

# Northolt Park Baptist Church

## Praying for the Church: Ephesians 3:14-21

The prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21 can be seen as containing two central requests, each of which carries certain results; it concludes with an outburst of praise, the doxology.

### 1. The first request: being strengthened with power (3:16)

The first request is that God might strengthen us with power through his Spirit in our inner being. Paul has already prayed in 1:18-19 that the church would know God's power; he asks here that God would *strengthen* them with power. It's the Spirit who conveys this power, and it operates in what Paul calls our 'inner being'. The same expression occurs in 2 Corinthians 4:16, where Paul speaks of the 'outer person' being stripped away while the 'inner person' is being renewed day by day. He prays that God's power might strengthen us in *this inner being* by his Holy Spirit. Paul knows that the front line of the battle is not 'out there', but 'in here', in our inner being.

### 2. The resources: out of the Father's glorious riches (3:14-16)

By what resources will this prayer be answered? The answer is given in 3:16 – 'out of his glorious riches'. This phrase is bound up with what Christ has done for us. Paul has prayed earlier in 1:18 that they will know 'the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints'. He uses a similar phrase in Philippians 4:19 – 'My God shall meet all your needs *according to his glorious riches* in Christ Jesus'. The riches are as great as those which have been secured for us by Christ himself; that's the extent of the supply of the power.

But the resources also have to do with who God is – he is our *Father*. 3:14-15 implies that the whole idea of parenthood, family, and clan ultimately goes back to God the Father. Jesus used the analogy, again in the context of prayer, when he said: 'If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your

children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!' (Matthew 7:11). That's the way Paul begins his prayer – by focusing on who God is, and what God has done. God has the *power* to meet our needs because of his great riches in Christ. And he has the *desire* to meet our needs because he is our loving Father.

### 3. The result: Christ dwells in our hearts (3:17)

The result of this power is that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. Many people want power – to be great evangelists or preachers, maybe, or simply to be thought *powerful*. Why does Paul pray for power? He gives the reason – 'so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith'. The Spirit empowers us so that Christ may indwell us. This is a way of referring to Christian maturity.

When people move into a new home, slowly but surely, perhaps over a considerable period of time (and normally a lot longer than they would really like!), they make the place their own. They make it their home, such that it has their stamp on it; it reflects them and their needs, their concerns, their likes and dislikes.

So also is it when Christ dwells in us. He makes our hearts his home. He moves in, takes up residence, and lives there. There is such maturity of character, it's as if Christ moved in and took over the whole place and made it his, so that the motives, the thinking, the values, the goals, the priorities, the shape of the whole place, is moulded by him who lives there. Is he at home in our hearts, or is he an embarrassed visitor? Is he an intruder in the home, a guest in the home, or Lord of the home? Paul is praying that Christ may be completely at home in the believers' hearts.

That is the purpose of this power for which Paul prays, not just for individuals, but for the church as a whole – that the *church* may become *mature*. The heart of this request is that

the church in Ephesus should know the continual transformation which is empowered by nothing less than the resurrection power experienced by Christ and given by him to us through his Spirit. Such that in our inner being we are so transformed that Christ inhabits us in all we are, and say, and do, and think.

It's a great prayer for the church!

#### **4. The second request: grasping the love of Christ (3:17b-19a)**

The second request is that they will be able to grasp God's love. Again, Paul has already mentioned God's love earlier in the letter (in 1:4-5 and 2:4); no wonder, then, that he can say here that we have been *rooted* and *established* in God's love. He mixes his images – not only a *solid* foundation, like a huge building, but *rooted*, like a great tree. All the growth in our lives begins with God's love, and takes its nourishment from God's love; all our activities are founded on the rock of God's love.

It's important to note that this is not a prayer that we might love Christ more. This is rather a prayer that *we might better grasp his love for us*. We sometimes sing these truths in powerful words:

Oh, the deep, deep love of Jesus...

Loved with everlasting love,  
led by grace that love to know...

How do we speak about Christ's love? Paul has a difficult time getting it across. He says: 'how wide and long and high and deep.' How do we measure love? 3 acres? 4 buckets? 16 kilogrammes? 40 miles? Paul wants us to know that Christ's love is wide enough to embrace all; it's longer than the eye can see; it's high enough to lift us all the way to heaven; it's deep enough to be with us in our lowest depths of despair. Then Paul uses paradox: 'that you may know this love that surpasses knowledge'. Paul wants us to know the love that surpasses our intellect – that you may know what you can't know; that you may know what I can't express! All of which shows that he is not talking about a mere head knowledge, but about an absorption into our very life and experience of the love of God.

#### **5. The result: filled with the fulness of God (3:19b)**

Once again, this has an aim to it – 'so that you may be filled to all the measure of the fullness of God'. That's another expression bound up with Christian maturity, similar to what Paul says later in 4:13. It's worth noting again that this is a prayer for the church, and that (again) it has to do with *maturity*. Paul wants the church to know the power of being able to grasp the love of Christ, in order that we might become mature – because we won't be mature without it.

This is true in our experience. We know that the well-being of children depends on them being brought up in an atmosphere of disciplined love. We know that the maturity of marriages and relationships depends on the security of committed love. Exactly the same thing is true of our Christian experience. Our heavenly father loves us, and we should work at learning to appreciate and cultivate his love – for we cannot be mature unless we do so.

Again, another great prayer for the church!

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Paul prays for the church. And it's important for us to line our priorities with his. We need an understanding of who God is, and what he's done for us in Christ. We need power from God's Spirit in our inner beings. Why? So that Christ may live in us. We need power to know more of the love of God? Why? So that we may be filled with fullness of God. These are crucial priorities for the church of Christ, and should be high on our agenda when we pray for one another, for our witness, for our fellowship, and for our worship.

The prayer is asking God to do great things. And the doxology at the end, the outburst of praise, puts it all into perspective. God is able to do *more* than we imagine (3:20-21). When all is said and done, this is the ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer – that there be glory to God *in the church* and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever. Amen.