

The Book of Ephesians

Lesson 6: Paul's Prayer for the Church's Strength -- Ephesians 3:14-21

There is a tender detail at the start of this passage that is easy to read past. Paul says, for this reason I bow my knees before the Father. In his world, the customary posture for prayer was to stand. To bow the knees, to kneel, was reserved for moments of unusual intensity, when the heart could not hold itself upright. Paul is on his knees. Before he asks for anything, he kneels, and that posture tells us how deeply he longs for what he is about to request.

And what does this great theologian, this planter of churches, this prisoner of Rome, ask for on behalf of ordinary believers? Not more comfort. Not relief from hardship. He prays that they would be strong, but the strength he asks for is the strangest kind. He prays for inner strength, in the hidden person of the heart, strength supplied by the Spirit, so that Christ might settle down and be at home in them, and so that they might begin to grasp a love that is too large to grasp.

Notice how the whole Trinity moves through this prayer like a single current. Paul kneels before the Father, asks for strength through the Spirit, so that the Son may dwell in their hearts. This is not abstract doctrine; it is the living God, Father, Son, and Spirit, at work in the interior of an ordinary Christian life. Paul wants these believers to be filled, rooted, grounded, strengthened, and at last filled up with all the fullness of God.

Then the prayer overflows its banks into one of the most soaring sentences in the Bible. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations. Paul runs out of words trying to describe how much God can do, and finally he just lifts his hands in praise. He wants us to know that the God we pray to is never the limiting factor. The limit is in our small asking, never in His great supply.

Group Discussion: Paul prays not for easier circumstances but for inner strength, the indwelling of Christ, and a deeper grasp of God's love. Why do you think Paul prays for these inner realities first, and how might our own prayers change if we prayed more the way Paul prays here?

Personal Reflection: Paul kneels and asks God to strengthen the hidden person of the heart. What is the actual condition of your inner life right now, and where do you most need God to strengthen you from the inside out?

Read Ephesians 3:14-21

Study Questions

1. In verses 14 and 15 Paul bows his knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named. What do Paul's posture and his way of addressing God reveal about how we should approach God in prayer?
2. Paul kneels in earnest, longing prayer for others. How would you describe the current state of your own prayer life, and what would it look like to pray with more of the earnestness Paul shows here?
3. In verse 16 Paul prays that God would strengthen them with power through His Spirit in their inner being. What kind of strength is Paul asking for, and why does he aim it at the inner being rather than at outward circumstances?
4. Paul prays for strength in the hidden, inner person. In what area of your inner life, your fears, habits, or weariness, do you most need God's strengthening power right now?
5. Verse 17 says the goal of this strengthening is that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. What does it mean for Christ to dwell, or settle down and be at home, in a believer's heart, and how does that happen through faith?
6. If Christ is to be at home in your heart, there may be rooms you have kept closed to Him. What part of your life have you not yet opened to Christ, and what would it look like to welcome Him there?
7. In verses 17 through 19 Paul prays that they would be rooted and grounded in love and able to comprehend the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. What does it mean to know a love that is beyond knowing, and why does Paul want them rooted in it?
8. Paul wants believers anchored in the love of Christ. How does being secure in Christ's love actually change the way a person lives, and where do you tend to look for love and security apart from Him?
9. Verse 19 prays that you may be filled with all the fullness of God, and verses 20 and 21 give glory to God in the church and in Christ Jesus. What does it mean to be filled with all the fullness of God, what does it not mean, and what does it tell us that God is glorified in the church throughout all generations?
10. Verses 20 and 21 say God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us. Looking back over this whole prayer, name one specific way the Lord is forming you through it, and one bold thing you sense God inviting you to ask Him for.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 14:23, if anyone loves Me, My Father and I will come and make our home with him; Colossians 1:27, Christ in you, the hope of glory; 2 Corinthians 4:16, though the outer self wastes away, the inner self is renewed day by day; Romans 5:5, God's love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit; Philippians 4:19, my God will supply every need according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.