
EPH 3:14-21 : AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER [12]

No. EE25

Last time, when we looked at v.19b dealing with our being filled to the measure of the fullness of God, we did not discuss the fact that our full inheritance in Christ will only find perfection at our resurrection. Only then will the full glory that God has prepared for His children from all eternity become a reality. No matter how well we progress in our sanctification in this life, it will always remain only a fraction of our ultimate inheritance.

Just the thought of it compels Paul (in verses 20-21) to burst forth in a lofty song of praise: "... to him be glory ... for ever and ever!"

THE GUARANTEE OF OMNIPOTENCE (3:20)

□ This song of praise is mainly a rejoicing at the wondrous omnipotence of the Lord (20). Paul is, after all, fully aware of the doubts that sometimes overwhelm us: *Will God really be able to fill us with the fullness in Christ that He has promised? Will we really be raised from the dead? Can the children of God really look forward to the glory promised by the Bible? Does God really have the power to raise a body that has been dead for a thousand years?*

Here in verse 20 the Word of God gives a very striking answer to all these vexing questions. He could hardly have put it more strongly and with more conviction.

□ The apostle describes God's omnipotence as seven layers of truth, building on each other:

What God has promised to do for us:

1. He is able to do (He has the power);
2. therefore He can do whatever we ask Him in prayer;
3. it even applies to those things we do not have the courage to ask, but only think;
4. He can do it all (Gr. *panta*)
5. and He can do even more than that (Gr. *huper*);
6. even more abundantly (Gr. *ekperissos*);
7. more abundantly by far (Gr. *huperekperissou*).¹

□ Herein lies the answer to the questions that vex us; herein lies our most wonderful consolation: The omnipotence of the Lord my God will take me to Him one day when the time for my departure from this life arrives. And when the time comes for the resurrection, He will also raise my body in glory, no matter how badly it was ravaged or destroyed at the time of my death or afterwards.

□ The apostle then continues. What he says is not just wishful thinking. God works "according to his power that is at work within us" (20b). Paul therefore reminds the Ephesians that they have experiential knowledge of this power. It is already at work within them. He does not elaborate on this statement though. He has already done so earlier in the letter, and assumes that what he teaches in chapters 1 and 2 is still fresh in the minds of his readers.

□ A comparison between this prayer and the one in chapter 1 shows that there is a marked similarity between the two.

In the earlier prayer the apostle prays that his readers may know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints. He then immediately

1. John Stott calls this last word a "super-superlative". For those who are not Greek literate, the NASB and ESV make courageous attempts at translating this sentence.

proceeds to talk about God's power - the power that He employs to our benefit (19a).

This power already came into play in Christ's life when the Father raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in heaven in a position of authority over the powers of darkness (1:20-23).

However, Paul's argument does not stop here, but is continued into the first ten verses of the next chapter. In 2:5-6 he states that what has happened to Christ has also happened to us (past tense!), although in a different sense. We also have been made alive, raised with Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly realms. And this is how Christians know the power of God through experience.

This is all very well, but what is Paul talking about? The key can be found in 2:1-3. As sinners we were dead in our sins (2:1), but were made alive when we were born again and were saved (2:5). Secondly we were under the wrath of God (2:3b), but were made alive like Christ when the Father declared that He was innocent and therefore could not stay in death under His wrath (2:6). And thirdly, we were slaves to the world (2a), the devil (2b) and the flesh (3a) - but have been placed with Christ in a position of authority in the heavenly realms (2:6).

Paul's argument in Eph 1 and 2 is therefore: you may rest assured that God has the necessary power to realise finally and fully the riches of your inheritance in Christ. After all, this power is already at work in your lives. You know the life-changing effects of regeneration, the full assurance of justification by faith, and the reality of victory over sin.

MAY THE FATHER BE GLORIFIED FOR EVER AND EVER (3:21)

□ It is inevitable: nothing but exalted praise can now follow. Exactly this is what Paul proceeds with. Let us take a closer look at Eph 3:21.

□ The words, "to him" (the Father), are accentuated by their position in the sentence.

□ The "glory" (Gr. *doksa*) that belongs to the Father is significant.

In Greek the word is closely related to the verb, *to make an evaluation*. To have glory therefore means to be someone of whom others have a high estimation, someone whom they praise and honour, someone to whom they pay homage.

The Old Testament equivalent (Hb. *kabod*) is illuminating. The primary meaning of this word is that of weight. To have glory therefore means to be someone who has weight - someone of substance, dignity, magnificence, status and majesty.

Paul's heartfelt wish is therefore that all people should be deeply aware of God's indescribable glory and majesty.

□ The words "in the church" are meaningful. It can be interpreted in two ways, both of which are probably applicable in this case.

- May the church itself experience it in this way. In other words, may each member be deeply aware of the Father's glory - His power, wisdom (3:10), mercy and love (2:4), and grace (2:5-8).

- May the outside world to an increasing extent see the glory of God reflected in the church. In other words, may the unbelievers become deeply aware of the glory of God as they observe the lives of Christians. May even the angels be overwhelmed by wonder at the rich diversity of God's wisdom when they observe the church (3:10; 1Pet 1:12).

□ The qualification "in Christ Jesus" must not be missed. It emphasises the fact that the glory and praise given to the Father is inextricably linked with Jesus Christ. Without Him and His work, there would have been no glory given to God. Christ was and still is the only channel through which the Father's glorious work flows.

The apostles never tired of emphasising this truth. Truly, the church (or the preacher) who does

not have this truth at the centre its teaching, is not proclaiming the true New Testament message.

□ Paul then proceeds on the loftiest of lofty notes. It is his passion that the Father be glorified "in all the generations of the age of the ages" (lit.). The idea is that dispensations, each consisting of dispensations, should follow each other continuously for ever and ever. The apostle grabs for words and expressions to emphasise the eternity of God and His dominion.

Forever and ever we, the church of Christ, will sing the praises of our heavenly Father. As we are carried ever higher, from one discovery to the next, our praises will rise from one crescendo to the next. We will take an inexpressible delight and joy in Him. And we will experience an ever present and predominant gratitude before Him.

"When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we've first begun." [John Newton (1725-1807): *Amazing Grace*].

□ How else can Paul close but with the word "Amen"? It is an exclamation: Truly! Certainly!

A FEW THOUGHTS OF APPLICATION

1. The Christian faith is not just a philosophy - a metaphysical *pie in the sky*.

Those of us who have received true salvation have first-hand experience of the life-changing effects of regeneration, of the boldness and security arising from our justification, of the victory over sin as a way of life. Yes, we often fail. Nevertheless, we know these realities to be predominant in our lives.

2. If then you know the working of this power of God in your life, you have every reason to be sure of *your future resurrection in glory*.

Yes, we believe and say this in faith, but death to us will not be a jump into a pitch-dark abyss. We have experienced the beginnings of God's salvation, and

we know that the hereafter will be a never-ending continuation thereof.

3. God will be and must be glorified in and through the church.

What a responsibility the church has! Let us not underestimate the importance of being part of a church. Doing your own thing in your own little corner, is not in accordance with God's ways. We are, of course, talking of a true church, a loving community of disciples who work arm in arm at knowing and serving the Lord zealously in accordance with His truth and commands.

And if there is not such a church in your town? Then you must be Christ's witness in your community. In principle there is no difference between you and the missionary in a far country. Find other followers of the Lord and plant a New Testament church. Also in your area God has to be glorified in and through a body of true disciples.

4. Take seriously your calling and rejoice in your destiny to glorify your heavenly Father forever and ever.

You say that you are a Christian? Let it then be engraved on the tablets of your heart: *to glorify God is what your whole life is about - in fact your whole eternity*. Let it be at the heart of your convictions; let it be the aim of all your endeavours; let it be the central passion of your existence!

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