

## Paul's Prayer for Enablement

October 18, 2002

- *What position do you usually pray in? (sitting, standing, kneeling etc...) What is the content of most of your prayers? (adoration, confession, intercession, petitions etc...)*

### Ephesians 3:14-21

*14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,*

*17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; [and] that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 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, 21 to Him [be] the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

"It is possible to know a great deal about an automobile-to know exactly how the engine, the ignition, the transmission, and so on operate-and yet never use it to go anywhere. It is also possible to know very little about an automobile and yet use it every day to travel hundreds of miles. In the same way it is possible to know a great deal about the Bible, its doctrines, interpretations, moral standards, promises, warnings, and so on, and yet not live by those truths." [John MacArthur, Ephesians, p. 99]

In Ephesians 1:1-3:13, Paul has instructed the Ephesians regarding many basic truths about the Christian life. He has taught the Ephesians who they are in Christ and the many spiritual blessings and riches that they possess in Christ. He has reminded the Ephesians of their former condition, and of God's transformation of them. He now moves on to intercede to God for them that they may be enabled to live according to these great truths.

### The Prayer's Introduction (3:14-15)

"*For this reason*" picks up after the parenthesis of 3:2-13, and repeats the words of Ephesians 3:1. The reason of which Paul speaks is therefore found in Chapter 2.

- *What truths from Ephesians 2 drive the Apostle Paul into prayer for the Ephesians?*

v. 5)

v. 10)

v. 15)

v. 16)

v. 17)

v. 19)

v. 21-22)

- ***What is Paul's attitude in this prayer and how is this noted?***

The phrase "*I bow my knees*" is not advocating a particular position in prayer, but more than likely Paul's attitude in prayer. In the Scripture we are commanded to pray without ceasing, wherever we are, whenever we want and in any or all situations. To pray consistently all the time necessitates being in various postures because you will never be in the same posture all day.

- ***In regards to posture, how do we see people praying in the Bible?***

Genesis 24:12-14

1 Timothy 2:8

Judges 20:26

Mark 1:40

John 17:1

Exodus 34:8

1 Kings 18:42

Luke 18:13

Daniel 6:10

A little poem by Sam Walter Foss emphasizes rather humorously that there is no specific position or posture that we are required to pray in:

*The proper way for a man to pray, says Deacon Lemuel Keys,  
And the only proper attitude is down upon his knees.  
No, I should say the way to pray, Says Reverend Doctor Wise  
Is standing straight with outstretched arms And rapt and upturned eyes.  
Oh, no, no, no, said Elmer Slow. Such posture is too proud.  
A man should pray with eyes fast closed And head contritely bowed.  
It seems to me his hands should be Austerely clasped in front.  
Both hands pointing toward the ground, Said Reverend Doctor Blunt.  
Last year I fell in Hitchkins' well, Head first, said Cyrus Brown.*

*And both my heels were stickin' up, And my head was pointing down.*

*And I made a prayer right then and there, The best prayer I ever said.*

*The prayin'est prayer I ever prayed Was standin' on my head.*

Now while this little poem is funny, it clearly depicts that the Bible places no requirement on the position of our prayers.

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 (i.e. Psalm 95:1-6). Second, we see references to bowing the knee before God in times of intense passion and emotion (i.e. Ezra 9:5-6; Daniel 6:10; Acts 20:36).

Paul felt led to bow his knees before the Father on behalf of the Ephesians, not because the 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. [MacArthur, p. 102]

The phrase "*every family in heaven and on earth*" refers to the saints of every age—those in heaven and those still remaining on the earth. It is referring to believers from all ages who legitimately derive their names from God.

### **The Prayer's Intercessions** (3:16-19)

- ***How does Paul intercede for the Ephesians? What is the content of his intercessions?***

#### **Intercession #1: That He would grant you according to His riches to be strengthened with power in His Spirit. (3:16)**

First, for God to give *according to the riches of His glory* is absolutely a staggering thought since His riches are completely limitless.

Second, the term *strengthened* in the Greek is the opposite of *discouraged* in 3:13.

Third, note that the source of this strength is the Holy Spirit. God sent the Holy Spirit to comfort us, to guide us in the truth, to remind us of Christ's instruction, and to convict us when we do not obey. The Holy Spirit provides power for our new lives in Christ.

As believers we are consistently reminded to be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18) or to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:16). The obedient, effective and productive Christian must be Spirit conscious, Spirit filled, and Spirit controlled!

- ***How can we incorporate this intercession into our own prayers? How can you personally apply this intercession to your life?***

#### **Intercession #2: That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. (3:17)**

Paul is not here referring to Christ indwelling our hearts in salvation. Obviously as we stated at the outset that Paul was writing to Ephesian believers (cf. 1:1, 3, 10, 12; 2:6, 10, 13). He is likely referring to Christ indwelling our hearts in sanctification.

Remember that the heart in Scripture carries the idea of mind and will. Paul is praying that the Ephesian believers give their minds and will completely over to Christ. It really carries the idea of

letting Christ rule in our hearts and likely emphasizes Lordship. We are to submit to, trust and obey Christ as Lord.

- *How can we incorporate this intercession into our own prayers? How can you personally apply this intercession to your life?*

### **Intercession #3: That you may be able to comprehend the abundant love of Christ. (3:18-19a)**

Christ's indwelling presence and the Spirit's strengthening power help believers to be rooted and grounded in love. (literally "having been rooted and having been founded in love," emphasizing the present result of a past action). In Greek this clause connects with verse 18 suggesting that by being rooted and grounded in love we will then be able to understand the magnitude of Christ's love.

- *What image or picture do the terms rooted and grounded bring to mind?*

Paul prayed that this foundation of love would give all believers the ability to comprehend or grasp the vastness of Christ's love, which is total, complete, eternal, and all encompassing.

- *How does Paul describe the vastness of Christ's love?*

"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 (Eph. 1:4-5) for a salvation that will last through eternity. We can see love's **height** in God's having blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3) and in His raising us up and seating us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph. 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 their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3)." [MacArthur, p. 110]

- *How can we incorporate this intercession into our own prayers? How can you personally apply this intercession to your life?*

### **Intercession #4: That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (3:19b)**

There is no way this side of heaven that we can fathom the idea of being filled up to all the fullness of God. Even to begin to grasp the magnitude of this we must think of every attribute and characteristic of God. The term filled up means to make full, or fill until full and is used many times in the New Testament. It speaks of total dominance! To be filled with rage is to be dominated or controlled by hatred. To be filled with happiness is to be dominated or controlled by joy. To be filled up to all the fullness of God means to be totally dominated and controlled by God, with nothing left of self. To be filled with God is to be emptied of self.

- *How can we incorporate this intercession into our own prayers? How can you personally apply this intercession to your life?*

### **The Prayer's Benediction (3:20-21)**

Paul closes with a beautiful and often quoted benediction. When the Holy Spirit has empowered us, Christ has indwelt us, we have been rooted and grounded in love, and God has filled us up with His own fullness, then He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.

- *As Paul gives this benediction, what is his focus?*

Paul has prayed for spiritual enablement for the Ephesian believers. He has interceded to God for them that they may be enabled to live according to the great truths he has already taught them in the

first two chapters of the letter. Paul will now move on in the letter to exhort the Ephesians to a worthy walk as a believer.

**Application:**

- *To what extent are your prayers based on what God has done in Christ or has promised to do by the Holy Spirit?*
  
- *How do think Paul's intercession here for the Ephesians will impact your own prayer life? How can this insight ad depth and content to your prayers?*