

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

### PAUL'S SECOND PRAYER TO THE EPHESIANS

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

#### **Introduction**

We briefly explored the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3 last week and in this study, we will go into details of his prayer to get the revelation of what Paul was asking the Father on behalf of the church then and now. Having explored verses 14 and 15 last week, we commence from verse 16.

#### **God's Resources**

*"... that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man" (v16)*

Notice the basis of Paul's confidence in God's ability to answer prayer abundantly -- God's "glorious riches or riches of His glory" -- fabulous wealth, unfathomable resources, unimaginable riches, and the power they create. You can see this theme in several of Paul's letters. So often we pray weak, flabby requests based on our own lack of faith, prayers that arise from our own spiritual poverty. Rather, we must learn to pray based on our belief in God's inexhaustible supply. When we can see God's riches in our mind's eye, our faith can rise to the occasion without worrying how God will ever be able to answer our prayer.

#### **Strengthening the Inner Man**

Paul asked that they would be strengthened with might, and that the strength would be according to the riches of His glory (a most generous measure). He also prayed that the strength would come through the Holy Spirit and that it would be put into their inner man. There is an inner man just as real as our physical body. We all understand the importance of strength in our physical body, but many are exceedingly weak in the inner man.

What constitutes our inner man?

*"... to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may  dwell  in your hearts through faith..." (vv16b-17a)*

Paul asked that Jesus live in these believers, even as Jesus promised in John 14:23: *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."*

Two ancient Greek words convey the idea "to live in." One has the idea of living in a place as a stranger, and the other has the idea of settling down in a place to make it your permanent home. Dwell uses the ancient Greek word for a permanent home. Jesus wants to settle down in your heart, not just visit as a stranger. The glory of the indwelling Jesus is something for us to know, and to know by faith. It is there for us but must be taken hold of through faith. You have your Bible, and you have your knees; use them.

The Spirit's inner strengthening is the same thing as Christ dwelling in their hearts; these are two parallel ways of expressing the same truth.

How can your inner man be strengthened?

#### **The Process of Sanctification**

Does this mean that Paul is praying for the salvation of the Ephesian saints? No. He is assured of their salvation (Ephesians 1:15). He is praying that the Spirit might permeate their whole being, through and

through. It is possible to be a "carnal Christian" (KJV, 1 Corinthians 3:1) and still be a genuine Christian. But the Spirit has a long way to go to form Christ in our character and train us to follow him. Paul is praying for more, that the work of Christ in us might continue and deepen and grow in us.

Many of us have selfishness hidden even to ourselves. As Christ's Spirit permeates our entire being, we gradually become more and more surrendered to him, every closet and room, every drawer and chest (of our hearts) -- and we become more and more filled with a knowledge of him, that is, we come to know him better and better.

### **Spirit-filled Christians**

Certain groups of Christians refer to themselves as "Spirit-filled." By this they mean, perhaps, that they have had a Pentecostal experience. Praise God for a Pentecost-like experience of the God of the supernatural! We know first-hand how wonderful and faith-expanding that can be. But, dear friends, "Spirit-filled" can be a deceptive and somewhat prideful jargon phrase. By definition all Christians have the Spirit (Romans 8:9b). Remaining filled with the Spirit requires a day-by-day surrender to God, a dealing with and giving up of sins that the Spirit reveals and being stretched by God to open more and to receive more of his infinite Being. Dear friends, may we all be truly "Spirit-filled," not as a mark of distinction from "lesser Christians" or "carnal Christians", but as a description of the Spirit's gracious and present work in our lives.

### **Rooted and Grounded in Love**

*"... that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge..." (vv17b-19a)*

Paul asked that all this would take place as they were rooted and grounded in love. The meaning seems to be that they should be rooted and grounded in their love for one another and be rooted and grounded in their love for God.

Remember, we're driving towards one of Paul's petitions in verses 18-19a that we will fully comprehend Christ's love. Paul has recently heard of the Ephesians' "love for all the saints" (Ephesians 1:15b), so they are not without love. But that practice of love must be deepened. He is asking in verse 17b that the Ephesians might be "rooted and grounded in love," that is, that love might more and more underlie their way of life. Only if we know the experience of loving hard-to-love people, can we truly comprehend the ins and outs of Christ's immense love. (Note: If you are avoiding church to avoid some hard-to-love people, perhaps you are seriously short-circuiting God's plan for your spiritual growth!)

### **Why should we be rooted and grounded in love?**

#### **1. To Comprehend the Love that Surpasses Knowledge**

*"... to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge"*

Paul prays for the power to grasp, the ability to comprehend the incomprehensible. How can Christ love those who are His enemies? How can God send his only begotten Son into a den of serpents to redeem them? To the natural mind it doesn't make sense. It is truly mind-blowing. Paul acknowledges this with the phrase "love that surpasses knowledge" (Ephesians 3:19a). "Surpasses" (NIV, ESV, NRSV), "passeth" (KJV) translate a verb that means, "to attain a degree that extraordinarily exceeds a point on a scale of extent, go beyond, surpass, outdo."

But Paul doesn't just pray that we might "get it." He prays that we might grasp the full scope of his love – width, length, height, and depth. Wow! Have I achieved this? Hmm, perhaps, maybe... I don't think so. Have you achieved this?

Father, fulfil Paul's prayer in my own heart!

## 2. *Filled with God*

*"... that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." (v19b)*

He doesn't want the believers to be half-filled but filled completely. The term "fullness" that we saw in Ephesians 1:23 suggests "sum total, fullness, even (super)abundance." Paul prays for the Ephesian Christians to be filled with "all the fullness of God." This is such a bold expression of prayer.

What does it mean to be "filled with all the fullness of God"?

If you and I want to be filled with all of the fullness of God, that requires Christ's access to and welcome in every area of our lives, no matter how much pain his entrance into these private places might entail. He must have all of us if he is to fill us completely. You can only be filled in the place of total surrender to the Lord.

What kind of life-pain or issues or struggle can be unveiled if Jesus is allowed to walk through all parts of your life that God might fill you fully?

### **A glorious doxology.**

*"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 generations, forever and ever. Amen." (vv20-21)*

As Paul came to this great height (what can there be higher than the fullness of God?), it is logical to ask how this can ever be. How can something so far above us ever become reality? It can only happen because God is able to do far beyond what we ask or think. This doxology does not only belong to the prayer that precedes it, but also to every glorious privilege and blessing spoken of in the first three chapters.

Who is able to bring such things to pass? Only God can do this because He can do far beyond our ability to think or ask.

Notice that the limiting factor is not what we can ask or imagine. The limiting factor is the power that is working in us. Whose power? God's power! Remember in Paul's first prayer for the Ephesians (Ephesians 1:19), the eyes of our hearts were to be opened to "his incomparably great power."

There is no limit to God's power. Our ability to comprehend God's power and desire to bless is surely limited, thus limiting the scope of our prayers. But God's power is infinite, limitless.

How can we feel so powerless when the unbounded power of God is ready to work through us?

The great saints of history could work miracles because their faith was unfettered by the unbelief fostered by a tradition of "excuse-ourselves" theology. Can you see why Paul prays that the "eyes of our hearts" be opened? When the blinders come off, the power can be released.

The only fitting response to this great God is to give Him glory – especially in the church, the company of His redeemed, and that He receive that glory throughout all ages, world without end – Amen!

When the church understands and walks in God's eternal purpose, God will be glorified, and the church will fulfil its important duty of simply glorifying God.