

# Power in the House

Ephesians 3:14-17a

July 17, 2016

This morning we're going to dig into Eph. 3:14-17. In v. 14 we'll pick up on a thought that Paul began back in v. 1 "For this reason." Two weeks ago Paul was about to pray but then began a digression in vv. 2-13. Now, in Eph. 3:14 Paul begins his prayer again, "For this reason I kneel before the Father." The reason for this prayer is all that God is doing in the Ephesian church, particularly what we learned back in chapter 2: that the church is a grace community made up of Christ-followers who formerly followed the ways of the world. And, that the church is one new humanity who have been reconciled to God and to each other through the cross of Christ.

I was originally planning to preach on vv. 14-21 this morning. But as I dug further into my study, I felt compelled to slow down and focus on just verses 14-17. That's where we need to focus today. In Eph. 3:14 Paul says, "For this reason I kneel before the Father." For Paul, as a Jew, a more usual prayer posture would have been to stand<sup>1</sup>, but here Paul kneels<sup>2</sup> expressing both his earnest concern to intercede on behalf of these beloved bros/sis in Christ and also his reverence for God.

Let's also notice that in Eph. 3:14 Paul says, "For this reason I kneel before the Father." We might have expected him to say he kneels before the King of Kings or perhaps before God Almighty. And indeed that's who our Heavenly Father is. But instead Paul refers to him here as Father. The honor Paul shows to the Heavenly Father reminds us of the culture of his time. Back then "father" was not just a term of intimacy<sup>3</sup> but also one of honor, dignity, and authority. A father is one who loves his family deeply but he is also one who is meant to be respected as the head of his home, and who can be relied upon for strength, provision, and protection.<sup>4</sup>

This is the one to whom Paul prays. Earlier in Eph. 2:18 Paul has already told us that, "...we... have access to the Father by one Spirit."<sup>5</sup>

So Paul takes God at His Word. He approaches the Heavenly Father on behalf of the Ephesian believers and prays for something... big. Very BIG. But, we're not quite there yet. Paul first reminds us of something else about our Heavenly Father in v. 15.

Eph. 3:15 goes on to explain He is the Father, "from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name." This introduces a word play in the Greek between Father "patēr" at the end of v. 14, and family "patria" in v. 15.<sup>6</sup> The word "family" is grammatically derived from the word "father." And Paul uses this play on words to make his point, our very being is derived from our Heavenly Father. We derive our name from Him. And "In ancient thought a 'name' was not just a means of distinguishing one person from another; it was particularly the means of revealing the inner being, the true nature of that person."<sup>7</sup> So, it is from our Heavenly Father that each of us derive our name; our "existence and significance depend on Him."<sup>8</sup>

It is in this context that Paul kneels before the Father. And it is with this clear understanding that He petitions God, not just because of who God is but also in light of who we are, in relationship to

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<sup>1</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 1999, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> See Ps. 95:6

<sup>3</sup> Consider Abba Father in Mk. 14:36, Rom. 8:15, and Gal. 4:6

<sup>4</sup> See O'Brien p. 255.

<sup>5</sup> And Eph. 3:12 reminded us again, "...we may approach God with freedom and confidence."

<sup>6</sup> (πατήρ) & (πατριά)

<sup>7</sup> O'Brien p. 256.

<sup>8</sup> O'Brien p. 256.

Him. God, our Heavenly Father, who is our creator and source, knows best what we need and how to deliver it to us. So, Paul brings his prayer to the One who knows us most intimately.

Paul begins Eph. 3:16, "I pray that out of his glorious riches...." Can you envision the riches of God? In my mind this would be illustrated by a HUGE vault, like you'd see in a bank. You walk in and this vault is filled with stacks of cash, piles of diamonds and jewels, file drawers filled with deeds of ownership for fancy cars, yachts, houses, and even entire islands. But this misses the point because God's riches are glorious. They go far beyond the things of this world. God has a deed of ownership for the whole planet. In fact, all the planets. He doesn't just have a star named after him, he has the deeds of ownership for all the stars. He owns the entire universe. And so, we see Paul walk into God's vault and look at the display of all He owns. And then, he reaches up on a shelf and chooses something to ask for. But, it's not for himself; it's for the Ephesian believers.

I mentioned earlier, Paul prays for something very BIG. Here it is:

In Eph. 3:16 Paul says, "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being," Now, if you are thinking, "aw man, I would have rather gotten my own star." Well, hold on just a minute. Maybe I can change your mind. In v. 16, Paul prays regarding their inner being. Our inner being is the irreducible core of who we are. You could strip away every other thing about us, everything we own, everything we do, everything that other people may think about us, and then you are left with just the raw core of YOU. And THAT'S where Paul prays for their strengthening.

Let me explain why this is so amazing; why this is such a BIG thing for Paul to pray for. You see, as human beings, we get so caught up in the outer stuff. The things that won't last. The stuff that really, I mean REALLY... doesn't matter! 2 Cor. 4:16 teaches, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." But the thing is, we do lose heart! When we focus on the outward, we lose heart because we are wasting away. This is the antithesis of the verse. And, it's the thing we need to understand if we want to grasp the ramifications of Paul's prayer.

Let's approach it this way. Throughout our week, which do we spend more time on: our outer self or our inner self? Do we spend more time on what's outward and physical or what's inward and spiritual? The older I get, the more I have to work at staying in shape. I went for a great run out on some logging trails this week with my dog Cooper. There weather was just about perfect. I broke into a good sweat and I was huffing and puffing but I ran about 4.5 miles. It felt good. And, it was good for me.

1 Tim. 4:8 admits, "For physical training is of some value..." but it then goes on to say, "... but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." No matter how far or how often I run, this present life will come to an end. Sure running may buy me a couple more years but it will have no impact on the life to come. You see, we get so caught up in this temporary stuff, the stuff that is wasting away, that we can lose track of taking care of our inner being.

1 Peter 3:3-4 also warns us, about the dangers, of having a focus on our outer self. "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

But it's hard for us to believe this. It's tough to keep a proper focus on our inner self. The outer self is the one we see in the mirror every morning. It's the one other people see as well and we want people to like us right? This is why, on an average day, the outer stuff gets so much more attention than the inner stuff. If we're honest, this is often just as true for Christ followers as for those not following Christ.

We are frail humans with fragile egos. We try to cling to our youth, to our outward beauty, and to our physical health. We tend to be so insecure. We anchor onto such weak and unreliable things. And then, when the storms of life come, we are washed away so quickly and easily. So Paul prays something BIG in v. 16. He asks that God “may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”

This is not about us learning to be strong or to drum up our own strength. This verb is in the passive tense; God is the One at work here. Paul’s prayer is not that we would be strong but rather that we would be strengthened, supernaturally through the Spirit. And so it’s a prayer request. It’s his intercession on behalf of the Ephesian believers. And, it’s how we need to pray for one another and ourselves.

In the first half of v. 17, Paul further explains God’s work in our inner being. In Eph. 3:17a he continues his prayer, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”<sup>9</sup> At first, this may sound a little innocuous. But, having Christ dwell inside of us is far from insignificant.<sup>10</sup> By heart, Paul means the center of our being: our personality, the thoughts, will, emotions, and whatever else that lie at the center of our being.<sup>11</sup> This is the very same inner being that v. 16 was talking about. Vv. 16-17 build on each other.

You see, v. 17 is talking about the Living Christ taking up residence in our hearts. The word “dwell” is a verb here “katoikeō,” and it means “to live in a locality for [a] length of time, ...reside, settle (down)”<sup>12</sup> Clearly this is not something literal. Jesus doesn’t actually live in one of the 4 chambers of our physical heart muscle. But this is something actual. Paul prays, that Christ may actually settle down in the center of our being through faith.

There is a 19<sup>th</sup> century translation of the Bible called the Weymouth NT that tries to flesh out the Greek idioms used in the Bible. It pulls these concepts together nicely for us in v. 17: “That Christ may settle down and be at home in your hearts by faith.”<sup>13</sup> Paul’s prayer here is not about our one-time salvation. Rather, his prayer is about a daily abiding relationship.

What an intriguing picture for us to meditate on. This is not just inviting Jesus into our hearts for dinner one time. It’s not just letting Him stay in the guest room of our hearts for a few nights. This is about Jesus being at home in our hearts. It’s about Him settling down there and dwelling in every part of the house. And He is there, through the Spirit, in our inner being, to strengthen us with power!

This all happens through faith. As we trust Jesus daily, He makes our hearts His home. “The implication of the apostle’s prayer, then, is that the more the Spirit empowers their lives the greater will be their transformation into the likeness of Christ...”<sup>14</sup> And so now, we see more clearly, just how BIG Paul’s prayer is. He is literally addressing the core of Christianity, how one becomes like Christ!

Our text this morning calls to mind a familiar little booklet called “*My Heart, Christ’s Home*.” It was written by a Presbyterian minister named Robert Munger back in 1954 and it still speaks powerfully today. There are copies of this booklet online for just a few dollars. Consider ordering one and reading through it this week.

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<sup>9</sup> Find a similar idea in Jn 14:23, “Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it harkens our thoughts back to Eph. 2:22 which says we are a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.

<sup>11</sup> O’Brien p. 259.

<sup>12</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 534). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>13</sup> Robert Boyd Munger, *My Heart, Christ’s Home*, 1986, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> O’Brien p. 259.

Our text also reminds me of a video illustration that I'd like to share with you. Search for the video online by The Skit Guys. It's called "God's Chisel."<sup>15</sup> As you watch it, consider what it means when we pray to become more like Jesus.

What we've talked about in this sermon is **THE STUFF OF REVIVAL!**

When we surrender ourselves in prayer to God's chisel.

When our inner being is being strengthened by His power.

When Christ becomes fully at home in our hearts.

That's when real and lasting changes occurs in our lives!

Rev. 3:20 says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." We often think of this verse as something written to people who are not yet Christians, as an offer to invite Jesus into their hearts.

But this verse is written to Christ followers in Laodicea, which is located just east of Ephesus. Very likely, these Christians had read the letter to the Ephesians. As we talked about two months ago, Ephesians was a circular letter. So, the Laodiceans were likely familiar with this idea of Christ dwelling in their heart through faith.

Let's bear this in mind as we read the verse again. This time, I'll begin with v. 19. Rev. 3:19-20 says: "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me."

***Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let's invite Christ to be at home in our hearts!***

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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<sup>15</sup> Search online for "God's Chisel" by the Skit Guys