

Profound Prayer

Ephesians 3:1-21

How can this study help me

In order to appreciate this part of the letter any reader needs to understand the structure. Paul has just declared that all the OT expectations of God's intervention in the world are shared by those who are not Jews by descent (2:11-22). Now Paul declares that his mission in life was to propagate this message to the Gentiles. This vision drives his prayers.

Anyone who reads these words today should come away with a sense of continuity. They experience the consequence of Paul's groundbreaking work. They should get a sense of where they fit in the overall plan of God for world history and what they can pray to perpetuate the plan of God, until all the world hears about Jesus.

The mystery that changed the world (verses 1-13)

We most often use the word "mystery" for something that can't be explained or that we can't understand. For Paul, "the mystery" (3:3, 4, 9) was what God had intended for the world's people, but only made possible through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The mystery of what God intended could now be spoken about. There was a way for Gentiles to experience the mercy of God and Paul was the spokesman for it.

- How did Paul get his understanding of "the mystery"? (3:3) How much do you think Paul understood of his life's work after his initial encounter with the Lord Jesus? (Acts 26:9-18)
- Paul's perspective on his life's work is that he was "a servant of the gospel" (3:7). Why was his life so hard when he was doing something good?
- Paul says that the mystery had other dimensions. It included "the church" and a frontal assault on evil spirits (3:10). What insights can you gain from Paul's last words to the leaders of the Ephesian church?

Profound prayer (3:14-21)

It appears like verses 2-13 were a digression prompted by the privilege of being a servant of the Gentiles. Paul returns to what he was going to say when he begins "For this reason ..." (verse 14; cf., 3:1.) Now Paul shows how profound prayer grows out of "the mystery", "the church" and "the gospel."

It is always difficult to follow the logic of Paul's prayers, because he is not arguing a point, but moved by the Spirit to speak from what we might call the heart. These verses might be called an ecstatic prayer in the Spirit.

But this much is clear Paul prays for power (to endure) and love (like that of Christ).

- As you already know, the Ephesians were in a spiritually hostile environment. What help would it be to have the strength of the Spirit or Christ dwelling in your heart? On a purely human level great tales of endurance are often attributed to an overriding vision or passion. In a battle with the supernatural world why shouldn't this be true as well?
- Paul also prays for _____ (3:18) like that of Christ. According to the rest of this letter what do we need love for? (4:2, 15,16; 5:2,25,28,33; 6:24.)

If you aren't moved to moments of ecstasy about the love of Christ, what could happen to the way you view others and your ministry?

What about us here and now

- Contrast the possible outcomes of prayer for health, prosperity, and pleasure with praying for love and courage?
- Why would God do more than we ask? Why might he do less?

So what do I do now?

- How would you pray this prayer for missionaries in a foreign culture?
- How would you pray this prayer for your friends/family in another suburban church (in Australia)?
- Can you write a prayer that develops around the twin needs of power/confidence and love for Christ Jesus.
- In a threatening spiritual environment, why is it important to know that God is more powerful than any other spiritual force? If we really believed this what would it do to your ministry?