

## Motivated by Faith and Love Paul's Prayer for His Friends at Ephesus

Paul's prays two prayers for his friends and converts in Ephesus that are recorded for us in his letter to the Church at Ephesus. Both give us some great insights to Paul's pastoral heart, and his understanding of the dynamics that are at work within living the Christian life.

Today, we are going to focus on Paul's second prayer in Eph 3:14-19, which I think holds both some real encouragement and definite challenge for us all in our daily contexts of living out Jesus' Kingdom Life in a fallen world.

### Eph 3:14-19

*<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*  
(Eph 3:14-19 NIVUK)

The inherently trinitarian and interactive nature of Paul's thinking comes through so clearly in vss. 14-17, in the way he structures this prayer that we have just read.

But let's work our way briefly through this passage from the top:

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name.*

While Paul is not suggesting that everyone is a redeemed child of God, he is, however, saying that God does claim a founding-Fatherhood over all his creation by virtue of his creatorship. For example, one translation says, "I kneel before the Father from whom all 'fatherhood' in heaven and on earth is named" (TCNT).

So, Paul begins his prayer by kneeling before our triune Creator of *everyone* and *everything*. He then begins to engage with the actual content of his prayer to the Father.

*<sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches -*

So much could be said here – after all, we are talking about the One who created the universe out of nothing with the simple phrase, 'Let there be...!'

**So, let's just settle on the fact that God is our inexhaustible source!**

<sup>16b</sup> – *he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,* <sup>17</sup> *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

As a way of getting into these two verses, let's ask Paul a couple of questions of them:

**What is he asking the Father to do?** I pray that he -

*may strengthened you with power through his Spirit in your inner being*

**What is the result he is looking for?**

*so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

**Notice the immediate connection that Paul makes between Spirit and Christ** – *strengthened by the Spirit – that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

Paul is not suggesting that his Ephesian friends are not Christians; he has already made that very clear earlier in the letter that they are his Christian brothers. So there is something else that Paul is wanting his Ephesian friends to get a handle on.

However, there is a further question that we have not yet asked Paul of this passage -

**Why do they need to be strengthened???**

Because we humans are inherently limited in our own resources!!!

One very simple reason for this being – we are not God, therefore, we are not perfect!

Therefore, we are not inherently strong.

As Christians, we have been gifted the Holy Spirit – however, we stand in the constant need of being strengthened – **one baptism in the Spirit but many infillings required!!!**

So, Paul is not questioning their status as Christians; however, **he is challenging the maturity or the intimacy of the relationship that is already there.**

One of the major themes running through Paul's letter to the Ephesian church is the nature of the relationship that God has brought his people into with himself. So, while there is one 'big relational idea' that Paul is developing here there are two sides to this relationship, as there are with any relationship. And this is the point that he is wanting to emphasise to his Ephesian friends – **it consists in God's side and their side.**

In Paul's mind, these two sides of the relational equation both contain a 'how' element -

**'How' will the Ephesian believers be strengthened** - *'through his Spirit'*

**'How' will Christ dwell in their hearts** - *'through faith'*

Let's explore this idea of 'faith' a little more – **What is faith?**

Paul says, *'Faith comes by hearing a word from God'* - however it may come (Rom 10:17). Faith is always the believing response within our inner being to God's voice in our hearts. So, faith is the resulting spiritual conviction generated by hearing a word from God through the work of the Holy Spirit requiring an active affirmative response on our part.

### The Interpretive Key to this Passage -

One of the keys to understanding this passage more accurately is getting clarity on the implications of what is intended with the word 'dwell' (*katoikesai*) - *that Christ may dwell in your hearts.* (Aorist infinitive active)

The word-group that are built around the same root-word that 'dwell' relates to, (*oikos* and *katoikeo*) overwhelmingly express the concepts of *living together; relating together; cohabiting* - and it covers a broad range of settings - living together in a city; living together in a home; or living together as a family.

Some examples -

- Joseph, Mary & Jesus **dwelt together** at Nazareth (Matt 2:21-23)
- The healing of Aeneas, who had been paralysed for 8 years, impacted **all who dwelt in Lydda & Sharon** with the result they all turned to the Lord (Acts 9:32-35)
- Paul held daily discussions in the School of Tyrannus at Ephesus for two whole years by which time Luke tells us 'all those who **inhabited** Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks' (Acts 19:9-10).

I'm suggesting that Paul is saying that they needed to be strengthened by the Spirit so that they could have **the 'capacity' – the willingness to be changed** – **so as to live together agreeably with Christ and his purpose.** He sees a need and he is praying into that need. The issue is not whether Christ was in them, the issue was, did they have the wherewithal to live agreeably with him - ***Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?* (Amos 3:3).**

But Paul goes further -

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,<sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

Paul goes on to pray that they may have 'power' to 'grasp something' - **the capacity to comprehend the vastness of God's love for them** - its width, length, height and depth - **to come to know it through their experiencing the daily reality of it – and this applies to us also.**

The two variables within us in this relational dynamic are 'faith' and 'love' -

**faith in** – the depth of our trust in Jesus as our Saviour and forgiver of our sins;

'love for' – the potency of our affection for our Lord, which is inversely proportional to the degree of our awareness of the depth of our sinfulness of which we have been forgiven.

As Jesus said to Simon the Pharisee regarding the woman who had washed his feet with her tears and wiped them dry with her hair in Simon's house, *"Her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."*

We cannot produce either of these two variables of our own power. We simply do not have the capacity within ourselves to make it work. But God's love is boundless, and it is essentially his love that inspires faith within us, and we have been 'gifted' both of these 'capacities' through Christ and the Spirit. It is both a gift and a task, a privilege and a responsibility, to learn how to engage with his Word and his Spirit.

As created beings, we are dependent on the empowerment of our Creator – this helps to define the underlying nature of a faith relationship that is based on God's love – we are always in his gracious debt and in need of his loving mercy, which he is always willing to pour out on us in abundance – I have come that you might have abundant life!!! (Jn 10:10)

What does this mean for each of us as in our various daily contexts???

Faith and love are undoubtedly two variables within us, but they can also be the motivators through which we are able to encounter and overcome the many competing pressures we find ourselves confronting in our life and ministry in this fallen world.

How can we explore growing in our faith?

How can we intentionally explore the inexhaustible dimensions of God's love for us?

It starts by becoming aware of our dependency on God's grace and his willingness to strengthen and empower us through his Word and his Spirit, as we come into his presence on a daily basis, acknowledging our need for his strengthening.

Jesus said, "If you love me you will obey me" (Jn 14:15).