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(Ephesians 3:14-21)

Intro. How many of you have started watching the Olympics? I love watching it & cheering our country on, but I also find a bit of satisfaction on seeing other countries I've visited do well—Australia, Canada, Bulgaria & such. When I see Olympic athletes, I'm reminded these are the cream of the crop. They aren't just good, but they are great athletes in their respective sports. When I prayed over this series, I realized there were several solid ministries our church offered, but there are also several weak areas. I want us to move from a “Good to Great Church.” I will be covering 5 issues we need to strengthen to become a great church. Today we look at “Prayer” from Ephesians 3.

Theme: Prayer

Background: This text is transitional from Paul's section on right beliefs to right behavior.

- I'm going to preach a shorter message today, because I want us to spend some time praying at the end. You may not be comfortable doing that, but it will only last a few minutes.

➤ **I want you to see 4 ways to pray:**

1. When you pray, show humility toward God the Father (3:14-15)

- Paul bowed his knees in prayer before God the Father—some will say we should always bow our knees in prayer & others will say it was a cultural thing, but we should at least show humility by bowing in our hearts (if not on our knees)

Illus: The most humble person I've ever met was Dr. Judson Vaughn, one of my professors in college. He was known for his life of prayer & would pray for every student each month. He walked around with his back & shoulders slumped & head down, almost as though he were non-existent—I believe his humble posture was a direct carry over from his private prayer life

- Showing humility before God is to recognize His sovereignty on the one hand & your insignificance on the other hand

Illus: I've been told there's a group of Oriental Christians who will not only get down on the ground when they pray, but they will carve out a small hole for their nose so they can get down further in expressing their humility

2. When you pray, seek the power of the Holy Spirit (3:16)

- Paul's prayer for the believers in Ephesus serves as a model for what we should pray for—strength in your “inner being”—your heart, the center of your soul—that the Spirit of God may strengthen you in your walk with the Lord, so that you live a life of yielded-ness to the Spirit's leadership so that He may fill you

Illus: Have you ever gotten into your vehicle & tried to start it only to find it won't turnover? It may be because you needed a new battery or a jump start—just as the battery serves as the power to start your car, the Holy Spirit empowers the life of the believer—if you don't have Him in your life, you not only don't have the power for the Christian life, but you also aren't saved—but if He indwells your life, He saves you & He can empower you as you pray & live for Him

3. When you pray, know the love of Christ (3:17-19)

- Paul uses both a farming analogy (rooted in love) & construction analogy (grounded in love) (3:17)—if Christ's love is your foundation, He can enable you to comprehend more about His great love—breadth (around the world), length (through the end of time), height (up to the heavens), depth (down to the grave)

- We should both have a mental knowledge of Christ’s love & what He did for us on the cross (3:18) & an experiential knowledge of Christ’s love, which actually surpasses understanding
 Illus: Any of us can gain a lot of knowledge about someone, especially if they are famous, but if you personally know them, it’s a different kind of knowledge, isn’t it? My wife & I know Mark Hall, the lead singer of Casting Crowns, for my wife was in his 1st youth group & we all went to college together. We even get Christmas cards from him & his family & you can know a few things about him, but when you know him, you see his humility & generosity to support so many kingdom causes—if all you ever do is mentally know about Christ’s love without experiencing His love, you really don’t know His love—but if you experience His love, you want to know more about it!

4. When you pray, expect God to answer exceedingly for His glory in the church & in Christ (3:20-21)

- Paul sees the work of the Triune God in prayer & anticipates God will actually answer His prayer, but not for his “best life now” but for God’s glory in the church & in Christ
- God is glorified through Christ’s sacrifice & the preaching of that sacrifice, but He is also to be glorified in His church

Illus: Too many times, we gather & we aren’t first & foremost asking if or how we are bringing glory to God. We may criticize a song because we don’t know it or don’t care for the tune, but that isn’t the #1 issue. We should ask, “Do these lyrics glorify God?” And then we should ask, “Is it helpful & appealing to others?” (if you are a mature Christian, you should be more concerned with reaching others—immature Christians focus on themselves)

- Notice how God can do far more abundantly than we ask or think, so He can answer your prayers!
- As we wrap up this morning, I want us to break into groups of 2-3 & I’m going to give you a few things to pray about this morning. I’ll give you a few minutes on each one, so if you are in a bigger group, you won’t have time to pray. So form your groups & here’s what you can begin to pray:
 - a. Confess your unworthiness and God’s greatness & grace**
 - b. Ask God to empower you with His Spirit in your Christian life & witness**
 - c. Request that God help you think deeply on Christ’s love & experience His love more fully**
 - d. Seek God’s glory through Christ in your life, your church & your pastoral staff. Ask God to work through you & this church in our community. Ask God to work through us as Christians in our nation & around the world through missions. If you need to respond to the life-changing message of Christ, you may come & talk to a pastor at this time.**

Conc. School’s about to start back & so you need to do some homework. If you aren’t already a part of a small prayer group, become part of one. It may be we need to restart a MOPS group or you may need to meet once a week with a few people for 30 minutes before starting your day. Maybe a few people in your SS class will want to meet at 8 or 8:30 on Sundays to pray for each other & our church. If you aren’t sure who to ask, write on the Connection Card that you would like to be connected to a prayer group.