

Prayer for Spiritual Empowerment

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction:

1. The first recorded prayer of the Epistle is in chapter 1:15-23 where the Apostle prays for their spiritual enlightenment. Now he prays for their spiritual empowerment.
2. The Apostle Paul was a great intercessor whose prayers were marked by:
 - An emphasis on praying for the *saints*. Paul did pray for the lost (Rom. 10:1) but the bulk of his recorded prayers were for the believers.
 - An emphasis on praying for the *spiritual*. It is not wrong to pray for physical and material needs such as healing (James 5:13-16) and daily needs (Matt. 6:11) but the problem is that all too often our prayers are heavily weighted on the side of the physical and material rather than the spiritual.
3. This prayer is one of the most majestic in the New Testament. A.T. Robertson comments, "Nowhere does Paul sound such depths of spiritual emotion or rise to such heights of spiritual passion as here. The whole seems to be colored with the "riches of His glory."
4. The prayer divides naturally into three sections.

I. THE PRACTICE OF PAUL'S PRAYER (VS. 14-15)

A. The Motivation behind his Prayer (Vs. 14a)

1. "For this cause" = in light of what Paul has just taught. At first glance we might ask what was the great urgency for Paul to pray for the Ephesian believers? They were saved, set apart and sealed with God's Holy Spirit. They had been placed in the body of Christ. What more could they need?
2. Perhaps the state of the Ephesian church some 35 years later might help answer that question. Through the Apostle John, Christ rebuked the Ephesian Church in these words, "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." (Rev. 2:4). "In the context of the churches of Revelation, it would appear that this cooling of first love is the first step into apostasy. The prayer before us and indeed the whole of the Ephesian Epistle is calculated to deter the subtle beginnings of spiritual decline. Only the constant infusion of the life and power of our risen Lord Jesus Christ will counteract the falling away of an individual Christian or of a whole church movement." (I. Western) The love of Christ does not lead us into apostasy, it protects us from apostasy!

B. The Method of his Prayer (Vs. 14b-15)

1. The Posture in which he Prayed (Vs. 14b)
 - a. In Paul's day, according to court etiquette when someone approached the throne, he bowed the knee. (Phillips) There are numerous postures for prayer in the Bible and there is a sense where each one conveys a heart attitude. Kneeling conveys humility, reverence, and dependence upon God.

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- b. Wiersbe: “The posture that links ‘sitting’ with ‘walking’ and ‘standing’ is “bowing the knee.” It is through prayer that we lay hold of God’s riches that enable us to behave like Christians and battle like Christians.”
2. The Person to whom he Prayed (Vs. 14b-15)
 - a. The Father of Christ (14b). The preposition ‘unto’ means ‘towards’. It speaks of the consciousness which Paul had when praying that he was directing his prayer to God who was listening while he prayed.” (Wuest) The general patter for prayer in the N.T. is to the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.
 - b. The Father of Christians (15)

II. THE PETITION OF PAUL’S PRAYER (VS. 16-19)

There is a very real sense in which this is one petition with four parts, like the segments of a telescope. One request leads into the next one and so on. Each request is introduced by the pronoun ‘that’. Paul prays for:

A. The Spirit’s Strengthening (Vs. 16)

1. The Provision of Strengthening (Vs. 16a)
 - a. ‘grant’ = means to give. This working of the Spirit in our lives is not worked up, it is prayed down!
 - b. “riches of his glory” = the standard and supply of the provision. ‘Glory’ is “the whole revealed perfections of God.” (Wuest) It is “the reflection of the essence of one’s being.” (Hoehner) Heaven’s wealth is available to saints who will pray!
2. The Person of Strengthening (Vs. 16b)
 - a. ‘strengthened’ = means to be made strong. It is in the passive voice reminding us that this power is not self-generated but comes from God. Twice this same word is translated “wax strong”, first in relation to John the Baptist (Luke 1:80) and then in relation to Christ (Luke 2:40).
 - b. “with might” = ‘dunamis’, Divine power, ability. Paul is praying that they will be made strong in God’s power.
 - c. “by his Spirit” = the Holy Spirit is the Agent of this power. He is the one who ministers God’s power to us in response to believing prayer.
3. The Place of Strengthening (Vs. 16c)
 - a. “the inner man” = the heart, spirit as opposed to the outer, physical man. 2 Cor. 4:16 “For which cause we faint not; but though our **outward man** perish, yet the **inward man** is renewed day by day.” Paul wants them to know power in their spiritual lives.
 - b. Andrew Murray observes:

“Day and night he cried to God in his intercession for them that the light and the power of the Holy Spirit might be in them. As earnestly as he believed in the power of his intercession for them so also did he believe in the blessing that theirs would bring upon him. “Now I beseech you... that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me” (Rom 15:30). —[God] will yet deliver us; ye also helping together by prayer for us” (2 Cor. 1:0-11). “Praying... for me... that I may open my mouth boldly” (Eph. 6:18-19 “This shall turn to my salvation through your prayer” (Phil. 1:19) The whole relationship between pastor and people depends on the united, continual prayerfulness. Their whole relationship to each other is a heavenly

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one, spiritual and divine, and can only be maintained by unceasing prayer. When ministers and people waken up to the consciousness that the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit is waiting for their united and unceasing prayers, the church will begin to know something of what apostolic Christianity is.”

B. The Saviour’s Abiding (Vs. 17a)

1. The Meaning of this Indwelling – ‘dwell’
 - a. The word ‘dwell’ means “to make one’s home, to be at home.” (Robertson) The word denotes a permanent habitation as opposed to sojourning or an occasional visit. Note how the word is used in the following examples to illustrate:
 - i. Acts 9:22 “the Jews which **dwelt** at Damascus”
 - ii. Acts 11:29 “the brethren which **dwelt** in Judaea”
 - b. Kenneth Wuest explains: “The personal presence of the Lord Jesus in the heart of the believer is not in view here. That is taken for granted. The word ‘dwell’ is ‘katoikesai’, made up of ‘oikeo’, “to live in as a home,” and ‘kata’, “down” thus “to settle down and be at home”. So, it has the sense “that Christ might finally settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts.”
 - c. Challenge: If you are saved, Christ indwells you, but is He at home in your heart? Or is your heart overtaken by things that grieve Him? You are Christ indwelt but are you Christ controlled?
2. The Means of this Indwelling – “by faith”
 - a. By faith we are indwelt by salvation and by faith we experience the abiding presence of Christ in our lives.
 - b. Wuest: “This trust here is not a trust in the Lord Jesus as Saviour, but, having believed on Him as Saviour, the saint is now to believe on Him as the One who fills with the Spirit, or grants the fulness of the Spirit, as Paul puts it in his prayer here.”

C. The Saint’s Growing (Vs. 17b-19a)

They were to grow in the love of God. “This love is a love that seeks the highest good in the one loved.” (Hoehner) Paul prayed that they would be:

1. Established in Divine Love (Vs. 17b)
 - a. The Agricultural Metaphor – ‘rooted’. God’s love is pictured as the soil in which the believer flourishes. We grow by the principle of love, not law. The root does two things: 1. It provides nutriment; 2. It provides stability.
 - b. The Architectural Metaphor – ‘grounded’. The reference is to the foundation of a building. Love is the foundation for the Christian love, not law. We live by an inner life principle, not by an external law principle.
2. Enlightened in Divine Love (Vs. 18-19a)
 - a. A Love which is Unmeasurable (Vs. 18)

The four dimensions are intended to illustrate the vastness of God’s love. Consider its:

 - i. Breadth – how wide is it? Is it only wide enough for a select few? No! His love is wide enough for all mankind (John

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3:16). His love is wider than the seas and broader than the vast expanse of the universe.

- ii. Length – how long is it? Where does God’s love start and where does it end? Can you measure it? Will God ever stop loving us as His children? Will we reach a limit one day? No! God’s love is infinite and eternal reaching back into the heart of God in eternity past and extending forward into eternity future. God’s love has no end, it is forever.
- iii. Depth – how deep is it? Is it as deep as the deepest ocean? What is its volume? It is deeper than the deepest ocean!
- iv. Height – how high is it? Is it as high as the sky? Does it reach to the stars, the galaxy and beyond? Does it reach as high as heaven? Do you see the picture? No matter how far you travel in any direction, God’s love is vaster still.
- v. Illustration: Abraham was instructed of God to walk “the length” and “the breadth” of the land he was to inherit. Gen. 13:14-15, 17 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.”
 - i. Hymn: Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the sky 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 oceans dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.
- b. A Love which is Unfathomable (Vs. 19a)
 - i. “to know” = refers to knowledge gained by experience.
 - ii. “passeth knowledge” = the word ‘passeth’ means “to throw beyond, to surpass, exceed.” “No matter how much knowledge we have of Christ and His work, his love surpasses that knowledge.” (Hoehner) This phrase is similar to that of Vs. 8 – “the unsearchable riches of Christ.”
 - iii. Illustration: Imagine if you could assemble 100 of the greatest Christians from church history in one room and have them share their knowledge and experience of God’s love in salvation. What an immense pool of knowledge that would be! And yet, God’s love would far surpass it still.
 - iv. Wuest: “No matter how much the saint experiences of the love of Christ, yet there are oceans of love in the great heart of God that have not been touched by his experience.”

D. The Spirit’s Filling (Vs. 19b)

1. Positionally we have been filled – Col. 2:9-10 “For in him dwelleth all the **fulness** of the Godhead bodily. And ye are **complete** in him,

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which is the head of all principality and power:" In Christ, we have been filled with His fulness.

2. Experientially we need to be filled – “that ye might be filled” (Eph. 3:19). There is a direct link between prayer and the filling of the Spirit. It is Scriptural to pray for the filling of the Spirit. Would to God we would all start praying fervently for each other that we would all be filled with His fulness.
3. Illustration: D.L. Moody’s experience (as explained by John Phillips). “He rarely spoke of his experience because it was too sacred, but it is recorded in his biography. He had been walking the streets of New York City, oblivious to the crowds and traffic, wrestling with God about a claim God was making on his life. Suddenly he gave in and felt an overwhelming sense of God’s presence sweep over him like waves. He went to a friend’s house, declined the offer of a meal, and asked for a room where he could be alone. Time passed. He was alone with God in a way he had never known before; he was filled with the fullness of God. At last Moody cried out to God to stay His hand, for he could take no more. After that experience his ministry was never the same. An anointing on him surpassed all that had gone before.”
4. Illustration: Imagine you possessed a vast fortune but instead of using it, you lived as though you did not possess it at all. You struggled from day to day to get by with your own meagre resources. How often we live this way as God’s people! We have been blessed with all spiritual blessings (1:3) but instead of appropriating them in our lives by faith for our spiritual needs, we try and live according to our own power and strength.

III. THE PRAISE OF PAUL’S PRAYER (VS. 20-21)

Paul concludes this prayer and this first major section of the Epistle with a stirring doxology emphasizing...

A. The Ability of God (Vs. 20)

Observe two truths about God’s power. It is...

1. Overwhelming Power (Vs. 20a)
 - a. “him that is able” = the word ‘able’ also comes from ‘dunamis’. Perhaps you would say, I desire the working of God’s Holy Spirit in my life. I want to know more of God’s power in my life. But how is it all possible? The answer is that God is able!
 - b. “exceeding abundantly above” = “this expression is the highest form of comparison imaginable.” (Hoehner) It means “beyond all measure, greatly exceeding all boundaries.” (Linguistic Key)
 - c. “all that we ask or think” = God’s ability to work in our lives and to answer our prayers is way beyond any request we bring him or even our wildest imaginations.
 - d. Note: Remember again that the context is prayer for spiritual blessings, not material blessings. This verse has nothing to do with the prosperity movement.
2. Operating Power (Vs. 20b)
 - a. ‘worketh’ = energy, power in operation. The operation of the Holy Spirit in His work of sanctification.

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- b. Challenge: There is no limit to what God can do but the extent to which He works in our lives will be largely determined by how much we are yielded to Him.

B. The Glory of God (Vs. 21)

1. The location of this glory (Vs. 21a)
 - a. "in the church" = this fits the whole context which is dealing with the church. It is in the church that God's manifold wisdom is displayed (Vs. 10) and it is through the church that God glorifies Himself.
 - b. Remember, the sole purpose of a New Testament church is the glory of God and it is only a church consumed with a zeal for God's glory that will know something of God's power.
 - c. Maclaren: "His glory is to shine in the Church, the theatre of His power, the standing demonstration of the might of redeeming love...So, then, think of that wonder that God sets His glory in His dealings with us. Amid all the majesty of His works and all the blaze of His creation, this is what He presents as the highest specimen of his power – the Church of Jesus Christ, the company of poor men, wearied and conscious of many evils, who follow afar off the footsteps of their Lord."
2. The mediation of this glory (Vs. 21b) Christ is the one who makes it possible for us to glorify the Father. His mediatorial ministry is in view.
3. The duration of this glory (Vs. 21c)
 - a. "throughout all ages" = that means **now** in this present age.
 - b. "throughout all ages" = that means **forever** into the future, in eternity. This is "the expression of one trying to convey the idea of eternity." (Wuest)

Conclusion:

1. Pray this prayer for yourself that you might know God's power in your life.
2. Pray this prayer for others that they might know God's power in their lives. It is especially important that mature saints take up the ministry of prayer for the young and immature in the Lord. "We cannot unveil the love of God to the young pilgrim, but the Holy Spirit can and does. Yet for some wise and good reason God has ordained that this great spiritual blessing be granted in answer to the intercessory prayers of His people. Some, no doubt sincere folk, turn to a highly emotive charismatic experience as the universal panacea (remedy) for all spiritual ills. Paul's, yea the Holy Spirit's method is the prayer closet of the more mature saints, lifting up their struggling brothers and sisters before the throne of grace, until the eyes of their understanding be opened, the Spirit be released in greater measure and the love of God flood their hearts." (I. Western)