11-4-18

Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul begins this new section of his letter with the words “For this reason”. This is the same way he began chapter 3 back in verse 1. Paul wants to pray for the Ephesian Christians, for the second time in this letter; he had also prayed for them back in chapter 1. Recall that when Paul began his prayer back in verse 1, he interrupted it to more deeply explain the mystery that God had kept hidden since before time began. This mystery was God’s plan to combine both Jews and Gentiles into one new creation in Christ, called Christians. These were people who, regardless of nationality, would become one people in the Kingdom of God with Jesus as their King.

Paul also explained how this revealed the wisdom of God, which is far above any person or angel, whether good or evil. By His wisdom, God will be glorified. He will be glorified by those who love Him when they happily praise Him for who He is. He will be glorified by His enemies when they are forced to bow before Him and proclaim Him sovereign.

Because of this diversion, we must go back in this letter to see what Paul is meaning when he says “For this reason”. At the end of chapter 2, we see that we as Christians are being built together into a holy temple, into a dwelling of God in the Spirit. When we studied this section of Scripture, we saw, here on earth, the Christian church. And this church would become perfected into a temple of God in heaven. The foundation of this building is made up of the apostles and prophets, and the cornerstone of that foundation is Jesus Christ Himself. This is, of course, referring to their teaching. Upon this foundation the church is built out of Christians. We can consider ourselves living stones and we are being shaped and fitted together by the Holy Spirit.

Of course, all this is spoken spiritually; we will not become some kind of literal building. But we are a dwelling place of Christ by the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus as our Saviour, He lives in us and we offer Him control of our lives. Now that we know what Paul is referring to, we see the reason for his prayer: If we are to be stones in this building, we need to be strong stones. If you were to build a house out of stone, you wouldn’t use any stones that were cracked or crumbly; your whole house would be weak and unstable. So, Paul now prays for the Christians that they would become strong by the Holy Spirit.

My metaphor of house building only goes so far. The fact is, that we are all cracked and crumbly; we are all weak and unstable. But that only magnifies the mercy and grace of God. He is willing to use us, even as we are. The thing is, that because of this mercy and grace, we are motivated to become better and stronger for our Lord. Paul explains how we do this throughout his prayer.

Paul indicates his prayer by saying “I bow my knees before the Father”. In other words, Paul kneels down. The standard position for prayer among Jews at that time was to stand. It showed respect to God. By kneeling down, Paul is showing deep submission to God and, at the same time, how important his prayer is.

We are certainly able to pray in any posture, whether it is standing, kneeling, sitting, or even laying down. The important thing is to focus on the One to whom we are praying. When we pray, it is time to lay other things aside and concentrate on the almighty God of the universe. Sometimes, it may come about that something is urgent and we only have time for a brief prayer. Again, even if it is only for a moment, focus on God. Remember whose presence you are in.

Notice how Paul refers to God as Father. That is a marvelous gift that we receive through Jesus Christ. When He becomes our Saviour, we are adopted into God’s family and become His children. We have the awesome privilege of calling the all-powerful creator our Father. And it is true in reality, not just in some abstract sense.

Next, Paul describes the Father as the One “from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name”. It’s easy to see how this applies to followers of Jesus. We are Christians, named after Christ. All the saints who have passed away are in heaven and those of us who are followers of Jesus are still here on earth. Some translations will limit this statement to only those who believe in Christ and will translate this as “His whole family”. But it actually says “every” family.

To understand this, we must consider the word “name”. We have talked about this before where in the New Testament, “name” means more than just how you refer to someone. It involves everything about them. It is their personality, it is how they think, it’s their feelings and emotions. It is all of the creature, mind, body, and spirit. To give somebody a name, is to show authority over them. Often times, in the Old Testament, we see one kingdom conquer another kingdom. It was common to leave the king in charge to administrate his kingdom, but he had to answer to the victorious king. To show his authority, the conquering king would change the name of the subdued king.

God is the creator; He has absolute authority over everything He has made. He has brought all beings into existence and has given them their roles in His creation. In this way, we see that all families have their name from God, because He is sovereign over all things in heaven and on earth. It is comforting for us to know this. We know that even those things which are hostile to God, and to us, are under His control and under His authority. These spiritual enemies of ours can do nothing unless God allows it. Even if we go through hard times, God will work them out to our benefit, if we simply trust in Him.

Verse 16 is where Paul actually begins His prayer. [T]hat He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. There is a lot in this verse. Let’s start with the word “power”. Power is used a lot in our world; it is mostly used in carnal terms. We think of those with a lot of money as having power; we think of those with high government positions as having power; we can even think of great physical strength as having power. It is something that people of the world desire and actively seek.

This is one of those things that many false teachers exploit; they twist this word in the New Testament to promise monetary wealth and physical health. They appeal to people’s natural desire to have these things and claim that the Bible promises them. This is not true, this is not what the Bible is talking about.

As we can see in this verse, Paul is speaking of spiritual power. And this is far more worthwhile than any earthly power. As Paul points out, this power is to strengthen us in our “inner man”. Now this would mean inner man or inner woman, whichever the case may be. Our inner man is that part of us that doesn’t exist in the physical: our minds, our hearts, our wills. We need these parts of ourselves to be strengthened so we can stand against the world, the flesh, and satan. We need strength to come closer to God and to become more like Christ.

When a person first accepts Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they can be thought of as babes in Christ. There is no way to explain all of Christianity to someone before they make their decision. In fact, Christians never reach that point, they are always learning about Jesus.

We can, however, gain in maturity as we live our Christian lives. In 1 John, the apostle has some different messages for children, young men, and fathers. When we studied 1 John, we learned that these titles were for increasing stages of Christian maturity. Unfortunately, there are many who become Christian but don’t mature. They remain stagnant; there is no visible change in their lives. We see an example of this in:

1 Corinthians 3:1

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ.

The people in Corinth were Christian, that is why Paul called them brethren, but they were not progressing; they continued to act as people of the world. We need to do better than this; the Bible calls us to maturity. But in order to mature, we need strength.

Besides maturity, we also need strength because of satan. When I refer to satan here, I refer to him and all those demons under his control. Satan and the demons are powerful, but they are finite. They can only be in one place at a time. So, being under attack by satan means (probably) to be under attack by one of his minions.

We are under attack by satan and he goes after the inner man. While he cannot read our thoughts, he can place ideas in our minds. He is strong, stronger than we are, but he is restrained by God. Still, he comes after us and if we are not strong, we will fall. These are all spiritual attacks and that is why we need spiritual power; our physical strength does not help us.

Another reason we need strengthening is so that we can receive more of the power of God; so that we are able to handle the gifts that are according to the riches of his glory. We cannot be weak and be able to withstand God’s glory. Consider that the Bible tells us that to look upon the face of God means death; for us to bear the full weight of God’s glory would kill us. Consider the accounts of those who have seen some of God’s glory.

Isaiah 6:5

Then I said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined!  
Because I am a man of unclean lips,  
And I live among a people of unclean lips;  
For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.”

Ezekiel 1:28

Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face

Daniel 8:27

Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days.

So often, we consider God as simply a friend, someone to help us out, someone who we can simply talk with; and sometimes, this is fine. But we must never forget Who we are dealing with: This is God, He created the universe, He is all-powerful. If He does not strengthen us to be in His presence, we will not survive.

These are reasons why the inner man needs to be strengthened; let’s look at some of the parts of the inner man. Our minds need to be strengthened. I think all of us have experienced doubts. When we experience doubt, we are led to believe that our faith is weak or even not there: We begin to question our salvation. These are some of the fiery darts that satan throws at us. If our minds are plagued with doubt, we will not be effective for the Kingdom. Doubts can paralyze us so that we can’t do the work God has for us. Our minds need strength so that we don’t suffer from debilitating doubt; and if any doubt shows up, we recognize it for what it is and resist the attack.

Our hearts need strength. Satan attacks our hearts through fear. We worry and fret over things rather than putting them into the hands of the Lord. This fear leads to imagining things that haven’t even happened; then we worry about them. Again, worry traps us; we cannot do the work God has for us, we cannot experience the joy that comes from being in Jesus Christ.

Our will needs strength. How often have we determined to do something, or not do something, only to fail in our resolve? So often, a person can be strong willed in the carnal world, but weak in the spiritual. Satan doesn’t care what you do carnally, but he will work against you in spiritual matters to try to undo what ever God has done.

Our inner man desperately needs strength and God has it for you according to the riches of His glory, which is beyond anything we can grasp. But how do we get it? Paul gives us the answer, also in verse 16: “that He would grant you” and “through His Spirit”. The strength we need comes from God as a gift. There is nothing we can do to earn it and we certainly don’t deserve it. We see here that Paul is praying for his readers to receive strength; so, it comes by prayer, by asking.

We are cracked and broken stones; we are weak and not fit to be used for building. But God loves us and He can fix us. We need to read the Bible; but we cannot read the Bible and expect to strengthen ourselves. We need to have fellowship with other Christians; but we cannot depend on others to strengthen our inner man. It is so simple, ask God for it; God loves to give good things to His children. Ask Him, depend on Him, and He will provide you with strength through the power of His Holy Spirit.

Prayer

LORD, we bow before You in our spirits. We entreat You with reverence and respect. You are God and there is no other. We worship You, we offer You praise, may we be used by You to increase Your glory.

Father, You know that we are broken. Because of sin, we are weak. But You are greater than sin, You have provided a way for our salvation by Jesus Christ. By Your Son, You heal us and strengthen us. Renew our minds, make our hearts courageous, and give us the will to avoid evil.

Thank You, Jesus. By Your obedient work on the cross, we can have salvation, we can have fellowship with both You and the Father; You have restored that broken relationship. When we accept Your gift of salvation, You give us access to all the blessings of God. We offer ourselves in return, use us to accomplish Your will.

Lord Jesus, it is in Your name we pray these things

Amen