which their life is to be rooted; love is to be the foundation on which their life is built.*”¹ This seed of love is nurtured by the regular reading of Scripture, prayer and drawing closer to Christ each day. As we grow in our faith Christ dwells more and more in our hearts and that leads us to know more of His amazing love.

That is what Paul wants for the Ephesian believers when their faith takes root and becomes established in their hearts. It is when that happens that believers may grow to know “*how*

¹ Stott, John, *Commentary on Ephesians*, electronic version

wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" (3:18b). That verse tries to explain just how vast is the love that Christ has for us. Consequently it is difficult for us to understand just how much He truly loves us. The New English Bible translation of this thought says that we should know this love of Christ "*though it is beyond knowledge*" (3:19). Just as God's riches are unsearchable (3:8) so is our full and total knowledge of His love unknowable. In **Philippians 4:7**, one of my favourite verses, Paul talks of God's peace when he says: "*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*" The peace that comes with our faith in Christ is way beyond our understanding and I would suggest that we have a similar situation with God's love given how vast it is. Just as God's peace "*transcends all understanding*" so is our understanding of His love for us far beyond our intellectual and mental capabilities.

Part 5 – Fullness

Paul's wish for the believers in Ephesus, and of course for us too, is that we should be "*filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*" (3:19). This thought of "*fullness*" is a recurring theme in Ephesians and Colossians. Here in 3:19 Paul talks of "*all the fullness of God*" which is similar to the thought in 4:13 where the Apostle says he wants us to become mature and attain "*to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*". In 5:18 he wants us to be "*filled with the Spirit*". Earlier in 1:23 when talking of the church Paul tells us the church "*is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills everything in every way*". In his Epistle to the Colossians the Apostle wants God to fill us "*with the knowledge if His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding*" (**Colossians 1:9**). This whole thought of being filled to the whole measure reminds me very much of David's comment in **Psalms 23:5** when he says "*my cup overflows*". That is very much what Paul wants for us as believers in Christ.

Looking again at the Commentary on this Epistle by John Stott we read "... *God expects us to be growing daily towards that final fullness, as we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ's image from one degree of glory to another.*"² As Christ fills us more and more we are transformed and changed in a variety of ways just as Paul urges us to be in **Romans 12:2** where he tells us to "*be transformed by the renewing of your mind*". The verse actually means that we should keep on being transformed; it is present continuous and I suspect that that is what Paul is suggesting here in 3:19b. I don't see this filling as being a one-off process; we need to keep on being filled as we grow in Christ. The American evangelist Dwight L Moody once said: "*The fact is, we are leaky vessels, and we have to keep right under the fountain all the time to keep full of Christ, and so have fresh supply.*" I'm sure many, if not all, of you will agree that we do leak in our faith and so we do need to keep on being filled by Christ's love.

Part 6 – Doxology

As we reach the closing verses of this prayer, **3:20-21**, we see what is generally known as a doxology; a short and spontaneous prayer of praise to God frequently offered at the end of a service or Epistle. In fact I've used these verses myself on a number of occasions as a Blessing to close a service. With that in mind it seems strange that Paul should use such a

² Stott, John, *Commentary on Ephesians*, electronic version

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prayer at this stage in the Epistle given that we know he is only half way through what he has to say to the Ephesian believers.

Even though Paul doesn't begin this short prayer by saying he is praying to God but "... *to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine*" (3:20), we can soon understand that God is the focus of the prayer since only He is the One Who can do more than we can ever imagine since only He has more power than we can imagine. Whilst the NIV wording may seem a bit difficult to understand the NLT reads more easily when it says: "*Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*" All of this is undoubtedly difficult for us to understand since we are mere finite beings and consequently struggle to comprehend the power and abilities that God has. We need to understand through faith that God is so powerful and loving that He will do more for us than we could possibly ever imagine and most certainly more than we could ever ask for. That surely deserves our thanks and praise as well as our worship. We can only truly appreciate God's love for us and the power available to us when we come to faith in Christ; and as I've said before Jesus is the key to all this.

Paul makes it clear that God alone deserves all the glory and praise that we can muster and His church, with Christ at the head, was created to bring Him that glory. It's important to note that this great glory will last for all eternity as Paul makes clear in those closing words: "*throughout all generations; for ever and ever*". Given that we live in an instant and fully disposal world I would suggest that such a thought is way beyond our comprehension.

Since a doxology normally signals the end we would expect these verses to signal the end of the Epistle. However, it isn't the end; these two verses merely form a short interlude where Paul offers praise, thanks and worship to a glorious and loving God.

Conclusion

Paul was above all else an Evangelist; someone who was called by God to take the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. However, not only was Paul a great Evangelist he was also a loving and caring Pastor. He had prayed earlier for the believers in Ephesus in 1:15-23 and now in 3:14-21 kneels before God to bring another prayer for the people of Ephesus.

Whilst this prayer in 3:14-19 may appear to be short it is packed with love and concern for the believers in Ephesus as well as requests to God. Paul wants the Ephesians to be filled with the love that Christ has for them and as a result to grow in their faith and be filled by Him.

We would all do well to read this prayer carefully and as we do so to draw nearer to God and grow in our faith as He takes up residence in our hearts. We need to fully appreciate just now much He loves us so that we can be filled to the brim with Christ.