

THE STUDY OF EPHESIANS
LESSON 10 NOTES
EPHESIANS 3:14-21
TURN ON THE POWER

The prayer of Ephesians 3:14-21 is a plea to God that also serves as a plea to believers. Paul pleads with believers to respond to God's sovereign provision, and he pleads with God to motivate them to do it—because God not only is the provider but is also the initiator and motivator. Paul calls on God to activate believers' power so that they can become faithful children and thereby glorify their heavenly Father.

In this great prayer of entreaty to God and exhortation to His children, Paul prays specifically for the inner strength of the Spirit, for the indwelling of Christ in the believer's heart, for incomprehensible love to permeate their lives, for them to have God's own fullness, and for God's glory thereby to be manifested and proclaimed. Each element builds on the previous ones, making a grand progression of enablement.

**PAUL'S PRAYERS
IN EPHESIANS**

First Prayer (<u>Ep 1:15-23</u>).	Second Prayer (<u>Ep 3:14-21</u>)
Revelation	Realization
Enlightenment	Enablement
Light	Life
Know what you are	Be what you know
Know the power of God	Experience the fullness of God
Power working for us	Power working in us
You in Christ	Christ in you
Christ fullness Church	Church fullness Christ

THE FATHER AND HIS FAMILY

Paul approaches the Father with boldness and confidence, knowing that He is more willing for His children to come to Him than they ever are of going to Him. He knows that God has been waiting all the while with a Father's heart of love and anticipation.

In saying, *I bow my knees*, Paul is not prescribing a required posture for prayer. He did not always pray while kneeling, and Scripture tells of God's faithful people praying in many different positions.

But in Scripture, bowing the knees signifies several things that may have prompted Paul to mention that position here. First, it represents an attitude of submission, of recognition that one is in the presence of someone who is of much higher rank, dignity, and authority. After proclaiming the Lord as "the rock of our salvation, ... a great God, and a great King above all gods," and as the Creator of all the earth, the psalmist says, "Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker" (Ps. 95:1-6).

As he prayed for the Ephesians while writing this letter to them, the apostle felt led to bow his knees before the Father on their behalf, not because that position or any other is especially sacred, but because it spontaneously reflected his reverence for God's glory in the midst of his passionate prayer.

Every family in heaven and on earth refers to the saints of every age—those now in heaven and those still remaining on earth. They are the only ones who legitimately derive their names from God the Father. Christians are no more or less the children of God than were believing Israelites, as well as believing Gentiles, before the coming of Christ. Every family of believers is a part of the one spiritual family of God, in which there are many members but only one Father and one brotherhood.

That word family can be translated "fatherhood" or "patria" and refers to all of the descendants of a particular patriarch. Every fatherhood in heaven and on earth gets its origin and name from the Father. He is the great Original—every other fatherhood is but a copy. Adam is called "the son of God" (Luke 3:38), referring to his creation. Believers are the "sons of God" by rebirth (John 1:11-13). All men are not children of God by nature. Instead, they are children of disobedience and children of wrath (Eph. 2:2-3). As Creator, God is the Father of each person, but as Savior, He is only the Father of those who believe. There is no such thing in Scripture as the universal fatherhood of God that saves all men. "You must be born again" (John 3:7).

Paul's first and central request for this divine family is that *God would grant them, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.*

For a millionaire to give fifty or a hundred dollars would be simply to give out of his wealth, but to give twenty-five thousand dollars would be to give according to his wealth. The greater a person's wealth, the greater his gift must be to qualify for giving according to his wealth. For God to give according to the riches of His glory is absolutely staggering, because His riches are limitless, completely without bounds! Yet that is exactly the measure by which Paul implores God to empower the Ephesians.

Almost every prayer of Paul's that is recorded in Scripture was for the spiritual welfare of others. Even when he was persecuted, imprisoned, and in need of many things for his own welfare, he prayed primarily for fellow believers that they might be spiritually protected and strengthened.

All of God's people are to be like Paul in having an overriding sensitivity to the spiritual needs of others, for the salvation of the unsaved and the spiritual protection and growth of the saved. We are to be sensitive to the spiritual needs of our wives, husbands, children, pastors, fellow church members, neighbors, fellow students, friends, and co-workers. We are to pray for everyone with whom we have any contact at all, as well as for many others—such as government officials, Christian leaders, and missionaries—whom we may never have met or known.

We all understand material riches but, spiritual riches, on the other hand, are not so obvious—and are not even attractive to the natural man or to disobedient Christians.

But to the spiritual believer, *the riches of His glory* are rich indeed. From the beginning of the letter Paul has been exulting over those divine riches—God blessing us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (1:3), His choosing us for Himself before the foundation of the world (1:4), His redemption and forgiveness (1:7), His making known to us the mystery of His will (1:9), His giving us an inheritance with His Son, Jesus Christ (1:11). The phrase “*of His glory*” testifies that these riches belong to God because of who He is. They belong innately to His Person, which is to say, His glory. Those, and many others, are the riches that every believer has in Jesus Christ. Paul is not praying for God to give these riches to believers, but that He would grant believers to be strengthened by God according to the riches they already possess. He wants them to live lives that correspond to the spiritual wealth they have in Christ.

STRENGTHENED WITH POWER

The first step in living like God's children is to be *strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man*. Yet most Christians never seem to get to this first step, not knowing what it is to see God's power fully at work in them.

Paul was concerned for the physical health of believers and was used by God to bring healing to many. He was concerned for the destitute saints in Jerusalem and worked tirelessly to raise money for them to buy food and other physical necessities. But he knew that the outer man was destined to perish. It is only a temporary housing for the real person, the inner man. “Therefore we do not lose heart,” Paul could say, “but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). Paul told Timothy, “But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth” (2 Tim. 4:17).

Only God can reach and cure the inner man, and that is where He most wants to work. His work begins with salvation, and after that His main field of work is still the inner man, because that is where spiritual life exists and where it must grow.

Although the outer, physical man becomes weaker and weaker with age, the inner, spiritual man should continually grow stronger and stronger *with power through His Spirit*. Only God's Spirit can strengthen our spirits. He is the one who energizes, revitalizes, and empowers us (Acts 1:8).

When the inner man is fed regularly on the Word of God and seeks the Spirit's will in all the decisions of life, the believer can be sure he will be strengthened with power through His Spirit. Spiritual power is not the mark of a special class of Christian but is the mark of every Christian who submits to God's Word and Spirit. Like physical growth and strength, spiritual growth and strength do not come overnight. As we discipline our minds and spirits to study God's Word, understand it, and live by it, we are nourished and strengthened.

INDWELLING CHRIST

"*So that*" translates *hina*, a Greek word used to introduce purpose clauses. The purpose of our being "strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man" is that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

Katoikeō (dwell) is a compound word, formed from *kata* (down) and *oikeō* (to inhabit a house). In the context of this passage the connotation is not simply that of being inside the house of our hearts but of being at home there, settled down as a family member. Christ cannot be "at home" in our hearts until our inner person submits to the strengthening of His Spirit. Until the Spirit controls our lives, Jesus Christ cannot be comfortable there, but only stays like a tolerated visitor. Paul's teaching here does not relate to the act of Jesus' presence in the hearts of believers but to the quality of His presence.

Jesus enters the house of our hearts the moment He saves us, but He cannot live there in comfort and satisfaction until it is cleansed of sin and filled with His will. God is gracious beyond comprehension and infinitely patient. He continues to love those of His children who insist on spurning His will. But He cannot be happy or satisfied in such a heart. He cannot be fully at home until He is allowed to dwell in our hearts through the continuing faith that trusts Him to exercise His lordship over every aspect of our lives. We practice as well as receive His presence by faith.

How awesome and wonderful that the almighty and holy God wants to live in our hearts, be at home there, and rule there! Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23).

THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN US

The result of our yielding to the Spirit's power and submitting to Christ's lordship in our hearts is love. When Christ settles down in our lives He begins to display His own love in us and through us. When He freely indwells our hearts, we become *rooted and grounded in love*, that is, settled on a strong foundation of love.

We can only have such love when Christ is free to work His own love through us. We cannot fulfill any of Christ's commands without Christ Himself, least of all His command to love. We can only love as Christ loves when He has free reign in our hearts. "By this," John says, "the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love

one another No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.... We love, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:9-12, 19).

The absence of love is the presence of sin. The absence of love has nothing at all to do with what is happening to us, but everything to do with what is happening in us. Sin and love are enemies, because sin and God are enemies. They cannot coexist. Where one is, the other is not. The loveless life is the ungodly life; and the godly life is the serving, caring, tenderhearted, affectionate, self-giving, self-sacrificing life of Christ’s love working through the believer.

When we are *rooted and grounded in love*, we then become *able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth* of love. We cannot comprehend the fullness of love unless we are totally immersed in love, unless it is the very root and ground of our being.

Comprehension of love comes from being continually immersed in the things of God, especially His Word. To *comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth* of love is to understand it in its fullness. Love goes in every direction and to the greatest distance. It goes wherever it is needed for as long as it is needed.

In whatever spiritual direction we look we can see God’s love. We can see love’s breadth reflected in God’s acceptance of Gentile and Jew equally in Christ (Eph. 2:11-18). We can see love’s length in God’s choosing us before the foundation of the world (1:4-5) for a salvation that will last through all eternity. We can see love’s height in God’s having “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (1:3) and in His raising us up and seating us “with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus” (2:6). We can see love’s depth in God’s reaching down to the lowest levels of depravity to redeem those who are dead in trespasses and sins (2:1-3). God’s love can reach any person in any sin, and it stretches from eternity past to eternity future. It takes us into the very presence of God and sits us on His throne.

THE FULLNESS AND GLORY OF GOD

The inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit leads to the indwelling of Christ, which leads to abundant love, which leads to God’s fullness in us. To *be filled up to all the fullness of God* is indeed incomprehensible, even to God’s own children. It is incredible and indescribable. There is no way, this side of heaven, we can fathom that truth. We can only believe it and praise God for it.

To be filled up to all the fullness of God therefore means to be totally dominated by Him, with nothing left of self or any part of the old man. By definition, then, to be filled with God is to be emptied of self. It is not to have much of God and little of self, but all of God and none of self.

In culmination of all he has been declaring about God’s limitless provision for His children, Paul gives this great doxology, a paean of praise and glory, introduced by *Now unto Him*. When the Holy Spirit has empowered us, Christ has indwelt us, love has mastered us, and God has filled us with His own fullness, then *He is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think*.

This statement should be savored, its taste lingering in our mouths long after we have read it, because it represents a build-up of thought that breaks through the limits of language. Paul's words make genuine contact with the truth he wants to express. Yet at the same time they point to a reality he cannot express in words. This is perhaps best expressed if we think of an ascending series of ideas:

God can do:

- ☐ All we ask
- ☐ All we ask or think of asking
- ☐ More than all we can ask or think of asking
- ☐ More abundantly than all we can ask or think
- ☐ Far more abundantly than all we can ask or think

Paul concludes verse 21 with “*amen.*” *Amen* is the word of positive response, confirmation and affirmation used in the Old Testament. Its Hebrew root means to be faithful, reliable, true. To say *amen* means to say ‘yes’ to God’s promises, or warnings, or praises. Jesus himself is the true Amen (Rev. 3:14). He alone has perfectly responded to everything God has said. In fact, he has done this on our behalf. In his life of obedience, he has said ‘Yes’ to God’s law in our place—where we have said ‘No’.

In his death on the cross Christ said ‘Yes’ to God’s judgment, taking our place and being *made sin* for us (2 Cor. 5:21), saying ‘Yes’ to receiving the judgment of God’s curse so that we might not have to bear it. Indeed, says Paul, all of the promises of God are ‘Yes’ and ‘Amen’ in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).

Let our own response be: Amen and amen!

References:

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Ephesians- John MacArthur

Let's Study Ephesians- Sinclair Ferguson