Apostolic prayers

Paul's Prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19

1. Introduction

a. Today we are continuing in our series on biblical prayers. These are the prayers that are recorded in scripture and in particular we are looking at the *apostolic prayers* – those prayers prayed by Jesus, Paul and Peter.

b. Last time we considered the prayer Paul prayed for the Ephesian church at the beginning of his letter to them. In that prayer he prayed for their hearts to be enlightened by the Spirit to receive and grow in the love of God. This is the foundational prayer upon which all the others rest. Without a heart which is enlightened by the Spirit to receive and grow in the love of God all other prayers will not break into the human heart.

c. Today we are going to consider Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-19 which is a prayer to experience more of God and also gives insight into Paul's approach to discipling young believers. As such this is a great prayer to pray **for me** to experience the presence of God, **and** to pray it **for my friends and family** to experience the presence of God. We can also see Paul's theology in bringing transformation to younger believers which will give us wisdom in how to shepherd younger believers.

d. As we read the passage, notice, "that," is mentioned four times. Paul says, "I pray that this happens so that that happens so that that happens so that that happens." There is a very distinct and clear progression in Paul's mind. If you notice it, then it will even equip you as a shepherd and a discipler of other people. These are the four progression points that the Spirit showed Paul. He prayed according to this, but he also taught and pastored people according to this fourfold progression.

Eph.3:14-19 *[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16]* ***that*** *according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17]* ***so that*** *Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—****that*** *you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,* ***that*** *you may be filled with all the fullness of God*

i We pray that the Spirit ***strengthens our inner man*** (mind and emotions) to enable us to love and obey Jesus. It takes God's power to love God and to understand His heart. (v.16)

ii Jesus ***dwelling in our heart*** or manifesting His presence on our hearts (v.17).

iii We receive a greater capacity ***to comprehend*** how He sees and feels about others (v.18).

iv We are equipped to walk in the ***fullness of God's purposes*** in each season of life (v.19).

e. In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul used different terminology when presenting the same truths that Jesus taught in John 15:5 when He called believers to ***"abide in Christ"*** and promised to ***"abide in them"*** which empowers them to ***"bear much fruit"*** that is expressed in loving and ministering to people. Jesus is the vine, or the source of life, and we are the branches, the expression of His life.

John 15:5 *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

f. Abiding in Christ involves talking with God, applying His promises, and obeying Him.

i ***Talking with Jesus***: Talking with God is the core activity of abiding. It starts here but includes more. This corresponds with "praying for the Spirit to strengthen our inner man" (Eph. 3:16). Jesus allows us to set the pace of the conversation. If we start the conversation, He will continue it as long as we do. Abiding in Christ involves an ongoing conversation with a Person that consists of many 10-20 second exchanges, strengthened by longer prayer times.

ii ***Applying His Promises***: Applying the promises of His Word empowers us to bear fruit. Shame, fear, and rejection rise up to challenge what He says about loving, forgiving, healing, providing for us, etc. We apply the promise of the Word to our hearts by *confessing the truth* and *resisting lies* against it when we feel shame (Rom. 8:1; 10:10). Applying His promises is an expression of praying or "talking to God" by agreeing with what He says about us.

iii ***Obeying His leadership***: Obedience is an expression of our love for Him. We talk to Jesus with a "spirit of truth" by intending to obey what we talk to Him about—it is not empty talk.

John 14:21 *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."*

2. Stage 1: Praying for strength to obey God—abiding in Christ

16 that *according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being*

a. This prayer for daily strength corresponds with "abiding in Christ," which is to pray or talk to Him. We pray that the Spirit ***strengthens our inner man*** (mind and emotions) by illuminating our thoughts with living understanding and inspiring our emotions so that we are energised by His divine might to sustain our commitment to obey Jesus and to realign to His kingdom perspective.

b. It takes God's power to love God and to understand His Word. He will strengthen us as we ask Him on a regular basis. Jesus taught us to ask for "daily bread"—daily inspiration, direction, provision, etc. (Mt. 6:11). Moses taught Israel to gather manna on a daily basis (Ex. 16:16-22; Jn 6:58).

James 4:6-8 *6 But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*

3. Stage 2: Christ dwelling in our heart—Christ abiding in us

a. Jesus ***dwelling in our heart*** or manifesting His presence on our hearts enables us to feel God's love as our life progressively becomes more ***deeply rooted and grounded*** in experiencing God's love. Paul connects two ideas together in 3:17—they are two sides of one coin pointing to the same truth.

so that *Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—****that*** *you, being rooted and grounded in love*

b. ***That Christ may dwell in our heart***: This speaks of an on-going or continual experience of His presence to convince us of His love in contrast to an occasional sense of it. The Spirit dwells in our spirit *instantly* at our new birth. Jesus progressively "abides in us" or manifests His presence in us by inspiring our mind and emotions (Jn. 15:5).

c. One distinctive of the new covenant is that He puts or writes His word on our heart and mind by illuminating our mind and inspiring our emotions

Heb. 10:16 *"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds",*

d. Jesus' manifest presence dwelling in our heart speaks of the Spirit actively inspiring our mind and emotions. In other words, He reveals and convinces us that God loves us in a personal way. There is a deep correlation between our obedience to Jesus (pure heart) and our ability to "see Him" which includes feeling His presence and understanding His heart. We do not *earn* God's blessing by our purity. But we *position ourselves* to receive more grace by walking in obedient love.

John. 14:21-23 *[21]He who has My commandments and keeps them…I will love him and manifest Myself to him… [23]My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*

Matt. 5:8 *[8]Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

e. ***Rooted and grounded in love***: Paul used architectural and agricultural terms to convey our lives being spiritually strong in the midst of storms–of fears, accusations, temptations, pressures, etc. Being "rooted" is related to agriculture and being "grounded" to the architecture of a building. A tree that is deeply rooted and a house that is built on solid ground doesn't blow over in a storm.

f. This includes receiving insight into God's love to such a degree that we define our life by it. We define our primary success and value in context to God's love. Our confession is, ***"I am loved by God and I am a lover of God; therefore I am successful."***

g. God's primary method in changing His people is to reveal how much He loves and cherishes them. The enemy wears down many with accusations and condemnation. Being preoccupied with shame and fear takes energy to manage, and it hinders us from going deep in God and from loving others.

4. Stage 3: Comprehending how God sees and feels for others—bear fruit

[17]that Christ may dwell in your hearts…that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18]may be able to comprehend ***with all the saints*** *what is the width and length and depth and height—*
[19]to know [experience and express] the love of Christ which ***passes knowledge****…*

a. ***With all the saints***: The Spirit allows us to see God's heart for His people. We receive from God in three ways—directly, by expressing it to others, and by others expressing and imparting it to us.

b. ***Passes knowledge***: It requires the aid of the Spirit to understand and experience God's love. The Spirit gives the ability to comprehend the value, destiny, and greatness of others and to see their weakness through the lens of God's patient love. Thus, we can celebrate who others are in God.

c. In John 15 Jesus tells us that those who abide in Him and He in them bear much fruit. We bear fruit inwardly in our character and outwardly in our ministry of love to others.

d. Paul highlighted 4 dimensions or different aspects of the Father's love

i The ***width*** of God's love embraces every person, personality type, and rank in society.

ii The ***length*** of God's love speaks of how far it reaches beyond our greatest sin and how long it lasts–forever through all ages. It is not short-lived but long enough to stretch to all eternity.

iii The ***depth*** of love speaks of the lowest depths to which Jesus stooped or descended to redeem us (Phil. 2:6-9) and the depths that God's heart opened to us (1 Cor. 2:10).

iv The ***heights*** of love include the exaltation that we receive in reigning with Him (Rev. 3:21).

5. Stage 4: The fullness of God's blessing in each season of life

Eph. 3:19 *[19]…that you may be filled with all the fullness of God [of our destiny].*

a. The full destiny for our life will **only** be released as we live in agreement with His leadership. The goal is to walk in the fullness. It is the fullness of God for that season of our life. This is not just something you wait until the resurrection and then walk in the fullness. We want to walk in the fullness of what God has for us right now in this year.

6. Summary

a. ***Stage 1*** (3:16)—The Spirit ***strengthens our inner man*** (mind and emotions) so that we are able to sustain our resolution to obey Jesus and to realign to a kingdom perspective and mindset.

b. ***Stage 2*** (3:17)—Jesus ***dwelling in our heart*** or manifesting His presence on our hearts enables us to feel God's love as our life progressively becomes rooted and grounded in experiencing God's love.

c. ***Stage 3*** (3:18)—We receive a greater capacity ***to comprehend*** how He sees and feels about others.

d. ***Stage 4*** (3:19)—We are equipped to walk in the ***fullness of God's purposes*** in each season of life.

e. As we pray this prayer we are praying to be strengthened in our inner man that He will dwell in our heart so that we will comprehend the Body of Christ and walk in fullness! This is fantastic, it is so straight-forward, and it is a fantastic reality. As I look at these 4 stages I say, "Lord, I love this! I want this!"

f. The Lord would say, "Okay, then pray it for yourself and pray it for them." Pray it for individuals. Pray it for your children and grandchildren. Pray it for your friends. Pray it for your neighbours. Pray it!

Eph.3:14-19 *[14] For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family[a] in heaven and on earth is named, [16] **that** according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] **so that** Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—**that** you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, **that** you may be filled with all the fullness of God*