

UNLOCKING OUR SPIRITUAL BANK ACCOUNT

PART 7: EPHESIANS 3:14-21

We are going to be looking at one of the great prayers in the Bible, a relatively short prayer – Ephesians Chapter 3 beginning in v 14. In this prayer we will see Paul’s pastoral heart as he prays for the spiritual growth of the Ephesian believers.

This prayer marks a transition between the two major parts of the book of Ephesians.

Chapters 1 to 3 (what we have studied so far), is primarily theological in nature.

You know, Paul’s letters have a lot of theology in them.

The first half of Ephesians has a lot of theology which we have already looked at.

It deals with our position in Christ and all that is ours in Christ, what is in our spiritual bank account.

[This is] very important theology for us to understand. And then as we get into Chapter 4, it is more the practical application for all that theology that we have learned.

So, given who we are in Christ and all that we possess in Christ, what do we do with all that?

What is the application? That is what Chapters 4 and following will talk about.

Sandwiched in between the theology and the practical application is this prayer.

Since this is a relatively short prayer, I am going to go ahead and start by reading the whole thing and then we will look at it in detail.

READ Ephesians 3:14-21

That is the prayer. There is a lot there and we are going to look at it.

Now, what is it that Paul is praying for specifically?

He is not praying for physical healing (not in this prayer). He is not praying for relationships to be restored.

He is not praying for successful recovery from surgery or safe travel.

And there is nothing wrong with [praying for] any of that.

But there is another burden on Paul’s heart that he is lifting up before the Lord.

I mentioned that Chapters 1 to 3 deal with theology and at the beginning of Chapter 1 Paul prays that God will give these believers spiritual wisdom and insight so that they can grow in their knowledge of God.

And then he gives them all this theology. So, before he even gives them the theology, he says, *“I am praying that you all will get this.”*

And then before he gets into the practical application, he is praying this prayer – that they will be able to live it out.

What is interesting is that v 14 to 19 [is] all one sentence. Typical Paul. He has long sentences.

At the core of what he is praying for is, *“that you [the church] may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

What do you think? Is that a good thing? It sounds really good, doesn’t it?

There was a British theologian and Bible scholar from the 19th Century who had a commentary.

His name was Adam Clarke. About this verse he makes this statement: *“To be filled with God is a great thing. To be filled with the fulness of God is even greater. To be filled with ALL the fulness of God is greatest of all.”*

So, you see, Paul is not just praying for us to be filled with God but with all the fulness of God.

This is a really, really good thing!

This is NOT part of our spiritual bank account. This is something that [requires us] to make a deposit.

We have to DO something to get this. So, we start off with all of these blessings (mentioned in Ephesians Chapter 1) and this is where we are heading toward, being filled with all the fulness of God.

[At this point one class member asked what is the difference between being filled and all the fulness of God? My response was “We are going to talk about it.”]

OK, so this is something that we [Christians] strive for.

The question is, what does that [*“being filled with all the fulness of God”*] mean?

What does that really mean and how does it apply to us?

As we go through this passage those questions will get answered.

So, we go back to verse 14 and Paul begins his prayer -- *“For this reason...”* [because we are all one in Christ] Paul says, *“I bow my knees before the Father.”*

Paul is on his knees before God. Now, you can pray in any number of positions and in the Bible you have people praying standing up.

You have people praying sitting down and laying down and so forth.

But certainly, on your knees is an appropriate prayer position.

In Psalm 95:6 the psalmist says, *“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!”*

Paul is on his knees (remember that he is a prisoner in Rome when he writes this letter) and he is praying for these Ephesian believers.

He is on his knees and he is talking to God.

Paul is praying in v 15 before *“the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.”*

So, what Paul does at the very beginning – this is the pattern that Jesus taught us in the model prayer – he is acknowledging who God is.

He is acknowledging the supremacy of God above all others.

Whenever we come into God’s presence it is important that we remind ourselves of who God is. We verbalize that.

God wants us to hear us say that, to acknowledge who He is.

So, on one hand, God is our Father. There is an intimacy in our relationship with Him, right?

We are His children. But, on the other hand, let us not forget that He is the Creator of the world; the God of the universe, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, holy, loving and just. Acknowledge that He is our Father, but He is the almighty God of the universe. All powerful, right? He is above all others.

Then Paul lays out his petition on behalf of the Ephesian believers. So, Paul is not praying for himself. He is praying for these believers in Ephesus.

V 16, “that according to the riches of His glory [speaking about God] He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—” Pause right there.

As believers in Jesus Christ, by our faith in Him, God – get this – God lives is IN us!

That is an awesome thought!

In a sense my physical body is like a house.

When I got saved, Jesus moved in. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ Himself lives in me and lives in you if you are a believer.

Now, what part does He live in? Paul states it right here in v 16: *“through His Spirit in your inner being.”*

Let me explain what that is. We humans are made up of body, soul and spirit, right? Three parts make us up. The body is the physical, the outer man or woman, what we see on the outside, what we spend so much time on. The soul and spirit comprise the inner person, the inner man. The soul is defined as your mind, your will and your emotions, the mental aspect of who you are. The spirit is our God consciousness. It is our conscience. It is our intuition. The body is what people see with their eyes and then the inner person is what they do not see. The inner man is the part that relates to spiritual things and allows us to have contact with God who is Spirit. He is in spirit form.

When we got saved – way back when – God moved into our inner being.

He took up residence in me, in all the rooms of my body, soul and spirit; my mind, my will and my emotions, all the rooms of my life. God came to live in my house.

That is the picture I want you to see.

Paul prays here that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, strengthen us in our soul and spirit; that He leads us and empowers us, and encourages us; gives us wisdom and insight and – here we go, this is the key for today – CONTROLS us.

[In order for the Holy Spirit to control us we have to submit to Him. We have to allow Him have control].

Let me ask you a question. How are we saved? How were you saved? This is not a trick question. How are we saved? By our choice, by faith. By faith in Jesus, right? So, we are saved by grace through faith. OK, that is how we are saved. Well, we walk the same way, by faith, the same way we were saved. We live out our Christian life the same way we were saved in the first place, by faith. By faith in Christ. We trust that God has our best interests at heart. He wants the best for us, right? We have to trust Him. He is our Father. He loves us. We believe that God knows what He is doing. How many of you all believe God knows what He is doing? Now, I will admit – I am going to just be totally honest with you as your teacher – that sometimes what I just said is hard to do (to let HIM have control). There are times (full confession) that I want to take the steering wheel and control my own life. Am I alone? No. It is a spiritual battleground. [It is] a daily struggle to let go and give it all over to Him. One of my favorite parts in the book of Romans is this battle that Paul is having in Chapter 7 that he describes taking place in his own self: *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me [this is the Apostle Paul talking], that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out [this is Paul]. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me”* (Romans 7:18-20).

Therein lies the problem. We are sinners. Even though we are saved, we still have the sin nature in us. And, as sinners, we are prone to sin. Paul recognizes this in his own life and he is the great Apostle Paul! So, what is true for him is true for us. It was a problem for him. It is a problem for us. We must daily pray (this is me too) that God will have control of us that day. We walk day by day. [We pray] that He will guide us, that He will guard our hearts and minds and keep us from sin. We may have a certain besetting sin that [we struggle with]. There is going to be something down the road, around the next corner and you are going to be faced with it. You need to be prepared. So, each day when you get up [in the morning], you need to start off by asking God, *“Take control of my life today. I know me. I need You today.”*

In v 17 Paul continues, *“...that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”* Let me stop there for a minute. [This is in the] present tense. You ARE being rooted and grounded in love. Two analogies that Paul combines here. One is *“rooted,”* that of a tree, the roots of a tree and *“grounded,”* a foundation of a building. Those are the two pictures that Paul is painting here. So, as believers, we have been planted in the fertile soil that is the love of Jesus Christ. We have the right amount of sunlight. We have the right amount of rainfall, the perfect amount of shade. Everything that we need to flourish, we have. God has given that to us. As our roots go deeper in the knowledge of Him, we gain strength and stability in our Christian life. Our faith deepens. We grow in love. We grow in Christ. In the other analogy, we are grounded in Christ’s love. Our foundation rests on bedrock, specifically, on the Rock that is Jesus Christ. He is the One who holds us up. He is the One that supports and sustains us.

V 18 goes on to say, *“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge...”* Again, let me stop there. Paul prays that we will be able to comprehend, and not just a little bit, but to fully understand and appreciate all that is ours in Christ. These are things he has talked about before. We already know about the love of Christ, don’t we? We know what He did for us on the cross, right? That is a great place to start. The love of Christ that died to save us from our sins. We have talked about a lot of the theology that goes along with that. We He paid the ransom for our souls. He satisfied the holy wrath of God against our sin. He made our relationship right with God. He declared us as righteous. So, there is a lot that we know about the love of Christ. But there is a whole lot more for us to learn about His love than we already know. Even at our advanced age, there is a lot that we can learn. We do not know it all. We may know a lot. Praise God for what we do know. But there is more for us to learn. No matter how much we learn and will ever learn, there will always be more for us to know about the love of Christ. It is that deep. It is that amazing. We are going to get to heaven and we are we are going to say, *“Wow! I never realized that!”*

And that brings us to the phrase that I have highlighted here, which is at the core of this prayer – *“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

That is our goal. That is where we want to be – filled with all the fulness of God. I do not know all that means, but I know that I am not there yet. So, God has taken up residence in our house. But He wants to fill us completely with Him. He wants to have full control and complete access to every room in our house. He wants to fill all those rooms that make up our very being – who we are. I want you to hear this... He wants to be in the room of our finances. He wants to enter our strategy and planning room. We have the “war room” of our house where we plan it all out. He wants access to our cell phones. He wants to be involved in all areas of our life. He desires to fill, to be in every single room of our life. So, Paul prays for the Ephesian believers (and I believe for us in this room as well, all believers) that the fullness of God, His very essence and presence will fill us completely. I am not there yet – full confession again. I would like to be. That would be an awesome place to be. But it [takes] a lifetime to get there. So, Paul is not praying for some new spiritual process to take place in our lives. He is not praying for some existential mystical experience. He is not praying that we will receive more of God than we already have. When you and I got saved, the fact is we received ALL of God. The Holy Spirit came to indwell us. Paul’s prayer here is NOT that we will be able to get something we don’t have. Rather, that we will grasp what we already have. We can see from the theology we have studied before all that is ours in Christ. Paul prays that we will understand what all that means and how we can apply that in every area of our life. God already dwells in us. That is a reality for us believers. But we do not fully comprehend what that means. And that is what Paul wants us to [know]. Like I said before, we may have some understanding. We have studied our Bibles. We have a little bit of an idea. Maybe we have studied it quite a bit and have a deep knowledge of this. But we are not fully mature yet. We, yes even at our age, are still growing spiritually. We are still learning (or we should be). We are a work in progress and we will be until the day we die. So, as Paul thinks about the depth of Christ’s love for us (and he is in prison and has had a lot of time to think about this), he breaks out into praise. He beautifully wraps up his prayer like this...

“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 [present tense], to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Ephesians 3:20-21).

John Walvoord makes this observation about this. He says, *“No human or angel would ever think that Jews and Gentiles could function together in one body [the church]. But with God’s power of love in each believer’s life, Paul was confident that Jewish and Gentile believers can function and love one another. This is astounding and though it*

is not naturally possible, God is able to accomplish it. Paul therefore ascribes to God glory, which is to be [made evident] in the church, where the miracle of love will occur and in Christ Jesus who made the union of Jewish and Gentile believers possible.” Only God can do that. Only God could have made the church, comprised of Jews and Gentiles, to be one. So, the question I have as we close this out is – What in your life today seems impossible or has you worried? What is your River Jordan that you are getting ready to cross? I do not know what it is that you are up against. There may be something that is really troubling you or that you are struggling with. Just give it to God. Every day when you get up, say, “*Lord, handle [whatever it is] Your way and in in Your time.*” Remember that His time is not always our time. We want it now, right? But God’s timetable is what matters. You can pray that every day if you want. But while you are doing that and while it is still ongoing, watch what God does. I want you to observe what God does with that specific prayer [need] that you have in your life – how He begins to answer that prayer. And then, watch Him work. He may work in a different way than you think He is going to do. I will tell you right now that I cannot predict God and tell you what He is going to do. Our great God is able to do “*far more abundantly than all that we ask or think*” (Ephesians 3:20). Just think about that – MORE than we ask or think. And we ask a lot, don’t we?