

Ephesians 3:14-21

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The entire text which we are considering in this exegesis, takes the form of a prayer. Prayer is one of those paradoxes in life which in many ways defies a logical analysis. While prayer is so simple that we can even teach our children to pray at a very early age, yet, it is so difficult that even Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray. I'm sure that each of us has also experienced our own personal difficulties in prayer. While it may be frustrating for us to try to express our needs to a God who already knows them better than we do, nevertheless, God certainly does give us abundant blessings in response to our stumbling, bumbling prayers. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (Js. 5:16b).

Verses 14-15: 14) Τούτου χάριν κάμπτω τὰ γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, 15) ἐξ οὗ πάντα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται,

Translation: "For this reason I bend my knees to the Father, from Whom the whole family in heaven and on earth receives its name"

v. 14 – κάμπτω – pres. act. ind. – to bend, bow

v. 15 – πατριὰ – ancestry, race or tribe, clan, family

The **Τούτου χάριν** which opens our study, refers back to 3:1, which in turn refers back to the prayer which Paul began in 1:15ff. Paul chooses to use a prayer in this instance because he is about to ask for something which cannot be accomplished through merely human actions. Those requests will be considered in greater depth at a later point in this paper. For the present, various commentators spend a great deal of time on the phrase **κάμπτω τὰ γόνατά μου**. They are quite convinced that Paul is emphasizing the proper posture for prayer – kneeling – a posture which is indicative of the honor and devotion which God so rightfully deserves. A case can be made for the fact that bending the knees to something is a traditional form of honor or veneration. In Romans 11:4 God says, "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal." But, I am not so sure Paul is placing a great emphasis on that aspect of kneeling in our text. In my Seminary notes on Professor Habek's course on the Book of Ephesians, I noted that standing was the customary posture for prayer, while kneeling showed more intensity in prayer. From my own experience I have not necessarily found that to be the case. Prayers in various postures – whether folding the hands, bowing the head, with eyes raised toward heaven, lying on my back, or even curled up in a ball – can be and have been just as intense as prayers offered when standing or kneeling. As a point of interest; Thayer notes that the phrase "to bend the knees" is used in Homer to designate sitting down to rest. To my knowledge God's Word does not condemn, nor even place on a lower plane, a prayer which is offered in the sitting position. Even a child, slouched down in his desk during a prayer, may not be showing disrespect or irreverence simply by his posture. Our posture in prayer is not all that important. The attitude of our hearts is the real issue.

Regardless of what his posture may have been for this prayer, Paul's attitude is certainly a proper one. He prays "to the Father." Although Paul is asking for something which is of extremely great value, nevertheless, he is bold and confident as he approaches the heavenly Father's throne of grace. Paul is able to approach the Father in such a manner, because he is a member of "the Father's family." The word **πατριὰ** designates a group which shares a common origin – the father. The father is 'the head and foundation of every family, and ultimately, he is to use the heavenly Father as the perfect father figure. The same word is used in Luke 2:4 (the house and line of David), and in Acts 3:25 (all peoples on earth). Once again the commentators spend a lot of time debating whether **πατριὰ** should be translated "family" or "fatherhood." Their thoughts run in two veins.

On the one hand, "the whole family in heaven and on earth" would refer to the Holy Christian Church – the unity of all believers in the church militant and in the church triumphant. On the other hand, "every fatherhood in heaven and on earth" allows for the possibility of the fatherhood of angels, and the fatherhood of men. Both are certainly allowable since the heavenly Father is the Creator and Originator of all things. My translation has already given you an indication of my own preference. Throughout his letter to the Ephesians, Paul has been emphasizing the unity which exists between believers in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, as found in 1:10; 2:11-22; and 3:6. This same unity is expressed perhaps most strongly of all in 4:3-6, "Hake every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body, one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." In such a context it seems strange to me that Paul would suddenly decide to drop the angels into the middle of this unity.

Verse 16: **16) ἵνα δῶ ὑμῖν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον,**

Translation: "in order that it might be given to you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man"

v. 16 - **κραταιωθῆναι** – aor. pass. infin. – to strengthen, make strong

These verses give us the petitions of Paul's prayer. In regard to their lives as Christians, the Ephesians were enroute from the weakness of childhood to the strength of maturity. We are all on the same path. The verb **κραταιωθῆναι** is passive, indicating that the Ephesians do not actively make themselves strong, rather, it is something which happens to them. This strength is a gift which comes out of the riches of God's glory, through His Spirit. It is important to realize that God's spiritual gifts come to us not through prayer, but through the Holy Spirit. That Spirit begins His work in us through the Means of Grace – the Gospel in the Word and Sacraments. "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (1:13). Here we note also that the Holy Spirit continues to strengthen us through that same Gospel. By including the noun **δυνάμει** Paul adds the thought that this is a powerful strengthening – a strengthening which is very effective, even explosive (cf. dynamite).

We also do well to note that Paul's request is for strengthening in the inner man – the new man – the spiritual side of each Christian. Unfortunately, because of the sinful nature which we possess, our prayers often focus primarily on the outer man – on superficial needs. This is what James wrote about in his letter, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (Js. 4:3). Paul recognizes the weakness of our human nature, and prays for those spiritual things which we are more likely to forget in our prayers. I think that our Lord Jesus Himself was emphasizing that same weakness in us when He included in His "model prayer," six petitions asking for specific, spiritual blessings, and only one petition to include all our physical needs.

Verses 17-19: **17) κατοικήσαι τὸν Χριστὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι, 18) ἵνα ἐξιχύσητε καταλαβέσθαι σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μήκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος, 19) γνῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πληρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ.**

Translation: "that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, being rooted and founded in love, in order that you might be strong enough to understand with all the saints, what is the width, and length, and height, and depth, even to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, in order that you may be filled to all the fullness of God."

- v. 17 – κατοικήσαι – aor. act. infin. – to live, dwell, settle
 – ἑρριζωμένοι – perf. pass. part. – to strengthen with roots, establish
 – τεθεμελιωμένοι – perf. pass. part. – to lay the foundation, establish
- v. 18 – ἐξιχύσητε – aor. act. subj. – to have full strength, be strong enough, be able
 – καταλαβέσθαι – aor. mid. infin. – to lay hold of, obtain, seize, make one's own
 – πλάτος – breadth, width
 – μήκος – length
- v. 19 – ὑπερβάλλουσιν – pres. act. part. – to go beyond, transcend, outdo, surpass (with gen.)

St. John wrote, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 Jn. 4:19-21). This love which God has for the Ephesians, and for us, is the basis for this entire section. God's love in making us His children and strengthening us with His Spirit, sets off a chain reaction involving the gaining of knowledge and understanding.

The first link in this chain reaction is "that Christ may live in your hearts through faith." In order for Christ to truly live in our hearts, there must be room in our hearts for Him. Christ has made us strong in the inner man so that we will not let the riches, honor, prestige, pleasures, and business affairs of this life, crowd Christ out of our hearts. Because of what He has done for us, we are to be less like self, and more like Christ, as Paul told the Corinthians, "(Christ) died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again" (2 Cor. 5:15). This becomes more and more possible as we continue to grow, "being rooted and founded in love."

The phrase ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι presents a beautiful double metaphor, to help explain the stability and solidity which is found in God's love for us. This is the second link in our chain reaction. The first picture is that of a tree. I think I can safely say that all of us have been through a major storm at some time or another. I can remember watching newsreels of storms showing trees bending at a good 45 degree angle to the ground, without being uprooted. The reason a tree has such stability is found in its system of roots. The roots of a tree spread out and occupy approximately the same amount of space below the ground, as the tree's branches occupy above the ground. God's love for us is compared to this broad and deep support base.

The second picture is that of a building. Immediately, Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders (Mt. 7:24-27) comes to mind. The man who built his house on the rock was wise. The man who built his house on sand was foolish. It wouldn't matter whether the house was built of straw, or sticks, or bricks; that house would not be able to withstand the stormy adversities of the world, if it did not have a solid foundation. In this day and age of skyscrapers, it has become all the more obvious that if a building is going to rise over 100 stories or more into the sky, and still remain stable, it will need to have a broad and solid foundation. The footings will have to be firmly established on the earth's bedrock. God's love for us is compared to such a foundation.

That brings us to our third link. When our lives are rooted and founded in God's love for us, the result will be that we will have a base which is sufficiently strong to support an even greater knowledge of God's grace. In other words, we need to firmly trust what God has told us in His Word if we expect to grow in our understanding of that same Word. The verb καταλαβέσθαι points this out. It means "to take hold of something and make it your own." It is a word used at times in the New Testament to designate a demon "taking over" a person – or demon possession. Here it is followed by the indirect discourse, "what is the width, and length, and height, and depth," i.e. to know the whole spectrum of God's love for us (or as Thayer suggests, the greatness, extent, and number of blessings received from Christ). While it is possible to have just a passing acquaintance with Christ's love, we will never fully appreciate the vastness of His love for us until we have made it our own through faith. The more faithfully we trust Christ's love, the more clearly we will see that there is always more of His love to know and experience. This will prove to be a continually ongoing process, since Christ's love surpasses knowledge.

Paul also notes that some of this knowledge may be gained together with all the saints – a fourth link. A mutual sharing or pooling of knowledge and experiences, such as we are privileged to have at our pastoral conferences, can be of great benefit. So also can any exchange of knowledge between us, whether it is on a synodical, district, conference, circuit, or even private level. However, I think it is in order to at least mention that God does not bless us simply because we are pastors, or because we gather together. We cannot assume that God will keep this chain reaction of learning going in us because He "needs" us. We must never lose sight of the fact that growth in our knowledge of God's love comes only through the Holy Spirit who works in us through the Means of Grace. Apart from God's Word and the Sacraments there can be no real spiritual growth.

Verses 20-21: 20) Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ ὧν αἰτούμεθα ἢ νοοῦμεν κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἡμῖν, 21) αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνων· ἀμήν.

Translation: "Now, to the One who is able to do beyond all things infinitely more than we can ask, or think, according to the power which is working itself in us, to Him be the glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus into all the generations of the age of ages. Amen."

v. 20 – ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ – adv. – superabundantly, beyond all measure, infinitely more than (with gen.)
– ἐνεργουμένην – pres. mid. part. – to be at work, be operative

Paul concludes his prayer with a fitting doxology. Once again Paul shows his complete confidence that God will answer his prayer. He seems to be searching for away to describe just how powerful God really is. Notice how the concentric circles of power keep getting more and more inclusive. God is able to do all things we ask – all things we can think of asking – beyond all things we can think of asking – infinitely beyond all things we can think of asking. And, this tremendous power is obvious to Paul, because of the power which is already working itself in us.

For all these things God is deserving of glory. Note that this glory comes from two sources: from the church, and from Christ Jesus. By being who He is, the perfect, only begotten Son of God from heaven, who fulfilled everything which the Father had asked of Him, Jesus gave glory to God. In His high priestly prayer Jesus said, "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do" (Jn. 17:4). By being who we are, the adopted sons of God and members of the church, by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, we also give glory to God.

That glory will continue on εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνων – literally, "into all the generations of the age of ages" – forever and ever – now and always. Say it any way you want to say it. Perhaps Professor Habek said it best on page 74 of his commentary where he wrote, "Human language is incapable of fully expressing eternity." All that remains to be said is ἀμήν. So, on that single note of surety, the Apostle Paul ends his prayer on behalf of the body of believers in Ephesus.

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