

Paul's Prayer

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[0 : 00] turn with me to Ephesians chapter 3. We'll be in verse 14 to 21 today. Just an add-on to the announcements today. Anybody planning to come see this Pilgrim's Progress thing tonight? All right.

So we're starting at six apparently. So no, that was the plan. I just don't always know these things. If we could either have either after the service or if people want to come in early before to set up food, potluck, kind of get it all going. And then we're hoping to start the movie at around 6.30 type of thing. So as Carl said, this isn't even out in theaters. It's coming out around Easter time. So my wife really loved the idea of this movie. So she actually got in connection with the distributor and we were blessed to be able to get it because they don't have a distributor in Canada. So she said, how about I distribute it to SBC? And they said, great, we'll do it. So we're one of the few showings that's actually going to be in Canada. So I'm looking forward to it. So turn with me to chapter 3, looking at verses 14 to 21.

If you are new or visiting with us today, welcome. You've joined us for a great time of worship in God's word and especially this incredible passage that Paul has prepared for us.

In case you didn't know, we're looking at this book of Ephesians. It's essentially divided into two parts almost perfectly. We have the first three parts is almost the theoretical, the building blocks of the church. And the next three chapters, which we are going to get into, is the practical application of the first three chapters that we've been learning. We got that okay? Does that make sense? Right? The lessons and then how to live out those lessons.

What's really amazing to us is that we know that when Paul talks about church, he's not talking about a building, but he's talking about a redeemed people that Jesus Christ has saved by faith. Amen? Amen. Paul clearly explains to us who is in this church. First off, he lets us know that nobody is born into the church. Nobody is born into the church. Nobody can work their way into the church. The fact of the matter. The fact of the matter is we all stand or begin as outsiders to God's church. In fact, we were once considered children of wrath, dead in our trespasses and sin. Then Jesus, through his sacrifice on the cross, which we will be celebrating next week, invites us in to this church. God made us alive in Jesus. God raised us up with Jesus and God sits us with Jesus in the heavenly places. Scripture tells us, as Carl read today, we read this in Ephesians, we are called his workmanship.

[3 : 22] We who were either Jew or Gentile, we who were either aliens, strangers to God, are now brought together into one people, perfectly reconciled to God, and through that reconciliation, reconciled to one another. That's awesome. We are being joined together to grow into what Paul calls a holy temple in the Lord, to be a dwelling place for God in the Spirit. It's interesting because how we interact together, how we function as a church, how we worship, how we love, says something about God, doesn't it?

If we are unloving, we harbor illness towards others. If we are unforgiving, what does that say about Christ, our Savior? So we're going to be getting into a passage today that is essentially Paul's prayer. And Paul is going to be giving us the building blocks for us to grow our prayer life for this church. We're going to understand what Paul wants to communicate to this church at Ephesus, which I believe is perfectly set out for us today. The truths, we're going to learn four truths to pray for our church here at Squamish Baptist Church. And if you are from another church just visiting, you can pray the same truths there because these are universal truths. So today I want to start us off in this text and I want to pull out four truths that we can use for our prayer life. So beginning in verse 14, Paul writes, for this reason, 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 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.

First question we want to ask ourselves when we're approaching this passage is, why is Paul writing this? Paul wants something from us. And the answer to this is found actually in the first verse of chapter 4.

So just take a look one verse ahead. Notice it says, I begin with I therefore. Remember what therefore is we refer to the preceding passage. This is the preceding passage. He says, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. And we've been talking about this. We've actually been called to something. We've been given gifts. We have a purpose.

So we're seeing this word walk. And we're going to see this word show up many more times in the next chapters of Ephesians. And what this word walk means from a Jewish first century mindset, it's actually how you carry on your life. When I ask you how your walk is, I'm asking you, what is your life like?

[7 : 45] What is your integrity? What does your way that you live this life say about you? So Paul is saying, the reason I'm going to be teaching you this passage today is because I want you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling that you have been called. Prayer is to be central to our walk with Jesus Christ.

Amen? Supposed to be. It's one of the main disciplines, the disciplines of the faith that we read. We're to pray for sanctification. We're to pray for spiritual growth, to pray for spiritual health.

And it's no different in our own lives, but how we are to pray as a collective for one another. So take a look at verse 14. Paul begins, For this reason, I'll bow my knees before the Father.

Question we pull for that, what reason? We're going back, if you remembered with us, if you notice at the very beginning of chapter 3, it says, for this reason. Paul was starting a prayer, and then he hesitated. And he gave us some more information. Remember that?

We covered that a couple of weeks ago. What he's actually referring to is the very end of chapter 2. And the verse is, In him, you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God the Spirit.

[9 : 15] So the reason we're praying this is so that you may function together as a dwelling place for the Spirit of God. Now, we see this sign of humility, this disposition of the heart.

And I want you to call your attention to this word, Father, that we see at the end of the first phrase. If you were a Gentile, if you were a stranger and alien to God, you were just told you're now no longer, but you're called a family member.

If you were a Gentile and you worshipped in Ephesus, chances are you went down to the temple of Artemis or Diana. You would offer food, meat, sacrifice to a God you did not know.

And the reason you did that is because the priest told you to. In that temple, there was a lot of sexual parts were part of the worship. It was a depraved form of worship that happened there.

You would pray to either a statue that was made out of gold or stone or wood. It did not know you.

[10 : 35] You did not know that. So you would have been enslaved to this false worship. Your ancestors before you, slaves to this worship.

But Paul is now telling you. You have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. And you can now call God your father.

That would be an incredibly powerful word to the Gentile believers. Those that were considered foreigners, strangers, and aliens.

And now they have a God that loves them and has concern for them. So this prayer that Paul is praying would have an immediate emotional effect on them.

And as such, this is a prayer for the saints who are here now who will come before and will come after. So the first thing that Paul prays for is found in verse 16.

[11 : 50] And we're going to read that Paul prays that they would be strengthened with power through his spirit in your inner being.

Verse 16. That according to the riches of his glory, he may grant you to be strengthened with the power through his spirit in your inner being. Now notice this prayer involves all elements of the Trinity.

Verse 14. I bow my knees before the Father in humility. Verse 16. Strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit. Verse 17. So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

The recognition here is Paul realizes that if you were to live this Christian life, that this power, this strength, guess what, doesn't come from within you.

This power comes outside of you. Is that new to you? In a lot of ways it should be.

[13 : 01] Because when you go to a Christian bookstore and you pull out a lot of what's very popular in Christian reading today, it's all about finding the spiritual power in yourself to follow God.

The reality is the Bible talks about that spiritual power is given. It is never earned. Our society, by and large, will tell us that you're special.

You're gifted. You just need to find that spark within you, right? If you are familiar with Joel Osteen, his whole, quote unquote, ministry is built on you finding the strength within, not in God.

It's a charlatan's way of taking your money. But what Paul is communicating here is the power is not within you.

It is outside of you. The power that you need to live this Christian life comes from the spirit that lives outside of you.

[14 : 12] That power within, it's not good. All you need to do is turn to Galatians 5. It tells you what the fruit of the flesh is in contrast to the fruit of the spirit.

Paul knows you need power in this Christian life, and that power doesn't come from within you. It comes from the spirit. Why is that? Because Paul knows that the Christian life flows from the inside, right?

It doesn't. I'm sorry. He knows that the Christian life flows, or our idea is that it comes from the inner man. But if you know the story of Jesus Christ, when he met with the Pharisees, are you familiar when he called them whitewashed tombs?

Basically, he was calling them the greatest form of hypocrisy ever. And what it meant is you guys look so good on the outside, but on the inside is death and uncleanness.

It isn't what goes into man that makes him unclean, but at what comes out of man that makes him unclean.

[15 : 27] Parents, the reality is you can protect your children all you want from the evils of the world, but your biggest challenge and concern is not what your children see or do, but what comes from inside their hearts.

I'll give you this little story. It's a friend of mine. He allows me to share this story. He has banned Star Wars from his home. Star Wars is not allowed.

And he's made that decision. And if you go to his Facebook posts, when Star Wars came out, he put a few posts on there. So I put a picture of me and Daniela going to the opening of the new series of Star Wars together, right?

Just had to kind of needle them a bit, right? It was a pretty positive memory that I had as a kid, but he had this really growing concern as he read about all the horrible philosophy that is in there.

But I remember he and I had a discussion, and I said, you know, I don't know a single person who's ever left the Christian faith to become a Jedi. I don't.

[16 : 38] I really don't. But what I do know is I do know children who've left the faith because the parents were overburdening their children with useless legalism.

They were putting restraint on them and smothering their children. My friend will be glad for me to share this with you, but he now allows Star Wars in the home.

And the reason is, one of his children just came up to him and said, Dad, can I still love Jesus if I play with Star Wars Lego? You know, it's just one of those simple things.

He wanted to protect it. But I get that question all the time as a pastor. Can my kid play Pokemon? Right? In my day and age is, can we do Dungeons and Dragons?

Okay, that might be a little bit more on the imagination, but whatever, right? There's all these different things. But the key point is, the idea is not just to protect your kid from the outside, but you have to have an understanding on what's going on inside.

[17 : 46] Because it's really easy to look good on the outside. And you know what separates Christianity from every other religion on the world?

Every religion tells you that the problem is on the outside of you and that your solution is found on the inside. Jesus Christ tells us something completely different.

The problem is on the inside. The problem is on the inside. And the solution is found in Jesus Christ, which is on the outside. You see, we need the power of the Holy Spirit.

And this comes through God. It is not try harder. It is not be nicer. It is not be better.

The key to living is to pray for the Holy Spirit's power. So now I want you to put yourself, you're hearing Paul teach you this.

[18 : 58] You guys need to be strong. It's like when I was a kid and my dad would come in and said, you feeling strong, son? That wasn't good news, right?

That meant I'm either chopping wood or making cement or laying a foundation for a house or something, right? Things I wasn't too good at eight years old. But anyway, what you're doing is when you're hearing Paul teaching this, you need to be strong.

You need to call on God's power. You're immediately thinking, uh-oh, why does Paul want me to have this power? What am I going to be going through?

Am I going to lose somebody? Am I going to be going through a trial? Am I going to experience discipline? History tells us that this young church was about to go through the Nero persecutions where more Christians would be sacrificed in the Colosseum to honor the Roman gods and to entertain the crowd.

So that power to resist that level of persecution, you are not going to find it inside of you. You're going to find it outside. Now, why? Why is he doing this?

[20 : 18] And this is the second point that I want you to see here. Verse 17. So it says, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. The reason I want you to be strengthened in the Holy Spirit is 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.

Now, this might not ring true to you because you might be saying, I thought Christ was already in my heart.

BK, I was told to accept Jesus in my heart and I have. So what's the deal? Why is he saying so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith? I'm a Christian.

I've put my faith in Christ. What gives? I remember coming down the aisle, coming before the pastor and saying, I believe. I remember singing that old Christian, the song, right, hymn, he lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives in me.

Isn't that enough? We know from Ephesians 1 they were sealed with the Holy Spirit. Now, what gives this verse away is when we hear heart, we hear sentimentality.

[21 : 39] We believe in our generation that this heart is the truest, most purest mediation of our intentions, that the strongest passions that we have.

However, the Bible never speaks of the heart in that way. The Bible speaks of the heart almost being the center of a computer. The computer has a CPU where all the programming goes into, gives all the instructions on how your computer operates.

When the Bible talks about heart, that's what it's referring to. It's not talking about the seat of your emotions. It's actually talking about the seat of your rooted desires.

So it becomes the source of your desires, your motivations, the actions. It's the whole point of who you want to be. We know that God needs to take control of one's heart, but that doesn't happen overnight.

overnight at all, does it? When you became a Christian, you weren't perfectly holy or sanctified in any way. There's a process that takes place.

[22 : 49] And Paul knows, and every mature Christian knows, that the Christian life is fought at the level of the heart and desires. Now, Paul uses a key word. See that word, dwell?

That Christ may dwell? What he's saying, it's an intensive word, and he's actually communicating, you need Jesus to live in a deep indwelling of your heart.

What he means there is, if your heart has a throne in it, Jesus has to be sitting on that throne. And Jesus has to be the one directing your actions, directing your passions, and how you conduct your life.

This is a permanent state of being. It's not, Jesus is my savior, so I don't go to hell. This is Jesus, I am giving you everything that I have.

And the only reason, the only way you're going to be able to survive is one, the strength of the Holy Spirit, and why? So that Christ may dwell permanently in that seat of your heart, that throne, your CPU.

[23 : 56] You. your affections need to be able to bow the knee to the will of God and say, not my will, God, but your will.

What causes confusion? I think we know our will pretty good, right? As much as we think we don't. It happens when we fluff off sin.

Well, my intentions were good, right? It's when we argue to our spouses. If you only knew my heart in that. Or it's when we start to misdirect and point towards the other good things that we do or did.

The reality is when we look at a church, men tend to design church in their own image. rather than God's image. When we put God in charge, he dispels those false affections.

He gets rid of them for us. And it's the same thing in the church. God's intention is to purify his church. He causes the heart to have right desires, right motives, and that we are conformed to Jesus Christ.

[25 : 26] Christ. This is what Paul is praying for. He wants us to be conformed in his image so that the heart would be the kind of place where Jesus would live.

A heart with the right disposition towards Jesus, as Paul says here, comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth.

what is he talking about? Church. He's actually communicating that a heart sold out to the will of God understands the height, the length, the depth of the church of all generations.

It's God's home. So the first thing that we want to be aware of, that we're just supposed to pray for strength. The second thing that we want to see is that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.

And the third thing I want you to note is Paul prays that we would know Christ's love. Strength, calling for him, God's love, and that we would know God's love.

[26 : 43] Verse 19, and he prays, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Paul wants us rooted and grounded in love and to know the love of Christ. Now think about this for a second.

This is actually a very interesting verse. Paul is praying something for us that is beyond our capacity to understand.

It's beyond us. Do you remember Philippians 4-7? He says that you would have the peace of God which surpasses all understanding. It's the same thing.

I want you to have a love that is so beyond you you don't even understand it. I want you to know a love that you will spend eternity experiencing that you will never ever ever reach the bottom of.

[27 : 51] Right? It's a love that grows greater and greater throughout eternity. Paul is asking God to give us an experiential knowledge of Christ that we will never ever understand or come to a limit of.

The reality is many of us struggle in this area. Can we certainly say that we if I ask you the question can we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that our spouses love us?

Love is tough to understand. Some days we can say yes. Some days not so sure. One of my professors says that when he is doing premarital counseling when he has the man and woman before him he will ask the wife to be if she feels love from her fiancé.

Obviously he's looking for a resounding yes. But he says once in a while I get the response of love I'm not sure.

I think so. Now what's interesting is you think that response has to do with the fiancé.

[29 : 24] It doesn't. Nine and a half times out of ten it has to do with her father. father. Because if a young woman has been loved well by her dad she will know how to recognize real love from her fiancé.

But if she's never experienced love from her father and hasn't gone through a biblical understanding she will never recognize it.

She will always feel insecure. She will work for it. Sometimes she will look elsewhere. Sometimes she will try to prove herself that she's good enough.

It happens the same in the church. If you're unsure that God loves you what do you do? usually I see it as a pastor as you work harder and you try to minister more.

Because you're trying to prove to God that you're worthy of a love that you do not understand. Because that love is so full of grace you don't have to prove it.

[30 : 41] Amen? When you know that you're wonderfully and perfectly loved you don't have to prove it. You actually live in the grace of that love. I have a friend you visit his church you will see some people and there's one couple in particular they will out serve out give anybody else in that church.

But sadly they are woefully far from God. Why? Because they're desperately trying to prove themselves. And when you know the story one doesn't even know their father and the other one has never felt any love in their family whatsoever.

So they're on this treadmill relationship trying to work and prove themselves to God. Sometimes we look at them and say wow really good servants.

Those that are spiritually discerning will often say that's a couple that has not experienced the grace and love of Jesus Christ. And they probably never had it in their family.

Fact is we receive our experience of love in many different ways. If I asked you guys to give me a list of the top ten reasons from a husband and wife they would be very similar.

[31 : 58] They might not be in the right order but there's going to be some crossover. That's generally things we're looking for. Reality is from a biblical counseling point of view and as every man knows you do that honey do list and you make your wife feel loved you get some slack in the home.

If you're not you're feeling tension. If your wife is unsure of the love that you have she will remind you of these things.

If you are a Christian and you are living the Christian life and you don't know the love of Christ you will never feel safe in church. I want you to know Paul wants you to know without a shadow of a doubt that you are loved with such a love with such a depth of love that you cannot comprehend.

Remember we learn from chapter 2 of Ephesians God's love is not based on how good I am or the promise I hold or how wonderful I could be he tells us that he loves us because of his great love.

That's mind blowing. It's got nothing to do with us. But for some reason he has chosen in his great love to love me.

[33 : 38] I'm okay with that. love. I may not understand it but I want to bask in that love. So when he uses that word in verse 17 by faith he's talking about an experiential type of faith.

It's a faith that we get by reading the word of God, implementing, growing, and understanding God. Someone who becomes a Christian who does not read God's word is never going to be really truly connected to God's love.

As you understand the truth that God explains to us in scripture, you understand church and how it functions, you will know God's love. How? It's going to be reflected in your love for me and my love for you.

When people in their church reaches out and helps us. Some of you I know have been loved and cared for in ways that you could not comprehend and never came from anywhere else except through the church which is by and large by God's grace.

Amen? Why? And this brings us to the fourth aspect of Paul's prayer. Check out verse 19.

[34 : 52] That you would be filled up to all the fullness of God. Paul wants us to be mature.

The other word sometimes it uses in scripture. It uses complete. It uses perfect. It means to be mature. Who we are to be in Christ.

It means to finally become what Christ created and redeemed you for. Do you remember the Garden of Eden?

Adam and Eve? The Bible tells us quite clearly that they were created in the image of God. But they were also told that if they ate of the fruit in the tree that God told them not to, they would become what?

More like God. They bid into that fruit. Did they become more like God?

[35 : 56] That's the greatest lie, right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? Right? They couldn't become more like him because they were already perfectly like him.

When they disobeyed and listened to the serpent, they did the exact opposite. They became less like God. In Jesus Christ, on the cross, in redemption, when God pardons us, he begins to restore us to the original image that was defaced in the garden.

Do you get that? That's what he wants to restore us to. Doesn't happen with a snap of a finger, but it takes time. And he uses, guess what, you and me in that process with one another to grow us to maturity.

He grows us so that we would return to the image that we once were. forever. You see, knowing the love of Christ in this way brings about the need to change the maturity and the restoration that we so desperately need.

Love matures us so that the image it restored in us so that we can begin to look like our father. Some of us can see a person's parents in them, right?

[37 : 21] I remember going to university, kind of lived there for four years, and at the very end, my mom shows up to pick me up and everyone's like, man, you look like your mom, right?

I'm going to tell you something right now, no 22-year-old in the world wants to hear that. You know, if they would have said I look like my dad, my dad's a big cop. He's a good 6'2", 6'3", thunderclap of a man.

If someone said, hey, you remind me of my dad, that's a good thing. It's true, I don't. I'm actually closer to my mom. But at that time, you don't want to know that, right? You see, if we're raised well, some of us who don't come from those kind of homes where we emulate our parents' habits, we know the struggles.

But we know that God works in us to make us look like him. And that's what Paul is praying for. When Jesus Christ sets himself up in our lives, he finds a literal mess.

When Christ moves in, we are a home in badly need of repair. But day by day, he sets about the task of cleaning it up.

[38 : 45] Don Carson asked a simple question. home is your home the type of home that Jesus would want to come and identify with. If he moved in, it's at the home that's welcome to Jesus Christ.

This is why Paul prays for power, my friends. The reality is the devil can recite scripture and he can know all truth, but he will never experience it like you and I can.

This is why we need his power. It's the power that won our pardon. It is the power that reconciled us to God.

It's the power that canceled our sin. It's the power that secured for us the gift of the Holy Spirit. It's the power that grants us eternal life and it's the power that makes us children of God.

That's the power that we are to pray for. And the power that is available to all those who call Jesus Christ Lord and Savior.

[39 : 55] I'm going to close with this quote by Charles Hodge. It's written in your bulletins. That God should love the good, the righteous, the pure, the godly, is what we can understand.

But that the infinitely holy should love the unholy and give his son for their redemption is the wonder of all wonders. Herein is love.

Not that we love God, but that he loves us and sent his son to be the propitiation of our sin. Let's pray.

dear holy and heavenly God father, we just thank you for the love.