

EPHESIANS 3:14-21  
"PRAYING! PRAYING! PRAYING!"

'Power' is a word that brings all sorts of things to mind. Power is something that comes from socket on the wall, or the battery in a torch and we pay a great deal for it at present! Power = corruption; we see political figures who have power and they use that power to treat other people unjustly and so we think that power must be a bad thing; "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (Lord Acton) This is not helped by the scandal of expenses that rumbles on with our MP's, who have not acted illegally, many of them, but have done what they've done simply because they can! Power is something that most of us only dream about: other people have power and we often feel powerless, we can't change anything, we are small cogs in a very large machine and other people are turning the handle; we have our dreams and aspirations, but there are huge problems to overcome and we never seem to achieve them and so we feel weak and at times especially vulnerable and that sense of weakness and vulnerability overwhelms us; so to talk of power is only a pipe-dream for us, we think!

Power is a good thing. Power can change the world for the better. Good people with power can achieve a huge amount of good in the world. Here is Chomno, our Cambodian friend, whose organisation is called CHO; he is not a politician, but he is a Christian leader in Poipet, Cambodia who has the power to change people's lives; why? Because he can! What have you achieved in life? Lots of people would quickly answer that question by saying 'nothing' but that is hardly true of anyone. Let me ask you again; go away and think about it – what have you achieved? The answer to that question is about what you have had the power to do – the power to bring up children, the power to go to work every day, the power to help people in need, the power to be a church leader, the power to love your husband or wife, the power to be a good neighbour, the power to be like Christ. Power is not the word we usually put in these places, but it is the right word!

Ephesians 3:14-21 is Paul's second prayer for the Christians in Ephesus. His first is in chapter 1, where he gives thanks for their faith and love and prays that they might know God, know hope and know the power of God at work in them. The theme of his second prayer is power: three times word power appears in these verses as Paul prays that the Christians in Ephesus grow in their faith; twice he uses word *dunamis* from which our words dynamo and dynamite and dynamic come. This prayer is all about what these Christians can do, or might be able to do, in the power and strength which God supplies; perhaps they are people who think that have achieved nothing, or can achieve nothing or who are swamped by their circumstances, life is hard, being Church in the Roman city of Ephesus is hard, where there are so many other religious, cultural influences. For whatever reason, Paul's prayer is all about power. Let's look at it.

The first thing to say is that prayer is so often the best place for us to admit our weaknesses and our sense of need. "Prayer = helplessness + faith". When we pray, we don't need to have all the answers, we don't need to suggest solutions to God; we can simply come and express our sense of need and weakness. Paul, here, would want us to see that the God to whom we pray is able to answer our prayers and is able to help us. Even if we're not sure how to pray, feeling weak and helpless is often the time when people start out trying to pray. We don't need to get the words right, but it is enough simply to express something of that sense of need in our hearts and God will hear us and understand us and will answer our prayers. We will come back at end to say again, that God has the power, more power than we will ever know and is able to answer our prayers, whatever we ask.

**Power no.1** – “*I pray...*” (3:16f) Christians are under pressure; their faith is being tried and tested; they feel weak and some perhaps are about to give up the faith. Ephesus was one of seven churches in what is now Turkey, seven churches that feature in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation; these are churches to which Spirit brings the word of the Lord to encourage them to persevere in the faith in days when Christian faith was hard. That letter to the Ephesians in revelation 2:1-7 tells us that they have endured lots of hardships for Jesus, but they have one fault – they have lost their first love, their love for Jesus has grown cold. Under pressure, perhaps from culture around about them, they have lost their way, they have been overwhelmed by their hardships, and feel weak. Maybe this prayer is anticipating this problem and so Paul prays that God will “*strengthen...*” (v16) He prays for them to continue in their faith, not to give up that faith, but that Christ will continue to live in their hearts by faith. He longs for them not to be overwhelmed by their weaknesses, and hardships, but for the power of the Spirit to be at work in them to strengthen them and help them to persevere. Power to make Christians strong in faith and life.

**Power no.2** – “*I pray...*” (3:17b-19) Here is another kind of power; this is more about ‘being able’ to do something. But ‘being able’ here is to do something huge! Paul prays that Christians in Ephesus will be able to grasp something of the size of God’s love; he admits that it is a love that you can’t measure, but he prays that they may begin to grasp something of this love. I’m not sure how much we are meant to take the ‘dimensions’ thing seriously, but we know the children’s song that says God’s love is “so high, you can’t get over it” etc. God’s love is massive, huge, infinite, measureless and this is the love with which He has loved us. It is a love broad enough to include everyone, long enough to last forever, deep enough to touch every circumstance of our lives and for Jesus to die and high to lift us up to heaven, glory and perfect peace. We are to know this is love with which God has loved us. How does it feel to be loved? How does it feel when someone shows you that they love you? Doesn’t it feel good? We walk with a spring in our step? What Paul’s prayer is all about – “Christians, we are loved by God in this measureless way; grasp that, walk with spring in your step!”

**Power no.3** – “*Now to Him...*” (3:20f) This ‘power’ comes twice! God is **able** according to His **power**. What can God do? What does God have the power to do? JB Phillips was a Bible scholar and translator; he wrote a book called *Your God is too small*. I have to say that I’ve never read the book, but it’s title is so true of so many of us. We have too small a notion of God and what God is able to do and of God’s power. These are words that form a benediction, a closing prayer, words that close some of our services too, but these words also open our eyes to a great reality – God is able to do far more than we ask or even dream. This is the power that created the universe; this is the power that raised Jesus; this power is already at work in us, to strengthen us, help us, change us, do all the things that Jesus says He will do for us. Paul prays for Christians to be convinced that God is able to answer our prayers; he wants the Ephesians to see what God is like, how big are the love and power of God; God will not be overwhelmed by the things that overwhelm them; God is not weak and small; God is not powerless to help; God is not unconcerned; but God is able to do far more than we ask – this is our God, and we find our help and hope and strength in Him.

As we said earlier, Pentecost is all about the outpouring of the Spirit of God on the Church. The Spirit has always been at work in the world and in people of faith, but Pentecost was about the Spirit being given to every Christian. The Spirit of God lives in us and it is clear from what is written about the Spirit in other places in the New Testament that He is a Spirit of power. We’ve talked about the change to Peter as a

result of the Spirit coming on him and how he was changed from being a weak, frightened man, to become a bold, powerful preacher; the same Spirit is at work in all of us to bring the power of God to bear on our lives. God's power is at work in us by His Spirit; it is quite amazing to think that riches of the power and grace and love of God, in all that that means, are at work in us to help us follow Jesus.

□ Faith is under pressure, you can feel it begin to drift; church is not as exciting as it once was, people are making life hard for you at work and you wonder whether faith is worth the effort; you realise that faith means making hard choices and you're not sure that you're up for these choices or are able to see them through to the end. Pray for power to persevere in faith, for strength to make the right choices and to see them through to end.

□ Life is hard. You're having to deal with illness, or just feeling more and more frail. You can't do all the things you used to be able to do, or it is taking you longer to do them. You are frightened of what life will be like in the future if this is the way you feel now and these fears and that sense of weakness are beginning to dominate life and the way you see life altogether. Pray for power and strength to overcome these fears.

□ There are new challenges in life; new baby, new job, new house, new church and all have their new demands and expectations and you're wondering whether you'll be able to cope with all of them or whether you have bitten off more than you can chew; the baby doesn't sleep when it should; it is hard to get to meet the neighbours; church is a bit foreign. Pray for strength and power to meet all of these challenges, head on.

Prayer is no automatic wish-fulfilment machine; you press the right buttons, say the right words, get three lemons in a row and hit the jackpot. It doesn't work that way. But (& here is what we really need to grasp today if we are to understand Paul's prayer properly) when we pray, we come to God who has the glorious riches of power and love to pour out on us. God is able; God has power; God's love is measureless. So we pray for power and strength to persevere in faith and life; so we pray for power to grasp how big is His love; so we pray for power to overcome difficult things; so we pray for the same power to be at work in other people we know who are feeling weak and helpless. God's Spirit is already at work in us; His power is already at work to make us strong, faithful, loving people. Pray that the same Spirit will still be at work in us, will help us in ways we need help, will strengthen us when we feel weak, will help us to persevere in faith under pressure, will help us overcome our fears. God is able to do all of this and far, far more; the tragedy is that, so often we don't know, we don't see, we don't grasp, we don't pray; so we're weak, overwhelmed, overcome. Pray for power.