

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR OUR STRENGTH

Ephesians 3.14-16: The foundation to glorify God and enjoy Him forever

Theme: (1Tim 4.7-8) Exercise yourself unto godliness (diligence and effort are required on your part).

So far in Ephesians 3 we have seen that Paul speaks of entirely of his new “dispensation” (his ministry).

- (v1, 14) Remember that “for this cause” Paul wants to pray for the Ephesians.
 - ✓ That cause is: (Eph 2.19-22) Their edification—their growth in holiness (godliness, Christ-likeness).
- (v1-13) But before he prays for them, he had something say...
 - ✓ (v3-4) Paul is our Apostle: Through him the Lord has given to us our instructions for the Church Age and our example of how to live in the Church Age as faithful stewards of what God has given us.
- So, as we move on to Paul's prayer, remember what we've seen so far: Paul has primacy for us today.
 - ✓ Because that is the prerequisite to reach the goal. Without following Paul, we'll never reach the goal.
 - ✓ And now, in Ephesians 3.14-21, we see the goal—we see what Paul prays for and where Paul wants us (Gentile believers in the Church Age) to be.

(v20-21) The ultimate goal of our existence is to glorify God.

- (v19) In order to do that, we need to be filled with God's fullness (which has a side benefit: we enjoy Him forever—we get to know His love!).
- (v16) However, that filling requires that we be *strengthened* first.
 - ✓ And to be strengthened requires *exercise*... and that's what we're going to talk about this morning.

I. (v14-15) Paul's Prayer: Simple

- Before his actual prayer, Paul gives a little introduction and it serves to make a couple observations.

A. Paul's Prayers are Brief

1. (1Thess 3.10; 5.17) Obviously Paul says that we should pray without ceasing, and he gives us the example of praying “night and day” for believers.
 - a) This refers to what we could call “open communication” with God (talking to Him all day).
 - b) But since what we see in Ephesians 3 is more of a specific prayer, it lends itself to making a couple observations about setting aside specific time for prayer each day.
 - c) As you read through Paul's prayers in the Epistles, you'll notice that all of them are *brief*.
2. All of the greatest prayers recorded in the Bible are just that: Brief.
 - a) (Mat 14.30) Peter's “salvation prayer” when he tried to walk on water consisted of three words: “Lord, save me”!
 - b) (John 17) One of the greatest prayers in all of Scripture is the Lord's prayer before He goes to the cross, and it takes about three minutes to read aloud.
3. My Point: (Mat 6.7) Let's not think that by our much speaking, that our prayers will be heard.
 - a) I've heard very influential preachers, pastors, and teachers say things like, “If you don't spend one to three hours in prayer each day, God will never move in your life.” That's wrong.
 - b) The length of our prayers, or the length of time we spend in prayer, does not somehow push our petitions up to the top of the queue.

- c) Don't beat yourself up because you don't set aside one to three hours a day specifically to pray.
- d) Set aside time to read the Bible and pray, but don't pull out a clock as your measuring stick of “successful and God-blessed” prayer.

4. How should we pray? Look at Paul: First, his prayers are fairly brief, and then...

B. Paul's Prayers are Biblical

1. (v14) Remember the key phrase in this chapter: “For this cause...”
 - a) Paul was praying for the “cause” that *God* established (not for his/Paul's own cause).
 - b) (Eph 2.19-22) Paul was praying for the Ephesian believers to grow in holiness—to be conformed to the image of Christ (to be godly, to grow in God-likeness).
 - c) That's God's will for every believer in the Church Age. Paul prayed according to God's will!
2. My point: God hears *biblical* prayers (no matter how long or short they are!).
 - a) If you want your petitions to go to the top of the queue (so to speak), pray biblical prayers.
 - b) (1Jn 5.14-15) Biblical prayers get heard and therefore biblical prayers get answered.
3. Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3 is simple, and it's a good model to follow:
 - a) His prayers are *brief* (even though he “prayed without ceasing” throughout the day).
 - b) His prayers are *biblical* (they are based on the will of God as revealed in the Word of God).

C. Paul's Prayers are Focused on the Mission and Followed by Action

1. Our mission is to be disciples of the Lord (through salvation and sanctification) and to make disciples of the Lord (through evangelizing the lost and edifying the saved). That takes work!
 - a) But, when we do that, we glorify God and enjoy Him forever (just like we see in Ephesians 3).
 - b) Paul's prayers were always focused on this, the mission (even when he prayed for his physical needs, it was to accomplish the mission—it always had something to do with the mission).
2. And then, every one of Paul's prayers is followed by *action* in the mission.
 - a) Paul prayed, yes. But, he was *busy* in the work of the ministry (the commission given him).
 - (1) It does no good to pray for growth if we do not get up and go out to sow the seed—getting the Gospel to the lost.
 - (2) It does no good to pray that God would edify the church if we don't get up and get busy building the house—building up other believers.
 - b) God gives the increase, yes (and therefore we ought to pray that He would!). But, He expects *us* to be diligent in the work, also. And that leads us to our next point of study.

II. (v16) Paul's Petition: Strength

A. Paul's first specific petition: “That...”

1. The word *that* shows us what Paul prayed for specifically: (v16) *That* they would be *strengthened*.
2. (v17-19) Later we'll see Paul praying *that* Christ would dwell in us (v17a) and fill us (v19).
3. Today, though, we want to focus only on v16: That we would be *strengthened*.

B. Strengthened—Defined

1. *To Strengthen* means to grow stronger, to increase in strength.
 - a) (2Tim 4.17) Obviously, it is the Lord who gives us the increase—He strengthens us.

- b) (Php 4.13) But, what we need to see here is that the Lord uses our experiences—what we do and what happens to us—to strengthen us (observe: Php 4.13 says *which* and not *who*, thus referring to the Lord using the things we do and experience to strengthen us).
2. To be strengthened, then, requires God's intervention and our participation.
- a) You don't grow in strength by doing nothing. You have to do something to be strengthened.
 - (1) Example: A soldier increases in strength for battle by rigorous training.
 - (2) Example: An athlete increases in strength for competition by training and exercise.
 - b) (1Tim 4.7-8) God will strengthen the Christian who is diligent and consistent in exercising himself unto godliness (God-likeness, Christ-likeness, holiness).
 - And Paul compares that “exercise unto godliness” with bodily exercise (training).
 - c) My Point: If you want to be strengthened in your faith, you're going to have to do something, you are going to have to work at it a little bit. It will not happen “automatically.”

C. Observe also: (v16) God will strengthen your inner man.

- 1. (1Tim 4.7-8) Bodily exercise (the training and exercise of your “outer man”) profits a little, so you ought to do a little!
 - a) But, your old man (your body, your flesh) is destined for the grave.
 - b) Yes, take decent care of your body (exercise a little!), but don't get carried away with it.
- 2. (1Tim 4.7-8) What profits both today and for all of eternity is an “exercise program” that will (by God's grace) result in godliness (growing in God/Christ-likeness, growing in holiness).
 - a) (Eph 4.22-24) God will strengthen your inner man if you will be diligent and consistent in your efforts each day to exercise yourself unto godliness...
 - (1) (v22) Stop doing wrong things (change your behavior—change what you do).
 - (2) (v23) Renew your mind (get Scripture in your thoughts!). Let the water of the Word wash your mind out and renew it!
 - (3) (v24) Start doing what the Word says you're supposed to be doing as a Christian (again: this is a change in behavior—you change what you do).
 - b) If you will put for the effort to do this diligently and consistently (it is an “exercise program”), you will find yourself growing in strength in your inner man by God's Spirit...

D. Another Observation: God gives the increase in strength in our inner man by His Spirit.

- 1. (Heb 5.12-14) Growth (strength, development, maturity) comes “by reason of use”—use of the Word. Why is that...?
- 2. (2Cor 3.18) Because the Spirit of God is the One who transforms us into the image of Christ (He is the One who gives the increase, who makes us grow, who strengthens us).
 - a) (John 14.26) God sent His Spirit to teach us His Word.
 - b) (John 16.13) God sent His Spirit to guide us into all Truth.
 - c) (John 17.17) God sent His Spirit to teach us His Words of Truth so that we might be holy, that we might be sanctified (made like Christ).
- 3. The Spirit gives us the increase in strength that forms the foundation for what follows in Eph 3.
 - a) He will do that supernaturally, because it is God that gives the increase (it's not “self-help”).
 - b) But, He strengthens us through the Scriptures, and that implies that we have a part to play.

Conclusion: (v14-16) Paul prays first for our strength...

(v14-15) Paul's prayers are simple: Brief, biblical, and focused on the mission.

- The length of time spent in prayer (our “much speaking”) is *not* a measure of spirituality.
- Pray according to God's will, as revealed in God's Word, and then get busy doing what God said.

(v16) Paul prayed first for the believers to be strengthened.

- He prayed because he knew all growth comes from God—God gives the increase.
- But that is *not* to the exclusion of our participation with God in this process of growth/strengthening.

Point of Application: If we want God to strengthen us in our inner man by His Spirit, we need diligence and consistency in our “training/exercise program.”

- (Eph 4.22-24) We need to spend time learning the Word of God, and then we need to put forth the effort to do what it says.
- Pray for godliness: Pray that God would strengthen you in your inner man and make you like Christ.
- And then put forth the *effort* each day to change your behavior and align your life with the Bible.

Being strengthened by God's Spirit in our inner man is the foundation for the fullness/filling that follows.

- If we do not start here (with diligence in “exercising” ourselves unto godliness), then we will never get to the filling—we will never glorify God on earth and enjoy Him while we are here.