

“A Prayer for the Church” (Part One)
Ephesians 3:14-19
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Introduction:

1. The New Testament Scriptures in general and this letter to the Ephesians in particular plainly teach that the church has a high position in Jesus Christ. An old hymn says, “Children of God, O glorious calling!” But how does the church reflect or demonstrate that glory in her experience or condition. Have you ever looked at other Christians and thought, “They don’t look very glorious to me?” Tell the truth!
2. We need supernatural grace to live the Christian life. The Christian is new in Christ, but only as we live by faith in the Lord Jesus do we exhibit that newness to the glory of God. The apostle does not point us to some post-conversion experience that somehow transforms us or lifts us to a higher level, so that “now we are really new”. No, he says, “Here is what you are in Christ. Now live that way by faith in Christ.”
3. The Bible never points us to a sacrament as a means to gain grace or strength. Instead, we are taught to approach God **by faith** and receive a direct supply of grace by the Spirit to help us. Paul knows this, so he **prays** for the church, for ordinary people in the church. All of us are meant to experience this blessing.
4. Perhaps the greatest failure of the contemporary church is the terrible and pathetic lack of believing prayer to God our Father for grace through Christ by the Spirit to live for the glory of God. Our purpose in our sermons on this passage is to attempt to correct this failure in our lives.

Exposition:

- I. What do we need from God?
 - A. The meaning of grace.
 1. Grace is an attitude in the heart of God. He gives unmerited favor to those who justly deserve his wrath. Eph 2:5,8
 2. Grace is the attitude in the heart of the person who has received grace from God. 1 Cor 15:57; Col 3:16; 4:6; 1 Tm 1:12
 3. Grace is spiritual power flowing from God. See 2 Cor 12:7-9; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Tm 2:1; Heb 4:16; 13:9; Js 4:6; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Ph 1:2; Col 1:2; etc. Since we receive this power or help by the Holy Spirit (Rm 8:13,26; 15:13; 1 Cor 2:4; 2 Cor 6:6; Gal 5:16; etc.), we should understand that we live under the leadership of the Spirit and not under the leadership of the law. We cannot grow in grace by human effort under the law (Gal 3:2-3). Instead, we must keep in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25).

Point: Biblical training and counseling are essential, for God uses his written word to effect change. But Biblical training and counseling apart from the Spirit are ineffective, for the Spirit gives life and grace to live according to the written word. The new man in Christ is truly new, but he does all things through Christ who gives him strength. God does this by the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit. We must avoid separating the word (2 Tim 3:16-17) and the Spirit (Rm 7:6)! To divorce what God has joined together produces either wildfire (whether of emotionalism or passivity) or moralism.

Comment: Someone recently asked me how BJU (Arminian) could adopt the nouthetic counseling views of Jay Adams (Calvinist). It is because *at this point* they share the same

theology, separating the Spirit from the word. Though there is an emphasis on the word, there is not a corresponding emphasis on the Holy Spirit. They are left with a moralistic view.

B. We need an overflowing supply of grace.

1. God is rich. At this point, please “plug in” all that was said last week about “the unsearchable riches of Christ”!

2. God supplies according to the riches of his glory. Being infinite in quantity, we can draw fully upon them and never diminish the supply.

Apply: Christians have been too content with a small experience of grace. We have brought thimbles when we should have brought five gallon buckets. Will somebody please explain why people will watch or participate in athletic events for hours with great enthusiasm and then complain when the preacher goes five minutes over the hour? Why will people eagerly watch “Who wants to be a millionaire?” for three hours a week, and they won’t spend three hours a week in the word of God?

Apply: How is your Christian experience now, compared to what it was five or ten or more years ago? Are you stronger in grace now than then?

II. What kind of grace should we pray for?

A. Understanding the form of the text.

1. The NIV does not translate the main verb of 3:16. It is “give”. Two infinitives in 3:16-17 follow this main verb to complete it. Literally, it says, “that he may give... to be strengthened... to Christ-dwelling...”

2. In other words, the two infinitive phrases are parallel to each other and in this case explain each other. What does it mean to be strengthened by the Spirit? It means that Christ-dwells in you! To be strengthened through the Spirit in the inner man is the same as being indwelt by Christ through faith in our hearts. We cannot divide the presence and work of Christ in us from the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out (cf. Rm 8:9-11).

Quote: “They are mistaken who hope that the Spirit can be obtained apart from obtaining Christ; and they are equally foolish and absurd who dream that Christ can be received without the Spirit.” [Calvin, *Commentary on Ephesians*, p.167]

B. Understanding the meaning of the text.

1. How can Paul pray for Christ to dwell in the inner person of the believer’s heart, if he is already living there? One of the basic truths of the believer is that the believer is in Christ and that Christ is in the believer (Col 1:27; Jn 17:23; etc.). The answer is this. Paul is speaking of Christ’s indwelling and the Spirit’s strengthening by degrees. We truly have Christ and the Spirit’s power within us, yet we are strengthened **as his power deepens** in our lives. The Lord is fully in us, but in our experience we come to know more of Him (Ph 3:10; 2 Pt 3:18).

Comment: This is probably the right place, along with direct assurance from the Spirit of adoption, to understand what some have called “the baptism (or filling) of the Spirit”. God reveals more of his glory in the inner man of the heart, so that the person’s experience of God is expanded.

2. “The Spirit *strengthens* the believer by giving him a share in all the benefits and blessings which Christ procured, as well as by confirming faith and love, that the conscious indwelling of Christ may be realized; the indwelling of Christ answering to the strengthening or confirmation of the Spirit.” [Smeaton, p. 85, his emphasis]

3. “For since the Father placed in Christ the fullness of all gifts, so he who has Christ dwelling in him can want nothing.” [Calvin, *Ibid.*] Compare Col 2:9-10.

III. Where do we need this grace?

A. We need this grace in the inner person of the heart.

1. Notice the form of the text. The inner man is in parallel to the heart; they are equivalent expressions. “This ‘inner man’ is not that which is rational in man as contrasted with man’s lower appetites. Paul’s terminology is not that of Plato or the Stoics. On the contrary, the ‘inner man’ is the opposite of the ‘outer’ (or: outward) man... The former is hidden from the public gaze. The latter is open to the public. It is in the *hearts* of believers that the principle of a new life has been implanted by the Holy Spirit.” [Hendriksen]

2. Every person has an “outer man”, the body, and an “inner man”, the heart. See also Rm 10:9-10; 2 Cor 4:16; etc.

B. This distinction is important to a proper understanding of sanctification (Biblical growth).

1. Part of our responsibility lies in a proper use of the body (Rm 6:13; 8:13; 12:1). One of the struggles of the saint is by the Spirit to control the not yet redeemed body (Rm 8:23).

2. However, though we are new in Christ, we must also grow and perfect holiness in the new inner person of the heart (Rm 12:2; 2 Cor 7:1; Col 3:1-2; 2 Pet 1:5-9). Your mind matters! So do your emotions and will. So does your conscience.

Conclusion:

1. The Christian life is a walk of faith. We pray for grace for other believers in order that they may live by faith! How is your walk of faith?

2. All that we need as Christians comes from the Lord Jesus Christ by the Spirit of God. Is the Spirit strengthening you with power in the inner person of your heart?