

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians

Ephesians 3:14-21

Ephesians 3:14-21 – *“For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all ages, forever and ever. Amen.”

Background Notes

We come now to the last section of the doctrinal portion of the wonderful book of Ephesians. Chapters 4-6 contain practical exhortations to believers based on the first three chapters, the doctrinal portion of the letter. Notice that the three chapters of doctrine begin with a doxology and end with a doxology. Ephesians 1:3 is the doxology at the beginning the doctrinal section, and 3:20-21 is the doxology at the end of the doctrinal section of Ephesians.

Great doctrinal truth is revealed between these two doxologies. We have the great truth and theme of the book that all believers, Jew and Gentile, are one in Christ forever. We have the wonderful truths that we are the Temple of the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ. He is the head, we are His body, and we will enhance His glory forever. What wonderful truth we learn in the first three chapters of Ephesians!

In this last section of Ephesians 3 is a prayer for believers, that they would be spiritually strengthened for participating in God's eternal program and purpose. Remember, this is not just Paul's prayer for the Ephesian believers - it's God's word to us as well.

Doctrinal Point

Believers are capable of being spiritually strengthened.

Remember that our doctrinal point for the first prayer in chapter 1 was that believers are capable of being spiritually *enlightened*. Here, the focus of the second prayer is that we would be spiritual strengthened. Verse 16: *“to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.”*

a. **The source of spiritual strengthening** (v14-16). The source of our spiritual strength and strengthening is obviously God. Verse 15 says that every family or kind or order in Heaven and on earth is subordinate to God. Everything finds its source in God, and it's from Him that the whole family in Heaven and earth is named. In verse 15 the supremacy of the fatherhood of God is emphasized, and this emphasizes the amazing magnitude of the resources that are available for our spiritual strengthening.

Notice that these resources are according to "*the riches of His glory*" (v16). Our heavenly Father is not only supreme in power and authority, but in wealth as well. All this spiritual power and spiritual wealth is available for our spiritual strengthening!

Here's the great point: we are capable of being spiritually strengthened in the "*inner man*." What's the "*inner man*?" The "*inner man*" is our inner being - the spiritual part of us that is now alive in Christ. You see, we were once spiritually dead, but now we are spiritually alive. We are born again; we have divine life. The Holy Spirit indwells us, and He enables, empowers, and strengthens our inner being. God the Father, through His Spirit, is the source of spiritual strengthening.

b. **The results of spiritual strengthening** (v17-21). These verses can be looked on as additional requests in the prayer, but they all depend on the spiritual strengthening of verse 16. These verses give us seven results of spiritual strengthening.

1. *Greater fellowship* - "*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith*" (v17). The idea here is not salvation, it is fellowship with Christ - *that Christ may dwell in your hearts*. Does Christ dwell in your heart? What is the center and focus of your heart? Your job? Your career? Some hobby or sport? Or let me put it another way: Is Christ at home in your life? Are you in fellowship with Him in every area of your life? Can you take Jesus with you wherever you go, at all times? The result of spiritual strengthening is greater fellowship with the Lord himself.

2. *Greater love* - "*that you, being rooted and grounded in love*" (v17). Notice what it *doesn't* say. It doesn't say "rooted and grounded in truth." Truth is very important, but it's understood that we are rooted and grounded in the truth. The result of spiritual strengthening is that you would be rooted and grounded in love. There are a lot of Christians who are rooted and grounded in truth, but they're not characterized by love. Being characterized by love is a sign of spiritual strength.

3. *Greater comprehension* - *that you "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height"* (v18). Of what? There's no object given here. Because of the context, it's most likely God's love.

- What is the breadth of God's love? The world. John 3:16 says: "*For God so loved the world...*"
- What is the length of God's love? Forever. 1 Corinthians 13:8 says, "*Love never fails.*"

- What is the depth of God's love? The cross. Philippians 2:8 says that the Lord Jesus left heaven's glory, took on humanity, went to the place of death, even death on the cross. - What is the height of God's love? Heaven. Read 1 John 1 & 2. Because of God's great love, we are His children - and we will be His children in heaven forever.

4. *Greater knowledge* - "*To know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge*" (v19). How can we know something that *passes knowledge*? Sounds like a paradox, right? But the point is that the love of Christ transcends our minds, and it is exhaustless. We can never know the love of God just with head knowledge. It's the matter of the heart - it must be experienced. Have you been spiritually strengthened to the point where you know the love of Christ in this way - by experience? Or do you just know the facts about God's love?

5. *Greater filling* - "*that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*" (v19). Being filled with all the fullness of God does not mean that we will become God. The "fullness of deity" dwelled in our Lord Jesus alone (Colossians 2:9). The idea here is that we would be filled with all the spiritual resources available to us from God.

Think of an ocean made up of the "fullness of God," meaning all of God's resources. Suppose we dip a glass into the ocean and fill the glass to the brim. The glass is filled with the ocean - but the full ocean is not in the glass! Do you see the illustration? To be spiritually strengthened is to be filled to the brim with the fullness of God.

6. *Greater power* - "*Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*" (v20). Verses 20 and 21 form the doxology at the end of the prayer. In this doxology we see two further results of spiritual strengthening – greater power and greater praise. When we get to heaven, I'm sure we are going to be amazed at the power and resources of God that were available to us, but we lost out on them because we didn't practice the truth of this verse.

Notice the amazing superlative here: "*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think!*" We need to think bigger; we need to pray bigger; we need to take bigger steps of faith. Not blind leaps into the dark, but greater, bigger steps of faith and trust. Our God is a big God. Spiritual resources are there. The power is available. For example, I'm totally amazed at what God is doing now through our website. To think that Talks and Devotions and biblical truth is going out around the world! Anybody with a computer -anywhere in the world - can download it! I only wish that I had greater faith. Brothers and sisters, we need to think bigger steps of faith.

7. *Greater praise* - "*To Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all ages, forever and ever. Amen*" (v21). As we are spiritually strengthened, we will praise the Lord more for His great and glorious eternal program and purpose, which we the Church, the Body of Christ, are part of forever.

So, we have seven results of spiritual strengthening here in the second half of chapter 3. Believers are capable of spiritual strengthening!

Practical Application

Are you a spiritually strengthened Christian - or are you still a weak Christian? We're not talking here about how much Bible knowledge you have, or how courageous a Christian you are, or how well you can defend the faith. These qualities are certainly good and they are evidence of a strong faith, but to be spiritually strengthened is the subject here. You can be a spiritual Christian from the day of your conversion, but you can't be a spiritually strengthened Christian at the day of your conversion. You must grow in Christ and be spiritually strengthened to become a mature believer.

To see if you're a spiritually strengthened Christian or still a weak Christian, go through the results that we have here in this prayer. Use them as a checklist. Greater fellowship, greater love, greater comprehension, greater knowledge, greater filling, greater power, and greater praise – do these things characterize your life? It's a good question for all of us. Are we spiritually strengthened Christians - or are we still weak Christians?