

COMMENTARY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS
I. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIANS

7.

E. THE PRAYING OF PAUL'S PRAYER
EPHESIANS 3:14-21

In these verses, Paul prayed the prayer, which he had been preparing the Ephesians to understand from the beginning of the letter. He stated the prayer in only eight verses, but the request contained in those words was so stupendous that it had taken him 58 verses to prepare them to understand it. Paul's request for them may be the most expansive request ever made to God. The exciting aspect of the request is that he offered it, not only in behalf of the Ephesian believers, but also in behalf of all saints. Every believer in Jesus who reads this prayer should recognize that Paul included him in the prayer. He should seek to understand the magnificence of its scope and open his heart to allow God to answer Paul's prayer in his heart and life.

- E. *For this reason I bow my knees* (3:14-21)
1. *To* (3:14-15)
 - a. *The Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (3:14b)
 - b. *From whom all the family in heaven and on earth is named* (3:15)
 2. *That He will grant you* (3:16-19)
 - a. *Through power to become strong in the inner man* (3:16-19)
 - (1) *According to the riches of His glory* (3:16b)
 - (2) *Through His Spirit* (3:16c)
 - (3) *Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith* (3:17a)
 - (4) *Having been rooted and founded in love* (3:17b),
 - b. *That you may be fully able to grasp with all the saints* (3:18-19a)
 - (1) *What is the length and width and height and depth* (3:18b)
 - (2) *And to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge* (3:19a)
 - c. *So you may be filled with all the fullness of God* (3:19b).
 3. *Now* (3:20)
 - a. *To Him who is able to do superabundantly* (3:20b-20d)
 - (1) *Above all that we ask or think* (3:20c)
 - (2) *According to the power that is working in us* (3:20d),
 - b. *To Him be glory* (3:21)
 - (1) *In the church* (3:21b)
 - (2) *By Christ Jesus* (3:21c)
 - (3) *Through all the generations unto the age of the ages* (3:21d).
 - b. *Amen.* (3:21e).

Verses 14-15. To whom Paul prayed. Paul said he bowed his knees, meaning he humbled himself in prayer. Nothing in Paul's writings or any other Bible writing indicates that kneeling is the only position in which a person can pray. Other Scriptures describe people praying with eyes lifted to heaven, with eyes bowed down in humility, standing, lying prostrate, even walking on a road. The position of the body is not what makes a prayer real or what obtains an answer from God. However, kneeling is expressive of humble submission, and Paul took that position to show he

entered into this prayer with deepest sincerity and earnestness.

When he knelt, he bowed before "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The Romans prayed to many gods. Paul wanted no one to question to whom he prayed. He prayed to the God who sent Jesus into the world. He called Him "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God the Father was Paul's Father through faith, but he recognized that first God the Father was Jesus' Father. God the Father was Jesus' father by nature. Jesus was like God and

equal to God in every aspect. He was God as fully as the Father is God. Paul's relationship to the Father was quite different. The only way Paul could claim God as His Father was through the death and resurrection of the only true Son of God, who is Jesus Christ.

Paul stressed that the God to whom he prayed was Jesus' father because he knew he had no right or power to enter into the presence of the Father to make any kind of request except through Jesus. The name of Paul gained him no recognition with God. The name of Jesus opened every door of the Father's dwelling-place and His storehouses. Because Paul came bearing Jesus' name through the power of Jesus' death on the Cross, all those doors opened to him. The same is true of every person who undertakes to approach God the Father in prayer. We must go bearing Jesus' name or we have no power or right to enter into His presence. Paul did not close his prayer by saying he was praying "in Jesus' name." He said the same thing in an even more effective way. He began his prayer by including Jesus in the address. Without acknowledging Jesus, however, his prayer would not have been a prayer at all.

Today in America, secularists are making a strenuous effort to prevent Christians from praying in public in Jesus' name. Probably they do not realize the seriousness of their effort, but even unconsciously they seem to realize that praying in any other name is uttering useless words. All other gods, regardless of what name they bear, are not able to hear and certainly are not able to answer any prayer. Secularists may not realize that they do not fear those other gods because they are not gods and have no power; yet even without faith they are able to discern that Jesus is entirely different. Their rebellious hearts fear Him; therefore, they do not want anyone to mention His name around them. Christians are supremely right to refuse to bend to their demand. We should even be willing to suffer if need be for the right and privilege to unashamedly acclaim that we pray to the Father through Jesus. To do otherwise is to deny the One who gives us the power and right to pray. Without acknowledging Him, our pious words fall to the ground unanswered.

The sad practice is that today many attempt to pray all the way through their prayer without ever mentioning Jesus' name, even in church where no one would think of objecting to their doing so. They fail to realize that none of us has the goodness or strength to approach Almighty God on our own or in the strength of our own name. When we attempt it, we utter beautiful words into empty space. They do not reach the ears of the Father, for we have no power to reach Him apart from the grace that Jesus obtained for us by His death on the Cross. Paul would never have made that mistake, and neither should we. Some may want to avoid the words "in Jesus name" at the end of a prayer, because they may sound too rote and insincere. They may be right, but if it leads them to think they can pray without acknowledging Jesus at all, they speak pious words to no avail.

Paul acknowledged, however, that God had a huge family, whose members live in both heaven and earth. People become members of that family through faith in Jesus, but the Head of the family is God the Father, who sent Jesus. In Rome as in America, people inherited their family name from their fathers. The family to which Paul belonged had God for its head and received its name from God. He gave His name to everyone who was a part of His family. He was glad to associate His name with every person of faith whether they were on earth or in heaven. So everyone who finds salvation in Jesus receives the name of Jehovah God as his family name. Still we receive that family name through Jesus's opening the way for us to become God's adopted children. Furthermore, Jesus' name is still the only name opens the way for us to approach Father God in prayer.

Verses 16-19. What Paul prayed for. The request in Paul's prayer is contained in only four verses, but it probably was the most extensive request ever extended to God in all history. Paul asked God to grant two blessings to the Ephesians. The second blessing he requested was the real object of his prayer. The first blessing he requested was simply that they be granted the power to grasp the second, greater blessing

Paul first asked for the Ephesians to be granted super strength. He indicated the special

nature of the strength for which he prayed in two ways. First, he indicated it by using two words to describe it. One word was not sufficient to describe the full extent of the power he was asking God to grant them. He asked for them "through power to become strong." The word translated "power" means "to have ability," "to be capable." The word translated "to become strong" means "to have sufficient strength for a task or undertaking." Paul asked for the Ephesians to be granted the ability to have strength enough to obtain the second request he was about to make in their behalf.

Paul also indicated the special nature of the strength He asked God to grant them by saying it was to be "in the inner man." He was not asking for the Ephesians to have physical strength. He was asking for them to have inner strength. It was a strength that would last when physical strength faded away. It was a strength that would open their eyes to truths that physical strength could never discover. It was a strength that would make them able to receive wondrous insights that are totally beyond anything that a physical body can imagine.

Paul spoke of four sources that were required for them to have the kind of strength He was asking God to grant them. . The first source was "the riches of His glory,." That is, the Father's glory. God the Father's glory is His character, might, and wisdom. "The riches of His glory" means God's character, strength, and wisdom fully expressed with nothing held back in reserve. God's glory in its richest and most abundant measure was required to give the Ephesians the kind of strength Paul desired for them to have.

The second source for the strength that was required for them to have the strength Paul requested was "His Spirit." Paul was still talking about the Father. The Spirit to which He referred was the Spirit that is related to God the Father. The Spirit to which he was referring is one-of-a kind, the Holy Spirit, who is also God. Paul prayed for a strength that was so strong it could come only from the Holy Spirit, who was God walking with them and supplying to them His power. It was a strength exceedingly beyond the highest and best humanity could achieve by its own efforts.

The third source of the strength Paul was requesting was "Christ dwelling in their hearts through faith." In addition to the glory of the Father and the presence of the Holy Spirit, Paul acknowledged that Christ's dwelling in their hearts through faith was required for them to have the strength for which he was praying. All three members of the Trinity work together in all things, but Paul stressed that their united efforts were especially required for people to receive the kind of supernatural strength he sought for the Ephesians.

The fourth source of the strength Paul requested was a life that was "rooted and grounded in love." Love was the way of life Jesus came to teach and to give to those who would trust in Him. The Ephesians were going to require that way of life in full measure if they were going to have the strength Paul sought for them. That love included love for God, love for God's people, and love for the whole of God's creation. Only that kind of commitment could enable them to receive the strength Paul prayed for the Father, Spirit, and Son to grant to them.

Paul's prayer for strength for the Ephesians was exalted and astounding, but it was only a means of obtaining what Paul really desired for them. He clearly said he prayed for them to have super strength so that they could grasp, take hold of, or embrace the great truth that was the subject and object of this whole letter.

It is supremely significant that Paul did not ask for the blessings of this prayer to come to the Ephesians only. He asked for those blessings to come also to "all the saints." Paul felt the Ephesian church was better prepared to understand the truth he desired for them to understand than any of the other churches he had founded, but still he longed for the same blessings to spread out from the Ephesians to all the saints, that is, to all those who are made holy through faith in Jesus. His request extended, not only to all believers of his days, but also to all future believers. It included every believer who reads Paul's prayer today. We know God definitely remembers Paul's prayer, because He had it recorded in His inerrant, eternal Word. He wants us to remember it, so we know for sure He remembers it. He not only remembers, He is

still answering that prayer by preserving this amazing letter and by opening the eyes and hearts of those who read and study it in faith. All who study the Book of Ephesians and who grasp its exalted revelations are receiving today an answer to the superb prayer that Paul prayed long ago when he was imprisoned in Rome.

Paul described what he prayed for the Ephesians and all saints to understand in two ways. First, he called it "the length and width and height and depth." He did not say the length, width, height, and depth of what. He evidently left his statement open ended to indicate that what he was praying for them to understand included everything. It was the greatest truth that had ever been spoken, surpassing everything human understanding can discover. That great all-encompassing truth was the theme about which he wrote this book. It was God's plan to eventually unite all things together into one creation-wide and eternal harmonious companionship.

The second way Paul described what he prayed for them to understand was "Christ's love that surpasses knowledge." Christ's love is all-encompassing. It is the length, width, height, and depth to which he had just referred. It extends to every person and every created thing in the whole cosmos. The cosmos is God's creation, and He did not create it to abandon it. He loves the whole cosmos as a mother loves her child that comes from her own womb. His love for the cosmos is so strong and so everlasting that He will not quit working to save it until He has restored all things in it to Himself. Above all, Christ loves the people in the universe. When He remakes the creation, He will give His great recreated harmonious cosmos to the people who have trusted Him as Savior. When He brings all things into unity, the only creatures in all of the universe that will be omitted will be the people who chose to reject it.

Christ's love also extends to every creature in heaven, where angels and redeemed people already live. When His harmony and love spread out over all of the cosmos, those who already live in heaven will also share in the expanded unity that will encompass all things.

Christ's love even extends to those who are confined in hell. He loved them enough to die to save them, like he died for every other sinner. Because they refused to respond to His love, He still loves them enough to confine them so they can no longer harm the rest of the universe He died for. He will show His love to them by giving them the choice they desired.

The length, width, height, and depth of all truth is that Jesus loves all things everywhere and offers deliverance and salvation to everything through the faith of those who will love Him back. His love and offer of salvation extend to every Gentile and every Jew who ever lived, who lives now, and who ever will live in the future. It also extends to every other created thing in the whole cosmos. No thought and no experience ever gets any bigger than that ultimate truth. Paul dared to pray that the Ephesians and all saints would understand it, not through human ability or reasoning but through revelation from God. He had received it that way, and he knew all other believers would have to receive it that way as well. Therefore, instead of trying to get the Ephesians and us to understand through his explanations, he prayed God would enable us to understand through the love of the Father, Spirit, and Son in our lives. Paul's prayer still abides in God's heart, and God continues to answer Paul's prayer when we have our eyes opened to understand the full extent of God's limitless, eternal salvation.

Verse 20. Paul's closing blessing. Paul closed his prayer with a blessing. Instead of expressing a blessing on any person, he expressed a desire for God to be blessed. The blessing He sought was for God to be glorified. He longed for God to be glorified, because only He could answer Paul's prayer and enable the Ephesians to understand. Yet God was fully able to do it because He has a superabundance of power to do more than everything we can think about or ask for.

Because God has the power to supply even the stupendous request Paul made, Paul wished for glory to come to Him through the church, the highest and most important of all of God's creations. He also wished for it to come through Christ, God's agent for creation, revelation,

salvation, and unification of all things. He wished for that glory to grow more and more and to spread farther and farther until it would be seen and magnified everywhere throughout the ages and also throughout the final age of all the ages.

Paul closed his prayer with "Amen," which affirmed and sealed everything he had asked. It was time for him to do so. When he had asked for all believers to understand the highest and best of everything God will ever do, nothing remained to be requested.