

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: [www.churchredeemeraz.org](http://www.churchredeemeraz.org)

Series: The Church  
Number: 18  
Text: Ephesians 3:14-21  
Date: October 9, 2011 (A.M.)

Pastor/Teacher  
Gary L. W. Johnson

## SPIRITUAL STRENGTH: A CATALOGUE OF GREAT THINGS FOR CHRIST'S CHURCH

**H**ow did you learn to pray? Perhaps you were raised in a Christian family and regularly attended church. You would have heard people pray (maybe even in King James English) all the time. Or perhaps you were converted out of a pagan background and prayer was something you were rarely exposed to – so that when you did come to faith in Christ, your first exposure to prayer may have been something like “Lord, I just want to thank you for being here.” We really do learn to pray by listening to those around us. This can be a good thing, but it also can be something that is not so good. If we are associated with godly Christians who pray out of a deep knowledge of the Scriptures, we will learn to pray accordingly. If, on the other hand, our associations are with people who pray glibly, using platitudes and clichés, our prayer will probably travel down the same path. How do we go about reforming our prayer? By turning our attention to the prayers of the Bible. D.A. Carson writes, “If every part of our lives is to be renewed and reformed by the Word of God, how much more should that be so of our praying? If our generation does not cast up many prayer warriors whose habits in prayer accurately reflect the standards of Scripture, it is all the more urgent that we return to the primary source. Then we shall learn afresh what to pray for, what arguments to use, what themes on which to focus, what passion is seemly, how these prayers fit into a larger Christian vision, how to maintain the centrality of God himself in our praying.”<sup>1</sup> This prayer concludes what is properly called the “doctrinal section” of the Epistle – what a conclusion! Apart from John 17, it is my opinion that this is the greatest and most glorious prayer recorded in Scripture. Its resemblance to 1:15-23 should not go unnoticed.

REVIEW: The opening words to v. 14, FOR THIS CAUSE, are resumptive of the same words in 3:1 and refer to the great privileges set forth in the latter part of ch. 2. This in turn brought the Apostle to his knees in prayer.

### STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS vv. 14-21

This one section may be broken into three separate parts. There is but one petition, yet many consequences which will result.

1. THE PRAYER ADDRESSED TO THE FATHER (vv. 14, 15) “...from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.” The English text does not bring out Paul’s play on words here – “father (*PATERA*) and “family” (*PATRIA* – denotes a group united by common descent from one source). What is being said here has to do with the relationship which men and angels have with God. He is the source of all blessing, “...out of His glorious reaches” (cf. 1:6, 7).
2. THE PETITION REQUESTED FOR THE SAINTS (vv. 17-19) “...that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” That is a specific request; it is preceded by the means by which it is attained, to which we will direct our attention.
3. THANKSGIVING AND DOXOLOGY TO GOD (vv. 20-21). By this Paul in effect declares that everything in our lives and in our prayers should be for the glory of God. Having surveyed the whole, we now want to examine the central thing for which Paul prays, or, rather, the means by which the fullness of God may be attained, i.e., Spiritual Strength. What is it and how do you get it?

## I. THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

- A. What is meant by “spiritual”? It is not physical, or communicated through a physical or an earthly source; it refers to that which is directly related to the Holy Spirit.
- B. Where does it occur? “...in your inner being” or, as the KJV reads, “...the inner man”; that is, the spiritual man, the new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). Why do we need this? Lloyd-Jones explains: “How then does this weakness of the inner man show itself? First of all, in a spiritual sense the mind needs to be strengthened. This is so because we are assailed by doubts. Some of the greatest saints have reported that they were assailed by doubts even at the end of their lives. They have not believed the doubts, but the doubts have presented themselves and have troubled them for awhile. Then there is the problem of depression. Depression is very difficult to define. You may wake up in the morning and find your mind in a depressed condition. The mind that may have been working perfectly yesterday does not seem to be functioning happily today. We are conscious of a kind of dullness and slowness and inability to think clearly. The mind seems to need to be strengthened. Or we may be troubled by evil thoughts that come and attack the mind. They seem to be thrown at us. Paul talks later in chapter 6 about ‘the fiery darts of the wicked one’. The devil hurls them into the mind. They start when you wake up in the morning before you have had time to think. So the mind needs to be strengthened. Another problem is that of wandering thoughts. We all experience this. You find that you can read light literature or a newspaper with no difficulty in respect of concentration. But when you try to read the Bible, your mind seems to wander in all directions and you cannot concentrate. You are looking at words, you are reading the verses, but your mind seems to be elsewhere. We need to be strengthened in the mind also because of the nature of Christian truth. While the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is in one sense gloriously simple, it is also true to say that it is the profoundest truth in the world. This Epistle to the Ephesians is not simple. You cannot understand it in a casual manner and without effort. You cannot gallop through it. There is profound truth here and subtle argumentation. There are ‘immensities and infinities’, to quote Thomas Carlyle. You cannot take these things *at a run*.”<sup>2</sup>

## II. THE SOURCE OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

- A. How is it described? It results in and is in actuality identical with the abiding of Christ in the Heart – not the reception of Christ, but the abiding (*KATOIKESAI* – to dwell, to live in, to settle down. The verb denotes the permanent habitation as opposed to sojourning or an occasional visit). Therefore, spiritual strength has its source in the abiding presence of Christ in the heart (cf. John 15:5). The Holy Spirit is the means by which Christ indwells (cf. (John 14:16-18). Christ Jesus is the ONLY source of strength for the believer (Phil. 4:13). It is by means of the Holy Spirit that HE strengthens the believer. “Paul speaks of this in 2 Corinthians 4:16-“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” The Holy Spirit orchestrates the endowment of the strength, which is freely given to us according to the scale of his riches. We are renewed and empowered for life, and we grow stronger and stronger even while our bodies grow old. We are frail containers pulsating with divine power! In this way we become full of Christ. He “dwells in [our] hearts through faith.” This is a beautiful upward spiral: Our capacity is strengthened according to his riches so we can appropriate more of his life; his life thus fills us and thus enlarges our capacity so we can hold more of him within. And so it goes onward and upward with Christ.”<sup>3</sup>
- B. How is this accomplished? OBJECTIVELY, it is by the Holy Spirit that Christ indwells, but SUBJECTIVELY, it is “through faith,” or lit. “by means of the faith” – the stress is on continuance. Christ is there, but when faith fails or grows weak, so do the signs or evidences of Christ’s presence (cf. Jude 20).

## III. THE DEMONSTRATION OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

- A. How does it exhibit itself? Many today point to fantastic demonstrations of miracles or the like – how astonishing that Paul says nothing of the sort! (comp. also Col. 1:11). It is rather in the

evidence of love and knowledge which the believer is to be “rooted (*ERRIZOMENOI*, perfect passive participle, to cause to take root, to become firmly rooted or fixed. The perfect tense points to the continual state) and established (*TETHEMELIOMENOI*, perfect passive participle, to lay a foundation, to be firmly established, note again the perfect tense), that you may have power (*EXISCHUSETE*, to be fully able, capable, to be strong enough. The preposition in compound is perfective and indicates a strength exerted till its object is attained).” What is the purpose of this power? “...to grasp (*KATALABESTHAI*, to comprehend mentally) ... and to know this love.” NOTICE how this love is described: wide – long – high – deep. How could this ever be comprehended? ! “...it surpasses knowledge,” and yet Paul prays for this very thing! – “The knowledge – surpassing love of Christ.”

B. What does it produce? The Spiritual strengthening enlarges our spiritual understanding – and that by love! Love apprehends knowledge, for this is no mere head knowledge (it includes that): it is a deep felt heart knowledge (comp. 1:18).

#### IV. THE GOAL OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

Remember this petition is directed to the Sovereign Father and rests upon Him in its granting, and we are not to know these things simply for the sake of knowing; we are to know so that we “may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” I personally don’t know how to explain what is involved here – it is too mind-boggling! It is like trying to describe Mt. Everest to someone who has never seen anything bigger than some Kansas hill. Perhaps the best explanation is I John 3:1-3, but to all those who have trusted In the Gospel, the process has begun, and it WILL be completed.

CONCLUSION: The apostle closes his prayer with the words, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably (*HUPEREKPERISSOU*, superabundantly, quite beyond all measure. The form is used as the highest form of comparison imaginable) more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that IS at work within us.” Is it any wonder that he concludes with the words, “...to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen.” Knowledge of all spiritual truth is to produce holiness. Love expands the intellect. Love apprehends love. When our hearts are Christ-filled, we will experience spiritual strengthening and be able to know something of the great love of Jesus Christ; and in knowing this love, we will be filled with the fullness of God – as much as we are able in this life. Then may this be our constant desire. The great medieval theologian Anselm expressed in these famous words, “Let me seek thee in longing, let me long for thee in seeking; let me find thee in love, and love thee in finding)”

#### ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (IVP, 1992) p. 182

<sup>2</sup> D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3:1 to 21* (Baker Book 1979) p. 137

<sup>3</sup> Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Crossway Books, 1990) p. 115