

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 11 November 2018. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

Paul's Prayer

Ephesians 3:12-21

In my lifetime, I've heard Christians pray countless times. I've heard the prayers of young Christians; and I've heard the prayers of Christians who have been saved for many years. I've heard the prayers of Christians who know a lot of Scripture; and I've heard the prayers of those who know little Scripture. However, I find that there really are only two kinds of prayers. On the one hand, there are the prayers of Christians who know *about* the power and love of God; but then, there are the prayers of those who know the power and love of God *by deep personal experience*.

You can always tell a Christian who personally knows the power and love of God by the way that he prays. The Apostle Paul was such a man. He was a man of intense prayer. *Two times* during his letter to the church of Ephesus Paul stopped to *pray* for them; and he *wrote down* his prayer in his letter. To Paul, it was natural to talk to the Lord right in the middle of a letter, as though He were part of a three-way conversation between friends. Paul knew the Lord well!

This morning, we will be looking at the *second* prayer that Paul offered to God in this letter. This isn't a flowery, politically correct, wishy-washy prayer. This is not a prayer that was designed to tickle people's ears, or to make everyone happy. Nor is this a dry, non-specific, powerless, empty prayer, offered up without any real faith. It is a deep, powerful prayer, offered up by a man who knew the reality of everything that he was requesting of God. It is the prayer of a man who *knew God* in an intense way.

In this prayer, Paul prayed that the Ephesian Christians would *personally experience* the spiritual riches that are in Christ. *Every* believer in this room needs Christ's spiritual riches. If you know Christ as your Saviour, yet you don't fully understand what you have in Christ, I pray that you *will* have a much greater understanding of Christ's riches by the end of this message. It is my prayer that you will begin to live the victorious Christian life that Paul talks about in this prayer. The title of this message is ***Paul's Prayer***.

Now, before we get into Paul's prayer for the Ephesians, I first would like to point out...

I. Paul's passion for the Ephesians (vv. 12-15)

Read Ephesians 3:12-21.

In the first 11 verses of this chapter, Paul had talked about the ***"unsearchable riches of Christ."*** Now, in **verse 12**, Paul says, ***"In whom we have boldness and access."*** That word ***"whom"*** refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. It is "in Christ," Paul says, that we have ***"access."*** Access to what? Access to the ***"unsearchable riches of Christ."***

Christian, the unsearchable riches of Christ are accessible to you at all times. In Christ, you have access to everything that you need to live a victorious Christian life. Furthermore, Paul says that we have access with ***"boldness"*** and ***"confidence."*** This means that as we go to Christ to ask for His spiritual riches, we may do so with assurance and confidence. We may be

confident that the Lord *will* answer our request. Christ doesn't begrudgingly hand out spiritual riches to His brethren: He imparts them gladly!

Read Hebrews 10:19-22.

Read James 1:5-6.

In these two passages, both Paul and James emphasise the fact that we may approach the Father with boldness and confidence. It is through the "***new and living way***," Jesus Christ, that we are able to come to the Father. However, you'll notice that we must approach God *in faith*. Paul said, "***Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith***." James said, "***But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.***"

Now, I must admit that my faith is often weak: and so is yours. That's a problem, isn't it? If we must have *faith* in order to have our prayers answered, and if faith be not a natural thing for us to have, then how can our prayers be heard? The answer to this problem can be found at the end of **Ephesians 3:12. (Read Ephesians 3:12 again.)** Did you catch that? It is by the "***faith of him***" (of *Christ*) that we have access to God in prayer. It isn't really "*your*" faith that gives you access to God, because in and of yourself, you don't *have the ability* to trust in a God that you cannot see. Your old, natural man has no faith in God, because the old man lives by sight. It is *Christ's* faith that you need! How can you *get* His faith? You need to *ask*. You must *ask* the Lord to *give* you the faith that you need. That's what the disciples did. They *asked* the Lord to give them faith. In **Luke 17:5** the Apostles said to Jesus, "***Increase our faith.***"

With this in mind, let's move on to **verses 13 and 14. (Read verses 13 and 14 again.)** In these verses, Paul now reveals the *purpose* of the prayer that he is about to make. In **verse 14**, Paul is beginning his prayer. He is bowing his knees to the Father. But *why* was he praying? *For whom* was he praying? Paul was praying for the Ephesian believers. *They* were the "***cause***" for which he was praying. Paul had just said, "***Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you.***" Because Paul desired that the Ephesians would not be faint-hearted, he therefore bowed his knees to pray for them.

Now, Paul *could have* put a lot more emphasis on the tribulations that he was experiencing. He could have launched into a dramatic description of his privations and sufferings. He could have said, "Pray for me, brethren, as I sit here in this dreary room, with these sharp chains around my hands and ankles, and with rats scurrying around my feet, and with guards watching my every move. Pray that I'll have strength to keep plodding on for Jesus, even though I'm in misery." Paul *could* have elaborated on his sufferings; but he didn't. That wasn't what they needed to hear. Paul's concern was for *them*. He was concerned that they would not become discouraged or disheartened by the fact that the man who had led them to Christ was in prison. He wanted them to be strong in the Lord, and not faint-hearted.

Many Christians love to let everyone know about all the trials or inconveniences they are experiencing in their lives. That wasn't Paul's spirit, though. Paul is saying, "Don't worry about me. God has a reason for my being in prison. My tribulations are '***your glory***.' In some way that we can't understand right now, God is using my suffering for *your* benefit."

How about you, Christian? What kind of things do *you* pray for? To be sure, God wants you to depend on Him for *your* physical, material, and spiritual needs; but are you praying for others, as well? Are you burdened with the needs of fellow Christians? Do you stop to think,

“I wonder if that brother, or that sister, is going through a trial right now? I should pray for him!” It should be every Christian’s desire to uphold others in prayer. Now, let’s read **verse 14** again. **(Read verse 14.)** Did you notice what Paul said about his prayer *posture*? He said, **“For this cause I bow my *knees*.”** This isn’t merely a figure of speech. Evidently, Paul really stopped in the middle of his letter, physically bowed his knees, and prayed for the Ephesians.

Now, why is this important? After all, God never commands us to assume a certain posture when we pray. In the Bible, we see people praying while they were standing, or while they were sitting, or while they were kneeling, or while they were lying flat on their faces. However, there is something very special and humbling about *kneeling* in prayer. Kneeling is a natural position to assume when you are pleading with God. When a person bows the knee to another person, it is a sign of *humility* and *submission*. In some cases, kneeling is even a token of worship. Many times in the Bible, that is exactly what it meant. That is what it will mean on the day when every knee in heaven and earth will bow to Jesus and call Him **“Lord.”** We will be *worshipping* Christ. Now, if we will bow the knee before God on that future day, why not bow the knee to Him *right now*, in this lifetime? Kneeling is a token of our worship; and it is a token that we are *keenly, desperately* aware of the greatness of our need.

Now, it certainly is not necessary to kneel every time you pray. Whether or not you physically kneel, though, you should be kneeling in your *heart*. The issue is, “Are you *submitting your heart and will* to God? Do you recognise the greatness of your need? Are you serious about what you are asking?” Paul was as serious as he could be. He *really* wanted these Ephesian Christians to experience God’s love and power in their lives; and he knew that the only way they could have God’s power on their lives was to *ask God* for it.

Now, before we get into the content of Paul’s prayer, there is one more thing that I would like to point out—and that is *the name* by which Paul addressed God. **(Read verses 14-15 again.)** There is a reason why Paul addressed God as **“the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.”** Paul is addressing God as “Father” because the whole focus of his prayer is going to be on our *family relationship* with God. Paul also mentions the fact that the **“whole family in heaven and earth”** is named after the Father. Why does Paul say this? Because the requests that he is about to make also have to do with the family relationship that believers have with *each other*. Paul is appealing to God on the basis of our family relationship, because everything he is about to request has to do with our position within the Family of God.

Paul’s prayer life was passionate. He didn’t pray casually; he prayed with *purpose*. Is your prayer life passionate and purposeful, Christian? Is a great deal of your prayer time devoted to the needs of *others*, as Paul’s was? Should your prayer life be lacking, learn from the Apostle Paul. Study this prayer, and ask God to transform your communication with Him!

II. Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians (vv. 16-20)

(Read verses 16-20 again.) In this prayer, Paul made four requests for the Ephesian believers. All these things that Paul requested are part of the “riches of God’s grace.” Paul is not praying merely that the Ephesians would *know* what riches were available to them: he is praying that they would actually *experience* these riches. Christian, you *need* these spiritual riches every single day; and you *can* access them! What are these riches? Well, let’s examine Paul’s prayer request list, and see what they are.

First of all, Paul prayed **that they would be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” (Read verse 16 again.)** Think of this, Christian. God’s mighty *strength* is available to you. All the strength you need to overcome sin is available. It’s not just *barely* enough strength, either. Let’s read **verse 20** again, and see how mighty it is. **(Read verse 20.)**

That expression **“exceeding abundantly”** is translated from the Greek phrase *huper ek perissou*. *Huper* means “above.” *Ek* means “out of”; but in this context, it means “exceedingly.” (It has the idea of being “outside the bounds,” or “far beyond.”) Then, the word *perissou* means “superabundant.” Put these three words together, and you get something like “exceedingly above superabundant”! *That* is how mighty God’s power is!

It doesn’t sound as though Paul received a proper training in psychology, does it? I mean, didn’t he go to a proper, state-accredited seminary? Didn’t Paul know that once you’re an addict, you’re always an addict? Didn’t Paul know that the best that an alcoholic can ever hope to say is, “My name is Joe, and I’m a *recovering* alcoholic”? Didn’t Paul know that lust is just part of the human psyche, and that if you try to suppress lust, it’s not healthy? Didn’t Paul know that the best you can do is to vent your lust in a way that doesn’t harm anyone (such as by watching R-rated movies with your wife)? Didn’t Paul know that you can’t really overcome anger—that you need to “redirect” your anger in a constructive or non-harmful way (such as through scream therapy)? Didn’t he know that you can’t ever really get over the hurt of your past—that you must go through countless years of therapy, and dig up all those suppressed memories? Didn’t he know that you need to dig up the “inner child,” and find out why others are to blame for your problems, and not *you*? Didn’t he know that you must create a “safe place” in your imagination, and resort there to escape your problems? Didn’t he know that behavioural problems are not spiritual problems, but chemical problems in the brain, which need drug treatment? The answer is **“No!”** Paul knew no such thing. What Paul *did* know is the power of his God. Paul knew His God; and He knew that his God is *exceedingly* more than able to give us power to overcome addictions, lust, anger, bitterness, and fear. Paul knew that **“*Whatever is born of God* (in other words, whoever is born again) *overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*”** Paul knew that **“*God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*”**

Christian, stop buying into the world’s lies. Stop getting your ideas about life from the telly, movies, magazines, and psychology, and start feasting on God’s Word. If God was powerful enough to save you from the *penalty* of your sin, is He not also powerful enough to give you *victory* over sin? The Bible says that He *is* that powerful. Stop thinking that you *can’t* get victory over that sinful habit (such as pornography, smoking, drinking, lying, anger, bitterness, or unforgiveness)! Stop thinking that you must cope with your failures, and that you will have to be content to live a powerless, defeated Christian life! Stop thinking that you *can’t* learn to love certain people. Stop thinking that you *can’t* be joyful and peaceful in the midst of desperate circumstances. Stop thinking that you *can’t* be longsuffering and gentle with people. Stop thinking that you *can’t* trust God with your finances, and give of your tithes and offerings to God. Stop thinking that you *can’t* share the Gospel with the lost because you don’t have the level of training that the pastor has. Stop living by sight, and live by faith! Christ has all the power that you need to live victoriously. He is able to do **“*exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.*”** By the way, what kind of “power” is Paul talking about? Let’s examine what Paul wrote earlier in this letter; and then, we’ll compare it to what he wrote to the church of Philippi.

Read Ephesians 1:19-20.

Read Philippians 3:10.

The power that enables Christians to live for God is the same power that raised Christ from the dead. That's powerful! Yet, there is something that we must never forget: **God does not force His power upon us.** In order to know Christ's power, you must know *Christ* in a close and personal way. Paul said, "***That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection.***" First, you must have a relationship with Christ. You must be saved! Secondly, if you *do* know Christ as your Saviour, you must be walking in close fellowship with Him. You must be on praying ground with Him because you are staying cleansed from sin.

Christian, if you go through your day without seeking God in prayer, without reading His Word, without submitting to Him, and without talking with Him, you will not know His power. If you go through your day without seeking to be conformed to Christ's image, without confessing your sins, and without asking Him to help you overcome sin, you will *not* know His power. And without Christ's power, all you have is your *own* will power.

Make no mistake about it: You will *not* be able to overcome sin by your own will power. Your "will power" comes from the same source that your *sin habit* comes from: and that source is your flesh! Your flesh is driven by pride and self-glory, rather than by the desire to glorify God. That is why it is impossible to please God without the resurrection power of Jesus Christ! Christian, are you submitting to God and allowing Him to "strengthen you with might by His Spirit in your inner man"? Or are you relying on your own fleshly will power?

Now, Paul's second prayer request for the Ephesian Christians is **that Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith. (Read verse 17 again.)** What does Paul mean here? Why would Paul pray that the Holy Spirit would " *dwell* " in the hearts of these believers? Doesn't the Holy Spirit indwell the heart of *all* believers all the time? Yes, He does. Let's look at that promise.

Read 1 Corinthians 3:19 and 6:19-20.

The Holy Spirit *indwells* every believer; and He never leaves us. God's Word makes this truth very clear. However, the word "dwell" here in **Ephesians 3:17** has a slightly different shade of meaning. The Greek word for "dwell" in **1 Corinthians 3:16** (where Paul says that the "***Spirit of God dwelleth in you***") is the word *oikeo*. *Oikeo* means "to reside, or inhabit a place." But the Greek word for "dwell" in **Ephesians 3:17** is slightly different. It is the word *katoikeo*. *Katoikeo* literally means to "dwell down." It has the idea of "settling down" into a house, and making it "lived in." A tenant may live *in* a house; yet, the house doesn't really belong to him. He must abide by the landlord's wishes as to what he can or cannot do in the house. Should the landlord say, "Don't have any pets in the house," or, "Don't hang up picture frames in the house," the tenant must abide by those rules. A person may be "comfortable" in a tenanted house, to a degree; but he never really gets 100% comfortable.

That is *not* the way it should be with Christ as He dwells within believers. Your heart is *His* dwelling place, Christian: thus, He should feel comfortable and "settled down" in your heart. In fact, *you* are the one who is living in *His* dwelling place! On the day you were saved, you handed the keys over to *Him*. For Christ to "dwell in your heart by faith" means that Christ is settled down in your heart as the *rightful Possessor*. It means that He is completely comfortable there, because you have completely yielded to Him. You are not telling Christ, "Make yourself at home, Lord: just don't go into these certain rooms, or make any renovations or alterations." You have given *Him* the keys to your heart and life; and you aren't asking for

them back! You are trusting that He will run your “house” infinitely better than *you* did before you gave Him the keys. Is Christ “dwelling in your heart by faith,” Christian?

The third prayer request that Paul asked of God was **that they would be rooted and grounded in love. (Read verses 17-19 again.)** This is an interesting prayer request. Paul uses a couple word pictures to get his idea across. First, he prays that the Ephesians will be “**rooted**” in love. The idea is that this love cannot be torn away or displaced, because it is deep and settled, like the roots of an oak tree. Secondly, Paul prays that the Ephesians would be “**grounded**” in love. In other words, this love is like the foundation of a building. This love is solid and unmoveable; and every act of service that we do for God is built upon it. But here’s the important question: “*Whose love is Paul talking about?*” Is he talking about *our* love for *Christ*? No. He’s talking about *Christ’s love in you.* **(Read verse 19 again.)**

Now, being “rooted and grounded in Christ’s love” involves a couple things. First of all, it involves **comprehending** (or understanding) **Christ’s love. (Read verse 18 again.)**

There is no way that even the godliest believer could ever fully understand God’s love. Paul says in **verse 19** says that Christ’s love “**passeth knowledge.**” Yet, as we continually meditate and dwell upon what Christ has done for us, we *can* understand the scope of Christ’s love more and more. As we understand Christ’s love more and more, we are motivated to *respond* to Him in love, and to serve Him without fear.

Back in 1812, Napoleon’s armies marched into Spain; and they soon discovered that the dreaded dungeons of the Roman Catholic inquisition were still in full operation in the Jesuit monasteries. The French soldiers were horrified at the instruments of torture and death that the Jesuit priests had invented for the “heretics” (those people who dared to believe the Bible). One of the discoveries that made an impression on the soldiers was that of a man who had died in one of the dungeons. Evidently, this man was a born-again, Bible-believing Christian, who had suffered and died for his faith in the true Gospel. All that was left of him were his bones, and the rotting remains of some of his clothing. However, there, on the wall, was an inscription in rock, which this man had made with a small piece of metal. The inscription was of a cross. On the top and bottom points of the cross were the Spanish words *profundidad* and *altura* (“height” and “depth”); and on the side arms of the cross were the words *anchura* and *longitud* (“breadth” and “length”). He obviously knew **Ephesians 3:18!** Pastor H.A. Ironside explained it in this way: “As that poor prisoner of so long ago was starving to death, his soul was contemplating the wonder of God’s purpose of grace; and to him, the figure of the cross summed it all up—the length, the breadth, the depth, the height!”

Do you start to doubt God’s love whenever you see the first sign of trial or hardship? That man didn’t! Despite his suffering, he could not get over the fact that Christ would love him enough to die for him! Christian, God wants you to be lost in the fascination of Christ’s love.

As you meditate on Christ’s love, you will be able to **know God’s love personally.** Paul prayed that the Ephesians would “**know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.**” This word “knowledge” has the idea of *experiential* knowledge. Paul isn’t merely talking about being *aware* that God loves me: he’s talking about being *filled* with His love toward others. The love of Christ is meant to be *passed on to others*, as you allow Christ to control you.

Read Ephesians 5:1-2. (The expression “walk in love” means that this love is a “lifestyle.”)

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

Paul had one more prayer request for the Ephesian Christians: and that is **that they would be filled with all the fullness of God. (Read verse 19 again.)** In **Ephesians 5:18**, Paul wrote, **“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be ye filled with the Spirit.”** When a person is filled with wine, he is under the control of that wine. In contrast, when a believer is **“filled with the Spirit”** (or **“filled with all the fulness of God”**), he is under the Spirit’s control. When a believer is allowing himself to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, he has access to the riches of God’s grace. He is filled with the power that he needs to resist sin, and to live righteously. He is filled with the love of God; and that love is poured out to others.

This is not a *theory*, Christian. This is not the way that only a few super-special Christians are able to live. *Every* Christian can be filled with the Spirit and controlled by Christ’s resurrection power. *Every* Christian can conquer the old fleshly nature every day—through Christ! The question is, “Will I submit to God, and let Him change me?”

III. Paul’s praise to God (v. 21)

Paul ends his prayer with words of praise to God. Let’s examine them. **(Read verse 21.)** One day we who know Christ will stand before the throne of God; and we will sing praises to the Lamb. But in the meantime, what about our praises down here on earth? Do they count for anything? When we enter into splendour of heaven, will our praises down here on this sin-cursed earth be forgotten? No, they won’t! Paul says that the **“glory”** (or “praise”) that is given to Jesus Christ right now, **“in the church,”** will redound throughout all ages!

So, what does this verse mean for *us*? It means that the words of praise that we sang this morning were not merely vibrations that went out into the air, and then died away forever. **God heard those songs.** You may not have the greatest singing voice; but *God was pleased* by the words that came out of your mouth--*if* you sang them in sincerity. *God* remembers our words and songs of praise; and He will store them in His heart forever. The praises that were offered to Him in the church this morning will redound for eternity! Christian, did *you* really praise Him today—not just with your lips, but in your heart?

Conclusion: As we have read this passage of Scripture this morning, our thoughts have been lifted to the realms of heaven. But now, we must come back down to earth. We are not yet in the “sweet by and by”; we are in the “nasty now and now.” We are surrounded by temptations, and are afflicted with our old sin nature. If you are going to live victoriously, Christian, you need these riches of Christ. They are all available to you in Christ Jesus. Are you availing of them by faith? I would also ask: Are you saved? Have you entered into a relationship with Christ by faith? If not, I urge you to let go of your own self-righteousness, and trust in the sacrifice that Jesus made for you on the cross. Trust in Christ today, and be saved!