



MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

Examining the text & our hearts:

Bible Reading: Eph. 3:14-21

1. Praying To The Father (Eph. 3:14-15)

- a. Transitioning from theology to experience: “For this reason...” (Eph. 3:14a)
 “Prayer & preaching should always go together. As Jesus ‘watered’ with prayer [Jn. 17] the ‘good seeds’ he had sown in the Upper Room [Jn. 13-16], so Paul follows up his teaching [Eph. 1:1-3:13] with earnest prayer & by recording it [here, he] enables us to ‘overhear it.’” [John Stott, Message of Ephesians, p.] “The Western church has perhaps allowed itself to be lulled into thinking that prayer & action are at opposite ends of the scale of Christian activity. On the contrary, those who want their actions to be effective for God’s kingdom... should redouble their time and effort in prayer [N. T. Wright, Paul for Everyone, p. 39]
- b. “I bow my knees before the Father...” (Eph. 3:14b)
 - a. God “seated us with Christ in the heavenlies (Eph. 2:4-6). Because we are seated with Christ, we can walk so as to please him (Eph. 4:1, 17 [etc.]) and we can stand against the Devil (Eph. 6:10-13). But [what] links ‘sitting’ with ‘walking’ and ‘standing’ is ‘bowing the knee’ [i.e., prayer]. It is through prayer...” [Warren W Wiersbe, Ephesians Thro’ Revelation, p 31]
 - b. “Paul bows his knees to the one true God, who is omnipotent over all his creation—including all the rebellious powers.” [Clinton Arnold, Ephesians, p. 209]
 - c. “The One to whom...Paul prays is both the intimate ‘Father’ & triumphant Creator-God who unflinchingly reigns over the cosmic powers & who is able to answer [prayer].” [Richard M. Cozart, Present Triumph...Ephesians, p.]
- c. The contents of our prayer reflect the desires of our heart

2. The Prayer (Eph. 3:16-19)

- a. The Prayer’s Structure
 - a. Structure –“5 petitions in 3 clauses: ‘that’/‘so that’” [P. Williamson, Ephesians, p.]
 - a. 16 That he may grant you, according to the riches of his glory,
 - a. to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being [‘man’],
 - b. 17 & that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith... that you, being rooted & firmly established in love, 18 may have the strength
 - c. to comprehend with all the saints what is the length & width, height & depth
 - d. 19 & to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, So that 5. you may be filled with all the fullness of God [summary request]

- b. "The specific intercessions appear to be four in number, in two pairs: [1.] Spirit-empowered strength in the inner being (3:16) [2.] the indwelling of Christ through faith and love (3:17), [3.] power to comprehend the [dimensions] (3:18), [4.] Knowledge of Christ's love (3:19)." [Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, p. 594]
- b. On the personal side (Eph. 3:16-17a)
- a. The first pair—for a Spirit-strengthened inner being & Christ's indwelling (Eph. 3:16b-17a)
- a. These two petitions clearly belong together. Both refer to the Christian's innermost being, his 'inner being' ['man'] & his 'heart.'...Although one specifies the strength of the Spirit & the other the indwelling of Christ, both...refer to the same experience...Paul never separates the 2nd &...3rd Persons of the Trinity...It is precisely by the Spirit that Christ dwells in our hearts & it is strength which he gives us when he indwells us...[Plus,] the indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees. So also is the strengthening of the Holy Spirit...Paul prays to the Father that Christ by his Spirit will be allowed to settle down in their hearts & from his throne there both control & strengthen them...One is struck by the...trinitarian structure of the apostle's thought." [John Stott, *Message of Ephesians*, pp.]
- b. Here (Eph. 3:16) "'the 'inner man' is functionally equivalent to the 'heart'...in the...parallel request"—Clinton Arnold
- c. "For Paul, believers do not experience Christ except as Spirit & do not experience the Spirit except as Christ. The same phenomenon seems to be found in Eph. 3:14-19. If so...Paul is praying for one thing—the presence of God in the inner self of the believers. This is called both the empowering of the Spirit (Eph. 3:16) & the indwelling of Christ (Eph. 3:17). The goal is that believers be filled up to the level of the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19)." [C. H. Talbert, *Eph. & Col.*, p. 102]
- b. The Son & the Spirit: The 'two hands' of God
- a. "The Son and the Spirit are always together in carrying out the work of the Father. They are always at work in an integrated, mutually reinforcing way, fulfilling the Father's will in unison. Yet they are not inter-changeable, & they are not duplicating each other's work. In fact, the Son & the Spirit behave very distinctively in carrying out the concerted work of salvation... Understanding them as the Father's 'two hands' helps us see their unity (they both come from the Father with one purpose) & their distinctiveness (they are 2 hands, not 1)" [Fred Sanders, *Deep Things of God*, p. 142]
- b. "The church is [the] new humanity which God's 'two hands' [Son & Spirit] are molding into the divine image...so the church becomes 'the fullness of him who fills all in all' (Eph. 3:14-21)." [K. Vanhoozer, *Dict. Theol. Interp. Bible*, p. 116]
- c. To be strengthened through the Spirit into your inner being (Eph. 3:16b; 2 Cor. 4:16)
- a. "We don't lose heart...though our outer person is decaying, yet our inner person is daily being renewed." (2 Cor. 4:16)
- b. Paul "uses exactly the same expression in 2 Cor. 4:16... 'We don't give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person (—exactly the same [Greek] expression as Eph. 4:16) is being renewed day by day.' (2 Cor. 4:16)...Paul's body, his 'outer man' is wearing out under the onslaught of years & of persecution; the 'inner man' is what is left when the outer man has completely wasted away." [D. A. Carson, *Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 184]
- c. "We all know senior saints who, as their physical strength is reduced, nevertheless become more & more radiant & steadfast...they live as if they already have one foot in [eternity]. Conversely, we know elderly folk, who...as old age weighs down on them...become more & more bitter, caustic, demanding, spiteful, & introverted. In their youth they [could] keep their inner being somewhat capped. Now...what they really are in their inner being is coming out." [D. A. Carson, *Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p. 184]
- d. "The sphere of the strengthening is the 'inner man'...where deep spiritual transformation takes place (Rom. 12:2)." [Richard M. Cozart, *Present Triumph...Ephesians*, p.]
- e. "To 'be strengthened with power thro' God's Spirit in your inner being'...is to be nurtured by the Holy Spirit into a life of loving union with God, a life of increasing Christ-likeness...Christ-likeness is a life of utter abandonment to God in love &, at the same time, total availability to God for others." [M R Mulholland Jr., *Deeper Journey*, pp. 88-9]
- d. That Christ may dwell/settle down in your heart (Eph. 3:17a)
- a. "I pray that Christ will make his home in your hearts through faith..." (Eph. 3:17a GNT)
- c. On the collective side (Eph. 3:18-19a)
- "In-order-that you...might be strong-enough to grasp together-with all the saints what is the width & length and height & depth, and to know the love of Christ surpassing knowledge " (Eph. 3:18-19a DLNT)
- a. To comprehend with all the saints more dimensions (Eph. 3:18)
- a. "with all the saints"—Comprehend in Community
- a. "Reflection [on God's Word] & [its] life-application must be filtered through the authoritative witness [of] Scripture. This is best done in the context of fellow-believers, always remembering that we 'have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth & length & height & depth' (Eph. 3:18). Truth and our understanding of it are in the realm of 'all the saints,' not just the individual believer. The believing community provides the safeguard & keeps our reflections balanced & on track." [J. Wilson, *Guide to Theolog. Reflection*, pp.]
- b. "With all the saints"—locally & universally
- a. "At this point in the prayer...all the saints come into view. When Paul prays for one congregation, he has other Christians in mind as well (2 Cor. 11:28). While the primary focus will be all local Christians, the scope is wider & indicates a universal perspective. Paul doesn't distinguish between the Ephesian Christians & all the (other) saints: they all need [& needed]...strength to comprehend. Supplication beyond the confines of a particular community is...expected of...Christians...They are members of [God's] household... (Eph. 2:19). Paul prays that the readers 'may have strength to comprehend with all the saints...the breadth [etc.]...' (Eph. 3:18). They are part of this larger entity beyond the confines of their congregations." [C. Stenschke, in S. Porter (ed.) *Paul &...Social Relations*, pp. 201-2]
- b. To know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge (Eph. 3:19a)

- d. A summary request—"in-order-that you might be filled to all the fullness of God." (Eph. 3:19b)
- a. By virtue of their union with Christ...believers share in the fullness, i.e., in the presence & power of the Spirit in their lives...Praying for...readers to be filled with the fullness of God, Paul is asking that they experience...a greater measure of the divine presence in their lives." [Clinton E. Arnold, Exegetical Commentary: Ephesians, p. 218]
 - b. Paul's prayer "is set in the context of the joint work of the Father, Christ & the Spirit. The prayer is directed to the Father & [Paul's] petitions include the strengthening in the inner being by the Spirit & in the heart where Christ dwells...The final petition is that God's people would appreciate the love of Christ & be filled with the fullness of God. Both the Spirit & Christ play a role in the heart; & both the Father and Christ are needed for the experience of God's love." [B. Crowe, C. Trueman, Essential Trinity, pp.]
 - c. Paul "prays [in Eph. 3: 14-19, for their] deeper experience of God. He summarizes...with the hope that 'they may be filled with all the fullness of God' (Eph. 3:19). This fullness has a triune focus; Paul includes the Father, the Spirit & in his prayer for God to work in their lives (Eph 3:14-19)...To experience the fullness of one Person of the Trinity is to experience the fullness of all three." [Allan Coppedge, God Who Is Triune, p. 45]

3. Praying 'With The Grain'

- a. "Whom do I pray to? The Father? The Son, The Spirit? God? The Trinity? All of the above? Here is the theologically correct answer: pray to the Father, in the name of the Son, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Most NT prayers follow that pattern." [Fred Sanders, Deep Things of God, p. 233]
- b. "We have an invitation to pray...to the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. This is not just the 'theologically correct' to pray, but a way of praying that draws real spiritual power from being aligned with reality...It means praying 'with the grain instead of against it'." [Fred Sanders, Deep Things of God, p. 219]