

p 49 WEEK 7: PRAYER FOR LOVE

Ephesians 3:14–21

The Place of the Passage

Paul resumes his flow of thought, which had been interrupted by his discussion on the mystery of the Gentiles' inheritance of the promises of the gospel (compare "For this reason" [Eph. 3:14] to "For this reason" [3:1] and "therefore" [4:1]). He will offer a prayer as the conclusion of his explanation of the gospel implications for new citizenship and as the conclusion to Ephesians 1–3, where he has focused on the calling of the church, especially as it pertains to the Trinity (1:15–17; see also 4:1–6). His prayer will also serve as a transition to the practical outworking of the gospel in chapters 4–6.

The Big Picture

Reasoning from the need to persevere through persecution (Eph. 3:1–13), in Ephesians 3:14–21 Paul prays for the church to be strengthened by God's greatness. The prayer asks God to move the church to realize the significance of its singular identity as a body united in the Trinity.

p 50 Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, Ephesians 3:14–21. Then review the questions below concerning this pivotal section in the book of Ephesians and write your notes on them. (For further background, see the *ESV Study Bible*, page 2267; available online at www.esvbible.org.)

1. The Power of the Father and the Spirit (3:14–16)

Paul appropriately bows on his knees in humility before God the Father—the one who gives a measure of filial identity to all people on the earth. In what way are all people associated with the name of the Father? How does this naming relate to and magnify the new relationship of Jews and Gentiles that Paul revealed in 2:11–3:13?

For the fifth time Paul mentions the "riches" of grace found in Christ (compare Eph. 1:7, 8; 2:7; 3:8, 16). He asks the Father to give the church power from his riches. What is the nature of these riches? What is the relationship of the working of the Spirit to these riches (see also 1:14; 2:22)?

2. The Presence of Christ (3:17–19)

The immediate goal of Paul's prayer for the church is that "Christ may dwell in [their] hearts through faith" (3:17). The verses that follow clarify the working of the indwelling Christ. If Paul is speaking to believers, why does he ask [p 51](#) for strength for Christ to dwell in them? What is the role of the believer's faith in this process?

Paul uses the idea of a tree being "rooted" to speak of the believers' lives. "Grounded" refers to the foundation of the believers as one body. What is Paul hoping the believers will *become*, if love does for them what soil does for a tree? What is he hoping they will *do* when they are grounded in love?

"Breadth and length and height and depth" express the great dimensions of the love of Christ (3:18). Why is strength from God needed to comprehend Christ's love? What would a lack of love within the church body have revealed about the Ephesian church?

"Filled with all the fullness of God" (3:19) points back to the "fullness of him who fills all in all" (1:23). By what measure could the Ephesians determine if their congregation was experiencing the fullness of God? How does this [p 52](#) fullness relate to their identity with Christ in the present and the future, both spiritually and practically?

3. The Plan for the Church (3:20-21)

Paul concludes the first three chapters of Ephesians with a doxology. How are "to him who is able to do far more than we can ask or think" fitting words of praise for what Paul has said in both 3:1-19 and, more generally, in all of Ephesians 1-3? What encouragement should the believers draw from the phrase "at work within us?"

What is Paul's final goal for the church of Ephesus in 3:21? What does this say about the hope of the gospel in each successive period of history?

Read through the following three sections on *Gospel Glimpses*, *Whole-Bible Connections*, and *Theological Soundings*. Then take time to consider the *Personal Implications* these sections may have for you.

[p 53](#) Gospel Glimpses

THE GOSPEL AS LOVE. God's unselfish motivation in bringing many to glory is to achieve their highest good and thus express his own greatest passion and affection. Being in perfect and holy fellowship with the Son and the Spirit, it is love that moves the Father to bring the elect into his family as his children (Eph. 1:4-7). In Ephesians 2:4, Paul demonstrates that love compels God to bring sons of disobedience to salvation from wrath by mercy and grace. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul will personify God's love for us as one who acts with patience, kindness, humility, consideration,

joy, truth, endurance, hope, and faithfulness. It is these virtues that Paul desires the church to know with increasing depth, through the power of the Spirit. All of the church's acts, thoughts, motives, goals, and speech must sink their roots in love's soil, from there to draw nourishment for obedience and faithful gospel witness. Only Christ's love, flowing through every member, will show to wicked powers God's glorious wisdom in sending Christ.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE GLORY OF GOD. In the doxology at the end of Romans 11, Paul proclaims the glory of God as the goal of all things and all history (11:36). All things exist to make the Lord's greatness known, to display the beauty of his perfections, and to bring him the highest praise—praise above all things, including all earthly pursuits. When Moses asked the Lord to show him his glory, he understood this as the ultimate experience all creation seeks (Ex. 33:18). God revealed his glory in safe measures in the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:10–11). Peter, James, and John were given grace to behold Christ in his glory as Christ made God known to them in the transfiguration (Luke 9:28–32; John 1:14). Christ elects believers for “the praise of his glory” and intends to display this glory through the church in every generation of history and forever (Eph. 1:12, 14; 3:21).

PRAYING FOR THE CHURCH. Similar to the prayer in Ephesians 1:17–23, the prayer of Ephesians 3:14–21 asks for enlightenment, “that you ... may have strength to comprehend” (3:18). In order for the church to have a grasp of God's glory corresponding to the greatness of Christ's salvation of the church, the Lord must provide spiritual insight. Seeing the fullness of the love of Christ in increasing measure requires greater illumination. Paul desires the Ephesians to experience the richness of a fuller understanding of Christ.

p 54 Theological Soundings

TRANSCENDENCE. From its opening pages the biblical story reveals God as a transcendent being. He existed before the creation as one distinct from the heavens and earth, calling all things into existence from nothing (Gen. 1:1–5). His “ways” and “thoughts” far exceed the thoughts of any finite, sinful being (Isa. 55:8–9). His greatness is so vast that it exceeds the ability of any earthly person to search out its depths (Ps. 145:3). As the great “I AM,” *life itself* resides within him, in great contrast to those to whom he must *give* life and sustenance (Ex. 3:14; Acts 17:28; Col. 1:17; 1 Tim. 6:13; Heb. 1:4). Therefore, the measure of his love is greater than what a human mind can fully comprehend, and his ability to accomplish his will for the church far exceeds anything we could conceive of asking him to do (Eph. 3:19–20).

ETERNITY. “To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever” (Eph. 3:21). The Lord has existed from eternity past and will exist forever (Rev. 1:4, 8). His plan offers eternal life to those who believe on his Son (John 3:16). God's plan “in the fullness of time” (or “the coming ages”) includes uniting all things in Christ (Eph. 1:10; 2:7). Each local body of believers has a stewardship over the gospel message and witness; all believers in Christ's

body should keep an eternal perspective on all things so as to remember that everlasting life with God exceeds and influences all earthly pursuits.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of Ephesians 3:14–21 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Make notes below on the personal implications for your walk with the Lord of the (1) *Gospel Glimpses*, (2) *Whole-Bible Connections*, (3) *Theological Soundings*, and (4) this passage as a whole.

1. Gospel Glimpses

p 55 2. Whole-Bible Connections

3. Theological Soundings

4. Ephesians 3:14–21

As You Finish This Unit ...

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of Ephesians. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study, to reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you—and perhaps to highlight and underline these things to review again in the future.