

## **Strength for Living**

### **Ephesians 3:14-19**

**Need: Life is such that all of us need inner strength for life.**

**Proposition: God makes inner strength available to His people.**

**Objective: To lead God's people to open their lives to the strength that God has made available through the Holy Spirit.**

**Introduction:**

**My fear is that most of us are living beneath our privilege as those born of God. We are like the Civil War veteran who had become a nuisance. He was always begging for a place to sleep or for something to eat. But if anyone would listen to him, he liked to talk about his friend Abe Lincoln. It had become something of a joke.**

**Finally a man confronted him. But the veteran pulled out an old worn document that had President Lincoln's signature on it. It was a grant to a pension that made the man financially self sufficient for the rest of his life. Because the veteran could not read, he was totally ignorant of the provisions that had been made for him. While he had been living penniless, he carried around with him this grant to everything he needed for the living of his life.**

**This prayer of Paul gives us insight into just what God has made available to us for the living of life. The fact that Paul prayed for this for his beloved friends in Ephesus encourages us to pray for such for ourselves and for other believers.**

**You should read these prayers of the Apostles like promises. Whatever he prayed for under inspiration is something that God has promised to us. Here is a promise of strength for the living of life in this world.**

#### **I. THE STRENGTH COMES TO THE INNER MAN.**

**Becoming a Christian does not make life any easier—in fact, it may make life more difficult. It does not give us immunity to temptation, suffering, or difficult circumstances. Rather it may actually thrust you into greater temptations, expose you to greater suffering, and surround you with difficult circumstances. This prayer of the imprisoned Apostle takes all of that into account. He knows that an inner strength is needed if you are to be victorious in life. His prayer focus is on the place where we are most vulnerable—in the inner person.**

**You are aware that there is an outer person—the physical-- and inner person—the soul, heart, or spirit. Most of us are stronger in the outer than we are in the inner—yet it is within that we need the strength.**

**Most of our severest struggles take place in the inner man. It is there**

**that we grapple with temptation, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It is there that the Enemy makes his strongest attacks. It is in the inner life that we need added strength.**

### **1. Strength to resist temptation.**

**While temptations may come to us through the senses, we respond to them through the inner man. Body strength makes little difference when you are struggling with temptation. If physical strength made the difference, Samson would never have fallen. It is the inner man that determines whether I will say “Yes” or “No” to the temptation. Jesus did not successfully resist temptation because he was strong in his body, but rather because He was strong in His spirit. He was walking in the power and strength of the Holy Spirit.**

**Did you succumb to a temptation this past week, break a resolve, or yield to an old habit? Why? Your inner person was too weak. You need to know that strength is available.**

**Samson is an example of a man strong in the physical; he could take on the Philistine army with nothing but the jawbone of a donkey. But he was weak in the inner man so he was overcome by the seduction of a woman.**

## **2. Strength to perform ministry.**

**Paul has just reminded us of our grand mission in the world. We are in the world as stewards of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is our task to share the Gospel with the whole world, and to do it in such a manner that even the angelic world will take notice and learn from us.**

**Do you feel adequate for such an assignment? I confess that I don't.**

**Such an assignment calls for a measure of inner strength that none of us have naturally. But since we are created in the image of God, we do have the capacity for such strength. Jesus demonstrated this in the incarnation as He pursued His mission and performed His ministry out of the full supply of inner strength. Such a full supply of strength is now available to us.**

**Do you feel like you are in danger of spiritual "burnout"? Do you feel overwhelmed by the demands that are being placed on you? My sister, God has a full measure of strength for just such demands.**

## **3. Strength to bear burdens.**

**Are you discovering that life is not for sissies? My observation is that every stage of life has its own special set of tests for us. The adolescent years are particularly difficult. You begin the move from a life of dependency upon your parents to a life of independence. You begin to**

**face the challenge of a whole new set of temptations that come from peer pressure in a culture like ours. You begin to make decisions that will affect the rest of your life.**

**Then you move away to the university, or out into the work-a-day world, and whole new set of stresses confront you.**

**Then come marriage and parenting! Do I need to say more?**

**Before you learn how to cope with all of this, your children become teenagers, and wow! Who is adequate for this?**

**Then the responsibility for aging parents falls upon you, and maybe even a life-limiting health problem.**

**Then you move into old age. There are many here this morning that can testify about the trials that come with aging! William Gurnall identifies the “evil day” in the Ephesian letter as being the last day of life. Our strongest and most intense battle will come at the end of life.**

**But wherever you are in the stages of life, if you are a Christian, inner strength is available. It is strength that will make you more than adequate, strength that will enable you to overcome whatever life may bring. This strength is the burden of this prayer from the Apostle!**

## **II. THE STRENGTH COMES BY THE SPIRIT.**

**“Through His Spirit” points us to the source of this inner strength.**

**Earlier in this letter Paul indicated that believers are “marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession.” So this Holy Spirit who was received at the moment of salvation becomes the source of the strength that is needed for the living of these days.**

**However in this prayer we actually have all three members of the trinity presented. I am convinced that these statements about the Spirit, Christ, and the Father are actually parallel statements. They are looking at the same reality from a different angle, or better that one actually leads to the other. We actually have the might of the Spirit, the life of the Son, and the love of the Father, which results in the fullness of God living in the person. But it all begins with the strengthening of the Spirit.**

**1. As a gift.**

**The NIV does not emphasize this, but assumes it. It simply reads, “he may strengthen you with power.” The KJV reads, “Grant you power”.**

**The Greek has the word for “give”. So this inner strength is not a reward for our efforts, but rather an expression of God’s generosity.**

**The Holy Spirit's work in us is a gift from the Father, a grace gift. This encourages all of us to expect this work in us.**

## **2. With power.**

**Actually two different words for power or strength are employed in the petition presented to God. In the life of the Christian it comes as strength that can withstand resistance, can overcome whatever obstacle it might face. The other word refers to the omnipotence, the living power that is resident in the Spirit.**

**You may remember that earlier in this letter the Apostle pointed to the resurrection from the dead as an example of the power of the Spirit.**

**“That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 1:19-20)**

**Can you imagine this? You have living in you the Person of power who actually quickened the dead body of Jesus and raised him out of the realm of death. This power can be released in your life, expressed through your life, as you face the varied realities of life day by day. We must never forget that all of this rooted in the reality of the indwelling Spirit.**

## **III. THE STRENGTH COMES THROUGH PRAYER.**

**Does someone want to protest? Do you want to claim that you are a Christian but feel weak as water as you face the struggles of life? Do you want to tell us that it is not working in your life? It could be that you have overlooked a vital part—it comes through prayer. This is why this prayer is found in this letter. Such strength is not automatically released in the life of the Christian.**

**1. An earnest prayer.**

**“For this reason I kneel before the Father.” Ordinarily Jewish men stood when they prayed. We are to understand that Paul prayed this prayer with special desire and urgency. He takes the position of surrender and humility before the Sovereign Father and asks for the release of this strength through the Holy Spirit.**

**You must want this strength. You must want it so deeply that you ask for it with earnestness. You ask for it specifically. You ask out of a deep sense of need.**

**Let me ask you—do you think you can make it tomorrow without this strength? How many days in this past week did you attempt to live without this strength? How many times did you ask the Father to fill you and strengthen you by His Spirit? Is that not revealing? Is it not embarrassing? We are like the veteran that is told about it the**

**introduction. We are trying to live as though God had never given us the Holy Spirit. His strength is released in our lives in response to prayer.**

## **2. An expectant prayer.**

**Two things speak of expectancy—the “out of his glorious riches” and the “through faith”. The old version reads “according to the riches of His glory.” That is such a glorious thought, encouraging truth! Let me see if I can illumine the meaning of this with an illustration. First Baptist Church is moving toward a major renovation program for your church. I looked over the first phase that was presented by the committee to the deacons and to you. It will require some major and sacrificial gifts by the members.**

**Let’s just identify for the sake of our illustration the wealthiest member of this church. I have no idea who this person might be, but let’s assume that this person is you. It is known in the congregation that you have saved your money across the years, and you are now reportedly worth in excess of ten million dollars. Would others be impressed if I told them that you are ready to pledge ten thousand dollars toward the effort? This is a sizable amount in Baptist giving, but it is not “according to the measure of his wealth”. There is probably some widow who living on a**

**fixed income that will give that much. No, if you give according to your wealth, your gift might be one or two million dollars. Something big happens when you give according to your riches—this is proportionate giving. This is what Paul is expecting and what he is basing his prayer upon. He knows just a little about the wealth of God, and he knows the heart of God. He knows that God is always inclined to do more than we expect, and even more than we ask. So this gives us reason to ask with expectancy.**

**When the apostle refers to the indwelling of Christ, he uses the phrase, “by faith”. This is another way of saying “with expectancy.” You act with confidence in the Lord, and expectancy based upon what you know about Him and what He has promised.**

**I suspect that receive we just as much of God’s inner strength for our lives as we desire and expect. Our tendency is to mistakenly assume that we can resist the temptations, perform the ministry, and bear the burdens in our own strength. We can’t! We don’t have to! Strength is available through the Holy Spirit if we will ask.**

**Dr. F. B. Meyer, the famous spiritual leader from England years ago, shared an experience that helped me. He was a part of the prayer and share group made up of mature and wise spiritual leaders from London.**

**One evening he shared with the group how the Lord had blessed him with a fresh experience of surrender to the Lord. A wise and godly man addressed him after his testimony. He rebuked him for talking too much about surrender. He said to Meyer, “Now my religion is taking in, taking in first, and dropping and giving up afterwards.” He reminded him that it is no problem to give up a candle when you have the sun. Then he shared an experience. He had once struggled with an ugly temper in his life. It would overcome him again and again, much to his embarrassment and guilt. Finally he came to the end of himself one day as he was seeking to teach a group of children. He began to become angry with the children when they refused to listen to his teaching. When he realized that he was on the verge of an emotional explosion, he turned to Christ and said, “Christ, be my sweet temper.” And the Lord did.**

**Dr. Meyer never forgot the lesson. When he needed power for service, he asked, “Christ be the power that I need.” When he needed strength to resist temptation, he prayed, “Lord, be in me the overcoming strength.” When humility was needed, he asked, “Lord, be in me the humility that is needed.” He learned to release the inner strength by prayer, a simple prayer of faith and expectancy.**

**Are you a child of God? What I have described is your birthright!**

**Claim it.**

**Alternate Conclusion:**

**I first began to learn about this strength in the inner person as a young pastor. I became a pastor before my nineteenth birthday, and before I knew much about the strength of the Lord. I went into a church that had just gone through a train wreck—they had fired their pastor. They were left with a splintered and dispirited fellowship.**

**I was presumptive as I went to the church. I knew I was saved, and knew that God had called me into the ministry—but little else about being a pastor. It soon became obvious to me that I was in over my head.**

**Fortunately for me a beloved friend invited me to attend a Bible conference in another state. During that conference two wonderful things happened to me. First, I met Alice who would be my life-companion. Second, I learned about the Holy Spirit through the ministry of Dr. J. B. Lawrence, retired president of the Home Mission Board. He expounded what the Scriptures teach about the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the life of the church. I also met some people**

**who obviously knew about the inner strength that comes through the Spirit.**

**I left that conference with an awareness of the inner strength, and a deep desire to know this strength in my life. But I did not know how to receive the strength. I tried everything I knew—but all in vain.**

**Then one Sunday evening after a particularly powerless and fruitless day, I stayed behind at the church to pray with a couple of friends. That night I ended up all alone with the Lord in the altar of that little church. I poured my heart out desperately to the Lord. Then His Word came to my heart, “If anyone thirsts, let him come unto me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because He was not yet glorified.”**

**Was I thirsty? Yes! Was I ready to drink? Yes! But how do you drink? You simply receive. You drink spiritually by believing. That night I chose to believe the promise of the Lord, and when I did the strength of the Lord began to flow into my heart.**

**Since that good night, as often as I have been willing to humble myself before the Lord, confess my weakness and need, I have found the strength within.**

**This is my testimony! You can do all things through the Christ who strengthens you from within.**

**(Alternate Outline)**

**Introduction:**

**We are called to high things in Christ. One of the first things you learn as you attempt to live the Christian life is your inadequacy. You have desires and intentions, but you lack strength.**

**Paul knew about a strength that is available to the believer, and he asked God for it in this prayer.**

**I. STRENGTH IS FOR THE INNER MAN.**

- 1. The struggle with temptation is in the inner man.**
- 2. The transformation of character begins in the inner man.**
- 3. The fruitfulness in our services begins in the inner man.**

**II. STENGTH COMES THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

- 1. He is God's generous gift.**
- 2. He is God's enabling gift.**

**III. STRENGTH COMES IN ANSWER TO PRAYER.**

**1. Earnest prayer.**

**2. Expectant prayer.**