

Praying for Spiritual Power

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[0 : 00] Deceased theologian and pastor John Stott wrote that whatever is our priority, whatever is important to us, rests on our hearts.

And the things that rest on our hearts, we tend to pray about. We don't need to be reminded about. There are some things I must admit I have to write down to remember, but there are some prayers that I don't need a journal note or anything else to pray about because they are on the top of my heart.

They are a concern for me. And as we continue our sermon series in the letter of Ephesians, we come to another of the Apostle Paul's prayers.

It's the second that we find in this letter, and from it we're able to see some of the priorities that Paul had on his heart for the Ephesian believers. But what's clear is that the priorities that Paul had for them were not exclusive to them.

The priorities that Paul had for them indeed were for all of God's people. So I think we will benefit this morning from considering these priorities in Paul's prayer.

[1 : 37] So if you've not yet done so, please turn in your Bible to Ephesians chapter 3. And this morning our attention will be directed to verses 14 through 21. If you're using one of the church Bibles, it's on page 977.

Ephesians chapter 3, beginning in verse 14. For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we are so grateful for the privilege to gather in this place to sing to you and now to hear from you through the preaching of your word.

Lord, as we have sung, speak to us. And would you show us Christ? Would you show us Christ in the pages of Scripture? And Lord, would you show us Christ in the midst of the church?

[3 : 50] Father, we pray that you will be glorified by all that is said and done, and we pray that as a people, you will be transformed more and more into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Lord, I pray once again for your grace and your help that I might serve faithfully these who are assembled here and those who listen online. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. So what priorities can we discover from the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers?

I think it is important for us to consider what these priorities might be because, again, although Paul prayed them primarily for the Ephesians, he didn't exclusively pray them for the Ephesians.

They apply to all of God's people everywhere. And since these priorities inform Paul's prayers, they should inform our prayers for ourselves and for one another.

[4 : 57] Now, to appreciate the context of these priorities that Paul is praying, that he lifts up to the Lord, I think it's important for us to remember what's going on at this point in the letter.

Notice that Paul, in verse 14, begins with the words, for this reason. And the natural question to ask is, for what reason? Notice, again, that in verse 1 of chapter 3, the Apostle Paul also began with, for this reason.

But you would notice in verse 2 that he kind of interrupts himself. He interrupts himself in verse 2, and he goes on to talk about this ministry that God has given to him, this ministry to reveal this mystery and to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Jesus Christ, primarily to the Gentiles. And so Paul interrupts himself from verse 2 through to verse 13, and he's talking about this glorious ministry that he's gotten.

So when he comes to verse 14, he is somewhat picking up where he was in verse 1 of chapter 3. And when we think of it in that way, what Paul was then going to be talking about, the reason that he has in mind, is what he was discussing previously, how God had, through the Lord Jesus Christ, reconciled Jews and Gentiles to himself and to one another, and how he was building them into one body of believers to be a holy temple in which he would dwell by his Spirit.

[6 : 50] Paul was bowing his knees and praying concerning that. It was such a glorious truth that it was bringing Paul to his knees that he would pray about it.

And what is clear is that the Apostle Paul is praying for something functional. He's praying for a functional reality of what God has done by reconciling people who are hostile to him and hostile to one another.

Paul is praying that this would not just be a doctrinal truth that is held up, but it would be a functional reality in the lives of the people. It's one thing to say that God has reconciled Jews and Gentiles together.

It's another thing to see that being lived out in the church. It's another thing to see people who were God's enemies now loving and serving him.

And the hostility between them and other people being broken down. Remember how we considered last week from Titus chapter 3, how Paul makes the point that before coming to Christ, we were all foolish and disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envying others and being hated by them and hating others.

[8 : 17] And then he says, we've been the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared. He saved us. Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy by the washing of regeneration by the word.

And so local churches are comprised of these kinds of people, formerly hostile to God, formerly hostile to one another, and now God has brought them together to live life in his new community.

Paul is bowing his knees that that would be a functional reality. And there are two priorities that we see the Apostle Paul praying.

Two very clear priorities that stand out in his prayer, and I want us to consider them, beginning with the first one, which is Christ's love. Paul prayed that the Ephesians would know Christ's love.

He does that in verses 14 through 19, which is one long, complex sentence. It's a long sentence, so you kind of have to dissect it to really get the core of what Paul is really praying.

[9 : 33] Notice he begins in verse 14 by noting that the whole family of God, the whole family of believers in heaven and on earth bear God's name as belonging to him.

And this is an important truth for us to highlight in this text. Although Paul is talking primarily about Jews and Gentiles, the larger truth is that all who belong to Christ are named by his name.

They bear his name. They're in one body and they bear his name. They are in one family and they bear his name. Notice in verse 16 that Paul prays that through the Holy Spirit, God would richly empower Ephesian believers in their inner being.

And he prays for a spiritual strength for them for a particular reason. The reason is in verse 17, so that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

Now this is an unusual request when you think about it. On the face of it, it's unusual because remember earlier in chapter 2 in verse 8, the Apostle Paul established that those whom God saves, he saves by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

[11 : 00] Christ. And so what is Paul really praying for when he prays for the Ephesians that Christ would dwell in their hearts through faith?

He's not talking about it in a saving sense, but I think what he is praying about is he's praying about their faith in a settled sense. He is touching on this issue of the assurance of salvation, having this settled faith in Christ in their hearts.

He's praying for Christ to truly be resident and that be evident in the lives of the Ephesian believers in a powerful way, in almost a tangible way.

Paul is praying for them to experience the reality of what God has done in saving them. And I think if you've lived the Christian life long enough, you probably have experienced those seasons where you're not experiencing in your soul the reality of Christ dwelling in your heart by faith.

You may have experienced doubting your salvation, feeling in the doldrums, feeling that Christ is far away. Paul was praying that they would know the nearness of God through Jesus Christ, that he would dwell in their hearts by faith.

[12 : 32] Not by circumstances, not by what they saw or what they felt, but that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith.

Paul also prays that they would be rooted and grounded in love. And it's clear that this love that he talks about is not love in a vacuum.

It's the love of Christ. Paul is praying for God's people who have been reconciled to him and have been reconciled to one another to be living out faith in Christ and love for Christ.

And what it looks like is that they are rooted and grounded in love. Paul is praying for this reality to be ours of what God has done in Christ.

But in a sense, those things that Paul has prayed are really a preface. They are an introduction to the core issue that he wants to prioritize for them and pray for them.

[13 : 44] So in truth, the priority that Paul has begins in verse 14. It's specifically, sorry, though the prayer begins in verse 14, the specific petition that he is lifting up for them is in verses 18 through 19 and that is that they may know the love of Christ.

But the language that Paul uses in verses 18 and 19 shows that he is praying for more than just a superficial knowledge of God's love, of Christ's love.

He's praying for the Ephesians collectively. He's praying that they would comprehend with the saints the love of Christ. And I think this is important for us to draw attention to because sadly, when many believers think of the Christian life, they think in a very individualistic way.

And here, Paul's prayer is that they would together come to know this. That they would get to know this in community, that they would comprehend this with all the saints. They would comprehend the love of Christ.

He's not praying for individual comprehension of love, although certainly that needs to be a reality for us as well. But the context in which he's praying it is that we would comprehend it in our shared life in the local church.

[15 : 23] And notice how he expresses it. He prays for them to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love. In other words, Paul wants us to know God's love in a fulsome way, in a broad way, how wide and how long and how high and how deep the love of Christ is.

He's praying that we comprehend the scope of it, the full scope of it. And even as he prays that, he acknowledges that is beyond knowledge, that it is beyond our ability to fully grasp.

He says it is, it surpasses knowledge. And see, this is the wonder of the Christian life. The wonder of the Christian life is we are called to know that which is unknowable.

We have this joy of always growing in our understanding of the love of Jesus Christ and we will never fully comprehend it.

You realize that there's even no promise that in the life to come that we will fully comprehend the love of the Lord Jesus Christ? Yet it is our quest to know it.

[16 : 45] It is our call to know it. We are called to know it but not in a vacuum. We are strengthened by the Spirit so that we might be able to comprehend it.

And so in truth this is a lifelong call to comprehend the love of Christ.

It is to contemplate it. It is to meditate upon it as we the people of God are rooted in the love of Christ. And then we are called to live out that love towards one another before a watching world.

And I think this is because Christ's love is best seen in his saving work on the cross and how he reconciles people to God and how he reconciles people who were once enemies to one another.

And so brothers and sisters this is a priority for Paul that he prayed for the Ephesians. And indeed this is for all of God's people that we will increasingly and meaningfully know the vast scope of Christ's love.

[18 : 02] And I think when we consider the aim of this prayer and the aim of this priority is twofold. First it will strengthen our relationship with the Lord.

Because we will become increasingly rooted and grounded in Christ's love and we will grow in our assurance of his love for us. And day by day that will result in humble gratitude for God's love. One of the reasons we often doubt Christ's love is because we have not sufficiently contemplated it. Because when we sufficiently contemplate the love of Christ we come with the conclusion how can I doubt his love now in light of what his love really is.

And this is what the apostle Paul gets at in Romans chapter 8. When he is saying to us how nothing will separate us from the love of God and Christ Jesus when he's saying to us think about it.

God did not spare his own son. If he didn't spare his own son why do you think he would withhold other things from you. He says no he will freely give you those other things because of his great love for you.

[19 : 24] And so we need to survey and consider the love of Christ. But sadly what we often do is when we survey the love of Christ we tend to measure our material advantages or disadvantages and whatever the measurement is we conclude whether he loves us or he does not love us.

I'm sure you've seen people remark often something good happens and they say oh God is good. No God is good period. If that thing that positive thing that good thing that wonderful thing that you wanted to happen if that did not happen God was still good and so when it happens that's no reason to say he is good because he is good independent of that.

And so is his love. God loves us through Jesus Christ independent of our advantages and disadvantages in our lives. Independent of the things that may befall us.

it may be catastrophe it may be trial whatever it might be that's not the measurement of the love of Christ.

Brothers and sisters when we want to know the love of Christ we don't look around in our lives we don't survey our lives we need to look back and we need to survey the cross we need to survey the wondrous cross on which the prince of glory died because it is there that God revealed the length and the breadth and the height and the depth of his love.

[21 : 11] For us when we were yet sinners when we were rebellious when we were hideous when we were without strength he revealed his love for us and so that is where we look for the love of Christ because it is in the cross of Christ that his love is most vividly expressed.

And so brothers and sisters may we take time to in an ongoing way contemplate the love of Christ through the cross of Christ and the wonderful thing is we got to do this together we got to do this together as we did this morning singing together singing songs that remind us about the cross of Christ and that is why we are a cross centered church not only do we get to sing about the cross of Christ but we get to hear preaching and teaching about the cross of Christ because therein is the love of Christ revealed but there's a second aim for this priority that Paul prays for us that we would know the love of Christ the second aim is not only would our relationship with

Christ be strengthened but our relationship with one another would be strengthened we don't know the love of Christ in a vacuum we know the love of Christ to live that out in our relationship with one another and when you think about it love the love of Christ is really functional in our relationships God's love towards us is primarily functional in his relationship towards us that he loved us when we were sinners when he did for us what we didn't deserve that he should do for us and the same is true when the love of Christ is functioning in our lives towards one another the love that we receive the love that we contemplate we extend that to one another and the more we understand the extent of Christ's love the more we will be willing to extend that to one another when we don't think of the love of Christ and the extent of it the vastness of it and even our undeservedness of it we tend not to try to reciprocate that to others when we read in 1 Corinthians 13 that love is patient and kind and love does not envy or boast and it is not arrogant or rude and it does not insist on its own way and it is not irritable or resentful and it does not rejoice at wrongdoing and it believes all things and hopes all things and endures all things and that love never ends this is not human love brothers and sisters this is divine love that has come to us through the Lord

Jesus Christ and we are to be rooted and grounded in it we are to be contemplating it as we live life together and as we extend this love to one another I know how we need to meditate upon it and the more we meditate upon the love of Christ the more we will extend the love of Christ to one another the apostle Peter says that love does what covers a multitude of sins a multitude of sins because Christ's love has covered the multitude of our sins as high as the mountain our sins are and Christ's love covers them and so this aspect of Paul's prayer this particular priority that we would know the love of Christ strengthened by the Holy Spirit the aims are that we would be strengthened in our

relationship with God and we would be strengthened in our relationship with one another as we live as his body as his temple in which he dwells by his spirit notice in the latter part of verse 19 that the apostle Paul indicates that through knowing the love of Christ we will be filled with the fullness of God now this is no small prayer this is a moving prayer this is a grand prayer this is a prayer that stretches our minds now clearly

Paul is not praying that we would literally be filled with the fullness of God because he prayed that he'd be praying for us to be God he's not praying for that but instead his prayer is for us to be godly his prayer is for us to be filled with God to be godlike to have our lives generously marked by God and his attributes and in this context the primary attribute that is in view is the love of God so in many ways this prayer of Paul is aspirational it is to call us to something that in and of itself is vast and somewhat escaping us but nonetheless we are actually called to it we know that we would only be filled with being marked by the attributes of God in the life to come but we pursue and we march on to still seek to grow in that in this life clearly the prayer has heaven in view but John

[27 : 34] Stott wisely points out that even though Paul's prayer that we be filled with the fullness of God points to heavenly perfection he says we have no liberty to try to evade its contemporary challenge what he's saying to us is we can't just quickly dismiss it and say well that's for heaven he says no we need to embrace the challenge that it calls us to that day by day being strengthened by God's spirit being rooted and grounded in Christ's love we are to seek to grow in our knowledge and our appreciation of the love of Christ and in the process being filled with the fullness of God all that he is and all that he represents and we do that in the context of the local church notice how this prayer that Paul is praying really brings into view our relationship with our triune

God we are empowered by the spirit to know the love of Christ and to be filled with the fullness of the Father and brothers our starting point is to pray this for ourselves and for one another our starting point is to incorporate this into prayers and that's why I appreciated the call to worship this morning that brother Clarence did as he took us back to this first prayer of the apostle Paul brothers and sisters let's pray this prayer for ourselves and for one another that we would be empowered by the spirit that we would know the love of Christ we would contemplate it we would scale as best we can its heights and its depths and its length and its breadth and that we would be filled with the fullness of God that we would look more like

God that we would ooze God as it were instead of ourselves and sin and flesh well that's Paul's first priority in this prayer Christ's love the God's people will know Christ's love and Paul's second priority in this prayer is God's glory which is my second and final point God's glory Paul prays for God's glory in verses 20 and 21 but not in terms of a petition he concludes the prayer and these words take the form of a declaration and a benediction let's look again at what he says in verses 20 and 21 now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us to him be glory in the church and in

Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen this is a fitting conclusion to Paul's prayer first is a reminder that God the father is the one who's being petitioned to cause his people to be strengthened by the spirit to know the love of Christ and to be filled with the fullness of God and so our role is not a passive one we're not passive in the process but the father must grant that we are strengthened with power by the spirit because without that then none of this is possible so the power is not ours it is the power of the spirit if you've served the Lord for any length of time and listened to jargon that many

Christians would use and things that they would say you probably have heard people use verses 20 to 21 and they would say something like well you could only God could only do it according to the power it work in you and generally speaking what they're referring to is they're referring to your own power they're talking about your power within you will determine what God does or does not do for you and friends that's not what Paul is saying here the power that Paul is referring to here is the same power that he referred to earlier that he was praying that God would strengthen us with from the Holy Spirit it's not ours it is the power of the Spirit that is at work in us in verse 21

[32 : 50] Paul concludes by saying to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever amen this is a prayer for God's glory glory despite all that Paul prayed or he taught before all that he said in these earlier verses in chapters 1 2 and 3 now to the end of chapter 3 and what Paul has in view in light of it all is the glory of God friends that's the accent it's a wonderful!

thing that Jews and Gentiles are reconciled together and it's a wonderful thing that God has saved us and reconciled us to himself but the aim of that the end of that is the glory of God and Paul is pointing us to that he's saying the apex of all that God has done in his saving work from before the foundation of the world and causing Christ to come and live and die and causing us to hear the gospel so that we can believe and we can be saved and we can be joined together with other brothers and sisters in Christ and be this temple for God he is saying that the aim of all of that is the glory of God in the church and in the Lord Jesus Christ this is no passing thing that the apostle Paul addresses for us salvation is not just something that is historical that we look back on but Paul tells us that this will continue to bring glory to God forever and ever throughout all the generations forever and ever amen God will be glorified in the church those whom he has redeemed God will be glorified!

in Christ the one who has redeemed them and the mere fact that this will happen throughout all generations forever and ever helps us to see the glory of it helps us to see the wonder of it and reminds us that that which will bring glory to God should cause us to glory to cause us to rejoice and brothers and sisters if we're not saying that this is worthy!

this forever glorification of God throughout the generations forever and ever if we're not seeing that then we're not seeing all that we need to see we need to contemplate it we need to consider this marvelous work of redemption that God has done in Jesus Christ that he will continue to be forever glorified in the church and in Christ throughout eternity forever and ever we don't leave salvation behind we don't leave the redemptive work of God behind even in heaven the Bible says we will sing the song of the lamb we will sing worthy to God who has redeemed us from every tongue and tribe and nation and people who is united together people who are hostile to one another he has brought them together in one body to be his people and he will be their

[36 : 23] God and this is a theme that is worthy of rejoicing and bringing glory to God in the church and in Christ forever this is a marvelous truth that the apostle Paul is reminding us of and concluding this particular section of his letter in God is glorified in the redeemed community and he is glorified in the one who has redeemed them the Lord Jesus Christ the second person of the Trinity if perhaps we're not seeing all of this I just want to remind you to just go back just go back to where Paul started where he started in chapter one where he told us about this plan that

God had before the foundation of the world where he chose us in Christ that we would be holy and blameless before him and how in love he predestined that we would be adopted as sons and then in time Christ came and he lived and died and through the gospel that has come to us we have come into saving faith and God puts us in a body calls us all by his name puts us in one body and we are there to bring glory to him and it's all through the Lord Jesus Christ brothers and sisters take it in again and let us take in what is worthy of glory to God throughout all generations forever and ever amen

I want us to consider how easy it is to pass over God's amazing work of redemption!

It is so easy! It is so easy for amazing grace to be boring grace! It is so easy to talk about God saving us and not gripping our hearts and even asking why the Apostle Paul in these concluding verses helps us to see that God's redemptive work through Christ in the church is so significant it will endure the glory of it will endure from now and into eternity verse 21 marks the conclusion of the first part of this letter and we know this because in chapters 1 through 3 what

Paul does is Paul simply lays out what God has done through Jesus Christ in reconciling sinners to himself and one another and what these three chapters are as some theologians say they are the indicatives they tell us what God has done they are statements of his saving work you find it look through it and comb through it to see if you see anything that it says what we did but next Sunday the Lord willing we'll come to the second part of the letter and in the second part of the letter we will see how Paul tells us those of us who are God's redeemed community how we are supposed to live in light of what God has done through Jesus Christ to save us and what theologians call the second part of this letter is the imperatives they are what

[40 : 50] God commands us to do he calls us to do in light of what he has done and notice the order the order is that we cannot be called to do until we understand what God has done we cannot be called to live out the Christian life until we understand what God has done to save us and interestingly we come to the first part of the second part of this letter we are called to walk in a manner that is worthy of the calling that we have Paul is saying to us he's saying in light of this amazing thing that God has done to save you walk in a manner that's worthy of that and we can do

it because we are enabled by the spirit we can do it because the spirit is at work in us he's going to cause to do many things to put off things and to put on things and we can do it because of what God has done to save us well that's what we will pick up next Sunday the Lord willing so let's pray Father thank you for the glorious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ thank you oh Lord for what Christ has done in loving us and I pray that you would work in our hearts to open our eyes as we sang this morning that we would see more of the love of Christ and Lord we pray that we would not only know this love to acquire knowledge but we would know it in a functional way deepening our relationship with you and our relationship with one another Lord work in us and through us in these ways we pray in Christ's name amen amen let's stand for a closing song amen to to amen