

Notes: *Praying for God's Strength, Love, and Fullness (Ephesians 3:14-19)*

Intro: Our ultimate victory in Christ is not in doubt, but the war to achieve it will last a lifetime and prove costly. We must seek God's help in prayer. We learn to pray by listening to those around us and here we may eavesdrop on Paul's model prayer for God's strength, love, and fullness.

#1: A Prayer to know God's strength (14-17a). This request puzzles some. Doesn't Christ by his Spirit already dwell in every believer? Paul would insist that, yes indeed, such is the case. Every Christian is indwelt by Christ and the temple of God's Spirit (Rom 8:9; 1 Cor 6:19). So what does Paul mean? Hodge: "The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees." God must increase our capacity to have Christ dwell in us in greater and greater fullness. Consider how weighty and holy and glorious the presence of Christ is! Ferguson: "If we are amazed that the manger in the stable could have held the Lord of all creation, it should be even more amazing to us that Christ himself comes to dwell in us. Yet he does." The clearest picture of Paul's meaning is found in 2 Cor. 4:16-18. The "outer man" is wearing away under the strain of years and trial and the "inner man" is being renewed day by day. We have probably known senior saints like this. Though their memories are fading and their bodies weakening they remain steadfast and radiant. They exhibit the fruit of God's Spirit. Conversely others we have known though not suffering greatly become more bitter, caustic, spiteful, and alienated from others through the years. The progress or regress of both hearts is increasingly seen. We must pray that God's strength will be evident in our lives by our gradual transformation into Christ's likeness. But how? Paul's Trinitarian emphasis guides our prayers. Rejoicing in our Father's love. God gives strength "according to the riches of his glory." By faith in our Savior, we become God's children and heirs of unfathomable riches of his grace and kindness to us (1:7, 18). Christ our Savior is the treasury in which our Father has placed all the riches of his grace from the bottomless mine of his eternal love. In love, our Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (1:3). In love, our Father chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless ((1:4). In love the Father predestined us to adoption as sons by sending Jesus to shed his blood as the payment for our sins (1:7). Experience God's strength by rejoicing in your Father's sovereign love for you in his Son. Relying on the Spirit's power. God promised through Ezekiel that his Spirit would dwell in his new covenant people as he did in the Temple during the period of the old covenant. Jesus promised that he would ask the Father to send the Spirit as our helper to be with us forever. Paul said in chapter 1 that having put our hope for salvation in Christ, we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit seals us by protecting and preserving us in grace. Greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world. Just as the one who dwells in a house keeps the house in repair, so the Spirit dwelling in the believer keeps the Father's grace in repair. When we are discouraged by our weakness and sin, this is a source of great strength and hope (1 Pt 1:5; Phil 1:6). Resting in our Savior's triumph. Feed your faith on Christ's triumph for you! We are reconciled to God by faith in his blood (1:7, 2:16). More than that we are united to a risen, ascended, and enthroned Savior (2:5, 6). He reigns for us with all authority and so we already share in his triumph. We are more than conquerors through him (Rom 8:32-34, 37). How soul strengthening!

#2: A prayer to know God's love (17b-19a). The best thing Paul could pray for believers was ever increasing strength as the fruit of an ever deepening knowledge of God's love. He uses

words from the world's horticulture and architecture to impress on our hearts how great is our Father's love for his children. The depths of God's love "rooted" and "grounded" in God's love. Paul cannot think of salvation without marveling at God's sovereign grace! How deeply is the believer rooted and planted in that grace? Like a tree rooted in God's electing and predestinating love. Like a building grounded in the deepest foundation possible—God's eternal unchangeable decree (1:4, 5, 11). The dimensions of God's love. The breadth and length and height and depth of God's love. How may we grasp the limitless dimensions of Christ's love? Appropriately early commentators saw these fourfold dimensions as pointing to Christ's cross, the gold standard and absolute measure of God's love for sinners. On his cross, Christ received what we the "sons of disobedience" deserve so that believers may enjoy the Father's love which Christ's obedience deserves. Christ's cross reveals the love of God: wide enough to save a world of sinners, long enough to last forever, high enough to take every believer to heaven, low enough to save the lowliest sinner who repents and trusts in him.

#3: A prayer to know God's fullness (19). Perfect conformity to Christ's image. No longer hindered by the sinful flesh or bodily weakness we will perfectly give and receive God love (1 Jn. 3:2, 3)! This assurance strengthens our patience as we march forward to our final redemption.