

Ephesians Chapter 3 v 14 - 21

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[0 : 00] Well, it's lovely to be here again for the second weekend. June sends her apologies.

My daughter starts her summer holiday today, being a teacher, and she arrived last night, so June thought that rather than travel to Whitby last night, she ought to stay at home with her.

So, let's just bow our heads in prayer briefly. Once again, Father, we thank you for your word, which is a light to our path, and which is able to make us wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Lord, we pray that this morning you would speak to us, and we especially pray that you teach us how to pray. In Jesus' name, amen.

I think a lot of the time when we pray, we are perhaps spending too much time praying for things that we're not sure are God's will or not.

[1 : 21] We're not sure that they're God's will because the Bible doesn't tell us whether they're God's will or not. The Bible doesn't tell us that it's God's will that you're healed of this particular illness.

The Bible doesn't tell us that you're going to be successful in this particular interview.

The Bible doesn't tell us even that this or that particular person is going to be saved. And we spend a lot of time praying for things like that, things that the Bible doesn't tell us clearly are God's will for us.

I'm not saying we shouldn't pray for those things. Frederick has already quoted Philippians chapter 4, don't be anxious about anything, but in everything with prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus so we can pray about anything, anything that causes us anxiety for ourselves or for anybody else.

We can pray about anything and we should pray about anything. But what I'm saying is that we should perhaps spend more of our time praying for things that we know are God's will for us, things we know God will give us if we pray for them.

[2 : 53] And there are many things that the Bible tells us are God's will for his people, all his people, and if we therefore pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, sincerely and humbly and persistently, then there is absolutely no question at all that he will grant us these requests.

I'm thinking of things like growth in holiness. The Bible says that God wants his people to be holy. We saw that last Sunday night when we looked at Hebrews chapter 12.

God is our Father and he even disciplines his children for their own good so that they might share in his holiness. He is determined, it is his will that his children should be holy.

And therefore if you're praying for holiness, God is going to hear that prayer and God is going to answer that prayer. Likeness to Christ, which is the same thing really. We've been predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, it's God's will.

If you're praying for that, there is no question that God will answer that prayer. Wisdom. James says, if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all people generously.

[4 : 11] Let him ask in faith, not doubting. So praying for wisdom is praying for something that God wants to give all his children and therefore he will answer that prayer. Guidance.

You don't need to worry about guidance. Christians spend far too much time worrying about guidance. God will guide his children. God promises to guide his children. And if you ask him to guide you, he will.

So, do you understand what I'm saying? That we should spend far more of our time. I'm not saying we should spend less time praying for those other things. But I'm saying we should spend more of our time when we pray, praying for those things that are definitely God's will.

And therefore, things that we should want more than anything else. Actually, the Bible tells us that God doesn't want us to be rich. Doesn't it? It says that over and over and over again. So if you're praying for constant riches, constant success, then you're going to be disappointed. And you may even end up thinking that God doesn't answer prayer.

[5 : 18] So you've got to pray for the things that God promises in his word to give you and tells us are his will.

So I thought we'd look at this model prayer that the Apostle Paul prays for the Ephesian church. And I'm suggesting that if you pray this prayer, or at least something like this, if you pray along these lines, if you pray guided in your praying by this prayer and other similar prayers from the Apostle Paul and other prayers in the Bible, if you pray these prayers of the Bible, then you are not going to be disappointed.

So let's look at this prayer that ends Ephesians chapter 3. Just two things really. First of all, to whom does Paul pray?

How does he think of the God who he's praying to? And then secondly, what does he ask him for? So first of all, how does the Apostle Paul think of God in this prayer?

When he prays, how should we think of God? And there's no question about that, is there? Look at verse 14. 14. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

[6 : 50] Jesus taught us to pray, our Father who art in heaven. And the Apostle Paul here prays to the Father. The one who is the source of all fatherhood.

The ultimate father. The Apostle Paul thinks of God as his Father. And I know we're so used to this. We hardly think about it. But Martin Luther said that if we could only understand the first two words of the Lord's Prayer, it would revolutionize our lives. Jim Packer in his book, Knowing God, says that the greatest of all the blessings that come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ, the greatest of them all is the blessing of adoption.

We're not just forgiven. We're not even just justified, declared righteous. The judge actually doesn't just declare us righteous. He doesn't just forgive us. He adopts us as his sons and daughters. And he gives us the same status as his own eternal beloved son.

[8 : 08] The beloved son of God, the eternal son of God, became man, became one of us, so that we could become sons of God. So that he could share his Father with us.

The Bible says that those who are in Christ are loved as much as the Father loves Jesus. He is our Father.

Excuse me, I've still got this cough that I had last week. I hope it's going to not put you off. But God is our Father. And that is amazing when you think in Ephesians chapter 2, that Paul says that we are by nature children of wrath.

We're not naturally children of God. We are naturally children of wrath. But the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came where we were and took all that we are so that we could become what he is, a son of God, with him to be.

He from death to life has brought me son of God with him to be. So when we pray, we should come to God as our Father. When we're praying for these sort of things, the sort of things that Paul mentions in this prayer, we should think of God as our Father.

[9 : 24] But more than that, we should think of him firstly as our rich Father and then secondly as our powerful Father. Firstly as our rich Father. Look at verse 16.

I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power. He is a gloriously rich Father.

It's great having a Father, but it's even better if your Father is gloriously rich. I mean you wouldn't hesitate at all asking a gloriously rich Father to help you out with your mortgage deposit, would you?

You'd go to him. You're his child. And he's rich. And he's generous. That's how Paul thinks of God. Do you think of God like that? I pray that out of his glorious riches. He is a rich and generous Father. And then he is a Father of immense power.

[10 : 28] Look at verse 20. To him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. Not only is he a rich Father, he is a powerful Father.

He's got the power, the strength, to answer our prayer. He's got the desire to answer them because he's our generous Father and he's got the power to answer them because he's our powerful Father. Verse 20 is absolutely amazing. Paul says that our Father is able to do what we ask.

Actually, more than that, he says he's able to do all that we ask. Look again.

It says that he's able to do more than all we ask. Paul hasn't quite finished yet. He's able to do immeasurably more than all we ask.

[11:29] No, no. He's able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine. Do you get the message? God can do what you ask.

That's what Paul is saying here. If you're asking for this, if you're asking what Paul tells us to ask for in this prayer, God has the power and the desire, the generosity to answer this prayer more than we'll ever imagine.

So that's how you have to think of God when you pray. You come to him as a Father and you come to him as a generous Father and you come to him as a powerful Father.

So that brings us to the second part. What should we ask him for? What should we ask this Father for? Two things in this prayer.

And the first is that through the Holy Spirit Christ would dwell in our hearts. Look at verse 17, 16. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

[12:45] When the Holy Spirit is working in our inner being Christ dwells in our hearts. Now the Ephesian Christians Christians to whom Paul were writing had already received the Holy Spirit.

He says in chapter 1 that they were sealed with the Spirit on believing. They were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. They received the Spirit when they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and they would never have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ without the Spirit.

But here he's praying for the ongoing work of the Spirit in their hearts. and he says that when the Spirit is working in our inner being the result is that Christ will dwell in our hearts.

Christ is in heaven at the right hand of God. How can he dwell in our hearts? He dwells in our hearts through the Holy Spirit. To have the Holy Spirit in your heart is to have Christ in your heart. Remember the teaching in John chapter 14 in the upper room where Jesus says I'm going away but don't worry he says don't be troubled I'm going to send the Holy Spirit and I will come to you through the person of the Holy Spirit and through the Spirit the Father and the Son will make the home in our hearts.

[14:04] So the Holy Spirit brings Christ to a Christian's heart. And that's what you should be praying for every day. You should be asking God to give you the Holy Spirit so that Christ dwells in your heart.

Do you notice how Trinitarian Paul is here? He asks the Father to grant the Ephesians the Holy Spirit so that Christ might dwell in their hearts.

It's Trinitarian through and through. So that's what we do when we pray. We ask the Father to work by His Spirit so that Christ dwells in our hearts.

Now what does the Bible mean by the heart? The Bible means by the heart the inner secret core of a person.

the heart is the real you. What you really are your innermost thoughts and desires and motive.

[15:15] And we should be praying that Christ would dwell there at the core of our being controlling everything that comes from there our words our thoughts our deeds that should be our prayer that Christ would have our hearts this is really important the heart isn't just your outward image we all have an outward image and we're very careful about that outward image especially on Sunday especially in church we're very careful about our image the way we're presenting ourselves the Bible says that God that man looks on the outward appearance the Lord looks on the heart and we should be praying that Christ would dwell in our hearts so there's more to the heart than the outward appearance there's more to the heart than the intellect the heart includes the intellect the heart isn't irrational it is rational it includes the mind it includes the intellect it includes the thoughts but it's more than just the intellect

I've come across people I'm sorry to say who are theologically very very clued up they have very very impressive theological libraries some of them have been almost like walking concordances when it comes to the Bible but they're not there's not been people like Christ at all they've been divisive people who everywhere they go there seems to be trouble there seems to be bitterness

un-Christ-likeness well you can have a theological knowledge you can have a good sound theological knowledge your theology can be right you can be biblical you can be Bible-centered without being Christ-centered you can't know Christ without the Bible but you can know the Bible without knowing Christ and there are people who do they know the Bible but they don't know the Christ of the Bible in their hearts you've got the Bible in their minds but Christ isn't in their hearts and therefore we should be praying that through the Holy Spirit in our inner being Christ would dwell in our hearts not just our outward appearance not just our intellect and nor is the heart the same as the emotions we sometimes think that the heart is is the feeling the emotion we put a heart on our Valentine cards don't we and perhaps it's something like that that has got Christians to think that the heart is is the feeling the emotion it includes the feelings it very much includes the emotions of course it does we feel deeply about the Gospel about the Lord Jesus but you know your feelings can be touched superficially without your heart being changed it often happens it happens actually in times of revival

Jonathan Edwards the great American theologian philosopher and man who was used by God mightily in revival he wrote a whole book on the emotions and one of the things he discovered was that a time of revival there would be people who would be truly blessed truly converted truly changed by the power of the Holy Spirit but then there'd be others who would who would copy what was happening in a superficial sort of way they would be touched in their emotions but it wouldn't be a permanent change it wouldn't change their attitude to sin it wasn't something permanent it was just something superficial it was something temporary the emotions can be superficial they can be temporary music people especially I think today can mistake a musical experience for an experience of the Holy Spirit but music can actually be a substitute for the Holy Spirit music can be something to arouse your emotion arouse the feeling instead of the Holy Spirit doing it and you can play in the

Salvation Army band and not be a Christian you can enjoy Gregorian chant or whatever and not be a Christian you can enjoy a Welsh choir singing a glorious hymn like Cumberlunda as I do I've got a Welsh mother something happens to me and the hair stands up on the back of my neck when I hear a Welsh choir or a Welsh even better mixed a congregation actually singing a hymn together in one of those Welsh chapels I have the most intense feelings but they don't necessarily keep me from sin the heart isn't the same as the emotions it includes the emotions it includes the minds but there's something deeper than the emotions there's something deeper than the intellect there's something deeper than just the outward image and Paul's prayer is that Christ would dwell there now the word dwell there's two words apparently in Greek for to dwell one means to dwell as a visitor or a temporary resident and the other means to dwell as an owner occupier there are two distinct words now you can live somewhere temporarily as a visitor

[21 : 40] I last weekend and this weekend have been given hospitality by Richard and Judy I've even been given hospitality by Richard and Judy when they're not there this weekend they left early this morning but they're very welcoming and I'm sure I can't remember but I'm sure at some point they've said something like make yourself at home Brian and I know they mean it but actually I know they don't not really I mean if they come home tonight and find that I've decided to redecorate the bedroom I think they'd be just a bit put out they don't really mean make yourself completely and utterly your home yes you're welcome for a while but it's our place and you enjoy being here for a bit but it's our home so that's one one Greek word for a for to to dwell means to dwell like that the other

Greek word for to dwell means to dwell as an owner occupier you own the place and when you own the place you you put your personality into it it's your home it's where you're comfortable Don Carson in his book on Paul's prayers pictures a young couple getting married buying their first home and it's in a bit of a state of disrepair and gradually they go to work on their house and they get it to what they want it to be might take some time but they stamp their personality on the house and the house becomes a home it's where they belong it's where they're comfortable and the word that Paul uses here is that and Paul's prayer is and this is what our prayer for each other and for one another should be that Christ the Lord

Jesus Christ would make our hearts the inner core of each of us his his home where he is in charge where he is comfortable where everything is as he wants it to be where everything un-Christ like is is put out that is what we should be praying for that's what Paul prays for the Ephesians that Christ would dwell in the heart I remember there used to be a program on the television I think it was

called through the keyhole and there used to be a panel of three people and a cameraman would go around the home of a celebrity and he'd take pictures he'd film the library the bedroom the kitchen and just by looking at the pictures just by looking at the film the three panelists had to try and work out whose home it might be and

I would like to ask you that if your home if your heart had a keyhole as it were if your heart could be examined like that would it be obvious that it was Jesus' home would it be obvious that it's where Jesus is comfortable where Jesus lived where Jesus has his way used to be a song we used to sing as children and it ended with the words I hope I can remember them I should have written them down make my heart thy palace and thy royal throne make my heart thy palace and thy royal throne is that what you're praying for is that what you're praying for every day you may not be using those exact words but is that the sort of thing that is uppermost in your mind when you pray or is it me health or the interview or selling me a house they're nothing compared to knowing

Jesus as we were thinking last Sunday night God Jesus the writer of the Hebrews actually says that God withholds some of these things in order to discipline his children he gave Paul the thorn in the flesh or at least he allowed the devil to give Paul the thorn in the flesh and didn't remove it because he knew that thorn in the flesh was ultimately going to be good for Paul so what are you praying for what is the content of your prayer are you praying for this that Christ would dwell in your heart so that's the first thing he prays for and the second thing he prays for is that through the spirit they would know the love of Christ he prays that through the spirit they would know the love of Christ now these Ephesians knew that

[27 : 48] God loved them Paul had told them that you can't preach the gospel to someone without telling them about the love of God in chapter 2 verse 3 I think it is he talks about the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our sins so the Ephesians knew that God had loved them that he adopted them in love to be his sons Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4 through Jesus Christ he loved them with a great love when they were dead in their sins chapter 2 but here he prays that they might know the love of Christ what does he mean by that he means not just that they might know about the love of Christ but that they might know by experience the love of Christ yes he means that they will feel the love of Christ that they will feel loved that they will know that they are loved it's wonderful to know that you're loved isn't it it is perhaps the most wonderful thing in life to know that you're loved if you know that you're loved you can get through just about anything if you know that you're loved you don't have to compete with other people you don't have to prove yourself you can just enjoy being loved and you can love others because you know everything's okay because you know that you're secure in love then you can love other people and Paul is praying that we will know that we are loved that the

Holy Spirit will show us that we are loved will show us the extent of that love the height the length the breadth the depth of the love of Christ which passes knowledge and yet he prays that we will know it increasingly that Christ loves us and the result will be that we love him and that we love others again if I can quote Don Carson he mentions that when he was a boy he had a serious illness and he knew that his mother loved him he knew theoretically that his mother loved him but one night he woke up and he found that his mother was sitting on the end of his bed weeping because he had been so ill and he said something like why mother you do love me don't you he knew in a new way the depth of his mother's love he didn't just know about it he knew it and we should be praying that we'll know the love of Christ that the

Holy Spirit will shed the love of Christ abroad in our hearts or pour out the love of Christ into our heart so that we're loving people loved and loving loved by God loving one another that's what Paul says we should be praying for so what are you praying for or are you still just praying you'll sell your house quickly well that's important if you need to pray about that but compared to this it's nothing nothing at all this is what we should be praying for and if we pray for these things God will answer our prayers it'll take time we'll have to keep on praying the same things over and over again but gradually will increase in the love of Christ our knowledge of it gradually more and more of our hearts will be given to him not a single experience although I'm not ruling out experiences of God's love at all not at all it's not primarily a single experience that Paul is talking about here it's a lifelong experience of being filled to the measure of all the fullness of

God enjoying everything that God wants to give us in Christ enjoying it all in our heart that's what we should be praying for and I encourage you to devote yourselves to prayer as Paul says to the Colossians and when you pray to pray like this and God will answer your prayer Amen Father out of

your glorious riches in your immeasurable power we pray that you would answer our prayer and grant O Lord that Jesus Jesus Christ by your spirit will dwell as the owner occupier of our hearts at the very core of our being and we pray that you by your spirit in our hearts would show us how much you love us the length the breadth the depth the height beyond our understanding cannot be measured we pray that we might know more and more of it every day and that we might become more and more secure in that love more and more ready to show that love to others hear our prayer we ask and part us with your blessing may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all until we meet again Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen