

## **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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### **Ephesians - it's all about Christ: Giving Glory to Him - Ephesians 3:14-21**

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today* where we are beginning a second six part series, that will complete our study of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Ephesians which we began earlier this year. Today we shall be looking at Ephesians 3:14-21 under the general title of "Giving Glory to Him". We finished our thoughts on the earlier verses of this chapter by reiterating the theme of the unity of the church that contains Gentile, as well as Jewish believers. In fact, Paul in Galatians 3:27-28 wrote: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." These verses of Scripture neatly summarise the passage that we dealt with in our last talk on the Ephesian letter.

This introduction serves not only as a reminder of a previous talk, but also as the reason for the prayer in the passage we are dealing with this morning. The verses which comprise this prayer are full of the most precious aspirations, for the Apostle desires nothing less for the believers, in the young church at Ephesus, than the fullness of God. That we mortals should have the secret of the living God revealed to us is a most wonderful thing, as a line from a children's hymn tells us. The same hymn says, "It is almost too wonderful to be." How often do we meditate upon the singular privilege of having such knowledge in these earthen vessels we call our bodies.

The prayer, contained in Ephesians 3:14-21, is without fear of contradiction an enraptured supplication. Let us consider then Ephesians 3:14: "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".

Paul had previously been moved to break into prayer for the Ephesian saints, as we saw in Ephesians 1:17-23. He began to pray again in Ephesians 3:1, but had been diverted by his contemplation of the marvellous mystery of grace that brought the Gentiles into blessing. Now he pleads with God that the Ephesian church might appreciate and appropriate the fullness of their spiritual blessings, but, before we embark upon a study of those blessings, let us notice the position Paul occupied for this prayer, which was on his knees.

Standing would have been the usual posture for Paul when he prayed in his unconverted days. No doubt there were times when he still prayed standing, or even walking, as he covered the many miles of his missionary journeys. The occasions when he kneeled down seem to portray an attitude of submissiveness and adoration as the Apostle was deeply moved in his affections for the Lord. Are we moved to bow our knees before God, especially when the wonder of His love and grace comes before us with freshness and power? Though I would never wish to suggest that we can only truly praise and worship when we are on our knees, it must be admitted that Paul is an object lesson of a Christian moved to demonstrate his worship and adoration for the living God.

Before we leave Ephesians 3:14, we must notice the One to whom the prayer is addressed. In Ephesians 1:17 the Apostle prays unto the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, whereas here, in Ephesians 3:14, he speaks unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Significantly, Dr. Ironside's comments regarding this are: "Divine titles are used most discriminately in the Word of God; never in the careless way that we so often use them ... When I think of God I think of the Maker of all things ... but I think of the Father as the One from whose bosom the eternal Son came into this world." [*Ephesians - In the Heavlies*, Ironside Commentaries]

When the Lord Jesus came into the world He came to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10), but He also came to reveal the Father to us, as is recorded in John 14:9, when He says to Philip, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." I am sure that many of you can recall the words of comfort spoken to Mary on the resurrection morning: "I ascend unto My Father and to your Father; and to My God and your God." (John 20:17) This is a sentence which resonates with joy in the heart of every true believer.

We now move on to Ephesians 3:16 where Paul begins his first supplication for the Ephesian Christians: "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man". Nothing of substance can ever be achieved in a Christian's life apart from the Spirit of God, so consequently the Apostle prays for the power of the Spirit to be operative in them. Without the Holy Spirit's action we could never become believers, which is why the Lord says to Nicodemus that he must be born again for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:5-6) If you are unsure where this incident is

recorded you will find it in John 3:1-21. Perhaps I do well to ask at this point if you have been born again and become a believer in Jesus?

Naturally speaking, our inclination is not towards God, for we are creatures of the earth and not of heaven which is why we have to be strengthened in the inner man. As Paul tells us in Romans 8:5-6, we have two natures and those that are carnally minded are living according to fleshly desires, whereas those who are spiritually minded experience life and peace. Which principle are we living out in this year, 2011? This prayer wishes us to know the mighty power of the Spirit of God.

We have only time to consider one more aspect of this verse which is the resources that make the blessings of the Gospel a reality in our lives. Paul describes these as "His glorious riches", or in the Authorised Version that I have already quoted as, "the riches of His glory". Westcott, the 19th century commentator on Scripture, wrote "that the glory of God is the sum of His perfections as manifested to us. God, in His supreme greatness and limitless spiritual wealth is the treasure chest from whence we draw in prayer and in our daily walk with Him." [*Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians*, BF Westcott]

In July 1944, I went on my first holiday to the seaside in North Wales. As a nation we were still fighting World War II, so many commodities were rationed and in short supply. In the house in which we were staying were some Canadian soldiers who were waiting to be sent to France where a second front had just been established. One day, after breakfast, I was standing by the door, waiting for my parents, when a soldier came down the stairs holding a large box of sweets. As I have said, sweets and chocolate were rationed at that time which meant I was not used to seeing large tins full of attractively wrapped sweets. He told me to help myself so I, being quite shy, reached in and just took a couple. "That's not enough!" said the kind soldier. "Put both hands in and take a lot!" I didn't need telling twice! The lesson from this story is clear enough. Are we drawing on the riches of God and His mighty power with both hands, or merely taking a pinch?

The main burden of Paul's prayer for the Ephesian saints is contained in Ephesians 3:17: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith". This is nothing less than the promise of the Lord Jesus to His disciples recorded for us in the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel: "Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." (John 14:23) I repeat what I said earlier about the great privilege of having the knowledge and presence of the living God in these mortal bodies. The thought of the Lord Jesus dwelling in our hearts has the force of permanently dwelling, not just occasionally visiting. He demands to be enthroned and reigning in our hearts, rather than occupying the place of a guest.

One of the first choruses I learned in Sunday School many years ago, brings out this truth before us:

*"Into my heart, into my heart,  
Come into my heart, Lord Jesus.  
Come in today, come into stay,  
Come into my heart Lord Jesus."*

Harry Dudley Clarke (1888-1957)

It might be a simple rhyme, yet I pray that the sentiment would be true for each one of us this morning.

Another supplication from Paul is in the rest of Ephesians 3:17-18, though this time I shall read it from the New International Version: "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ". I once heard a preacher refer to the dimensions of this love of the Lord as wide enough to reach across the entire world to include all of the children of God. Its length spans from eternity to time, and back again, showing us that He loved us from everlasting to everlasting. It is surely high enough to lift all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, into the heavenly places to enjoy immense blessing, and deep enough to rescue us from sin's degradation for we "are by nature the children of wrath." (Ephesians 2:3)

On every occasion when we read about the love of God, we ought to remember that it is in Christ that God's love is revealed to us, especially in His dying love at Calvary. We do have a revelation of God's power and wisdom in creation. We are also recipients of His providential care, but it is in His mighty work of salvation that the magnitude of His perfections are known, as we can read in John 1:18: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Nothing less than this is the great Apostle's desire for his fellow Christians.

We must also notice that being rooted and grounded in love is for all the saints, not just those who were living at Ephesus, when Tychicus arrived with Paul's letter. Personally, I believe that the phrase "all the saints" could also refer to the time when every member of the church past, present and future, is gathered in the Lord's presence, for then we

shall have some estimation of the extent of the love of the Lord Jesus that took Him to the cross for your salvation and mine.

We must move quickly to another of the petitions that the Apostle Paul is making for the believers at Ephesus, and if you have just joined us can I remind you that you are listening to *Truth for Today* where we are considering Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, and I am about to read Ephesians 3:19: "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." When Paul is asking that the believers should know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge he is asking that they, and we, should know that which is ultimately unknowable. Yet we know that this is not a paradox, for the youngest believer can sing the children's hymn:

*"Jesus loves me and I know I love Him;  
Love brought Him down my lost soul to redeem;  
Yes, it was love made Him die on the tree:  
Oh, I am certain that Jesus loves me."*

Philip P. Bliss (1838-1876)

We should not be content, however, with experiencing only the fringe of this love, for, naturally speaking, our appreciation of the love our parents have for us increases as we grow older and more mature. In like manner, as we grow as Christians our knowledge of this eternal love, manifested in the Lord Jesus, should grow and deepen each passing day, yet all the time we must realise that the vastness of this love exceeds the span of our minds.

The second part of Ephesians 3:19 suggests that we should be filled with all the fullness of God, which would seem to be the summit of Paul's intercession for the Ephesian believers. The wonder of such a statement should be compared with that of Solomon in 1 Kings 8:27 when he was building the Temple at Jerusalem: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" As Solomon knew the impossibility of containing the eternal fullness of God in any man made structure, so we too should understand that no finite man is capable of containing the infinite.

One Biblical commentator wrote concerning being filled with the fullness of God in the following terms: "...the Christian may be filled with all the fullness of God according to his measure as a new creature in Christ, and in such a proportion as he is capable of in this life." [*The Ability of God* Arthur W. Pink] I believe there is in the thought of being filled a continuing and advancing process for though we follow the words of Paul, in Philippians 3:10, and always seek to know Him and the power of His resurrection, we never arrive in this life at the finality of Christ.

Many years ago, when milk was delivered by a milkman wheeling a big churn, my mother would usually have a two pint jug filled to the brim. Occasionally, when we had guests for tea, she would give the milkman a bigger jug which he would fill according to her instructions. Sometimes it was only three-quarters full; at other times it would be full to overflowing. Are we content with a limited experience of God? An empty heart leads to an empty life. The words of Paul's prayer, that we have read together, holds out for the Christian the exciting possibility of knowing God in all His fullness.

There is that about God, in His intrinsic greatness and glory, we can never know, because being finite creatures of time we can never really grasp the truth of a Being who is infinite and eternal. No believer can completely know the mystery of God, as He must ever remain beyond the range of man's intellect or powers of description. We must be careful, though, that we do not view such requests for knowing the fullness of God as some kind of transcendental meditation, reserved for hermits and mystics. He has communicated attributes of His eternal being that are within the range of those of us who are born again.

For instance, we can know that God is light for the Lord Jesus said that He is the Light of the world and those that follow Him shall not walk in darkness (John 8:12). Has the light of God entered our hearts? Another example is found in some words from 1 John 4:7-8: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." Here it states plainly that God is love. Is His love shed abroad in my heart? Such words inform us that if we are born of God we shall love one another, because we know the God who is love. I claim that, far from being the experience for some isolated mystic, this knowledge of God is the birthright of every one born by the Spirit, and, as such, is an intensely practical truth and not something for the elite or super-spiritual Christian. To contemplate the perfections of Christ in all His holiness and righteousness, and to grow in the knowledge of Him in the majesty of His love, should surely increase our love for Him, as well as feed our desire to follow and serve Him in this world. In summary, therefore, to be filled with the fullness of God is to receive all that God can bestow upon us from the majesty of His eternal being. When we, through grace, receive of the fullness of God, the tawdry, tinsel attractions of this world will assume their rightful place in the priorities of the Christian.

All that is left for us from our passage of Scripture is Ephesians 3:20-21: "Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding

abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." These familiar words, used as a benediction to close many Christian meetings, contain the themes that we have discussed in our previous programmes on Ephesians 1-3. One is the plenitude of God's gifts which we considered in Ephesians 1:18-19 and, again in Ephesians 2:7 as well as Ephesians 3:19. If we had time we could also trace Paul's reference to the secret of the Christian's power and the unbreakable link between Christ and His church.

It is not, however, a summary of Paul's teaching that I wish to concentrate upon, as we finish our broadcast today with this inspiring doxology. Doctrine and the spiritual framework of the church and the individual Christian's life were never subjects that left the great Apostle cold. Whenever he stopped to consider the great outpouring of grace and love, that was manifest in the Lord Jesus, he lifted up his heart in thanksgiving and praise.

Notice the gathering of superlatives as the writer adds to the basic "now unto Him that is able to do all we ask". It is not even, "able to do abundantly above all that we ask". Rather is it, "Unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." We should never fear to make our requests known to such a loving and powerful God who works through us and in us.

We do not offer our own achievements as we are moved to bow in worship and praise, for as King David acknowledged in 1 Chronicles 29:13-14: "Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee." As for David, so for us, for when we bow in worship to give glory to God all we can do is to ascribe greatness and excellence to Him. To rejoice and offer praise from his own heart was not enough for Paul, for he looked for the time when the whole redeemed company, throughout the eternal ages, would give glory to God through the Lord Jesus.

My prayer, as we close this morning, is that we would be of the same mind as Paul and offer our praise and worship, this day, unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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