

MATURE BELIEVER IN CHRIST: THE GREAT PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH AND THE BELIEVER EPHESIANS 03: 14–21

Introduction

This is the great prayer of Paul for the church and the believer. It is probably the second most important prayer in all the Bible, ranking second only to the Lord's model prayer (Mt. 6:9-13). Because of its importance, it should be prayed by believers every day. Certainly, this is the reason God has had it included in Holy Scripture. Note the detail as it is read and studied. Its focus is a mature believer in Christ.

- I. The prayer (vv .14-15).
- II. Request 1: for strength, power within — by God's Spirit (v. 16).
- III. Request 2: for Christ to rule and reign within — by faith (v. 17).
- IV. Request 3: for love (v. 17).
- V. Request 4: for understanding — a full understanding of all spiritual things (v. 18).
- VI. Request 5: to know the love of Christ (v. 19).
- VII. Request 6: for the fullness of God (v. 19).
- VIII. Conclusion: the encouragement to pray and trust God for the answer (vv. 20-21).

I. *Ephesians 03:14–15 The Prayer of Paul*

Note four things about the prayer.

1. The prayer was for a specific reason, a specific purpose. The words *for this reason* refers back to the eternal plan of God and the life of the Christian believer which he has discussed (Eph. 2:1-3:13). That is, Paul is referring back to the great salvation and birth of the church which God has wrought through Christ. No greater thing has ever been wrought upon earth than what God has done through Christ. Through Christ...
 - God has wrought salvation (Eph. 2:1-10).
 - God has given birth to the church, the new body of believers which He is building (Eph. 2:11f).Therefore, it is of utmost necessity that the work be completed. The work of salvation must be completed, and the building of the body of believers (the church) must be completed. This is the *great reason* for which Paul prays.
 2. The prayer was so important that it drove Paul to his knees. Kneeling is a sign of desperate need and dependency. It shows that a person...
 - is utterly dependent upon God.
 - is earnest.
 - is reverencing God.
 - is humble before God.
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3. The prayer addresses God as the Father. Jesus Christ came into the world to reveal God, to show men just what God is like. Before Christ, men had thought of God as far away, distant and unconcerned with man and his world. But Christ revealed that this is just not true; it is a false picture of God. God is near and vitally interested in man and his world. In fact, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

The point is this: when Paul prayed to God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, he was praying to the God who would listen and answer his prayer. He was not praying to the ceiling, nor into thin air, nor to some lifeless concept or idea in his mind. He was praying to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who was the only living and true God — to the very God who would hear his prayer.
4. The prayer was also addressed to the Father of the whole family of God. That is, God is the Father of all believers who have ever believed and trusted His promise, both past and present.

II. *Ephesians 03:16 Power of the Holy Spirit*

The first request is for strength and power in the inner being, for the strength and power of God’s Spirit, for His presence and power in our lives. Note several facts.

1. The word *strengthen* (krataiothenai) means to be made strong, tough, enduring. It means to have energy or force; to act, endure or resist.
2. The word *power* (dunamei) means force, energy, might.
3. The believer needs to be strengthened with power in the “inner being,” that is, in the deepest part of his being, in his soul, in his heart, in his spirit — in the spirit that God has renewed. It is there that he must be *strengthened with power*. Why?
 - a. Because it is the only way he can overcome the flesh (sinful nature) with all its weakness. It is the only way he can conquer...
 - temptation and sin
 - disease and suffering
 - selfishness and worldliness
 - trouble and trials
 - grief and death
 - problems and circumstances(See note, *God’s Blessings*, pt. 1, Eph. 1:3.)
 - b. Because it is the only way the believer can ever lay claim to all the blessings of God and fulfil God’s eternal purpose for his life (Chapter 1-3). The believer must be strengthened with power in order to break loose from the flesh (sinful nature) and focus upon the eternal promises and call of God. Simply stated, his spirit must be strong and powerful...
 - to be everything God wants him to be.
 - to do everything God wants him to do.

4. Note the source of such conquering strength and power: the Holy Spirit of God. And note that He dwells within the *inner being* of the believer. There is no other source that has enough power to conquer the severe trials and corruptions of this world, all of which result in death and decay. No group of men — not even all the men in the world with all their science and technology — possesses the power to control the evil and death of man. We do not even have the power to make one single person perfect nor to stop one single person from dying. If there is a Power strong enough to conquer the evil and corruption of this world, it is in the Spirit of God and in Him alone. Therefore, the great prayer of the believer is that God would grant to His church — to all the believers of the world...
 - that He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.
5. Note one other thing: How do we know God will hear and answer our prayer? How do we know that God will give us this strength and power? Because of what this verse says: "...out of His glorious riches." "His glorious riches" are seen in Jesus Christ. It is God's glorious grace and salvation revealed in Christ. God loves us! That is the reason He will strengthen us with power through His Spirit. (See Eph 2:4-10.)

Acts 1:8 "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

2 Cor 12:9-10 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Eph 1:19 And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.

Eph 3:20 Now 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.

Col 1:11 Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully.

Heb 11:33 Who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions.

Isa 40:31 But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Isa 41:10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

III. *Ephesians 03:17 The Indwelling Presence of Jesus Christ*

The second request is for Christ to dwell, that is, rule and reign, in our hearts — by faith. The word “dwell” means a permanent not a temporary dwelling. It means to take up permanent residence; to live in a home; to enter, settle down, and be at home. When a person believes in Jesus Christ for the first time, Christ enters his life. Therefore, the believer is not praying for Christ to enter the hearts and lives of believers; Christ is already in their hearts and lives. What then does this request mean? Just what the verse says:

- => that Christ would be at home and live in a permanent sense within the believer.
- => that the believer would be aware and conscious of Christ within his heart — always aware and conscious that Christ has taken up residence within him.
- => that the believer would let Christ control and guide his life — permanently and constantly — because Christ is at home in his heart.

It is the presence of Christ within that motivates the believer to follow Christ. The more the believer is aware and conscious of Christ within him, the more he will *walk and live* in Christ.

Note that Christ dwells within the believer by faith. But note that Biblical faith is not a wish or hope that something is true. It is not *perhaps* something is true but *perhaps* it is not. Biblical faith always means the belief and commitment of a person’s life to truth and reality; it is a belief and commitment to fact.

John 14:20 *“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.”*

John 17:23 *“I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”*

Gal 2:20 *I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Col 1:27 *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

1 John 3:24 *Those who obey his commands live in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.*

Rev 3:20 *Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.*

IV. *Ephesians 03:17 Love*

The third request is for love. This is *agape love*, the very same love God has for us (see notes, *Love*, Eph. 2:4-5; Gal. 5:13-15; 5:14; 5:22-23).

V. *Ephesians 03:18 Understanding*

The fourth request is for understanding, a full understanding of all spiritual things. It is crucial that the believer grasp God's eternal plan and glorious salvation — all that has been covered in chapters one through three:

- => the great blessings of God (Eph. 1:3-14).
- => the knowledge and power of God (Eph. 1:15-23).
- => the mercy and grace of God (Eph. 2:1-10).
- => the reconciliation and peace wrought by Christ (Eph. 2:11-18).
- => the church: who and what it is (Eph. 2:19-22).
- => the new body of people God is forming, that is, the great mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:1-13).

God has done so much for the believer that it cannot be measured. Therefore, believers must pray and seek God to increase their understanding and the understanding of all saints. All believers must comprehend the breadth, length, depth and height of what God has done for them and the church. The more believers comprehend, the more they will surrender their lives to Christ and serve Him.

Thought 1. The more we understand what God has done for us, the more we will reach out to take the love and salvation of God to a world reeling under the plight of evil, poverty and death.

1 Cor 2:9-12 *However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" — but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us.*

2 Tim 2:7 *Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.*

Prov 2:6 *For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.*

Prov 8:14 *Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power.*

VI. *Ephesians 03:19 The Love of Jesus Christ*

The fifth request is to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge. It is utterly impossible to grasp and experience the love of Christ anywhere close to its full measure, but we should pray for God to help us learn more and more of His love — and we should make the request *often every day*. (See notes, Gal. 1:4-5; 3:13-14; Eph. 2:6; 2:8-10; 2:13 for discussions on the love or death of Jesus Christ. See note, *Jesus Christ, Humiliation*, pt. 2, Lk. 2:40 for a complete picture of the depth of the love of Jesus Christ.) There has

never been penned a greater description of the unsurpassing love of Christ than that of F. M. Lehman in the song, “The Love of God”: “Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade, to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky. O love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forever more endure. The saints and angels song” (Nazarene Publishing House, Kansas City, MO).

John 10:17-18 *“The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”*

John 15:13 *“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

Rom 5:6 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Rom 5:8-10 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

Rom 8:35 *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

2 Cor 5:14-15 *For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.*

2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

1 John 3:16 *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.*

VII. Ephesians 03:19 Fullness of God

The sixth request is for the fullness of God. The Amplified New Testament is excellent in describing the meaning of this request:

“That you may be filled (through all your being) unto all the fullness of God... [that is] may have the richest measure of the divine Presence, and become a body wholly filled and flooded with God Himself!”

The believer possesses the indwelling presence of the Spirit, Christ and of God. When Jesus Christ was promising to send the Holy Spirit to believers, He promised that the trinity — the Father, Son and Holy Spirit — would all three come and indwell believers:

John 14:16, 23 *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — Jesus replied, “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”*

The point is this: each Person of the Godhead has a different function within the believer. Therefore, the believer is to ask specific things concerning each. He has already prayed to be strengthened by the Spirit and to have Christ dwell within and control his heart. Now the believer is to pray for “all the fullness of God [Himself]” — for God and His presence in all its fullness to fill and flood him, ruling and reigning and having His perfect way in the life of the believer.

Note one other point stressed by F.F. Bruce. The preposition to (eis) suggests a progressive experience. The believer is to pray for God to constantly fill him, to constantly flood him with all the fullness of God (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, p. 69).

Rom 11:33-36 *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

Col 1:9 *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

VIII. *Ephesians 03:20–21 Conclusion*

There is the encouragement to pray and to trust God for the answer. Note two points.

1. God is able to do what we ask. Note just how strong and powerful God is. He is able to do...
 - “immeasurably”: to surpass; to go beyond any request; to overcome and do anything.
 - “more”: to overflow and to do more than enough.
 - “than all that we ask.” to go over and above, beyond any need.
 - all we imagine. Imagine going beyond anything we can think! What is the greatest answer or deliverance we can think? God is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

Thought 1. *Thompson Chain Reference Bible* points out what Scripture says about God’s power: He is able...

- to raise up children from stones.

Luke 3:8 *“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*

- to fulfil promises even if they are humanly impossible.

Rom 4:21 *Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

- to make grace abound.

2 Cor 9:8 *And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*

- to do immeasurably more.

Eph 3:20 *Now 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.*

- to bring everything under His control.

Phil 3:21 *Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

- to guard the soul's treasure.

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

- to save completely.

Heb 7:25 *Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.*

- to keep from falling.

Jude 1:24 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.*

(Thompson, Frank Charles. *The New Comprehensive Bible Helps*. "The New Chain Reference Bible," Indianapolis, IN: B.B. Kirkbride Bible Co., 1964, p. 153, number 3810.)

2. Note the source of answered prayers: it is the power that works within us. What is that power within us? It is the combined power of all that God has put within us, all that for which we are praying:

=> the power of the Spirit strengthening us.

=> the power of Christ indwelling us.

=> the power of love working in us.

=> the power of understanding all that God does.

=> the power of the fullness of God Himself.

Mat 19:26 *Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."*

Luke 1:37 *"For nothing is impossible with God."*

Rom 8:13 *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

Rom 16:25 *Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past.*

1 Cor 10:13 *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

Eph 1:19 *And his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength.*

2 Tim 1:7 *For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.*

3. Note the purpose of God in answering prayer and in doing all this for us: that He might be glorified in the church through Christ Jesus. And note how long He is to be glorified: throughout all generations, world without end. ■