

Ephesians: Blessed Beyond Belief to Build up the Body

Lesson 6: Paul's Impossible Prayer and Doxology Ephesians 3:14-21

Small Group Questions

1. What do you value most?
2. If you were able to list all the things you prayed about this last week—what would it reveal about what you value most?

Outline

- I. Circular letter to those who are “in Christ” 1:1-2
- II. Praise to God: The believer’s position in Christ to the Praise of His Glory 1:3-14
 - A. The Father’s Past Plan: His eternal plan to choose individuals to be blameless and holy, to be adopted as sons—to the praise of the glory of His grace
 - B. The Son’s Present Provision of salvation: redeemed and forgiven, based on the superabounding riches of His grace, having made known the mystery of His will—to subject everything to Christ, providing an inheritance for those who believe—to the praise of His glory
 - C. The Spirit’s Present Protection of Future salvation: Sealing those who believe as a pledge of His ownership and their assurance of an inheritance—to the praise of His glory
- III. Thanksgiving and Prayer
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 - B. Prayer 1:16b-23
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 - The hope of His calling
 - The riches of His inheritance in the saints
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- IV. God’s Plan applied individually 2:1-10
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 1. God’s action described 2:4-7
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 - 1) Made us alive together with Christ
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- V. God’s Plan Applied Corporately 2:11–3:13
 - A. 2:11-22
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 - B. Expanding on the mystery: corporate identity 3:1-13
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 - God is the sources of the Mystery
 - 1. The Content of the Mystery revealed to Paul—by grace 3:1-7
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 - 1. Honor to God declared 3:14-15
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 - a. Empowered by the Spirit in the inner being 3:16-17a
 - b. Empowered to Comprehend the Love of Christ 3:17b-18
 - c. Filled with the Fullness of God 3:19
 - B. Paul’s Doxology—ascribing glory 3:20-21

Review

1:1-3:21 Positional Unity of the Church

1:1-23 God’s (life insurance) plan and benefits

1:1-2 A circular letter to those “in Christ”

Paul writes to those “in Christ—that they might experience God’s grace and peace.

1:3-14 Believers have: **Every spiritual blessing—to the praise of His glory**

The plan, provision and protection of Salvation

God is blessed, because He has blessed those “in Christ” with every spiritual blessing

“God has enriched believers with every spiritual benefit for their spiritual well-being.”¹

A reminder of the great things God has done for the individual believer

WOW—it is all about God

¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 301.

All we have in salvation is for His praise and glory.

1:15-23 Prayer for insight to truly know God

The prayer for those who have everything—know God better

Prayer for personal insight to their relationship with God for the purpose of deeper experiential appreciation of their riches benefits

To realizing the hope, riches and power on their behalf—which is evidenced by Christ current exalted position

Paul prays that believer's know God personally and intimately—so that they would realize the hope of their calling (past), the riches of His inheritance in the saints (value) (future) and the extent of His power on their behalf (present)—which is evidenced by the power to raise and seat Christ and to subject all things to Him and to give Him to the Church as sufficient head (make Him head of the Church).

Why did He do this?

“In chapters 2 and 3 Paul explains the execution of the eternal plan by showing how God makes sinners into saints and builds them into the church, the body of Christ. In 2:1-10 Paul states how sinners, who deserve nothing but God's wrath, become trophies of his grace.”²

2:1-3:21 Steps towards fulfilling God's plan

2:1-10 God's plan (1:3-14) applied to individuals

Man's condition 2:1-3

Apart from God man is hopeless because they are dead in trespasses and sin

Condition apart from God (2:1-3)

- though dead in trespasses and sin resulting from
- nature/life—walk according to the values of the world
- devil—are controlled by the ruler of the world
- and actions of the will (enjoyment of sin)

“But God” (God's provision) 2:4-10

Man's condition, apart from God is hopeless because they are dead in trespasses and sin as a result of their walking according to the values of the world, are controlled by the ruler of the world, and by actions in keeping with their desires.

But God

Who is rich in mercy (character), motivated by His great love (cause)

Applied His power to make believers alive, raised, and seated with Christ, so that they would be a revelation of God's grace

Based on His grace provided a gift

—a relationship with Him—no longer separated (dead) but unified (alive) as an expression of the surpassing rich of His grace

Obtained through faith

—not works

For the purpose of doing good works

—to reveal God's grace through actions

- Character—Who is rich in mercy
- Motivated—By His great love
- Based on—His grace
- Provided a gift
- Obtained—through faith
- Purpose—to do good works, which reveal God's grace in action

2:11-3:13 God's plan applied corporately

² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 305.

2:11-22 Our new position corporately

Now have been brought near to God and have been made into a new man—entity

2:11-12 Formerly

Those who were hopeless

Separated from God's promises

and Messiah—given to Israel

2:13-22 Now have been brought near to God

And have been made into a new man—entity

3:1-13

The mystery of the Church is revealed after Christ

Paul explains his role as administrator and dispenser of the mystery to the Gentiles

The church is not natural—unity in spite of diversity is difficult

To show the wisdom of God—even to the cosmic powers

3:14-21 Prayer and Praise

3:14-19 Prayer for the Ephesians to know and experience Christ's love and experience maturity

filled by God

The impossibly big prayer for intimacy and to be total consumed with God

3:20-21 Doxology: Praise to God for His superabounding

Introduction

Questions

If you were able to list all the things you prayed about this last week—what would it reveal about what you value most?

How big are your prayers?

Do you pray small or big prayers?

Do you ever pray for the impossible?

Do you find that you sometime pray for things you know will happen?

Why? To strengthen your faith?

As we go through this section I want you to think about two questions:

1. What does Paul value? (i.e. as he identifies what he prays for, look at what are the key element—for personal application).
2. What can we learn about how we should pray?
How can we pray this for our children?

Context

Paul's first prayer (1:15-23) for believers was to know God intimately and experience his power, and his second prayer (3:14-21) is for believers to know the power of God's love and to experience Christ's love for one another.³

It is because the Gentile Christians are now incorporated into the body of Christ that he prays that they may appropriate their spiritual privileges to the full.⁴

→ Prominence is given to words for power, knowledge, the interior life, and fullness. Once again this passage is strongly theocentric and Trinitarian.⁵

³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 471

⁴ *Expositor's Bible Commentary, The*, Pradis CD-ROM:Ephesians, Book Version: 4.0.2

⁵ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p 177.

Overview

“For this reason” (v. 14) **points back to the salvation and privileges described in chapter 2**. Both in terms of content and structure, similarities exist between this prayer and the one in 1:15–23.¹ Connections also exist with the beginning doxology by a focus on love (1:4), glory (1:6, 12, 14), and the Spirit (1:13–14). Prominence is given to words for power, knowledge, the interior life, and fullness. Once again this passage is strongly theocentric and Trinitarian.²⁶

The opening words of v.14, *For this reason*, take up the same expression at v. 1, where Paul was about to lay his concerns for his Gentile readers before God in prayer. However, he broke off almost immediately in order to give an account of his ministry to them and their distinctive place within the mystery of God that had been revealed to him. Now he completes the sentence of v. 1 and reports the content of his intercession for them (vv. 14–19), which has been enriched by all that has been said in the so-called digression of 3:2–13. **What Paul does here, namely, intercede for his readers, naturally flows out of his ministry indeed, it is part of what it means to serve them as Gentiles. Here is a servant of the gospel whose ministry involves a profound commitment to intercession for the ultimate maturity of his readers.**⁷

Both the intercessory prayer and the doxology hark back to earlier themes of the letter. In particular, they contain a number of parallels to the praise and prayer of chapter 1. In a sense, 3:14–21 could be considered a further application of the ideas developed in the earlier prayer:¹³¹ petition is offered to the Father (1:17; 3:14–15); it is for the Spirit (1:17; 3:16); there is a concern for knowledge and fullness (1:18–19; 3:18–19); a linking of knowledge and power (1:19; 3:19); and, finally, praise and glory are offered to God (cf. 1:6, 12, 14; 3:21). At the same time, Paul's intercession and doxology provide a transition from the theology of chapters 13 to the paraenesis that follows in chapters 46.^{132 8}

Structure

The whole passage might be a hinge—emphasizing the mystery (already explained) and how to live out this new relationship (chapters 4-6).

⁹Paul's Relation to the Mystery of this New Spiritual Community (3:1-13)

2B. Specific: Personal and Corporate Nature of Blessing (2:1-3:21)

3C. Paul's Role In Establishing the New Community (3:1-13)

1D. The "Mystery" Was Made Known to Him (3:1-6)

2D. Paul Received Divine Grace... (3:7-13)

1E. To Preach Christ (3:7-8)

2E. To Unveil the "Mystery" (3:9-12)

3E. To Endure Suffering for the "Mystery" (3:13)

4C. Paul's Prayer for the New Community (3:14-21)

This section contains what Simpson calls "Paul's enraptured supplication" (p. 78). After the parenthesis in **vv. 2-13**, the apostle resumes his prayer, comprising three major petitions (**vv. 16, 17a; 17b-19a; 19b**), the first two of which lead into the next with the last preparing for the closing doxology (**vv. 20, 21**). Kirby (p. 129) notes the trinitarian outline of this prayer, in which the apostle asks that his readers may possess the strength of the Spirit (**v. 16**), the indwelling of Christ (**v. 17**), and the fullness of God (**v. 19**).¹⁰

¹ See p. 70.

² Note the parallels with Colossians 2:6–10.

⁶ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p 177.

⁷ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 252-53.

¹³¹ So Patzia, 220.

¹³² Cf. Best, 335.

⁸ Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999). 254.

⁹ Daniel B. Wallace, Ph.D. *Ephesians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline*, Biblical Studies Foundation, © 1999.

¹⁰ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, , Book Version: 4.0.2

Some would see the structure not as three statements based on the *ἵνα* clauses but as one statement elaborated, as does Snodgrass.

The prayer is artistically and symmetrically arranged with “that” (*hina*) clauses and infinitives both before and after the participles “being rooted and established in love,” which stand at the center of the prayer. Note how the passage unfolds:

I kneel before the Father ... (v. 14)
 that [*hina*] he might give you power to be strengthened [infinitive] ... (v. 16)
 so that Christ may dwell [infinitive taken as result] in your hearts ... (v. 17)
 rooted and established in love [participles]
 that [*hina*] you may have power ... ”
 to grasp [infinitive] ... (v. 18)
 and to know [infinitive] ... (v. 19a)
 that [*hina*] you may be filled ... (v. 19b).

While we could understand the three “that” (*hina*) clauses as parallel, so that Paul prays for three things (the Spirit’s power, Christ’s indwelling, and fullness), more likely Paul prayed for only one thing, the empowering of the Spirit. All else in the prayer explains the meaning and result of that empowering.¹¹

Hoehner further elaborates it as¹²:

Request: that he would grant you . . . to be strengthened . . . in the inner person (3:16)
 Result: so that Christ may dwell in your hearts (3:17)
 Purpose: you might be able to comprehend (3:18)
 Result: and so to know Christ’s love (3:19a)
 Purpose: that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God (3:19b)

See more from Hoehner on page 489.

Exposition

Paul normally includes an extensive prayer at the beginning of his letters. These prayers normally include some combination of the concepts: love, faith and hope. And some form of a challenge to growth resulting in effectiveness. As you read through the Pauline epistles you quickly see that these prayers (they often accompanying thanksgiving sections) are not just habit but very thoughtful. What he gives thanks for and what he prays are specific to the situation he is writing to.

One of the anomalies in the pattern of prayer is Ephesians. Not only do most scholars believe that Ephesians was a circular letter, not just intended for the church in Ephesus but the surrounding area. But this letter includes two length prayers.

The second prayer, is what I'm entitling Paul's impossible prayer.

Ephesians 3:14-20 Paul's “impossible prayer”

Big picture of God
 Powerful—but personal
 Loving—intimate
 Fullness—all consuming
 Big prayer to God
 We pray to the size of our God

¹¹ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p 178.

¹² Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 476

We need to help people to a big view of God

I. Paul's Prayer for the New Community 3:14-21

A. Paul's Impossible Prayer 3:14-19

Prayer for Power to Know, Experience and Demonstrate the Love of Christ

1. Honor to God declared 3:14-15

Statement of Prayer or Approach to Prayer 3:14-15

I bow my knees—"bow" (κάμπτω) only used 4 times in NT (Rom 11:4; 14:11; Eph 3:14; Phil 2:10) conveys the idea of worship or submission to a supernatural power

Standing was the more normal posture among the Jews but kneeling was not unknown. Eusebius referred to it as the familiar custom of Christians. It symbolizes submissiveness, solemnity, and adoration. Paul turns in prayer to the Father. "Before" (*pros*) is a face-to-face preposition applicable to an intimate relationship. He addresses God as Father because through the redemptive act of Christ access is now made possible to him through the Spirit (Eph 2:18).¹³

Father

Frequently used in Ephesians (8 times)

In 3:15 (and 4:6) the broader sense occurs: God as the Father of all humanity. The emphasis in Ephesians on a cosmic Christ and a cosmic role for the church is based in an understanding of God as a cosmic Father. The anticipation that all things will be brought together in Christ (1:10) presupposes that God is the Father of all.¹⁴

from whom every family

Play on words πατήρ and πατριά

πατριά is a group descendant from common ancestor (family, tribe, nation)

Who is referred to?

Should "every" be translated "whole"?

"every" is the more normal and natural grammatical translation

Most natural to understand this as "every family" not an attempt to limit it to the redeemed.

NIV "his whole family" is very interpretive. "his" is not in the text. They are emphasizing that the "family" is the "church" just discussed. Possible, but not probably, as it is not the most natural translation.

in heaven and on earth

Similar to 1:10

Options

1. every fatherhood—i.e. God the father is the model of all of their fathers

"family" seems a more natural and consistent interpretation

Thought this view may be favored, if translated with "whole" versus "every" because the context is emphasizing unity and oneness

¹³ *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Book Version: 4.0.2

¹⁴ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p 179.

2. heaven refers to angelic beings and earth refers to humans
3. a merism to include all of creation—but referring to humans

The family of God is not confined to earth but embraces heaven as well. This may simply refer to the church triumphant, but could include the angelic hosts, described in rabbinical literature as "the higher family."¹⁵

→ Several alternatives exist for understanding "every family in heaven and on earth," but most likely it is an attempt to be as inclusive as possible to emphasize the cosmic scope of God's reign and purposes. Paul saw the divisions among the human race as existing under the one God. The implication for the unity the letter seeks is obvious.¹⁶

derives its name

God the creator (3:9) is still at work.

2. Content: Enablement to know and experience the Love of Christ and be filled with God 3:16-19

THE MAIN INTENT of Paul's prayer is clear: He wants his readers strengthened by God's Spirit so that they may know intimately Christ's presence and love. If this happens, all else will fall in place. The ethic of chapters 4 – 6 has its foundation in this prayer.¹⁷

Empowered by the Spirit in the inner being

**Empowered—according to the riches of His glory
—strengthened with power**

Indwelt by the Son

Indwelt—indwelling your hearts through faith

Filled completely by the Father

Filled with all the fullness of God

Request: that he would grant you . . . to be strengthened . . . in the inner person (3:16)

Result: so that Christ may dwell in your hearts (3:17)

Purpose: you might be able to comprehend (3:18)

Result: and so to know Christ's love (3:19a)

Purpose: that you might be filled up to all the fullness of God (3:19b)

a. Empowered by the Spirit in the inner being 3:16-17a

Big Power—Personally Applied

3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory,

Paul's asked that the request that he is about to make, be answered according to the wealth (singular is better than plural) of all that God is—Glory: the reflection of His essence, the total sum of all His attributes

to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

Paul prays for his readers that the Spirit will be so strong an influence at the controlling center of their being that their lives will show it.¹⁸

¹⁵Expositor's Bible Commentary, Book Version: 4.0.2

¹⁶ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 179

¹⁷ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 179.

¹⁸ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 180.

Strengthened— κραταίωω to make strong, always passive in the NT, reinforcing that it is something God is doing

Power— δύναμις focus is on the ability or capacity to act, an ability already defined 1:19

3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;

Verse 17 explains verse 16

Dwell—Permanence, abiding, settled in my whole life, Romans 8:9

Christ indwells us through the work of the Spirit. The Spirit's empowering or indwelling and the indwelling of Christ are not separate things. In 2:20–22, the church was called “a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” This lofty description of the church is now paralleled by an equally lofty description of the individual believer, who has experienced salvation and transformation. By the Spirit's work Christ takes up residence in the person. Paul prays here that Christ will permeate one's whole being. It is the equivalent of the command in 5:18 to be continually filled with the Spirit.¹⁹

We know Paul preferred to speak of our being in Christ rather than of Christ being in us. [Ephesians 3:17](#) is one of only five Pauline texts that speak of Christ being in us (the others are [Rom. 8:10](#); [2 Cor. 13:5](#); [Gal. 2:20](#); [4:19](#)). Of these [Galatians 4:19](#) is closest to [Ephesians 3:17](#): Like a woman in childbirth Paul endured labor pains until Christ was formed in them.²⁰

b. Empowered to Comprehend the Love of Christ 3:17b-18

Intimate understanding and experience of Christ surpassing love

and that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

“that” ἵνα is not parallel to the first ἵνα clause,

there is not coordinating conjunction

and along with the just stated infinitive of result “so that” the ἵνα clauses serves as show the purpose (not content like the one in verse 16)

love (agape)—seeking the highest good in the one loved

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints

what is the breadth and length and height and depth,

One article governs all four making them a group

Merrism= parts for the whole

That they would comprehend the vastness of Christ's love

c. Filled with the Fullness of God 3:19

All consume by God—Spiritual Maturity

19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge,

¹⁹ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 180.

²⁰ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 180.

τέ “and so” is called a postpositive conjunction. Though very similar to other coordinating conjunctions it seems to indicate an internal logical relationship rather than an external one like καί

“to know” – here is to acquire experiential knowledge

“which surpasses knowledge”

See Eph 1:19, 2:7; 3:19

This can be contrasted to mere religious or theoretical knowledge
And between knowledge that is rooted and grounded in love and mere knowledge

But best—to fully comprehend the love of Christ is beyond our capacity.²¹

No matter how much knowledge we have, Christ love surpasses that knowledge.

That you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

This final ἵνα clause again not introduced by a coordinating conjunction is not parallel to the previous two ἵνα clauses. It expresses the purpose of “knowing Christ’s love.” It also serves to sum up the other two.

“filled up with the fullness of God” –completeness, going towards (up to)

To be filled up to the fullness of God is to know the love of Christ.

See Hoehner p. 491.

The expression “all the fullness” occurs elsewhere only at [Colossians 1:19](#) and [2:9](#), both indicating that [all that God is dwells in](#) Christ. We saw in connection with [1:23](#) that “the fullness of God” refers to the way God makes his presence and power felt. [In experiencing Christ Christians experience the fullness of God, his presence, and power.](#) In experiencing that fullness they themselves are made full by Christ. That is, they partake of God’s own being and are made like him. This is an ongoing process. The thought of [Colossians 2:9 – 10](#) is parallel: God’s fullness dwells in Christ and in him Christians are made full. The implication in Ephesians is that as believers encounter God’s love in Christ, they will be filled with love. This same thought is put in the form of an imperative in [5:1 – 2](#).²²

B. Paul’s Doxology—ascribing glory 3:20-21

This prayer and its doxology ([3:20 – 21](#)) are connected by the words “power” and “glory.” Paul’s prayer ([v. 16](#)) is for God to give *power* from his *wealth of glory* (NIV, “glorious riches”), and his doxology is about the One who has *power* to give more than we ask or think and to whom *glory* belongs ([v. 20](#)).²³

Doxologies in the form “glory to God” are frequent in the New Testament, though most are much briefer. The use of “glory” in Ephesians and throughout the New Testament is fascinating.

God is a God of glory ([1:17](#); [Acts 7:2](#)),

and his glory reveals who he is ([John 1:14](#); [Rom. 6:4](#); [Heb. 1:3](#)).

God gives glory to Christ ([John 17:22](#); [Acts 3:13](#); [1 Cor. 2:8](#); [1 Peter 1:21](#))

and people ([Rom. 2:10](#); [8:30](#); [1 Cor. 2:7](#)).

²¹ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 489.

²² Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 182.

²³ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p. 180.

Christians are transformed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18).
 People are to do everything for God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31)
 and are to give glory back to God (Eph. 1:6; Phil. 1:11).
 In the eschaton further glory will be revealed (Rom. 8:18). "Glory" is a word that virtually encompasses the whole of Christianity. Here the focus is on the praise and honor that should be given God for his saving work.²⁴

1. To the All-Powerful 3:20

"are more abundantly"

Infinitely beyond what we can ask or think

"It could be literally translated 'to the one who is able to do beyond everything, very far in excess of that which we ask or think (cf. word study in 3:4). In other words, his ability far surpasses not only what we verbalize in prayer but also beyond our wildest imaginations."²⁵

God is all-powerful or **omni-competent**. There is nothing we could ever face that would surprise Him, nothing we could ask that He could not deliver, nothing we could need that he has not prepared for.

"power at work in us"

δύναμις —power or ability that is capable for the task

It is not our power or strength—it is what God has given or placed "in us"—see 3:16-17. Therefore He is to be praised.

2. Be Glory 3:21

In the church—this new entity that the wisdom and power of God created in Christ.

Review and Application

So what?

How big are our prayers?

God does not fit the limitations of our expectations.

We pray to the size of our God and Faith.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with **every** spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, (ESV)

Ephesians 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the **riches** of his grace, (ESV)

Ephesians 1:19 and what is the **immeasurable {surpassing} greatness** of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might (ESV)

Ephesians 1:23 which is his body, **the fullness of him who fills all in all.** (ESV)

Ephesians 2:4 But God, being **rich** in mercy, because of the **great love** with which he loved us, (ESV)

Ephesians 2:7 so that in the coming ages he might show the **immeasurable riches** of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (ESV)

²⁴ Snodgrass, Klyne. *NIV Application Commentary, New Testament: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, © 1996) p., 182.

²⁵ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002) p. 493.

Ephesians 3:8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the **unsearchable riches** of Christ, (ESV)

Ephesians 3:10 so that through the church the **manifold** wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. (ESV)

Ephesians 3:18-19 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. (ESV)

Ephesians 3:20 Now to him who is able to do far more **abundantly** than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, (ESV)

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Paul normally includes an extensive prayers at the beginning of his letters. These prayers normally include some combination of the concepts: love, faith and hope along with some form of a challenge to growth resulting in effectiveness. As you read through the Pauline epistles you quickly see that these prayers (they often accompanying thanksgiving sections) are not just habit but very thoughtful. What he gives thanks for and what he prays are specific to the situation he is writing to.

One of the anomalies in the pattern of prayer is Ephesians. Not only do most scholars believe that Ephesians was a circular letter, not just intended for the church in Ephesus but the surrounding area. But this letter includes two length prayers.

The second prayer, is what I call Paul's impossible prayer. And it has challenged (exhorted) the kinds of prayers I raise to God.

Before reading this passage, ask yourself, "If I could list all I prayed for this past week--what would it reveal about what I value most?"

Ephesians 3:14-19

Paul's prayer, a response to ("therefore") what he has told his audience about their salvation, leads to a profound Trinitarian prayer for the strength of the Spirit (Ephesians 3:16), the indwelling of Christ (Ephesians 3:17) and the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19).

But it is not just a theological statement, it become a daily challenge when we realize the breath of the prayer.

Big Prayer

Ephesians 3:16-17a 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— (ESV)

Paul's prayer begins with a request that God--according to the riches of His glory... and the strength of His power... This is a big prayer. That the God of all glory, the Creator Sustainer Owner of all, would through His mighty power and unlimited resources strengthen us. How much can He strengthen us?--completely. Is there anything His empowering can't sustain us through?--no.

But this is not just a statement of a fact about God--He is all-powerful. As wonderful as that truth is, Paul takes this core nature of God and asks God to apply it personally. His prayer is not that God would be all-powerful, He is. His prayer is that the All-powerful will apply that power personally and intimately--in our inner being.

Intimate goal

The big prayer continues,

Ephesians 3:17b-19a 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, (ESV)

Paul wants the strengthening to have a specific focus--to comprehend, to understand, to know the whole vastness (breadth, length, height, depth) of Christ's love. Part of what makes this an impossible prayer is that Paul prays that we would **know** the whole vastness of Christ's love which "surpasses knowledge." He wants us to know something that goes beyond our knowledge and understanding. But is not contrary to knowledge or dismisses knowledge.

Paul's prayer is that we would have an experiential knowledge, a personal experiential intimate understanding of how much Christ loves us! Not just a realization of the fact of Christ's love, but to fully personally, intimately appreciate the complete nature of Christ's self-giving love.

All consuming result

The result of this prayer is that

Ephesians 3:19b that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (ESV)

Again, the impossible prayer, ends with another big request--that we finite creatures be fill with the fullness of the infinite God.

The prayer is that as we are strengthened by the All-power personally and as we become intimately acquainted with the comprehensive love of Christ that we might be totally consumed by the infinite God.

WOW!

Impossible or the picture of spiritual maturity?

This passage first challenges me to want a great connection, understanding and a more intimate relationship with God.

Second, the passage challenges my puny, small, weak, selfish, self-focus, concrete time-bound prayers. Not that we should not pray for those things, but the vast majority of prayers I pray and I hear prayed are so small compared to Paul's prayer.

Realization

This has made me realize

1. That we pray to the size of our God and faith.
2. God does not fit the limitations of our expectations.

May we learn to pray in a way that honors the majesty, magnitude and the intimate personal nature of God.

(You can listen to a [devotional discussion of this impossible prayer here.](#))

