



## UNIT 5 EPHESIANS LESSON 6

### “PAUL'S PRAYER FOR GENTILES”

#### STUDY PASSAGE: Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul now takes up the thought that was interrupted at the beginning of the chapter, but it is a thought that has been intensified by the contemplation of his apostleship and of the great mystery that has been revealed to him by the Spirit. "For this reason", not only refers back to the new way of access opened to the Gentiles by Christ, not only to the fact that the Gentiles with the Jews are being formed into a spiritual house wherein God may dwell, but also to the great truths he has just mentioned in verses 2-13.

The common position for prayer was standing. Bowing the knees, which was probably not upright kneeling, but prone kneeling with the head touching the ground, was reserved for very intense times. (See Luke 22:41, Acts 20:36).

As we look at this part of the prayer, we see that it is a fourfold petition, followed by a doxology. The petition is asked "according to the riches of his glory". This links up with the words in v20 - "able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine". He is able to do this because there is no limit to the riches of his glory, the riches of all his perfections revealed to humans.

#### THE FOURFOLD PETITION

##### **1. The prayer for inner strengthening v16.**

The word for "strengthened" means "being made strong or capable". The natural question is, "strong or capable for what?". The answer commentators like Moule and Morling have suggested is "strong and capable of bearing the presence of the indwelling Christ". They thus see this first petition as a preliminary for the second. Others, like Foulkes, see it as more general. "The prayer is that Paul's readers may be equipped with the power that makes them able to stand firm in Christ, and to live and work for Him (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:13; Philippians 4:13)" (Foulkes, p102). There seems no reason why both interpretations could not be accepted.

##### **2. The prayer that Christ may dwell in your hearts v.17**

- a) Its meaning. The word means "to take up permanent abode" in contrast to temporary residence. The idea is of settling down and being at home.
- b) Its tense. The tense is "aorist", which signifies action at a point.

Thus, the prayer is that through faith Christ may, at a point, take up permanent abode in the lives of the readers. As he is writing to Christians, this has some difficulties, since the scripture teaches that Christ is in the heart of every believer. The meaning of the word "dwell" seems to hint at the answer. It is not a prayer that Christ may enter into the believer, but that



following the inner strengthening of the Spirit, and through faith, Christ might have a "home" in the heart of the believer, rather than just "a place to stay".

Of this, G.H.Morling said, "Thus there is suggested a spiritual crisis ... Here is a way of definite advance".

We understand that this is achieved by the indwelling or "dwelling in" of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, and whose ministry is to make us aware of Christ.

### 3. The prayer for the comprehension and knowledge of the love of Christ vs17-19

When we are strengthened inwardly by the Spirit, and when Christ dwells in our hearts by faith, then we can be said to be rooted and grounded in love, and it is then that we will be able to comprehend and know the love of Christ.

"Have your roots and foundations" presents us with a mixed metaphor - but each suggests a lot. "Rooted in love" suggests that our life is nourished by love, "foundations in love" suggests that the stability of our life is love. Thus, being nourished and supported by the love of Christ in our hearts, we have power to comprehend and know that love for ourselves.

"We have the power to understand with all God's people". Love, by its very nature, can only be understood with others, not in isolation. Only in fellowship are we able to comprehend all the dimensions of the love of Christ. The words "power to comprehend" meaning an earnest grasping, suggests the difficulty of the task envisaged simply because it is no mere intellectual feat, but a matter of practical experience, a living together in love which is no easy thing (Foulkes p105).

Likewise, we can only know the love of Christ by the experience of loving. As we love Him, and as we love others as He loved us, so we can know what His love is. It cannot be known in any other way because it surpasses knowledge.

### 4. The prayer for the filling with all the fullness of God vs.19

This is the supreme consequence of the indwelling of Christ by faith: that all the divine perfections which are in Christ, not just part of God's nature, might consequently be in us.

## THE DOXOLOGY

After a prayer like that, something had to be said. Even though Paul had asked these petitions "according to the riches of his glory", the mind boggles at the boldness of the requests. So Paul, in this doxology, reminds us that the power of God is greater than any experience we have, anything we can imagine or conceive.

Notice how the petition has led to praise. This is because his petitions grew out of his view of God and of his confident trust. A small concept of God means limited trust, small petitions and little praise. A large concept of God means greater faith, bolder petitions and greater praise.



**QUESTION 1:**

Paul brings his extended prayer to a conclusion in vs14-21. What is his first request (v16)? Explain it.

**QUESTION 2:**

What is his second request (v17)? Explain it.

**QUESTION 3:**

What is his third request (vs17-19)?

**QUESTION 4:**

The notes say that kneeling to pray (as in v14) indicates intensity of prayer. Look at Luke 22:41 and Acts 20:36 and briefly explain the situations there.

**QUESTION 5:**

In what way is the beginning of Paul's letter (1:3, 4) similar to the ending of chapter 3 (vv 20, 21)? To whom is Paul ascribing blessing and glory?

**QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:**

What sort of petitions do you bring to God? Do you see God as Paul did? Write your own doxology, keeping in mind what you have learned in the first 3 chapters.