



St. Paul Evangelical Community Church (SPECC)

Worship Address : Cerritos High School Auditorium
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October 4, 2009

Theme: Praying for Pleasure

Text: Ephesians 3:14-21

The sermon title for this week may seem a little strange. In fact, some may wonder whether a message with this title can be Biblical. We don't usually think of prayer and pleasure at the same time. But as we study our passage for today, we'll see that God desires for us to have deep, deep pleasure in Him.

I want to introduce four truths about prayer before we come to our passage for today.

(1) First, prayer isn't for sissies. Prayer is a spiritual discipline like running is a physical discipline. Only the spiritually strong can stay at it. When you sit down to pray, you can bet that a thousand things which absolutely must be done, will call out for your attention. If we let them, they will call us away from the discipline of prayer.

(2) Sometimes younger people have a certain image that mostly older people pray. "I'm young," they say, "and too busy to pray." It is true that older people should pray, but middle-aged and young people should pray also. If a person doesn't establish the discipline of prayer when they are young, it is not likely that they will engage in the discipline of prayer as they grow older.

(3) Third I don't want us to rush to verse 21 of this passage. You may have heard these words spoken in connection with prayer before, "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine..." Pastors and believers in general like to use that verse to teach that our prayers are too small. It is true that our prayers are sometimes too small. But Paul is writing about something very specific in this context. He prays that believers might be filled with God's power and love.

(4) Finally, the title of the message for this morning is "Praying for Pleasure." This means that the subject for today will involve what John Piper has called, "Christian Hedonism." "Hedonism" is a philosophical word that describes people who live to seek pleasure wherever they may find it. It is not necessarily a bad thing. It is the kind of pleasure that a person might seek that could make the pursuit of pleasure a destructive thing. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is about receiving the power and love of God. There is pleasure in that pursuit. Christian hedonism is a good thing.

Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." Paul's prayer for the Ephesian Church is that they might delight themselves in the power and love of God. Paul's first request is that the Ephesians be strengthened with the power of God's Spirit out of his glorious riches. The phrase, "glorious riches," gives us a



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clue that there can be pleasure in prayer. Paul says elsewhere that the Spirit is God's spiritual down-payment of the blessing of everlasting life. The Holy Spirit is a foretaste of heaven. The pleasure of heaven will be far greater than any pleasure that we can imagine, and the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of that. Related to this request is another request that Christ might dwell in our hearts by faith. This does not mean that Christ does not already live there. It means that Paul's desire is that Christ would live in our hearts in such a way that he would make His presence known to us.

Paul's next request is that we would have the power to grasp the love of Christ which far surpasses knowledge. As Paul makes this request in verses 17b-19a, we get a sense that the love of Christ is so far beyond human knowledge that Paul cannot even find words to describe it. His desire is that Christ's love would be the foundation of our lives. Paul writes that we can't even grasp what God's love is like without God's power. In the New Testament, Christ's love is not an abstract idea. It is action and power. We know about the greatness of Christ's love because of his sacrifice of himself at the cross. We experience Christ's love through the Holy Spirit who has been poured out in our hearts.

Paul's final request is that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Paul has the boldness to pray that the power and the presence and the glory of God would fill our hearts. When that happens to the believer, the result is pure pleasure. So believers are Christians who are hedonists. We are people who pursue pleasure in God. This is a powerful prayer. But Paul ends it with a doxology that is mind-boggling. He writes that God is able and willing to do this more than our minds can even imagine. God listens to our prayers—especially to our prayers to be filled with His power and love. So, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart."