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## A Prayer for Power Ephesians 3:14-17a

**Intro:** We have been looking quite extensively at Paul's presentation of God's plan to bring together in unity both Jews and Gentiles into the church. This plan was a mystery in OT times that was hidden in God (9) but was revealed in the NT era by the Holy Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets (5b). As we saw last time, it was by the outworking of this plan in the church that the manifold wisdom of God is constantly and consistently being revealed to the angelic hosts, both faithful and fallen. It is through the endurance of our unity among the disparate groups within the Body of Christ **and** our faithfulness to pursue God's will in every aspect of our lives that we show the angelic beings the wisdom and rightness of following God's way. The holy angels witness the outworking of God's plan of salvation and praise Him for His wisdom. The fallen angels offer stubborn yet futile resistance to it and shudder in their doom.

In our text today, Paul is finally able to move on to his next point – the point of prayer. Ch3 closes out with a prayer offered by Paul on behalf of the Ephesian Christians. It is a wonderful prayer in that it provides us with insight into Paul's heart as well as information on how to pray effectively. This prayer has 2 main petitions and concludes with a beautiful doxology. As this prayer is fully loaded with important theology; principles and truths that directly impact our Christian lives today, we will take our time to unpack and dissect these truths in order to glean as much wisdom and instruction from them as they can provide.

How did you learn to pray? For many of those who were raised in a conservative Christian home or attended a main-line denominational church, their prayers are often laced with smatterings of Elizabethan English: "We thank Thee, heavenly Father, that in Thy great grace Thou hast condescended to visit us here." Others seem to think it important to pray loudly or with great excitement. Of course, since prayer is merely holding a conversation with God, there's nothing wrong with simply praying in a normal voice using common language. Too often in our Western Christian culture, the idea of proper prayer is focused on style or posture of attitude. While these things do have a place in the activity of prayer, they are at best

secondary to the requirements of obedience, knowledge and submission.

Anybody who's ever thought seriously about prayer has at one time or another wrestled with the question of its value. Sometimes this is because we don't always get what we pray for. We pray according to what we think is the will of God, but the answer is denied or delayed. This may cause us to question the purpose of prayer. Does it work, am I wasting my time? Or we struggle with the relationship of prayer to God's sovereignty. "Why pray if God's going to do what He will do anyway? Will my prayers change God's mind?" Our prayers don't get God to change His mind. They would be dangerous if they could. But, it's striking that none of these questions ever deterred the biblical writers from praying. In fact, it seems that the more aware they were of God's sovereignty or God's will, the more fervently and more frequently they petitioned Him through prayer.

Effective prayer's not based on our style of prayer, our attitude in prayer or even our posture in prayer. As Christians, we pray, first and foremost, because the Bible tells us to. Jesus prayed, the Apostles prayed, early Christians prayed and they all did so fervently. It is both our privilege and our responsibility. So, first of all, effective prayer is a matter of obedience to God's Word. Secondly, as we have seen, effective prayer occurs as we gain knowledge about the character of the God we pray to and His plan for His church and His people. Again, this is only discovered to the degree that we study and apply His word to our lives. Lastly, Effective prayer is a result of submitting ourselves and our petitions to the will of God. When we discover what God is doing, what God wants to do in His people, we can pray accordingly with confidence, knowing He will hear and answer our prayers. Let's look at Paul's prayer... 14-21.

**14-15** – for this reason – Paul's praying to God for the Ephesians for a particular reason. What is that reason? Is it because he didn't want the Ephesians to become discouraged by his suffering for them (13)? Is it because he has a personal interest in their wellbeing? Is it because of the reconciling work of Christ and his own understanding of it by special revelation? More likely, Paul's confidence is based on his belief that God has already determined to do these very things for and in the Ephesian believers he's praying for.

For this reason could refer back to anything said in the previous verses. But

remember what these verses are about. They tell us how God is establishing His church (new humanity gathered from old humanity) in which the manifold wisdom of God is being displayed before the watching angels. God's doing this. God's revealing His glory in us. Therefore (for this reason) Paul prays for those in whom God is doing this. He prays that they may be fit vessels, strengthened by God for this important task. Paul's prayer is based in his knowledge of God's purpose. He's praying confidently according to God's will. We can't pray effectively if we don't have insight into God's purpose and will

I bow my knees – Here we learn of Paul's preferred position in prayer: bowing on his knees. This was a position of the utmost humility which was in stark contrast to the more normal posture of prayer in the Jewish culture, to pray from a standing position with the hands raised up. Paul's humility stemmed from his personal experience with God's grace, his knowledge of God's great eternal plan, his place in that plan and how God's work is unstoppable even when Paul was imprisoned. The more Paul learned of God and experienced His grace, the more humble he became.

But is kneeling the required position for prayer. Well, let's put it like this: Solomon prayed on his knees, as did Ezra and the Psalmist calls us to kneel (**Ps 95:6**). Daniel prayed on his knees, people came to Jesus on their knees, Stephen, Peter, Paul and other early Christians prayed on their knees. Most importantly, Jesus prayed on His knees. But do these examples amount to an implied requirement for prayer? Not at all! The Bible has enough prayer offered from positions other than on the knees to show us that it is not required. At the same time, it also has enough prayer offered on the knees to show us that it's good. Whether we actually bow our knees is not important; that we bow our hearts and wills to the Lord is the vital matter.

**15** – Here, we see the level of passion in Paul's prayer. Paul's praying for Christians as God's family; meaning he's praying with the boldness a family relationship provides. We pray for lots of people regardless of their relationship or lack of relationship to Christ. We pray for those who are in authority. We pray for the lost, asking God to bless the ministry of missionaries as they attempt to take the gospel to them. We pray for the lost in our own community.

This is right. At the same time, we don't always pray with the same confidence or in the same way as when we pray for those who are already Christians. When we pray for believers we're praying for those who've already responded to the gospel, and we know what God is doing in them. He's making them like Jesus, teaching them to live and serve and even suffer as He did. So we are bold in these prayers. We don't pray, "If it be your will." This is God's will. We pray that God will accomplish His will in the lives of those for whom we deeply care about.

Plus, this is to be our prayer for all Christians—not just for those who are like us or who we know. It's the entire family of God that Paul prays for—Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, male and female, young and old, educated and uneducated—everyone, for it is in the family as a whole that God's great purpose of making known His manifold wisdom is fulfilled. When we pray we must go beyond our own interests or the concerns of our own limited circle of Christian friends and instead pray for the church of God at large. We must ask that it be strengthened throughout the whole world, and we must be encouraged by what God is doing through His people everywhere.

**16** – There are 2 central requests in Paul's prayer: 1) that God might strengthen the Ephesians with power through His Spirit in their inner being and 2) that they may be able to grasp the limitless dimensions of the love of Christ (**19**). Today's study will focus on the first petition. At its heart, Paul's first request is a prayer for power. Paul regularly prays for power. We saw this in his first prayer in **1:18-19a**. Here, he prays for power more specifically, that they may be strengthened by it. Of course, who doesn't want more power? Modern Christians often pray for power too; power to build great ministries, power to influence great crowds with the gospel; the power to heal and operate unfettered in all the gifts of the Spirit. I'll venture to say that more than a few Christians, like James and John, have prayed for power to call down fire from heaven. Yes, today's Church desperately seeks power from on high but are they seeking the same kind of power mentioned here?

The nature of this power Paul prays for is carefully described. It's a power that's to be mediated through God's Spirit. God is the source and the Holy Spirit is the channel. Just as important, Paul specifies the sphere in which this power is to operate – the inner man. What does Paul mean by that

exactly? We get a clearer picture of his meaning from a passage where he uses the same phrase ([II Cor 4:16-18](#)). Paul's body (outer being) was wearing away under the onslaught of years and persecution; his inner being is what's left when the outer man has completely wasted away.

Most of us have never suffered great persecution but we're all getting older. We better understand this process when we consider some of our more senior Christians. We all know or have known older Christians who, as their physical strength declines, they become more steadfast and radiant in their faith. Their memories may be fading, their pain may be nearly unbearable, their excursions out in public may be severely cut down but somehow they live as if they already have one foot in heaven. As their outer being weakens, their inner being runs from strength to strength.

Even for those of us who have quite achieved senior status, the restrictions and limitations of the outer being still make themselves felt. I'm starting to feel pain in places I didn't even know I had. I can still operate at full steam but I'll pay for it later. And some day, if the Lord tarries and this world lasts long enough, my outer man will waste away completely and I'll be pushing up daisies. Yet inwardly, in the inner being, Paul insists that we Christians are being renewed day by day.

The Christian's ultimate hope is for the glorified or resurrection body. But until we receive that gift, it's our inner being that's being strengthened by God's power. In a culture where so many believers are desperate for good health but don't seem too interested in the transformation of the inner being, Christians urgently need to follow Paul's example and pray for God's power to be displayed in our inner being. The reason this is so necessary is because this is the part of our being that controls our character and prepares us for heaven.

There are 2 other aspects of this power that Paul prays for and they can best be understood by asking 2 questions.

1) By what measure of resources will this prayer be answered with? Paul says according to the riches of His glory! Now, when we hear "riches," we almost automatically think "cha-ching!" But what are these glorious riches Paul is relying on? For Paul, this expression refers to what God has already secured for us through the work of Jesus Christ. This is made more clear from another, better-known passage ([Phil 4:19](#)).

From Paul's perspective, everything that is coming to us through God comes through Jesus Christ. Jesus has won our pardon, reconciled us to God, paid for our sin and cancelled it, secured the gift of the Holy Spirit, granted eternal life to us, promised that we will be with Him for eternity, made us children of the new covenant, accounted to us His righteousness, has risen from the dead and all of God's sovereignty is now mediated through Him and is directed to our good and to God's glory. All the blessings God has for us are tied up and mixed in with the work of Jesus Christ. So, one reason Paul prays to God for this transforming power is that he is convinced that the supply of the riches of God's glory available in Jesus Christ is as lavish as the benefits secured by Christ on the cross.

2) For what purpose does this power serve? The answer is seen in the first half of **v17**...

**17a** – Notice the appearance of the Trinity in Paul's prayer. He petitions the Father to strengthen believers through His Spirit so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. Clearly, the purpose for Paul's prayer for power is so that Jesus would live in these believers just as He promised He would in **John 14:23**. Of course, as interesting as all this may be, this entire expressed "purpose" strikes the Christian reader as a bit strange. Don't we believe that Jesus by His Spirit already takes up residence in us when we become believers? If that's the case, why does Paul say the purpose of his prayer for power is so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith? Doesn't He already do that?

Yes, of course He does but Paul means more than this. It's true that all who are truly Christians are indwelt by Jesus Christ, but it is also true that this is something they grow into as Christ takes stronger and fuller possession of every corner of their lives. The clue to Paul's meaning is found in his use of the word for dwell. There are 2 Greek words that can be translated as dwell. The 1<sup>st</sup> one, which Paul doesn't use, means to dwell in a place as a stranger. That's the word used of a foreigner (like Abraham) dwelling in a land not actually his own. The other word, which Paul **does** use, means to dwell in the sense of settling down in a place and making a permanent residence there. Here, it's used for Christ's abiding in a believer's heart and life. The prayer is that Christ might settle down in our hearts and control them as the rightful owner.

A literal illustration may help to clarify Paul's meaning. Annette and I moved to Houma in 1985. We lived in an apartment for 2 years with no visible way of escaping that situation. Then one day we found a house that had been repossessed by the bank that was anxious to unload it – a motivated seller – so we jumped on it and purchased it. Mind you, this was not a new house – it had good bones but it also had a lot of problems. There was no condenser unit for the a/c. There were only 2 walls in the entire house that were sheetrock, the rest was dark wood paneling with zero insulation behind it. The colors in the kitchen were tangerine orange and lime green, the wall paper on those 2 sheetrock walls was atrocious and every room had a different color of carpeting in it. The wrought iron columns that help us the carport were partially rusted out; there was no landscaping and a massive amount of grass to cut. But, for all the problems, we loved it because it was ours.

Now, the heart of the problems with our new home was that it reflected the character and sense of design of the previous owners, whom we didn't know and certainly didn't appreciate. So, we were living in a home that still felt like someone else's house. But, as the months and years slipped past, the a/c was fixed, ceiling fans were installed, the nasty wallpaper disappeared, the funky colors in the kitchen disappeared, sheetrock replaced paneling and was painted rooms to suit our own tastes. After a lot of time, money and effort, the house has finally been converted to meet our needs and express our character and taste. It's the only place in this world that feels like home.

In the same way, when Jesus by His spirit, takes up residence in our hearts, He finds the moral equivalent of nasty wallpaper, goofing color schemes and widespread disrepair. His new house still reflects the character of the previous owner (you). So He sets about turning this residence into a place appropriate for Him, that reflects His character; a home in which He is comfortable. There's a lot of cleaning to do, quite a few repairs and some much-needed expansion but His aim is clear; He wants to take up residence in our hearts as we exercise faith in Him.

When people take up long-term residence somewhere; their presence eventually characterizes that dwelling. If you were given photos of random dorm rooms from any college or university, 9 times out of 10 you could tell if it was occupied by a male or a female. We just naturally want our living

space to reflect who we are and most college age males are slobs. Make no mistake, when Christ first moves into our lives, He finds us in very bad repair. It takes a whole lot of power to change us and that's why Paul prays for power. He asks for God to strengthen us by His power in our inner being so that Jesus could genuinely take up residence within us, transforming us into a home that pervasively reflects His own character instead of our slobbish, fallen character.

The idea of getting rid of the old and dirty and adopting the new and clean appears in Paul's writings in many forms. Probably one of the clearest is found in [Col 3:5-17](#). This passage is both powerful and practical. In clear, concrete terms it spells out the changes Paul expects to take place in the lives of believer or rather, it spells out the changes Paul is praying for when he prays that God's power will so operate in our inner being that we become suitable dwelling places for our risen Savior. We need spiritual strength to allow Christ to comfortably dwell within us because there's something in us (old nature) that resists the influence of the indwelling Christ. That old nature can be conquered as the Spirit of God gives us the victory of faith.

This first petition is a plea for power – power to be holy, power to think, to act and to talk in ways that are utterly pleasing to Christ, power to strengthen our resolve to walk in righteousness, in visible gratitude to God; power to be humble, to be discerning, to be obedient and trusting – power to grow in conformity to Jesus Christ. This goes beyond just understanding certain biblical truths. Of course, biblical Christianity insists that certain truths be believed but Satan can quote the Apostle's creed and can even confess its truth but he's never personally experienced the transforming power of that truth.

God's purpose for those He redeems is not simply to have them believe and recite certain truths but to see them transformed by those truths in a lifelong process that stretches all the way to heaven. So Paul prays along those exact lines. He asks his heavenly Father that out of His glorious riches He might strengthen believers with power through His Spirit in their inner being so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith. 😊