

Ephesians 3:14-21 | Paul's Prayer for the Church

Tyler Velin | October 24th, 2013

Before we get rolling too far along today I just want to let us think over something: why is Paul writing this book? Because as this book has progressed we have seen that Paul is writing about church. He's writing about gathering and meeting, encouraging, worshipping and loving as the local and as the global body of Christ.

Why do we do this? Why are we doing what we are doing now? Are we making much out of nothing? Is this gathering here, just a wake for Jesus. Wake's are the old English word for what happens at funerals, where the whole group gets together and celebrates the life of the person who has died. Has church simply become a traditional, weekly funeral?

Because it would be so much easier if we were to take the message of Christ, and hear it, respond to it and deal with it on our own. To think like Jon Muir, the famous outdoorsman, and just see nature as the great cathedral. We are closest to God when we are closest to nature. Because in Montana you can make a very compelling cause for that.

But we have a very compelling reason to do church today. The old testament always spoke of the Christ coming to gather to himself a people, and in **Matthew 16:18**, Jesus makes his intentions for the future very clear. Christ died to gather people to himself and his gathered people make up his church.

Why was Paul so obsessed with the church? Because Jesus died for that church. To ignore the church, is to make less of Christ.

With that said we have seen Paul wanting to do very specific things in this book. Often times we sit down and read the Bible mindlessly because we have learned to view the Bible through a sort of dead lens. We read it like we have to read textbooks, just hoping we will learn from it. But we can't ignore what Paul is trying to do here. Paul is telling us what he wants to do in writing this book.

Three times already in this book Paul has used the phrase "For this reason." That's because Paul is interspersing teaching, with application for the church. He teaches us something about God, and then says for this reason I am making it known to you. So in a very over simplified look back at what Paul is saying here we see three things. 1.) In chapter 1 Paul talks about the inheritance we received in Christ and he writes it for this reason: that we may know the riches of his glorious grace with the saints. 2.) Chapter 2 talks about dead people being made alive, and Jews and Gentiles being made one for this reason: That you may be gathered together into the dwelling place of God. 3.) Last week Stephen spoke and said that the mystery of the gospel brings people together for this reason, that through the church the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to the rulers and authorities.

Even in those three points, we see a progression of the theology of the church. Paul wants to make you into a better Christian by teaching you the wonderful gift Christ has given us in the church.

So Paul wants us to know with the Church, to be with the church, and to do with the church. And Paul's concluding line for last week was: **3:13**. But how? That's what Paul is going to talk about today. And, as Kelsey just read, the very first verse we are going to look at tonight begins with: For this reason I bow my knee before the Father, so that is what we want to do right now. **Pray.**

I like to try challenging things. One time a friend of mine told me you can't break an egg if you squeeze it length wise in your hand. So I called her out on it, she gave me an egg, and I couldn't do it. Then I had some friends over and I told them the same thing, and they popped egg all over my kitchen, not wanting to be outdone, I tried it, and popped egg outside of my kitchen. Moral of the story, you can't break a hardboiled egg with your hand, but you can get your friend to be real eggs all over his kitchen.

I remember I was taking a spiritual gifts test once, and those are always kind of weird. But this one had a particular question which stood out to me. "Do you like attempting impossible problems?" And I remember laughing at it because if I truly knew it was impossible I wouldn't want to do it. But then I thought back on my life, and I as a kid thought I could try to walk on water (that's what happens when you are raised in the church), and I also remember staring at a spoon legitimately thinking I could bend it like the kid in the Matrix.

I do try to do impossible things. Stupid, silly things. But I can tell you the place I try to do the most impossible things is in my heart. Because often times I get the idea that I can restore my worship on my own. I can better my faith on my own. Or that I can worship God better on my own, heal better on my own, or just live better as a Christian on my own. But there is nothing more impossible than progress for a Christian who sees himself as self-sufficient.

That's why I love how Paul opens this portion of scripture: **3:14**. Paul has asked that we as the church come to know as the church, come to be as the church, and come to do as the church but he knows that you can't do any of that. As an individual Christian you don't have that power. But God does. That's why this is the culmination of Paul's prayer at the beginning of Ephesians.

Paul is saying because of everything that I have challenged you to do, I pray for you. There are three reasons Paul is turning to prayer here, we see the first reason for prayer in **Eph 3:15-17a**

1. Paul prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts.

This is such a generic Christian phrase: "Does Christ live in your heart?" "Have you accepted Christ into your heart?" And we know what it means. We know what **Rom 8:7** says because we just talked about it in community groups this week. If Christ dwells in our hearts it means that Christ's death has killed our hostility towards him, and he has given us himself as our savior. For Christ to dwell in your heart is a sign of faith, and that is exactly what Paul is saying here.

To be a Christian means that Christ dwells in your heart. That sin is defeated, that death is destroyed and that by grace, through faith we believe in Christ Jesus as our Lord and savior. We know what it means. But do we know why it matters?

What does it matter when it comes to the church? Why is Paul praying this over the church? Paul is asking the church to do some heavy lifting here, and in my mind as I read this, I think a better prayer would be, "That according to the great riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner beings." That would have been a better prayer if I were to write it. That we get power as the church through the Holy Spirit. But that is not where Paul stops, he prays that we receive power from the Holy Spirit so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

That's because Paul knows that the greatest gift of power, the greatest ground for strength is not strength and power on their own, but a faith in Jesus Christ. The greatest power the Church has today is a faith in Christ Jesus sealed by the Holy Spirit.

You see power is never a detached attribute. Superman wasn't powerful by default, he was powered by the nature of his planet Krypton. Spider-Man was powered by a radioactive spider. Batman was powered by wealth. Christians are powered by the gospel which culminates with

a faith in Christ Jesus. That is our power as the church. Faith in Christ, Christ dwelling in your hearts is the only thing that will empower you to be on mission for the Church of Christ. Nothing else will. Your girlfriend won't, your aspirations won't, your morality won't, your zeal won't, Christ will.

The object of ultimate importance for the church, is that Christ dwells in the hearts of the members of the church.

Second point Paul makes: **17b-19a**

2. That we may have strength to know Christ as the Church.

It's things like these verses and that silly spiritual gifts test that frustrate me. Because here Paul is praying for us and he says I want you to understand and know the unknowable. I want you to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.

I can't do that. I know the knowable love of Christ in my own life. I know that at one point I was dead in hate, unbelief and lust. I know that I was 10 times the sinner that I could ever describe myself to be, and I know that while I was yet a sinner Christ died for me, that is what I know.

That's all I can know on my own. But the church can know more.

As a church, each and every one of us comes with our own scars of sin, and our own stories of redemption. That's why it is important to see again what Paul just prayed: **17b-19a**. We can't comprehend the breadth and length and depth of the love of Christ on our own, but we can comprehend it with all the saints, we can know it as the church.

My favorite holiday by far is Easter. It never used to be, but in my adult life it has come to be. That's because when you get all your church together to celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Christ as a whole, you get to experience the love of Christ which surpasses all understanding. **Ps 145:3**

We gather and praise the unsearchable riches of Christ, and through an amazing work of the spirit, God allows us to know the depth of Christ, because we as the church have experienced that great salvation. Do you want to be affirmed of who Christ is? You will never find it on your own outside of the church. Christ is known in his church.

In mysterious ways we cannot describe, we know Christ's unknowable riches in real ways together as the corporate people of God. And Paul is praying that the church of Christ is able to know that in amazing and wonderful ways, rooted and grounded in love.

The third thing Paul is praying for the church is seen briefly in **3:19b**.

3. That we as the church may be filled with the fullness of God.

Anyone who has ever dabbled in Christianity wants to be filled with the fullness of God. Even if people don't know what that means. We as a culture want more of everything, and God is included in that. But so many times we get caught up in the impossible again.

Be try to do it on our own. We can do it by spending time away in nature, listening to podcasts, music...etc. Those are all good things, but none of those things allow you to be filled with the fullness of God.

Paul has been hinting at this throughout the book so far. Look at **Eph 2:22, Eph 1:22-23**.

This is actually what we are going to discuss this weekend at Sovereign Hope, as we look at Part 5 of The King And His People, the church. God's fullness was pleased to dwell in Christ, and while Christ dwells in the heart of individual believers, the fullness of Christ is seen in his church.

We could spend a month talking about how this is seen in the church, through various gifts, and skills working together, but I am not going to spend a lot of time on it because we are going to discuss it this weekend, and then in your community groups, you are going to discuss it next week.

But I think it is important to sit back and look at what Paul is saying here. He wants to

encourage us in his prayer, and he prays that we have something better than power, we have Christ, he prays that we as the whole church know the unknowable riches and love of Christ, and that we as the church are filled with the fullness of God.

Why wouldn't we want to go to church? Why would we want to neglect these things? Because sin isolates. And Paul knows that, and that is why Paul is praying this over the church right now. That is why Paul is praying this over you right now.

There is nothing better for the Christian than doing and being the church. It's not simply a place we gather, also it is also something we do throughout the week as we fellowship with believers in this fallen world. When the church starts doing these things that Paul is praying for, the forces of darkness tremble. You see Christ enabled the change on the cross, but in giving us the Holy Spirit, Christ is going to bring the change through the Church.

No government, no military, no power or ruler will ever compare to the success and domination that the church is going to have. The church is going to win, because the church has already won in Christ. And when that saturates us, everything changes.

Here is what I want us to do. I'm calling it the Ephesians prayer challenge. Paul prayed for these things because he knows we have a tendency to do out of our own power, rather than God's. So what I want us to do is take these cards, and put them somewhere, and on these cards I have the three prayer requests of Paul, and I want you to program an alarm in your phone for the next four weeks, which brings us through to our thanksgiving break, and I want us to pray for the church together. I want us to pray that we as the church have Christ dwelling in our hearts, that we know the vastness of the love of Christ, and that we become filled with fullness of God so that the world may see and know the goodness of the glory of Jesus Christ. And I'm going to pass these things out during the closing worship set, but I just want you to listen to this prayer, and Paul's benediction and encouragement he give us at the end, and then I'm going to close us in prayer. **Eph 3:14-21.**