

THE SOVEREIGN GOD AND THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL: A STUDY OF EPHESIANS

(LESSON THIRTY-FOUR)

“I BOW MY KNEES”

EPHESIANS 3:14-21

14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

20 Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

21 Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

In **Lesson 30**, we began our examination of chapter **3**, of the Apostle Paul's letter to the **Ephesians**. We noted in that **Lesson**, that in verse**1**,

Paul started to offer a prayer on behalf of the believers in Ephesus. His exposition in chapter 2, of God's grace exhibited in the salvation of sinners, and His uniting of both the Jews and the Gentiles in one body, caused him to burst forth into prayer. However, his prayer was interrupted shortly after it commenced, as he digressed to speak about the "*mystery of Christ,*" and to give a description of his ministry. He resumed his prayer in verse 14, and concluded in verse 21. It is this passage that we will be considering this evening.

In **Ephesians 3:14-21**, we have the second of two prayers recorded in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. We find the first prayer in chapter 1, verses 15-23. In this first prayer, Paul's emphasis is on **enlightenment** but in the second prayer, his emphasis is on **enablement** and **application**. Having taught the believers in respect of what was true of them, he now prays that what was true **of** them might be experienced **by** them. He wants them to demonstrate in their lives, the reality of their **position** and their **possessions**.

Many Christians fail to live victorious, Christ-exalting, God-glorifying lives, as a result of a lack of knowledge concerning their elevated position "*in Christ,*" and the riches of God's grace at their disposal because of their position. This is certainly regrettable, but it is perhaps even more regrettable that many others, who are aware of their position and possessions "*in Christ,*" fail to live overcoming lives because they have not applied their knowledge in a practical way.

Brothers and sisters, our growth and maturity in the faith and our effectiveness in the Kingdom, does not so much depend on how much we know, but on how much we apply what we know to our lives, so that there is genuine and ongoing transformation of our lives. Paul is saying in effect to the saints in Ephesus and to us today, "I want you, not only to know about the riches of grace at your disposal, but to get your hands on these riches; I want you realize how vast and unlimited they are, and I want you to start using them."

It is worth noting that both of the prayers recorded in this letter, as well as all the other prayers, recorded in the other letters that Paul wrote while he was incarcerated in prison, deal with the spiritual condition of the inner heart-life, and not the material needs of the body. Certainly, it is not wrong to pray for physical and material needs, but the emphasis in Paul's petitions is always on the spiritual. Too many of our prayers focus only on physical and material needs and fail to lay hold of the deeper inner needs of the heart. It would do us good to use these prison prayers of Paul as our own, and ask God to help us in respect of our inner heart-lives, for that is where our greatest needs are.

Paul begins verse **14** with the very same words with which he began verse **1**: "*For this cause.*" These words go back to the thought of God's gracious salvation of sinners, both Jew and Gentile, and His uniting of them into one body, and this body growing into "*an holy temple in the Lord.*" On account of this, Paul says, "*I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

The first thing that strikes us is Paul's posture: "*I bow my knees.*" What an experience this must have been for the Roman soldier to whom Paul was chained! Whenever Paul kneeled to pray, the soldier would probably have been forced to kneel also and to listen to him as he talked to God.

The Bible does not specify any one particular posture of prayer. According to **Genesis 18:22**, Abraham **stood** before the Lord when he prayed for Sodom. Solomon also **stood** when he prayed his prayer of dedication in respect of the temple, according to **1 Kings 8:22. 1 Chronicles 17:16**, informs us that David "*sat before the Lord*" when he prayed about the future of his kingdom. And in **Matthew 26:39**, we read that our Lord "*fell on His face*" when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Whether we actually bow our knees is not the important thing. The important thing is that we bow our hearts and surrender our wills to the Lord.

Paul bows his knees “*unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” The word “*Unto*” is a translation of a Greek word which means “facing.” It speaks of the consciousness which Paul had when he was engaged in prayer that he was directing his prayer to God who was listening while he prayed. Whenever we approach the “*throne of grace*” we must be conscious that we will be encountering God face-to-face, and that He will be attentive to our prayers.

Paul’s prayer was addressed to “*the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Paul is emphasizing the fact that when our Lord was here on earth, He lived in total dependence upon God.

There are two main schools of thought regarding the manner in which Jesus Christ ministered during His earthly pilgrimage. The first and perhaps the most commonly accepted theory is that He ministered as God. He healed the sick, raised the dead, walked on water and stilled the tempest because He was God. This view of Jesus gives credit to everything miraculous that He did to the fact that He was God manifested in flesh.

The other school of thought is that He ministered as a man anointed by the Holy Ghost. This view does not discredit, ignore, or deny the deity of Jesus Christ. Rather, this view understands our Lord as willingly deciding, in eternity, to limit the exercise of His own deity when He would assume a human existence. He made this decision so that He could live His life as a man on this earth in the same fashion, and with the same limitations, faced by ordinary human beings. I am of the opinion that it is this School of thought that best represents the position of Scripture.

In **Philippians 2:7**, Paul, in speaking of the incarnation, writes that our Lord “*made himself of no reputation.*” The literal translation of the phrase is, “He emptied Himself.” The operative Greek word is **kenoó**; (**ken-o’-o**), which means, “to empty, to make void.” When Jesus Christ made Himself of no reputation, or emptied Himself, He did not give up His essential deity with all of its attributes and characteristics, but He added to that deity a genuine and complete humanity, in order to exist in the form of a servant. **He did not lose His divine attributes** in the incarnation, but **He gained human**

attributes. It was in this state that our Lord lived His earthly life and performed ministry as a man anointed by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ had to become a human being in order to make an atonement for our sins. In His incarnation our Lord performed for lost humanity a double service. On the one hand, He discharged the penalty of sin through His own suffering and death, and on the other hand, He restored holiness and life through His perfect obedience to the moral law.

He became a human being for specific purposes relating to the redemption of mankind. Without becoming a human being, Jesus Christ could not have saved us, and He could not have become our High Priest. He had to become a genuine, complete, and authentic human being in order to redeem those who are of genuine, complete, and authentic humanity.

It is in this sense that I believe Paul refers to God as *“the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

There is a sense, however, in which all human beings in general, and Christians in particular, share in the fatherhood of God. Paul states that *“the whole family in heaven and earth is named”* after the divine Father. Every family in heaven and on earth gets its origin and name from the Father. He is the great Original Father; every other fatherhood is but a poor copy of His. In **Luke 3:38**, Adam is called *“the son of God.”* This is referring to his creation. Believers are the *“sons of God”* by rebirth and adoption. All human beings are not children of God by nature. Instead, they are children of disobedience and children of wrath, according to **Ephesians 2:2-3**.

As Creator, God is the Father of every individual. Paul indicates this in **Acts 17:28**, during his discussion with the Athenians on Mars hill. He said, *“For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.”* But as Saviour, He is only the Father of those who believe. There is no such thing in Scripture as the universal fatherhood of God that saves all men. In the sense of salvation, only saved individuals are children of God.

The expression “*the whole family in heaven,*” is probably a reference to the saints who have died and gone on to be with the Lord. These make up “The Church Triumphant.” The expression “*the whole family in earth,*” in all likelihood, refers to “The Church Militant,” comprising believers who are alive and still fighting “*the good fight of faith.*”

In verses **16-19**, we have the substance of Paul’s prayer to God for the saints in Ephesus:

16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Paul makes four requests of God for the saints in his prayer, but they must not be looked on as four isolated, individual petitions. These four requests are more like four parts of a whole. One request leads into the next one, and so on. He prays that the “*inner man*” might have spiritual strength, which will, in turn, lead to a deeper experience with Christ. This deeper experience will enable them to “*comprehend*” God’s great love for them, which will result in their being “*filled with all the fullness of God.*” So, then, Paul is praying for **strength, stability, apprehension, and fullness.**

The first request that Paul makes on behalf of the believers is for **strength.** He prays That God would grant them, “*according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.*”

Brothers and sisters, the **presence** of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer is the **evidence** of his or her salvation. Salvation. But the **power** of the Holy Spirit is what enables him or her to live a consistently victorious life. Paul did not pray for the Holy Spirit's **presence** in the lives of the believers in Ephesus, for he was writing to persons who were already saved. Instead he prayed for the **power** of the Holy Spirit to be operative in their lives, for many of them were not living overcoming lives. The power of the Holy Spirit is the **only** resource that we have for Christian living today.

Someone has said, "If God were to take the Holy Spirit out of the world, most of what we Christians are doing would go right on - and nobody would know the difference!" This is very sad, but very true.

The power has to be "sent down," we cannot "work it up." We waste a considerable amount of time in church, trying to work something up. We do this, either because nothing is being sent down, or because we are too "feeling" oriented and are only satisfied with what appears to be sensational, and are therefore insensitive to the different ways in which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself. If a lot of noise and excitement are not a feature of the services of some denominations, the worshippers do not feel that anything significant is being accomplished. Thus noise and excitement are equated with a move of God.

Brothers and sisters, a church service is not supposed to be a replica of the **Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus**, where various spiritual conjuring acts are performed: acrobatics, clowns, fire eating, juggling, lion taming, magic acts, snake charming, sword swallowing, tightrope walking, trapeze, and general buffoonery with the Pastor serving as a spiritual Ringmaster.

I do not know about you, but I am tired of participating in meetings where so-called men and women of God "decree and declare" at the top of their lungs that healings and miracles will occur in the lives of people, and that churches will experience financial and spiritual breakthroughs, none of which ever happen. And instead of these false prophets and

prophetesses being rebuked and silenced, they are celebrated by saints who are strong on the spectacular but wrong on the Scriptural-saints who are easily excited but not easily edified; saints who are always hearing from God but never learning of God.

Does anybody recall the fate that was visited upon false prophets in the Old Testament?

I am tired of the **7-Eleven** songs. “What are **7-Eleven** songs” you ask. They are songs, comprised of seven words that have to be sung eleven times, or as long as it takes for everybody to get into a frenzy. They do not celebrate Jesus Christ, nor glorify God. Some of them don’t even make sense.

I am tired of the proud posturing of the professional pulpитеers, the fantastic fabrications of the faithless frauds; the slick sophistry of the spiritual schemers; and the untrustworthy utterances of the utterly unsound. In short, I am tired of listening to the lies peddled by religious hucksters, who are nothing more than religious pimps attempting to prostitute Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

If we really have the power of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives and in our churches, we don’t have to “fake it to make it.”

The power of the Spirit is given to us “*according to the riches of His glory.*” “*The riches of His glory,*” is not merely a reference to God’s grace and power but to all of His revealed perfection. Brothers and sisters, the riches of the glory of God are limitless! The measure of the gift for which Paul prays on behalf of the saints in Ephesus, is nothing short of those perfections of God which are revealed now in their glorious fullness and inexhaustible wealth. Our God has a well of gifts and graces that never runs dry; He can give lavishly without holding back, never having to worry that the storehouse of His power will be emptied. We may be confident that God will grant any request we have to be strengthened in our inner being.

Jesus Christ returned to glory and sent the Spirit from heaven to indwell and empower His people. It is not necessary for us to “work something up.”

The power of the Holy Spirit operating in our lives will cause us to be “*strengthened with might...in the inner man.*” This strengthening is to take effect by means of the power imparted by the Spirit of God in the “*inner man.*” The “*inner man*” means the spiritual core of the saved person where God lives and works. The outer man is perishing, but the inner man can be renewed spiritually in spite of outward physical decay. Paul makes this point in **2 Corinthians 4:16**. He writes, “*For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*”

Dwight L. Moody, the noted American evangelist wrote the following in his autobiography released in 1900: “Some day you will read in the papers that D. L. Moody, of East Northfield, is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! At that moment I shall be more alive than I am now. I shall have gone up higher, that is all; out of this old clay tenement into a house that is immortal—a body that death cannot touch; that sin cannot taint; a body fashioned like unto His glorious body.”

Brothers and sisters, our culture is almost entirely preoccupied with the “*outward man.*” Our concerns are almost exclusively external. The way we look, the clothes we wear, the house we live in, the vehicle we drive, the career path we are pursuing, the circles we move in, the strength of our financial position. But God is preoccupied with the “*inner man.*” His concerns are not so much for our externals but for our internals, for He knows that it is in the inner man that all these external things find their true significance.

God is interested in our inner-heart life, the core of who and what we are. He is concerned about that part of us that is not exposed to others, the part that we conceal. His focus is the real you, the real me; you and me when we are on our own; you and me when nobody is looking; you

and me in the privacy of our bedrooms; His attention is riveted on the part of you and me that will last forever.

The second petition that Paul makes for the believers in Ephesus is for **stability**. In verse **17** he writes, *“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love.”* Paul uses three pictures here to convey his idea of spiritual stability. The three pictures are hidden in the three verbs: *“dwell,” “rooted,”* and *“grounded.”*

The word *“dwell”* is the translation of the Greek word **katoikeó**: (**kat-oy-keh’-o**), which means “to settle down and be at home.” The expanded translation is; “that Christ might finally settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts.” What a wonderful idea! That Christ might finally settle down and feel completely at home in my heart. O how I yearn in my bowels for this! In my spirit I cry out like David, “O LORD, how long?”

Certainly, Christ was already resident in the hearts of the Ephesian believers, or else Paul would not have addressed them as *“saints”* in chapter **1** verse **1**. Therefore, Paul’s desire for them must have been that the Lord Jesus Christ would finally feel at home in their hearts. Paul prays that our Lord might live in our hearts as His home. Is that our prayer? Do we even desire it?

It is one thing to be in a person’s home, but quite another thing to feel completely at home there. Our Lord condescends to live in the heart of a sinner saved by grace. What an honour to have such a guest in our hearts. What a tremendous condescension on the part of the Lord Jesus to be content to live in the heart of the believer and have fellowship with him or her.

Do we make Him feel at home in our hearts? Does He have free access to every aspect of our heart life, or is He shut out from this room or that? Are we occupied at times with persons or things that we feel are not consistent with our fellowship with Him? Does He ever sense that we are ashamed to own Him sometimes? Do we ever speak or act in a

manner that would cause Him to think that we are offended because of Him. Is He Lord of our lives, the invited guest to occupy the throne room of our hearts? Does He really feel wanted?

Kenneth Wuest, the noted Greek New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth century, quotes **Dr. Max Reich** as saying “If we make room for the Holy Spirit, He will make room for the Lord Jesus.” That is, if the believer lives in conscious dependence upon the Holy Spirit and consistently yields to Him, the Holy Spirit will make room for the Lord Jesus in the heart and life of the believer by eliminating from his or her life the things that are sinful and worldly, thus allowing the Lord Jesus to feel completely at home in his or her heart.

Brothers and sisters, our hearts are not to be regarded as an **Airbnb**, but as a permanent residence, where the Lord Jesus comes to dwell consistently, progressively and intimately.

Many have tried to make Jesus Lord of their lives, and have failed because they have tried to do so in their own strength. No person can own Jesus Christ as Lord except by the Holy Spirit. That is why Paul prays that we might be strengthened with might by His Spirit in order that Christ might finally settle down and feel completely at home in our hearts. The secret of the Lordship of Jesus, is a desire that the Holy Spirit make Him Lord of our lives, and a trust in the Spirit to accomplish that for us. Do we honestly desire Jesus Christ to be Lord of our lives? Remember that if He is not Lord of everything, then He is not Lord at all.

Brothers and sisters, what Paul is praying for is a deeper experience between Christ and His people. He yearns for Christ to settle down and feel at home in their hearts - not a surface relationship, but an ever-deepening fellowship.

The word “*rooted*” moves us into the plant world. A tree must get its roots deep into the soil if it is to have both nourishment and stability, and the Christian must have his spiritual roots deep into the love of God.

One of the most important questions a believer can ask himself or herself is, “From what do I draw my nourishment and my stability?” If there is to be power in the Christian life, then there must be depth. The roots must go deeper and deeper into the love of Christ.

The word “*grounded*” is an architectural term; it refers to the foundations on which we build. One day an architect told a Pastor who was anxious about the seemingly slow pace at which the church’s new building was progressing, “Pastor, the most important part of this building is the foundation. If you don’t go deep, you can’t go high.” Many Christians have attempted to go high, but because their roots have not gone down deep enough and consequently they are not grounded, they have fallen flat on their faces.

Being rooted and grounded are the result of the strengthening by the Holy Spirit in the inner man and the settling down of the Lord Jesus and His feeling at home in the believer’s heart. Brothers and sisters, Paul says that it is “*in love*” that we must be rooted and grounded, not in law. This love is the love of God with which the Holy Spirit floods the heart of the believer who yields to Him.

What does it mean to have the Holy Spirit empower the inner man? It means that our spiritual faculties are controlled by God, and that we are exercising them and growing in the Word. It is only when we yield to the Spirit and let Him control the inner man that we succeed in living to the glory of God. It is critical for us to understand that the work of the Holy Spirit in the “*inner man*,” is a work that He effects through means. He uses these means to fulfill His purpose of having Christ dwell in our hearts by faith.

Brothers and sisters, the means that God has appointed to be used by the Holy Spirit to fulfill His purpose in our lives, are the ministry of the Word, prayer, Bible reading and fellowship. If we do not consistently engage in these spiritual activities, we will not be strengthened with might in the “*inner man*.” If we are not strengthened with might in the

“*inner man*,” Christ will not “settle down and feel completely at home in your hearts,” and we will not be “*rooted and grounded in love*.”

In 1772, the English poet and hymn writer **William Cowper**, wrote the hymn, “*O for a Closer Walk with God*.” We will conclude our study with its stirring and challenging words.

*O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!*

*Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord?
Where is the soul refreshing view
Of Jesus, and His Word?*

*What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.*

*Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest;
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast.*

*The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be
Help me to tear it from Thy throne,
And worship only Thee.*

*So shall my walk be close with God,
Calm and serene my frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads me to the Lamb.*

Lord willing, in our next **Lesson**, we will consider the two other petitions that Paul made for the Ephesian saints in his prayer, recorded in verses **16-19**.