

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 8/18/91
Ephesians 3:14-21 "How to Pray More Biblically"

Intro (of service): Theme--Prayer

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Q: How's your prayer life? Is it dynamic? Do you know how to pray?

Problem: Lots of Christians don't know how to pray biblically.

Proposition: When Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:14-21, he did 3 things. So let's notice 3 ingredients of prayer that is biblical today.

- I. Prayer involves Preparation (14-15).
 - A. He made sure his posture was in order (14).
 - B. He made sure his focus was in order (14).
 - C. He made sure his perspective was in order (15).
- II. Prayer involves Petitions (16-19).
 - A. Strength of the Spirit (16)
 - B. Intimacy with Christ (17a)
 - C. Comprehension of the Love of Christ (17b-19a)
 - D. Fullness of God (19b)
- III. Prayer involves Praise (20-21).

Q: What prompted Paul to pray?

A: V 14 "For this cause. . ."

You'll recall, when Paul began Eph 3, he wanted to pray (see v 1 "For this cause I Paul"). But he couldn't. Remember why not? He had a burning issue on his heart that the Ephesians needed to grasp. And so do we. What was that issue? He introduced it in 1:8-14. He elaborated on it in 2:11-22.

1. Jesus Christ makes men right with God. All men.
2. Jesus Christ makes men right with each other. In fact, he eradicated all social, ethnic, and economic classes and formed one "new man" (2:15). Paul says, "God doesn't make distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, or rich and poor, or male and female. All that matters is being in Christ, and belonging to Christ." In our day, between whites and blacks. . .

That was the "mystery" of Christianity. The "mystery" was no mere academic matter for Paul. He gave his life for it. He wanted the Ephesians to grasp it. And us. Notice his relationship to this mystery. . .

See Col 1:27-30

Now let's zero in on the apostle in Eph 3. He's in prison in Rome, on his knees. Praying (imagine what the Roman guard thought!). He can help us to learn to pray biblically. Notice the first thing Paul did. . .

I. He prepared himself--Prayer involves Preparation (14-15).

Vv 14-15 ". . . I bow my knees. . ."

The first thing that strikes me about the way Paul prayed is what he didn't do. He didn't rush glibly into the presence of God. Although prayer is intimate, it's not casual.

Illust:

Before Paul prayed, he prepared himself. How? He made sure 3 things were in order.

A. He made sure his posture was in order.

V 14 "I bow my knees"

That's unusual. The usual posture for a Jew in prayer was standing (eg--Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and Publican in Lk 18:11,13, both men stood to pray). Kneeling was unusual. Listen. Kneeling indicates an exceptional degree of earnestness. Intensity. Not casual conversation with God. But heart to heart pleading with God.

There is no set posture in prayer.

--Abraham stood before the Lord when he prayed for Sodom (Gn18:22)

--Solomon stood when he prayed to dedicate the Temple (I Kg 8:22)

--David sat before the Lord (I Chr 17:16)

--The Psalmist said in Ps 121, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills. . ."

--Joshua fell prostrate to the earth upon his face (Josh 7:6).

--Jesus fell on His face in the garden of Gethsemene (Mt 26:39)

Scripture doesn't specify only one posture to use when we pray. We can pray standing, kneeling, sitting, walking, and even lying down. The issue is this--Use a posture which accords with the content of your prayer.

Suggestion: Most of us could improve our prayer lives greatly by getting down on our knees, and recognizing the honor due to the One listening.

B. He made sure his focus was in order.

V 14 "unto the Father"

Prayer is a family affair. Children talking to their Father. In the Bible, most often, prayer is addressed to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit. That's our focus. We pray to the "Father".

Mt 6:9 "This is how you should pray, Our Father. . ."

C. He made sure his perspective was in order.

V 15 "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named"

When Paul prayed, he kept the "Big Picture" in mind. It wasn't just "him and God". No. He realized he wasn't an only child. He was part of a family. And he prayed with the rest of the family in mind--"the whole family"). He realized that some of the family was already where? "in heaven" And the rest was where? "on the earth" The Church Triumphant. And the Church Militant.

The proper perspective in prayer:

Mt 6:33 "Seek first the Kingdom of God (not your own!)"

I Tim 2:1-3 "I exhort that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for ALL MEN. . . For this is good in the sight of God, who will have all men to be saved."

Paul wasn't hung up on himself, and his own interests. We don't find him praying like we often do, "Lord bless my business, bless my health, bless me as I take this test,

bless me, me, me. . ." No. He prayed with this proper perspective--He wanted God to be glorified, and he wanted God's plan to be accomplished in the lives of people.

Insight: There's no doubt about this. God used Paul to impact lives with the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. Many lives. He evangelized and started churches from Palestine to Asia Minor to Europe. He wrote nearly half of the NT books.

Q: What was Paul's approach in impacting lives? His strategy?

A: It's no secret. Neither is it spectacular. Paul's strategy was twofold:

1. Teach the truth of God's Word to people.
2. Pray the truth into the lives of people.

Teach the Word. Pray that the Word will sink in. That was Paul's strategy. We see it in Ephesians--after two great doctrinal sections, we find two great prayers. Paul taught. And Paul prayed. Simple. Not flashy. Unspectacular. But it works in impacting lives. Why? It's God's strategy.

II Tim 4:2 "Preach the Word. . ."

This strategy will work for. . .

- this church as we seek to impact this community
- parents who are serious about impacting their children
- teens that want to impact their peers for Christ

Illust: At least 3 conversations this week with people who said, "What I'm looking for in a church is a place where I can go, not to be entertained, not to here clever stories or jokes, but a place where I can hear what God has to say to me through His Word." People are hungry for the Word!

Tran: The first thing we notice about prayer that is biblical, as we probe Paul's example, is that Prayer involves Preparation. Next, we come to the heart of his prayer.

II. He offered petitions--Prayer involves Petitions (16-19).

Warning: You may have noticed something by now. Studying Paul's prayer can be a little intimidating, even dangerous. His prayer may unsettle us a little. The reason is clear--Most of us don't pray like Paul prayed.

That was true in the area of Preparation. It's even more so in the area of Petition. I want you to see the things for which Paul prayed. What petitions did the apostle bring to God? What "wish list" did he take to his Lord?

V 16 "That He would grant you"

What did Paul want God to give to the Ephesians? Good health? Jobs? Money? No. He asked for 4 things (4 "thats" in vv 16-19)

- A. Strength of the Spirit (16)
- B. Intimacy with Christ (17)
- C. Comprehension of the Love of Christ (18-19a)
- D. Fullness of God (19b)

That's it! When was the last time you prayed like that?

Illust: Like a staircase--4 steps in this biblical prayer; one step leads to the next

A. Strength of the Spirit (16)

V 16 "That He would grant you. . .to be strengthened. . . in the inner man"

Notice the details of this request:

"according to the riches of his glory"--God does not give to us "out of" His riches, but what? "according to" His riches. There's a big difference!

Illust: If I was a Billionaire, and I gave you \$10, I gave you a gift "out of" my riches. If I gave you a million dollars, I gave you "according to" my riches. Like Wiersbe, says, the first is a portion, the second a proportion. That's the way God gives to us--"according to"!

Q: What does Paul want God to give? Strength in the inner man

90% of our prayer request have to do with the outer man--our physical body.

There's nothing wrong with that (eg--Paul was concerned for Timothy's health in I Tim 5:23; he also said in I Tim 4:8 that bodily exercise profits a little. . . but then what? "But godliness is profitable unto all things")

Paul's first petition focused on the inner man. That's the spiritual part of our being. The inner man is born dead in sin (Eph 2:1). The inner man becomes alive when we receive Jesus Christ (Eph 2:5).

Did you realize that our external man is wearing down and dying? I'm sure you did, as your body creaked this morning! But what should be happening simultaneously to our inner man?

**See II Cor 4:16 "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

V 16 "strengthened by the Spirit"--something the Spirit must do (Gal 5:22)

Q: How much attention do you devote to the welfare of your inner man? It breaks my heart to see Christians who are coming apart at the seams. They make time exercise their physical bodies. They make time for recreation. They make time for everything, except. . . They devote little attention to spiritual maintenance. And they wonder why they're crumbling on the inside. No peace. A bundle of nerves. Frazled and dazzled in the fast pace of life.

God wants to strengthen your inner man. Paul prayed to that end.

How can you have a strong inner man? No secret recipe. Just this. Make feeding your inner, spiritual man a priority.

Illust:

Step #2 in the staircase. . .

B. Intimacy with Christ (17a)

V 17 "That Christ may dwell in your hearts"

"dwell"--verb has the same root as the noun "house"; lit. means "to settle down" somewhere; or as Kenneth Wuest says, "to settle down and feel at home" (LB paraphrases, "I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts.")

Your life is like a home. What happens when you're at home? You kick off your shoes. You drop your guard. The outward facade disappears. The real you comes out.

Here's Paul's second request--"I pray that Christ will feel at home in your life." How does that happen. . .

"by faith"--I Pt 1:8 "whom having not seen you love"

Q: Does Christ feel at home in your life? Is He comfortable in your life?

Q: Is there any area where Christ is not welcome in your life?

Illust:

That's what spiritual intimacy is all about.

We've come to step #3. Strength. Intimacy. Paul's 3rd petition. . .

C. Comprehension of the Love of Christ (17b-19a)

Vv 17b-19a "that ye being. . . comprehend. . . know"

In steps 1-2 Paul says, "I want you to know the Life of Christ." In step 3 he says, "I want you to know the Love of Christ."

v 17 Be rooted and grounded in love (for o.a.)

v 18 Contemplate love (Christ's love for you)

Prejudiced, self-seeking people are unstable. They are at the whims of their volcanic emotions. Not so people who comprehend the love of Christ. They are rooted and grounded (17).

"comprehend" = to seize; to hold fast; to understand ("Get this truth!")

Eg--Acts 10:34 Peter to Gentiles, "I perceive that God is no respecter of persons."

V 18 contains a paradox. Paul says, "I pray that you will comprehend the incomprehensible!" What is it that's beyond our comprehension? V 19. .

V 19 The Love of Christ--It passes knowledge. Not that it's irrational. It's beyond knowledge. The love of Christ is too deep for our human, finite minds to fathom.

Quote: John Stott, "The love of Christ is BROAD enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles), LONG enough to last for all eternity, DEEP enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and HIGH enough to exalt him to heaven!"

See Romans 8:37-39

Hymn: Wesley, "And can it be. . . Amazing love, how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me?"

Q: Do you realize how much Jesus Christ loves you?

The love of Christ will melt the heart of the most hardened man.

Illust:

We've reached the top of the staircase in Paul's prayer--Strength, intimacy, comprehension, and finally, one more which sums it all up.

D. Fullness of God (19b)

V 19b "that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God"

Mt 5:48 "Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect."

God's fullness and perfection is our standard. We could not achieve that standard. Never. But Jesus Christ achieved it for us.

Jn 10:10 "I am come that you might have life. . . abundantly."

Q: What's Paul asking here? "I pray that you won't be shortchanged in your Christian life. I pray that you won't settle for second best. I pray that you'll experience the fullness of God in your life. All of it. In its entirety."

Illust:

Tran: Paul can help us learn to pray more biblically. His prayer contained 2 ingredients--Preparation and Petition.

Perhaps you're thinking, "Wow! Paul didn't mess around when he prayed. He was reverent, yet bold! He asked God to do great things--to enable them to experience the life of Christ, and to comprehend the love of Christ. What gave him the audacity to ask for such things?!" Third. . .

III. He praised God--Prayer involves Praise (20-21).

Vv 20-21

Notice the "power" terminology in Paul's prayer. He uses 4 different greek words to depict various aspects of God's power when he prayed:

v 16 "be strengthened with might"--Strength

v 18 "be able"--Ability

v 20 "power" (*dunamis*)--Power

v 20 "worketh" (*energeia*)--Energy

Listen. When Paul got down on his knees, he was well aware of the awesome authority to which he aveiled himself. Limitless power was at his disposal when he prayed. When WE pray, we tap into all this, for ourselves, for others--Stength, ability, power, and energy.

Do you know what God can do for us? Two things. . .

1. More than we can ask!
2. More than we can think! Wow!

Conclusion: When people ask, "What's happening at WBC?", here it is. By God's grace, He is using His Word to penetrate hearts and exalt Christ. God unleashes His power.

Illust: Power

Q: Have you viewed prayer as the key that taps into the power of God?