

## A PRAYER FOR STRENGTH

### Ephesians 3:14-21

*This is a copy of the sermon preached by Dr. Paul Mims, Pastor, Cornerstone Baptist Church, January 1, 2012*

We stand on the threshold of a new year. 2012 will be a year when we will elect a president, congressmen, and local leaders. The direction of our country will be determined by these elections. This will also be a pivotal year for our church. We will enter our new building and have the opportunity to grow Cornerstone as in no time in the past. A completely new future will be ours. We plan to add a Minister of Music to our staff who will develop children's, youth, and adult choirs plus various ensembles. We need to revamp our Sunday School and organize it for outreach. We need to add new members so that the church will have all of the spiritual gifts of service that we should have to accomplish the mission assigned to us by our Lord. Immediately, we have to plan for the new beginning which will include a dedication of our structure that has risen from the ashes.

On the personal level, all of us will face some old challenges and some new situations in the New Year that will require a strength beyond ourselves. How can we get the strength that we will need to be servants of our Lord in the church? Where does the inner strength come from that will enable us to rise above the lowlands of life and become all that we can be?

The prayer of the Apostle Paul for the church at Ephesus reveals where and how we can find the strength we need as we face all that is before us.

**AS BELIEVERS WE MUST UNDERSTAND HOW GOD MADE US** – *“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” (vv.16-17).*

What is our inner being? We often mistake this to mean the SOUL. But God made us a trinity of BODY, SOUL, and SPIRIT. In I Thessalonians 5:23 Paul said, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is easy for us to understand the body and its five senses through which we perceive life – seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling. The SOUL is composed of the mind, the emotions, and the will. The SPIRIT is that part of us that is like God – in his image. It is eternal. It is the part of us that connects with God's Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16, Paul said, “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” Our bodies grow old with the passing of the years. Our eyesight changes, our hearing fades, and our bodies slowly break down. Our souls are affected also. Our minds become less sharp, our emotions become less keen, and our wills are not as strong as they had been. But even without the aging process and in our youth we can see our bodies weaken and our souls collapse under the pressures of life.

There is a place within us that can be strengthened at any point in our lives if we know Christ, and that in our spirit. It is here that God can come to us and renew us in the “inner being” of our lives. This is the deep seated part of our being. When a person is broken hearted, truly discouraged, and is at the point of giving up, we say that this person is “dis-spirited.” The spirit is broken. When a believing person reaches this point healing can begin when the individual get a fresh “drink” of God's Spirit. In I Corinthians 12:13 Paul said, “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body...and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” God made us capable of “drinking” from his Spirit. When the body is thirsty, nothing will satisfy like a drink of water. When the soul is thirsty, it has to drink from natural life – that is why we need beauty to satisfy our minds and emotions. But when the spirit is thirsty, we “drink” from the Spirit of God to refresh and revitalize our being. His Spirit imparts power to us and fills us with a fresh

anointing. If we drink often of God's Spirit then our spirits are strong, our souls are vital, and our bodies are healthier. These are his glorious riches. Listen to all of the areas in which a Christian can drink of God's Spirit and be refreshed: A Bible teacher asked his students to examine all the Scriptures they could find on the Holy Spirit and put their findings in alphabetical order. This is the list they came up with:

acceptance, ability, adoption, anointing, appointments, boldness, blessing, cleansing, character, comfort, commands, conviction, confidence, confirmation, counseling, conscience, deliverance, discernment, disciplining, deposit, empowering, enabling, encouraging, faith, fellowship, freedom, fruit, gifts, glory, Godhead, goodness grace, grieving, guidance, guarantee, healing, hope, helping, holiness, impartation, inspiration, inner witness, interpretation, joy, judgment, knowledge, life, liberty, love, miracles, new birth, obedience, oneness, peace, perseverance, power, prayer, prophecy, preaching, persuasion, quickening, release, revival, revelation, righteousness, sanctification, the sword, sealing, sonship, strength, teaching, truth, tongues, trinity, transformation, unity, utterances, understanding, vitality, vindication, victory, warning, wisdom, witness, youthfulness, zeal. Most of these topics have to do with our "inner being." So when we understand how God has made us it is a lot easier to get the strength we need.

**AS BELIEVERS WE HAVE A GREAT CAPACITY TO KNOW GOD** - *"...that you might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."* (v.19).

The prayer for strength acknowledges that the believer must be rooted and grounded in the love of Christ to understand this awesome strength that is available to us. The dimensions of this love are wide enough to reach every person in the world, long enough to pursue a person through life, deep enough to reach from heaven to the lowest hell in which some of us live, and high enough to lift us up to the heights of experience and service in the kingdom.

When Christ "dwells in our hearts by faith," as Paul prays, he means that Christ should feel completely at home with us. Is he comfortable with every area of your life? Could you have taken him with you in all of your activities this past week? Is he comfortable enough to dwell with you and not want to leave?

A boy climbing in the mountains found an eagle's nest with an egg in it. When he got home he put it under a hen along with her other eggs. When the eagle hatched he thought he was a chicken. He learned chicken behavior and scratched in the chicken yard with his 'siblings'. He didn't know any better. Sometimes he felt strange stirrings within himself but he didn't know what to do with them, so he ignored or suppressed them. After all, if he was a chicken he should behave like a chicken. One day an eagle flew over the chicken yard and the eagle looked up and saw him. In that moment he realized he wanted to be like that eagle, to fly high, to go to the mountain peaks he saw in the distance. As he spread his wings he suddenly understood that he was like that eagle. Though he'd never flown before, he possessed the instinct and capabilities. At first he flew unsteadily, then with greater power and control. Finally as he soared he knew he'd discovered his true self - the creature God made him to be.

Sometimes I think how foolish I am to scratch around as a chicken when I could fly like an eagle. This is when I live too much in my old nature and not enough in my new nature. It is when I try to live in my own strength and not in the strength of the Holy Spirit, my own wisdom and not God's wisdom, my own will and not God's will. This makes me a chicken about life and keeps me grounded when I could be flying.

To be "rooted and established in love" as Paul is praying is vital to the spiritual life. For a tree to be strong the roots have to go deep in proportion to the spread of the branches. A Christian has to be rooted in loving Christ and being loved by him. The fruit of this is knowing, living, and serving in the dimensions of his love.

The story is told of a group of women that met for Bible study. While studying in the book of Malachi, chapter three, they came across verse three which says: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." This verse puzzled the women and they wondered how this statement applied to the character and nature of God. One of the women offered to find out more about the process of refining silver, and to get back to the group at their next Bible study. The following week, the woman called up a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him while at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest, beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith work, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire, where the flames were the hottest as to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot, then she thought again about the verse, that "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver." She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the entire time the silver was being refined. The man answered "Yes, I have to wait until I can see my face in it. Then I know that it is purified." When Christ can see his face in us, we like the silver, have cast off our impurities and are able to reflect his love and grace. It takes us going through the refiner's fire to reflect his image. When we reach this point, we truly know God and have grown the capacity to experience his fullness.

**AS BELIEVERS WE REVEL IN GOD'S POWER** - *"Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever! Amen."* (vv.20-21).

The prayer for the church closes with this doxology of praise for what God is able to do for us and in us. He is able to do many times more than we can even ask. You say, "Pastor, why doesn't God just do the simple things I ask him to do for me?" It could be because he wants to do far more than you are asking and he knows that you are not yet ready for such a blessing.

Our new church building is turning out to be far more than we asked for just after the fire. I believe that the future will also be more than we can imagine for Cornerstone at present. We want him to be glorified in the church and in Christ Jesus not only in our generation here, but in those congregations who will follow after us in years to come.

Tim Hansel in his book "When I Relax I feel Guilty," writes some insights of what most people want from God. "I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets with a migrant. I want ecstasy, not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new birth. I want a pound of the Eternal in a paper sack. I would like to buy \$3.00 worth of God, please."

What we want of God we can have. If we don't want much we will never have much. But if we hunger and thirst for him we will come to know him as the bread and water of life and we will have a strength that is not ours – for he will live mightily in us.

Praise Be To His Name!