

A PRAYER FOR ETERNAL IMPACT

Ephesians 3:14-21

Intro. I once had the privilege on going onboard a nuclear powered aircraft carrier for a short cruise on which children were allowed to accompany their parents. The son of the commander of the air wing had a rare disease that had crippled his body and threatened to take his life at a young age. He was tenderly carried by the captain of the ship and given a seat of honor in his chair. His dad piloted the first aircraft to be launched that day. When his plane left the deck, the pilot turned the nose straight up and began to climb out of sight. I knew that I was witnessing something pretty special when someone breathed the words—“full military launch.” This plane was not only hurtled down the deck by the cat which provided launch speed, it was hurtled skyward by full afterburners. This extra dose of power was designed for extra thrust for a jet with full armament.

I wondered that day—and I continue to wonder today—are we launching the church with full military power? Too much is at stake for us to do less. Let’s consider then Paul’s prayer for the church.

Notice that “for this reason” links this prayer to the preceding discussion of the church as the instrument through which God intended to reveal His manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms (3:10). With eternity at stake, Paul utters an impassioned prayer for the church.

1. Strengthened by the Spirit in our inner being (16)

It is not surprising that Paul would begin his petition with the issue of full empowering. This has been a concern throughout the letter. In his first prayer (1:15-23) he focused on the power available to the church. In that prayer he compared it with the power that raised Jesus from the dead. The reason for this “full military power?” Because the church is to express God’s fullness in the same manner that Jesus did during His incarnation.

Paul wants us to understand that the power available to us is unlimited—“according to His glorious riches.” The Holy Spirit has been sent to indwell us so that the church might be fully equipped to advance God’s kingdom on earth.

The empowering is experienced in the “inner man” as contrasted with the “outer man” which is destined to pass away. The inner man is the true and enduring self, which delights in the law of God, according to Rom. 7:22. The inner man is experiencing daily renewal in Christ as the outer man wastes away (2 Cor. 4:16)

There is nothing you individually or the church corporately is called to do that it is not empowered to do!

2. Fully indwelt by Christ (17)

The word “dwell” is aorist and thus the sense is that Christ would take up His abode in our hearts. We find a similar statement in John 14:23. “If a man love me, he will keep

my word: and My Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

We sometimes refer to this as the issue of Lordship. Paul is praying that they would allow Christ to enshrine Himself as Lord in their hearts. How does this occur, you might ask? When our love for Jesus causes us to obey His word above all else. Can't love what you don't know. Can't know what you don't read and study. Are you desperately and fully in love with Christ? If so you will love and obey His word. If you find yourself too often defeated spiritually, look for areas of disobedience. Repent, confess, and be restored.

3. Know the love of Christ which surpasses knowing (18-19)

Did you notice that the love of Christ is so overwhelming that it is described in four dimensions—wide, long, high, and deep. We are impressed when we can see things in 3 dimensions. But even these earthly measuring devices are inadequate to describe God's love and thus Paul declares that it “surpasses knowledge.”

How can we know something that is beyond knowing? Good question! But the answer is in the text. We cannot ignore the phrase “with all the saints.” We are foolish if we think we can know the love of Christ in isolation. It is only in community that we have the opportunity to know this love that surpasses our individual knowing.

It is like we are assembling a jig-saw puzzle when we come together as a church family. I have one piece of the picture of God's love, you have another, and you have another and so on. I know that God's love is steadfast when your parents die, you know He is faithful when your dreams die, while another can give testimony that he can take you through pain and suffering. As we gather, we place our pieces of the puzzle together enabling us to know the love of Christ.

4. That you may be filled up to fullness of God (19b)

There is simply no limit to the spiritual infilling which Paul seeks for his readers—it can only be measured by the fullness of God Himself.

This was the essence of Paul's prayer in 1:22-23. What God accomplished in the crucifixion, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ, He accomplished to enable the church to express God's fullness in the world today.

Paul speaks again of this goal in Ephesians 4:13. It occurs as each gifted member of the body does its part (4:16).

5. The Sealing Confirmation (20-21)

Has Paul prayed for too much? Is it impossible for our church to express God's fullness in the world today. No, a 1000 times no. What is your greatest dream or your boldest request for our church? It is too small for our God. He can do “exceedingly abundantly more.” You might ask how and why.

The “how” is “His power working in us.” We are the how!

The “why” is “His glory in the church and Christ Jesus” When the church receives glory it is reflected on Christ for we are His bride!

Invitation

