11-11-18

Ephesians 3:14-21 (2)

Paul is now offering a prayer for the Ephesian believers. The best part for us is that this prayer can be offered for any Christian, at any point in history. This prayer is for us. Notice that this prayer is prayed for Christians. This is not a prayer for someone who has not yet accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour. This prayer also tells us something about the Christian life.

That initial prayer to ask Jesus to be Lord of our lives; that initial confession of Jesus as being the only way to salvation and to the Father; is just the beginning of what we are offered. That initial, heartfelt confession of Jesus secures our salvation. As Paul tells us back in 1:13, that upon believing in the message of the truth of the Gospel, “you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise”. Once we are sealed with, not by, the Holy Spirit, we belong to God through Jesus Christ and “no one can snatch us from His hand”.

There is only one sad thing in all of this. So many Christians stop there. I certainly don’t say this to downplay salvation; there is nothing more important in our lives than to accept that wonderful gift offered to us by Christ. There is nothing more amazing than salvation; we can’t earn it, we don’t deserve it, and it was brought about by a tremendous sacrifice of God Himself. The fact that God loves us demonstrates His glory to all creation; especially to the powers and forces that are in the heavenly realm.

The sad part for Christians stopping with salvation is that there is so much more. Wanting more of what God has to offer is not being greedy; it is having a desire that is according to the will of God. God wants to give us more. As Paul tells us in Romans 8:32.

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

This demonstrates the overflowing love and generosity of God. You would think that after sacrificing His Son on our behalf, that would be it. How could we possibly hope for, or even imagine that we might receive anything more? Yet that is Paul’s point: If God is willing to give His Son on our behalf, there is no limit to what He will give. There is also an indirect warning to those who reject God’s Son. If we reject the sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf, then how could we hope for anything else? There is nothing left but God’s wrath.

We must also be careful to understand what gifts God has for us. When we think of being given good gifts, our carnal minds tend toward things of this world: money, worldly power, comfort, worldly security, good health. While God may choose to grant these things, He has much better stuff in mind. God has spiritual gifts for us. These are the things Paul mentions in his prayer: strength in the inner man, Christ dwelling in our hearts, being rooted in love, having knowledge of the love of Christ, experiencing the fullness of God.

These are things we look forward to in our next life. The Bible is full of promises of joy and communion with God when our time on earth is done. But what Paul is telling us is that we can begin to experience these good gifts now; here in this life. In fact, we ought to be experiencing them now. The Christian life is to be one of constant growth in the Lord; Both intellectual growth and growth in our experience of spiritual realities.

In the New Testament, several passages point out the difference between those who eat meat and those who consume milk. These words are used in the spiritual sense to differentiate between a mature Christian and one who is just starting out. Many times, though, the Christian never develops a taste for meat. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews is forced to chide his readers for their lack of progress.

Hebrews 5:11-14

Concerning him we have much to say, and *it is* hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Expounding this verse entirely is for another time, but we can see the need for Paul’s prayer. The verse in Hebrews is referring to a teaching of Jesus being a high priest of the order of Melchizedek. This is not a teaching for someone who is a new Christian or not yet a believer. Just as an infant would choke on a piece of steak, so a new believer wouldn’t have the back ground to understand the teaching regarding Melchizedek. But a Christian should eventually get to that point and this is Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian Christians.

We talked last week about strength; strength in the inner man. This is spiritual strength: It is for our spirits to become strong and it is brought about by the Holy Spirit. Because it comes by the Holy Spirit, there is nothing we can do to gain this strength but to ask for it; it is a gift from God, it comes by prayer. This strengthening is for our inner man: it is for our minds and hearts and wills. All of these parts of us need to be strong in order to become mature, to withstand satan, and to be able to withstand more of the power and glory of God; in other words, come closer to Him.

As verse 16 tells us, this strengthening comes according to the riches of God’s glory. Now, God’s glory is unending; so, that tells us His riches are unending too. This is what we have access to through Jesus Christ. While it is beyond our comprehension, it is real and God wants us to share in it.

Verse 17 starts with “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith”. This sounds a little confusing. The Bible tells us that when we accept Jesus as Saviour, He lives in us. It tells us that we are saved through faith, particularly by faith in Jesus. So, if we are saved, we have Christ living in us. Why then would Paul pray this way, that Christ would dwell in our hearts? The answer lies in the word translated “dwell”.

All of us can live somewhere. For example, we might stay a night or two in a motel. Perhaps we might spend a week camping in a tent or a cabin. Regardless of the amount of time we spend there, it is simply a place we are living at the time. These are places we stay, but don’t really call them home. We don’t have the rights and privileges there that we do in our homes. When we accept Jesus, He lives in us and He won’t leave us. We are saved. But what rights and privileges do we allow Him while He is there?

There is a big difference between where we stay and where we dwell. Our dwelling is our home. This is where we are comfortable, this is where we have free reign. In our dwelling, in our home, we have rights of ownership; we have control of what happens there and can guide what comes in and what goes out. Our dwelling belongs to us.

Likewise, our heart can be a place where Jesus stays or it can be His dwelling. Paul’s prayer for the Christians is that their hearts become Christ’s dwelling. This comes about by prayer; it comes about by a gift of the Holy Spirit. Our desire for Jesus to dwell in our hearts comes from the Holy Spirit because it is entirely against our human nature to let Him be there. When our heart becomes the dwelling place of Jesus, it becomes His home. He then has those rights that come with ownership.

We, by the power of the Holy Spirit, give Christ ownership; we give Him free reign of our hearts and our lives. Jesus then guides what comes in and what goes out. We are His home; and this is when He and the Father come in and sup with us. This is when we can begin having true communion with Him, even while we live this life.

As Paul brings out in his prayer, this is all by faith. The more we, as Christians, talk of Jesus living within us, the more comfortable we become with the idea. But how do we explain that? How do we comprehend with our minds the idea of the God of the universe somehow taking up residence inside us? We don’t. It is beyond us; and this is where faith comes in. The Holy Spirit gives us the faith we need to accept the Gospel; from this we can accept the Bible and believe what it says. The Bible tells us that God will dwell in us by His Holy Spirit, so we accept that as true; and indeed, it is.

Now, if Christ is truly dwelling in our hearts, there will be definite evidence that He is. All the evidence will be based in love. This is so important as Paul shows us in the rest of verse 17. [T]hat you, being rooted and grounded in love. Love is so important that Paul mashes two metaphors together; one agricultural and the other structural.

Consider love to be a deep rich soil that our Christian lives are planted in. Our roots must go deep and spread wide. For one thing, this is our anchor. A plant that has a deep, wide root system will not be easily uprooted. If our Christian roots are deep and wide in love, our faith will not be shaken and we will be able to consistently respond lovingly to others, regardless of how uncivil they act toward us. Also, the roots are where the nourishment comes from. If our strength and growth come from love, we will become more like our Saviour and be able to bring glory to God. Keep in mind also that “God is love”; so being rooted in love is to be rooted in God through Jesus Christ.

Being grounded in love is calling to mind a foundation. The foundation is the most important part of a structure; without a good foundation, the structure will not stand. But even a good foundation will be of no help if it is not on solid ground. Here Paul is calling that solid ground love; if we have all the trappings of Christianity but they aren’t based on love, our Christianity is weak. Again, God is love, we must build on the solid rock of Jesus Christ.

The importance of love in the Christian life is even pointed out by Jesus Himself when questioned about the greatest commandment.

Mathew 22:37-40

And [Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

The whole Law and the Prophets grow out from us loving God and loving others. The Christian life is to be rooted and grounded in love. I think we are all familiar with chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians where Paul writes of the importance of love; In this chapter he tells us how worthless all spiritual gifts and Christian actions are without love. We, as Christians, are called to love.

I think we all know that so often, Christians fail in this calling. We become self-righteous, forgetting that the righteousness we have is Jesus’s and is bestowed upon us. We become like James and John who wanted to call down fire from heaven to devour the Samaritans. This is not our place. We are commanded by Christ to love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us. Wrath is not for us to wield, it belongs to God alone. “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

Additionally, this love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but we must not wait passively for love and all that comes with it.

Philippians 2:12-13

So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

See how Paul is saying that God is at work in His Christian children by the Holy Spirit; and this is according to **His** will. At the same time, we are called to activity, “work out your salvation”. Consciously desire to treat others with love, starting with the brethren and extending to those who are outside of Christ. Read your Bible, it truly contains the words of truth and love, and puts good treasure in your hearts.

And as Paul demonstrates for us here in Ephesians; pray. Pray for this love which can only come from God and that He so very much desires to place in our hearts through Jesus Christ. By prayer we can commune with God while we live here on earth, and be more prepared for meeting Him face to face.

Prayer

LORD, we hear much about love, but so often its meaning is distorted and twisted into something that no longer even resembles love. May your Holy Spirit work in our hearts to give us a true understanding of love that comes from You. A selfless love; one that deeply cares for others.

It is hard to love in this world. It is so fallen, there is so much evil. It is easy to become hard and simply wait for Your wrath to be poured out. But this is contrary to Your command; and You would not give us a command unless You wanted us to keep it. But here we learn, that we cannot keep Your commands apart from You.

And so LORD, we ask for Your Holy Spirit to strengthen our inner man. Lord Jesus, dwell in our hearts by faith. Truly come in, with the Father, and live here; have free reign; make us Your home.

It is in Jesus’ name we pray

Amen