

Paul's Second Prayer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 June 2024

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] We've been working our way for a couple months through the first half of this letter of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians. And today we'll finish up with the first half into chapter three.

We'll come back around to it in the spring time looking at chapters four to six in a lot of detail. So 2025 we'll be back in Ephesians, Lord willing.

This is Paul's second prayer. So he's already prayed once in this passage and he comes and prays again at the end of the first half. And it's, as we've seen in Paul, a very long sentence.

So verse 14 to verse 19 is all one sentence. This is the third time he's done that where in Greek it's been a lot of words without any punctuation.

We have that again. It's a powerful prayer, a very powerful prayer. We cannot do it justice this morning. We would need to go for a long time word by word to really get the depths of all that's here.

[0 : 58] So, for instance, we're not going to be able to really think hardly at all about the doxology at the very end. So we'll have to just look at verses 14 to 19 mostly and think once again, what does Paul pray for?

What does Paul pray for us? And from that we can learn what we can be praying for, how we should be praying. So let's think about that together. First, what is it that Paul's praying for here? That's the question.

Very obvious question, very important question. What is it that Paul prays for? Let's think about that. And if you look at verse 14, he says in verse 14, for this reason I bow my knees to God the Father.

And if you have a Bible, you can look back at verse one. And in verse one he said, for this reason, and then he interrupted himself to talk about his own ministry. And so now what you have here in verse 14 is him coming back to the prayer that he had started in verse one, but never prayed.

So now he's actually going to pray it. He's going to pray the prayer that we began to look at last week. And so what is it? What is he asking for? Who's he talking about in this prayer? Who is he praying for?

[2 : 04] That's one of the questions that the commentators will bring up. And there's a bit of a debate about this because of what he says here in verse 15. So it says, I pray I bow my knees before God the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.

And the reason there's a question about who exactly is Paul praying for here is because of that line, every family in heaven and on earth named by the God.

And you can't see this in English, but in Greek it looks really similar. We know, you probably know that the word father in Latin is pater, Greek patera, right?

In English we have father from fader, old English, and if you look at Italian or Spanish and German, all these different, you have Padre, you have all sorts of names, and they all, you can see, you don't have to know any other language, and you can see the word father typically and recognize it.

And that all comes from Greek, *patera*. And then right after that in verse 15, it says, from whom every patria is named. And so there's a real connection in the original language between father and family.

[3 : 18] Father and fatherhood is basically one way you could read it. And so what, it's hard to see in English, but what Paul is saying here is I'm bowing my knees before God the Father, and I'm talking about I'm praying for every single person that's part of the household of the Father.

That's really the way to translate the word. Meaning he's praying for the church in heaven and on earth, every single person that's part of the church. And that makes total sense. What's the for this reason I pray?

If you've been with us the past few weeks, you know that Paul has been saying over and over again that Jews and Gentiles because of the cross are all part of God's family. And now he's saying, and now, because God has established this family, this church that did not exist, that finds its ground, its existence in the cross, I'm going to pray for all of them.

Every single Jew, every single Gentile, that's a part of God's family that believes the Gospel. And we've said a number of weeks that this letter is a circular letter, which means that Paul meant for it to be disseminated beyond Ephesus.

So even in some of our Greek manuscripts, there is a blank where Ephesus or Ephesians is written so that a church could put in their own name. So this was meant to be shared around with everybody.

[4 : 33] And because this is God's word, because Paul is an apostle of Jesus, this is for us. He's saying, I pray for every single person in the household of faith, Jew and Gentile, wherever that church might be, meaning he's praying for you, he's praying for us.

This is Paul's prayer for the whole church all the way into 2024. And what that tells us is here, you can have what he prays for.

This is for you. What he's about to pray for is a prayer for you. It's our prayer for ourselves. And we can actually have this. And so what is it? And it's in verse 16, see it in a couple places, verse 16.

He says, I pray that the Holy Spirit would give you strength with power. He says it again down in verse 18, that you may have strength.

So here's Paul's prayer, lots of detail we could talk about, but to make it as simple as possible, Paul prays that you, if you're a believer today, a Christian, and the whole church, that you would have strength, strength and power.

[5 : 37] And he adds the little phrase in your inner being at the end of verse 16. Okay, so what is he praying for? He is praying for you. He's praying for us. We pray for ourselves. He teaches us how to pray here.

We should be praying for spiritual strength in the inner life, in the soul. If you were with us a while back, we looked at the first prayer of Paul, and I noted that it's interesting.

He doesn't have a single prayer about his circumstances. If you were here last week, you would have remembered that Paul said, I'm a prisoner under Nero. He calls himself prisoner of Christ Jesus, but Paul is in chains right at this point when he writes this, under the evil emperor Nero.

And he doesn't pray about that. He doesn't pray about his circumstances, not at all. The only thing he prays for in the book of Ephesians is for our souls, our inner lives, our inner being.

And that's just to say that, so important, I think people who are Christians, of course, know this, but more and more people who aren't are becoming more and more aware of this, that the most important thing to deal with in this life is your soul.

[6 : 40] Your inner life is so important. It's so much more important than your outer life, than your circumstances. You can have really great circumstances.

And if your inner life is a mess, it doesn't matter. You're a mess. You're not okay. You can be a celebrity. You can be so wealthy. You can have achieved everything you wanted to achieve in life.

But if your soul is a mess, none of that matters. And you can have horrible circumstances. The floor can give way beneath your feet. And if your inner soul is steady and okay, if you have strength in your soul, you're okay.

And so Paul does not pray for the outer life. He prays for the inner life. And he says that you really can have spiritual strength. That's the prayer from him for us today. And we have to think what that is.

Spiritual strength, if I could summarize it in one way in this prayer, what is it? Spiritual strength according to Paul is that you would be close with the Lord. So it's very simple.

[7 : 41] But he's just praying that you would have real communion with the living God in your life. That's spiritual strength. Communion, abiding with God. That you would actually know God's presence in your life.

That you would have communion with the living God. And he's praying this, remember, for the whole family of God, the whole household of faith, the whole church. And I think what we have to say is that the best way for us as a group, as a church family here at St. Columbus, and if you're visiting today and you're a Christian from somewhere else, the best way you and your church and us and our church and all the churches of the world can have real spiritual strength, corporately, is if we seek spiritual strength individually.

So we have to be seeking spiritual strength in our individual lives. Communion with the living God in order that we would feel that together. Okay, so, all right, that's what he prays for.

What does it mean? What is spiritual strength exactly? Let's think about that briefly. What is spiritual strength? One of my favorite passages in Paul is 1 Timothy 4-8, where he says, physical training is of some value.

All right, so Paul tells you it is not bad. It can be a good thing to go to the gym. Spiritual training is of some value, but godliness, he says, is of value in every circumstance.

[8 : 58] Now, he's talking there about physical strength and spiritual strength. And he says, we all know that it's good to be physically strong and not good to be physically weak in the sense that you can lack health.

You can be sick. You can have physical weakness or strength. And he says, and in the same way and even more important, it's a very real thing to talk about spiritual strength and spiritual weakness.

Peter says, I desire and long for all of you to drink spiritual milk and go beyond that. So he says that we, when you come to faith, you're a baby in the faith and you need to grow.

Paul is saying that it's very real to grow as a Christian, that you can have come to faith in Christ and not yet experienced spiritual strength, not yet grown, not yet been strengthened in your inner life, in your soul.

And so he tells us the way to get that is to abide with the Lord, to come near to God, to commune with God. And he talks about it in a few ways. I'm just going to highlight them very quickly. One, the first one is in verse 19.

[10 : 02] He says, my prayer is that you would have spiritual strength by what? That you would know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. Think about it.

He says that you would know the love of Christ in your life that goes beyond knowledge. That you would know something that is above knowing, that is above knowledge. And so he's talking about knowledge in two different ways there.

And he's saying, I pray that you would know that's the verb of intimacy, that you would have intimacy with God that surpasses your intellectual knowledge of God. That's what he's talking about.

Now, look, if I think about, I wonder if I asked you, why are you a Christian if you're a Christian today? One of the things I think we probably would all say for the believers in the room today is you would say, I'm a Christian because I do think that it makes rational sense.

So Christianity makes better sense of life for me than any other worldview I've ever looked at. So I like what C.S. Lewis says. He says, I believe in Christianity like I believe in the sun, not because I go out every day and stare at the sun.

[11 : 05] Don't do that. And instead, I believe in Christianity because by it, I see everything else in the world. In other words, Christianity makes so much sense for me of everything else that I see in this world.

I can't understand Christianity, sorry, the world apart from God. And that's rationality. Paul is not saying that he wants you to become so spiritually strong that you get beyond the intellect.

No. He's saying that, of course, Christianity should make sense, that it is rational, but he's saying, but his prayer for you is that you would reach a level of spiritual strength where Christianity is more than just the intellectual ascent to you.

It's more than just rational fact that you would know something that's beyond knowing, that you would have an intimacy that takes you beyond that spiritual strength.

The second thing he says here is that you would be rude at verse 17, that you would be rooted and grounded in love. That's a metaphor. Rooted and grounded, it immediately makes us think of plants, right, trees, something like that, flowers.

[12 : 07] Whose love is he hoping that you would be rooted and grounded in? He's not saying at all. I hope that you and your heart would have more and more love, more and more love for God, more and more love for people.

Of course, he wants that for us all. But he's talking about being rooted and grounded in God's love and knowing deeply, intimately, the love of God for you.

Rooted and grounded all the more in that. Let me think about it this way. I don't know if you've, probably all of you have had the experience at some point of planting a tree or something like that, a plant.

And if you get a tree, a little baby tree, and it's too tall for its width, it can't hold itself up. And so you plant it and you have to try to root it down deeper, and then you have to try to pack the soil and ground it, root it and ground it.

Because if you don't, what's going to happen to it, it's going to tilt. And so then if it does that, you've got to get a stick, and you've got to prop it, or you've got to get strings and make sure that it doesn't tilt and grow at an angle.

[13 : 13] That's the metaphor. He says, I want you and your soul, spiritual strength, to be rooted and grounded where the soil of God's love is packed down on your heart so that your roots are bedding down deeper and deeper and deeper and deeper into the dimensions of God's love.

That's spiritual strength, that you would have intimacy with God in knowing more and more of how much God loves you. Not just rational knowledge, but more than that, deeper than that, it's rooted and grounded. And then the third thing, last thing, as he says in verses 16 and 19, he says, the only way that you can have this is if the Holy Spirit gives you that strength to comprehend that love, to know that love.

He says that in verse 16, verse 19 he says that you would be filled with all the fullness of God. So that spiritual strength becomes something where the Holy Spirit so fills your heart, that you're so rooted and grounded in a consciousness of God's love that you feel the fullness of God in your life by the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now that's spiritual strength. That's what he says it is. Let's be as simple as possible. He says that his prayer for us all is that we would be constantly growing in a deep awareness that God loves us and that God's with us.

That's spiritual strength. You can know so much, you can be a theologian, you can do systematic theology, you can do it all, and that's very good. I like that stuff.

[14 : 39] And he says, but I want you to know something that's beyond knowing, and that's that God loves you more than you can ever imagine, and that God is with you in a way that you have not fully yet grasped the depths of, that you would commune with God, that you would have God's presence in your life, and that you would be aware of it.

He says that's spiritual strength. Now if you're a Christian today, Paul has been saying to us over and over again, you already have that. You already have God's love. You already have the presence of the Spirit in your life.

And his prayer is not that you would get it, you have it if you're a believer. He's saying that you would grow in the knowledge of who you already are more and more. That you would, what's the language he uses, that you would reach out and grasp it.

That you would take it, that you would own it. We'll move on to the final point, but I think one way to illustrate it would be like this. Imagine that you are utterly poor, utterly poor, and you are starving to death.

You've got no food. You don't have any resources at all. And somebody comes and fills your, fills, gives you a kitchen, a kitchen's worth of food.

[15 : 46] You know, just loads you down, fills up these cabinets, gives you a place to live, puts all this food in your cabinets, fills your fridge up with good food. You've got a microwave, you've got a cooker, you've got everything you need.

And you're starving to death. And anybody who looks at you from the outside end would say, you know, you are actually, you have truly, objectively, legally become very wealthy in food.

But you never go into the kitchen and open the fridge. You never go and open the cabinet. You know, you never go and take anything out and cook it or eat it or open the box.

And on the one hand, we could say legally, objectively, truly, you are wealthy in food. But you're not grasping it. You're not using it.

You're not taking it. You're not eating it. Now, Paul is saying to you, if you're a believer today, you are so wealthy in the riches of Christ, truly, objectively, legally, it can never be taken away from you.

[16 : 43] You're united to him forever. But he's saying, my prayer is that you would actually be grasping that and reaching for it and taking and eating and communing and reaching new depths of spiritual strength all the time, spiritual growth, spiritual strength, moving from milk to solid food.

That's the prayer that he's praying for us here. Thirdly, lastly, how can we do that? How can we grow up in that? How can we reach out and grasp it and take it? I think that the simplest way to put it in brief is to say, Paul is praying for us here that we would have the strength to stare at God's love, that we would every single day, the way to grow is to look at God's love for us, to look at God, to stare at God in a way.

I think that's what he means when he, in verse 18, he says, I want you to comprehend it, to stare at it with the eye of the heart, a deep comprehension. I want you to know it, a verb of intimacy.

I want you to really look at it and consider it and let it soak over your heart every single day. I think that's the basic way. The intimacy that comes by seeking it and looking at it and looking for communion with God every single day.

I heard this from another pastor recently, a guy in the States named Brian Haybick. He pointed out this sociological experiment that I went on YouTube this week and watched over and over again.

[18 : 07] There was a guy in the middle of the 20th century, a sociologist in the States, a psychologist that said that he could make any two people fall in love with each other. He would take, of course, he's talking about emotional, emotional affection there.

He would take a man and a woman and he would put them in a room and he would sit them basically knee to knee facing each other. They would stare in each other's eyes for four minutes.

Then he had 36 questions that they would ask each other. He said, by the end of that, there would be a deep emotional connection. Since then, that was 1950, 1960, since then, a lot of people have done this experiment with other groups, with people who are not like each other at all, that are typically against one another in the public sphere, maybe separated by political persuasion or whatever it may be.

They put them in a room together. They sent them knee to knee across from each other, nothing in between them. They say, now I want you to stare at the other person's eyes for four minutes, no talking.

Some of you would hate this beyond imagination. Most of us, I think, probably would. Actually, you can go watch this. This has been done in different places. When you see it happening, what happens is when they're staring at each other's eyes for four minutes, there are these moments of breakthrough that actually do take place.

[19 : 24] You can see it, nonverbal communication, where people who had no clue about each other all of a sudden are clearly becoming friends. You can see it in the face.

Sometimes, people will start weeping in these videos, just from staring at another person's eyes for four minutes. It's without fail. You watch every single one of them that they get up, the guys are doing this thing, side hugs.

Everybody's giving each other hugs at the end. They never talked. Then at the end, they start communicating. Sometimes though, in the videos, you'll see people who start weeping and looking away, as if they're experiencing deep shame of some kind.

You don't know what it is, but it's as if somebody is staring down into the depths of their souls and they feel that. You can see it taking place. You can see that when somebody really looks at you, even though they don't know your thought life, they don't know your inner life, it does feel as if somebody is peering into the depths of your soul and knowing you in a way that almost feels like it's beyond a boundary.

You know what the good news is, the gospel? What Paul's praying for you. He's saying that the good news is that God stares at you. He looks at you. He sees you.

[20 : 36] You watch a four minute video of somebody staring into another person's eyes and you say, it feels like they're looking into my soul. God sees all the way down to the very bottom of who you are.

God sees you and he knows you. He knows the depths of your soul to the point where the secret sins and misdeeds dark cannot be hidden from him.

He knows everything about you. And we all struggle with sin. We all have things that are hidden from other people that we think about that we know that we've done.

God knows the things that people don't know about. He knows the things that everybody knows about in our lives where your family and your friends can say of you, oh, this person, you know, I love that they're impatient.

They lack joy. They don't have peace. They suffer in all these different vices and you say, well, you know, that's just my personality. God sees the little stuff and the big stuff and here's the gospel.

[21 : 32] He sees it. He knows it and he loves you anyway. That's what makes the good news, good news. Jesus Christ goes to the cross knowing the depths of who you are, staring into the heart of your soul and he loves you right through it.

He loves you anyway. He sees you and he loves you. Now, Paul is saying when you've gotten the beauty of that, the reality of that, the depth of that love, his prayer is that you would turn around and stare back at God.

God stares at you. He sees you and he loves you anyway. Will you turn around and look at God and look at the love he asks for you and the presence of God in your life? That's the depth of communion that you can have. That's the way to grow.

Another way to express it. In the 19th century, there was an author by the name of Edwin Abbott. May have come across this book. He wrote a book called Flatland, a romance of many dimensions.

It's a laugh out loud. You pick up 19th century books. You don't expect a laugh out loud. This one will make you laugh out loud. It's about, it's actually a satire about Victorian aristocracy in the United Kingdom is the point of the book.

[22 : 41] But in the book, it's in a world where everything's in two dimensions. So the protagonist, the main character is a square and he lives on a flat plane and he can only move like this.

And a sphere comes along, a three-dimensional sphere comes along and tells the square there is a three-dimensional world. And the square doesn't know what to do with that.

He doesn't believe it. He's never seen three dimensions. He can't imagine what three dimensions could possibly be. And he says to the three-dimensional sphere, the 2D square says, you're a monster.

Be thou juggler, enchanter, dreamer, devil. No more will I endure thy mockery. Is this madness or hell these three dimensions you speak of? And the sphere says neither, it's knowledge.

You see, the two-dimensional square could never imagine that there are three dimensions. He couldn't see it. The scientists tell us that there are more than four dimensions, but we can't imagine that because we live in a three-dimensional world.

[23 : 41] Einstein said the fourth dimension is time. I don't understand all that. But the scientists tell us there are many more dimensions than that that go beyond our ability to see and grasp.

Now, what does Paul say about you staring at the love of Christ? What does he say? Verse 18, he says, I pray that you would grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ.

He puts the love of Christ in four dimensions. And four dimensions is beyond our imagination. And I think what he's trying to get us to do there is to say, do you know that God loves you in ways that you have not yet discovered?

Do you know that God loves you in ways you've yet to experience? The depth of that love, the height, the breadth, the length, the depth, it's beyond what you can measure God's love for you.

And that the more and more you'll enter into that and the more and more you'll dive into that, the more and more communion you will experience with the living God and the more and more you'll have strength.

[24 : 42] Paul's telling us we have yet to plumb the depths of God's love. As we start, as we close here, let me, I don't know all the depths of the love of Christ for us, the height, the length, the depth, the width of it.

Let me give you 25, just 25. 25 ways that I know God, that I know Jesus is for you if you're a Christian and God's love you. Christ is your sin-bearer.

He is your shalom, your peace. He is your temple, the true presence of God in your life. He is your victor over all principalities and powers. He is your elder brother, your redeemer, your covenant keeper, your healer, your crown and glory.

He is your holiness, your reconciler to the Father, your atoning sacrifice. He's the one who gives everlasting life, justification, sanctification, glorification. He removes your guilt.

He throws away your shame. He promises immortality. He is resurrection life for you and the promise of resurrection for your physical body. He is your king, your priest, your prophet, your hope.

[25 : 44] There's 25 ways. I don't know the rest. There's so many more dimensions of the way that Jesus loves us. And Paul is saying, I pray that the Holy Spirit would give you strength to dive into that and to know more and more that God's love for you is beyond your imagination.

And if you can experience that, you'll begin to grow in heart more and more in communion with Jesus Christ himself. Let me close with this.

You believe in Christ today, many of you. You're a believer. But maybe functionally, you're still living in the flat land. You're living in a two-dimensional reality instead of saying, well, there's three, four, five, there's 11 dimensions.

There's more than I can count. There's a multiverse. I don't know. And don't stay in the flat land. Stay here at the love of Christ for you, explore it in ways that you have yet to find.

Don't be a functional flat lander, I think, is what Paul's praying for us here. Pursue God this week. It could be the case that you're a Christian believing on the promises of Christ, believing that Jesus Christ died to wash away your sins.

[26 : 56] And you know that. Rationally, you know that. Intellectually, you know that. But you have yet, it could be the case that you are truly a believer, but you have yet so far in your life, Christian life, to ever have deep communion with God.

You've never taken the next step to have deeper abiding communion with the living God. And one of the things you could try this week is what Paul talks about in verse 14. He says, I bow my knee before God the Father.

You could try praying, kneeling. That's what he says he's doing. I bow my knees. So that way your physical outward posture is trying to spur along your internal posture, kneeling before the Lord.

Let me give you a picture of what this is. Blaise Pascal. Blaise Pascal was the French mathematician of the 17th century, an absolute genius of a person.

He invented one of the earliest calculators, mechanical calculators that we have. He invented the syringe. We use those quite often. He invented the hydraulic press.

[28 : 00] He is very famous for all of that, but more famous for something that's called Blaise Pascal's memorial. His memorial was a little piece of paper that he wrote one night in November in 1654, and he sewed it into his jacket pocket.

And every single time he would get a new jacket, he would rip it out and sew it into his new jacket pocket. This is what he writes. This is what happened to him. He moved from mere reason to deep abiding communion.

The year of Grace 1654, Monday, the 23rd of November, from 10 to midnight, fire, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the philosophers, not the God of the learned, certitude, certitude, feeling, joy, peace, God of Jesus Christ, forgetfulness of the world and of everything except God.

He is only found by the ways taught in the gospel, grandeur of my soul, joy, joy, joy, tears of joy. God, I left him, I fled him, I renounced him, he was crucified.

Let me never be separated from him. Complete submission to Jesus Christ. May I not forget your words. Amen. He sewed it into his jacket pocket so he would never forget the night of fire that came down into his life.

[29 : 26] Seek the face of the Lord this week. Kneel in prayer before the Lord. Seek communion with the living God. If you're a Christian, and this is the last thing I'll say, you're a Christian today, Paul says, verse 18, I pray that you would have the strength by the Holy Spirit to comprehend the love of God for you.

That means that he is assuming you don't always have that strength. He's assuming that sometimes you are weak in soul, and sometimes strong in soul. That's his prayer, that you would have the strength by the Spirit to grasp this.

That means that we've got to go forward today knowing that there are absolutely stages of the Christian life. Where sometimes we are weak in the soul, and sometimes we are strong.

That we don't tend to move from strength to strength to strength. We tend to move from strength to weakness back to strength again. And so maybe today, if you're struggling right now in weakness of soul, not feeling the presence of God in your life, stale.

Stale with your relationship with God. Stale in your relationship to your local church. Just know that Paul is saying to you, that will change. It will change.

[30 : 39] You will move back to a place of strength. And seek the face of the Lord this week. Seek communion with the living God. Know the dimensions of God's love for you.

They are never ending. Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you love us and you abide with us. And so we ask now that you would be our strength. Holy Spirit, give us the strength to seek communion with you.

That we would know the depths of the love of Christ beyond all imagination, beyond dimensions. That we would not be functional flatlanders. That we would not be mere materialists, that we would see that there is so much more than we yet know.

And we pray for this in Christ's name. Amen.