

06/11/2020 Ephesians 3.14–21 Bible Study

Read Ephesians 3:14–21 in your favorite translation. I will print the NET–2 translation.

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. 16 I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he will grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person, 17 that Christ will dwell in your hearts through faith, so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love, 18 you will be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and thus to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you will be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do far beyond all that we ask or think, 21 to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

COMMENTS:

This section follows the same structural pattern that Paul established earlier in the epistle. He began with a great hymn of thanksgiving for all of the spiritual blessings that God provided in Christ (1:3–14) and followed this by a prayer for his readers to understand their hope and inheritance in the Lord (1:15–20).

In 2:1–3:13, Paul provides a lengthy exposition on the believer’s position in Christ (2:1–10), the incorporation of Jews and Gentiles into one body, the church (2:11–22), and Paul’s personal role in revealing God’s eternal and secret plan (3:1–13).

This is followed by a prayer that the readers will understand the magnitude of God’s plan and be filled with the perfect fullness of God (3:14–19). An appropriate benediction closes the main doctrinal section of the epistle (3:20–21).

These similarities, however, should not prevent one from seeing some of the significant differences in the prayer. One devotional writer put the distinction in the following way: In the first prayer, the apostle petitions God for knowledge; and in the second, he prays for love.

The first is a prayer for revelation; the second is for enablement. It is not enough merely to know; we must be. The fruit of divine knowledge is the expression of divine life in us and through us (cf. Matt. 5:14–16).

Two significant features of this prayer should be noted. First, it has many parallels to the praise and prayer in chapter 1. In a sense, 3:14–21 could be considered a further application of the ideas developed earlier: prayer is offered to the Father (1:17 = 3:14f.); prayer is for the Spirit (1:17 = 3:16); the sphere of God’s action is in the mind (1:18) or the inner self (3:16).

There is also an aim for knowledge and fullness (1:18f. = 3:18f.); there is a linking of knowledge and power (1:19 = 3:19); and finally, praise and glory are offered to God (1:6, 12, 14 = 3:21).

Second, this prayer has a wonderful and ever-expanding progression to it. The author begins by listing three specific requests: He prays that his readers may (a) receive inner strength from the Holy Spirit (3:16), (b) experience the abiding presence of Christ in their hearts (3:17a), and (c) root and ground their lives in love (3:17b).

The author envisions two significant developments from this: first, a deeper understanding and appreciation of the extent of God’s love (3:18); second—the ultimate goal—being “filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (3:19).

3:1 and 3:14 begin with the same words, “For this reason.” I consider it one of the features of the writing of St. Paul. He is saying, “If you want to understand what I am saying now, you need to remember what I told you before.” He is frequently building a case for what is to come.

There is a play on words in the Greek which doesn’t come out as well in English in vs. 14–15. The word for father is “patros” and for family is “patria.” Paul says God, as Father, is the one from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

The meaning of the text is ambiguous and raises a number of problems: “patria” means a family, clan, or tribe that descends from a common ancestor. It cannot be translated as “fatherhood,” although the idea of fatherhood is there and has led some commentators to think of God as the prototype or archetype of all fatherhood.

The phrase whole family “pasa patria” presents a problem. Some translations use “whole family,” but to do so requires a definite article which is not used here. The ESV “every family” is the correct translation.

But now we have to deal with “from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.” Some have assumed it a reference to those alive on earth and those whose souls are in heaven, awaiting the end and the great resurrection when Jesus returns to earth.

I believe it is a reference to all created beings, both physical and spiritual. Only God is uncreated. He created everything else, the material world as well as the spiritual world: the hosts of heaven, the holy angels as well as the fallen angels led by the devil.

V. 16 brings us to the central thought of this section: “I pray that according to the wealth of his glory he will grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person (being).” Power comes from the Holy Spirit. Remember how Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8) until they received power from the Spirit.

This empowerment comes from the indwelling Christ working in us (cf. John 15:5, Gal. 2:20). Jesus doesn’t call you to pick yourselves up by your own bootstraps. He asks us to let him live in us and through us so that we might do God’s work.

He doesn’t say, “I can help you tap into some power which is hidden in you.” The power we need is God’s power from the Holy Spirit and also Christ himself living and working in us. All of this is only possible when we are rooted and grounded in love.

We need to have an understanding of how great the love of Christ is. As v. 19 tells us, “the love of Christ surpasses knowledge.” It is a lifetime project to comprehend the greatness of the love of God.

Then the closing blessing of vs. 20–21 emphasizes it even more. “Now to him who by the power that is working within us is able to do FAR BEYOND all that we ask or think.” This is not to bring us glory, but to bring glory to the church and to Christ Jesus IN ALL GENERATIONS Never sell short what God can do in you and through you.

REFLECTION QUESTION: Have you ever faced a challenge for God in your family, community, or church and told yourself, “I can’t do that.” You are telling the truth when you say that. There is so much we cannot do. However, when you dismissed the challenge you were forgetting who works in and through you: God! There is nothing God CAN’T DO! Check it out with him. Our God is without limits.