

Session 2

August 2, 2020

WE PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER

Ephesians 3:14-21

Scholars have identified more than forty Pauline texts that deal with prayer. Some are prayers of thanksgiving (1 Thess. 1:2ff; 1 Cor. 1:4ff). Others pronounce blessings (2 Tim. 4:22; 2 Thess. 3:16). Some are quite personal (2 Tim. 1:3ff). But others, like this one written to the church at Ephesus, is just that: a prayer for the congregation as a whole. Here is Paul at his best. Regarding these verses, the 19th century Scottish expositor Alexander Maclaren said, “In no part of Paul’s letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervor than this wonderful series of petitions.”

The position of Paul’s prayer (vv. 14-15). Paul wrote sentences at a time seemingly without catching his breath. His thoughts—that are interrupted by other thoughts—often make for long sentences with few definite breaks. So, when he says, “For this reason...” (v. 14), it’s hard to figure out what reason he is referring to! He may be referring to the encouragement he offered in verse 13; or he may be referring all the way back to verses 1-3 and the grace and revelation that had been entrusted to him by God. In any case, the picture of his submission is both vivid and intimate. Paul’s humility is displayed in his kneeling before the Father. This is Paul’s *position*. The Father’s majesty is described in His headship: He is the One from whom every family is named. While some debate whether this includes the lost as well as the saved (or even angels), this matters not. The focal point of verses 14-15 is the solitary, humble servant in absolute submission to the grandeur of the Father, the One who has the authority to grant his requests.

The petitions of Paul’s prayer (vv. 16-21). In the remaining verses, we see the prayer requests that Paul makes for the church at Ephesus. Notice that the prayer is for the congregation as a whole. But since churches are made up of individual people, the prayer applies to individual believers within the church as well. Notice too, that while most of *our* praying is done for outward physical things (like the health and wellbeing of our church members), *Paul’s* petitions are for inward spiritual things that would build up the body of Christ from within, before spilling out to others. Three main requests are made:

1. That they be filled with power (vv. 16-17a). The first request is for power. The emphatic is clear: to be *strengthened* with *power* might be better expressed “to be built up with the bursting potential of power.” Knowledge is a great thing (as we will see below); but power activates that knowledge, putting it into motion. Again, the starting point is the inner man, through the agency of the Holy Spirit that dwells within. Verse 17 reminds us that the entire Trinity is at work within us, and that all of this is accomplished by faith. The word “grant” sounds fancy, but it is the simple Greek word for *give*. The Father has it; it is found in the storehouse of the “riches of His glory” (v. 16). And He is willing to give it as an act of His grace.
2. That they be filled with love (vv. 17b-19). The second request involves love. There is a clear progression here. The body must be *rooted* (initially) and *established* (over time), in love. Only then can believers grasp (*comprehend*) the love of Christ that, ironically,

surpasses all understanding. There is a spiritual principle here: understanding His love only comes by experiencing it. Paul suggests that being filled with the fullness of God is contingent upon experiencing the outpouring of love demonstrated in the redemptive work of Christ.

3. That they be filled with awe (vv. 201-21). Paul ends his prayer with a rich benediction that draws all attention back to the kneeling servant and the majestic God of verse 14. He alone is able to do over-and-above, not only what we ask, but over-and-above what we can even think about asking! In these words, Paul draws the church into adoration as well. To God alone is all glory due, in the church (His family) and in Christ Jesus (His Son) for all eternity.