

Effectual Prayer Empowered by the Spirit

by Don Currin

The sermon emphasizes the desperate need for effectual prayer, the importance of the Holy Spirit's enablement, and the glorious realities that result from being strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man.

Duration: 34:15

Scripture: Romans 11:25, Galatians 4:4, Ephesians 1:16-23, Ephesians 3:14-19, Ephesians 4:13, Ephesians 6:18, Colossians 1:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Effectual Prayer"

Description

This sermon delves into Paul's prayer in Ephesians chapter 3, emphasizing the essence of revival praying and the need for a visitation from God. Paul's prayer focuses on believers being strengthened by the Spirit to experience Christ dwelling in their hearts, rooted in love, comprehend the vast love of Christ, and be filled with all the fullness of God. The sermon highlights the desperate need for effectual prayer, the Spirit's enablement, and the pursuit of experimental reality in encountering God's presence and fullness.

Transcript

I want you to open your Bibles, if you would, tonight to Ephesians chapter number three, Ephesians chapter three. You certainly appreciate this more sure word of prophecy as much as I do, or you would not be here tonight. And with that said, I want to delve into one of Paul's prayers that he has recorded in the Holy Scriptures for us tonight.

I want you to look with me here at Ephesians chapter three. I'm just going to read the text from verse 14 through the end of the chapter. A rich epistle it is.

And Paul bears his heart, verse 14, for this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Let's pray once again together. Father, you know how desperately we need a visitation from you. And when we look at this prayer, we see one of the most astounding implications is that this is really the essence of revival praying.

This is what the church needs to bring it to a dimension of spiritual reality that sadly in most circles today has been long forgotten. We would ask tonight that you might draw near and speak to us. We know that our dependence must fall utterly upon you.

There is nothing, even the best of men, could come and articulate your truth tonight. And perhaps we would be encouraged and intellectually stimulated, but our life would not experience an abiding sustained change that would perpetuate your glory unless the Holy Spirit falls upon the place. So we would ask tonight that you would give us something that is experimental, that is profoundly full of reality, that your people would be encouraged, that this would truly be a time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

Lord, we beg of you tonight, grant every lady, every man here, all the young people, a vision of yourself and such a work of your Spirit that would cause the truth to dance in our hearts. Please come tonight and revive your people. We ask in Christ's name.

Amen. In the way of introduction here tonight, it is interesting that the preface of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians begins with a reason. He says, for this reason, back in verse 14.

Commentators, quite honestly, are divided upon what the reason is. There are some that believe that the reason is that Paul said, I'm held captive is for preaching the gospel and the benefits that it produces for the Gentiles. Other commentators believe that the reason speaks of the advantage that the gospel affords those who are despairing.

As Paul has weathered the storm, as he has endured persecution, he's drawn from the gospel as a divine buoy to buoy him up in the midst of his adversities. Now in the light of all that the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ has taken the initiative to accomplish both for Jew and Gentile, Paul is moved to drop to his knees, as you read on, and pray that the benefits of the gospel might be fully grasped by the saints at Ephesus. His posture in prayer, brethren, is no sham.

It's not a hypocritical gesture. It is full of reality. He is in dead earnest here, as he expresses his heart in dropping before God and uttering a plea from the uttermost depths of his heart.

The prayer here that he prays possesses both petition and praise. Paul requests that the Ephesians might be strengthened with his might through the spirits in the inner man. And then he goes on to express his benediction and prayer as he tells who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think.

This afternoon we will only look at Paul's petition. You'll notice in verse number 15 now, it reveals the impartiality of God as he is a father both to Jew and to Gentile. From both groups, the scripture here says he has called his elect and united them as the whole family in heaven and earth.

Therefore, listen, the phrase refers to a common bond of all who have been reconciled with the Father through Christ. It does not refer to God giving each of his children individual names. Rather, it speaks of all God's children, whether Jew or Gentile, whether they are in heaven or earth, being under the same Father.

And in other words, he says that all are the same spiritual faith family that are under the name of the Lord God. Al Barnes made this statement, the expression is taken from the custom in a family where all bear the name of the head of the family and the meaning is that all in heaven and on earth are united under one head and constitute one faith community. Now we're laying a foundation.

Please bear with me for a moment. When you look at Paul's petition here, you might get the impression that he is asking multiple blessings for the Ephesians. But it's interesting, he's only petitioning God for one thing, that they might be strengthened with might through the Spirit in the inner man.

The petition is that the inner man of every believer would be quickened to grasp this request, the saints in Ephesus, that they would encounter four spiritual entities. These are blessed things, namely, that Christ would dwell in their hearts, that they would be rooted and grounded in love, and that they might know the love of Christ that surpasses intellects, that they might know it in their heart, this spiritual reality, and then a total domination of God in all of life. We'll come back to that in a moment.

But you will note, brethren, that while Paul never uses the term revival, he is describing the nature of one. For these four things that are the results of being strengthened with might by God's Spirit are characteristic of global awakenings in the history of the church. For example, you see that he mentions a greater dimension of love, both in love for others and his love, the Father's love for us.

Often in church history, great times of revival, titles of spiritual awakening are described as showers or torrents of love. Love for God, love for the saints, love for the unregenerate. It's characterized by showers of love.

So with that said tonight, let me share with you three things. First of all, the desperate need for effectual prayer. The desperate need of effectual prayer.

Paul is in earnest. In Ephesians 3 and verse 14, for this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then verse 16, that he would grant you. Now, brothers and sisters, I remind you that the apostle was a praying man, a praying man.

He was a living epistle of intercessory prayer. He was aware that he had written to them and prayed for them that his prayer would not be in vain because he depended on the Holy Spirit to strengthen them, to lay hold of these glorious realities. But he prayed.

Spurgeon said that prayer is the rope that rings the bell in the ear of God. Someone defined intercession years ago as a ballistic missile that can be launched from a launching pad no larger than a place to kneel, travel at the speed of thought, land precisely on target thousands of miles away, and there is no defense against it. It's prayer.

It's prayer. Are you a praying person? Are you a praying man? Now here's something that's interesting. With all of its credentials, with all of its ministerial and spiritual pedigree, Paul knew that that was not sufficient to bring about a work of God.

He cast himself upon God in prayer. Here's a thought. Do we pray? Do we know anything of our own utter weakness? Is our prayerlessness an acknowledgement that we are too dependent on ourselves? Let me remind you that prayer is the language of the poor, the poverty stricken, and those who posture themselves as beggars win the heart of God in prayer.

You see, Paul prayed and he prayed often. You find his ongoing pleas for the Ephesian saints are revealed in this epistle alone. Consider how he often prayed.

He prayed for them in Ephesians 1 verses 16 through 23. When he asked God to give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation for their spiritual advantage and knowing what the hope of their calling was, the richness of the glory of the inheritance and the exceeding riches or greatness of his power toward them. Now listen.

Listen for a moment. He also prays in Ephesians chapter 3 for their understanding. Through that understanding there would be a divine enablement brought by the Holy Spirit whereby they might be strengthened with might.

And he's praying and believing God that they might grasp these glorious benefits which are fourfold as a result of being strengthened, enabled by the Spirit. He prays again, you find, in Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 18 for the saints when he tells them that he's praying always with all prayer and supplication for all the saints. Brothers and sisters, we don't put on the whole armor of God just to overcome evil.

We don't put on the whole armor of God to obtain some prized object that we're believing God for. That's a part of it. But you find the context, the purpose of putting on the whole armor of God is to pray, to supplicate in prayer.

This is the thing that we should underscore. Listen, Paul prayed. He prayed because he recognized his inability to affect change.

And he prayed faithfully because he continued to be consciously aware of his own helplessness. You see, we pray by virtue of the fact that we recognize in some measure our utter helplessness before God. But the spiritually proud, the self-sufficient find it very difficult to maintain continuity when it comes to pleading before the throne of God.

Paul prayed. He prayed earnestly for the Spirit. Listen, while we might not like to hear it, this I believe in our hour is a tribute to self-sufficiency, our own prayerlessness.

Do you pray? Can you continue in prayer? Do you know anything of the prayer of opportunity? Perhaps God many times uses the very ministry of prayer to wean us off of our own self and independence of Him in ministry. But there's a second thing I want you to see in the text, and that is in chapter 3 and verse 16. And that is the need of the Spirit's enablement.

Notice once again the phrase, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit. It's interesting. Throughout Paul's epistles to churches and individuals, he uses such phrases as by the Spirit, through the Spirit, in the Spirit.

Do we know this type of prayer? To be utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. He's dependent on the Father for His petitions, but He relies on the Holy Spirit to quicken those petitions in the hearts of His people. In Ephesians alone, you see the Apostle's great consciousness of the Holy Spirit.

For example, back in Ephesians 2 and verse 22, there is speaking of the church. He says it's built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 3 and verse 5, He speaks of a revelation that comes by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets.

In Ephesians 3 and verse 16, there is our text, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man. Ephesians 4 and verse 3, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Look at Ephesians 6 and verse 17.

There He speaks of the soul of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And then the very next verse in verse 18, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. Ask your night friend, do you have an ongoing dependence upon the Holy Spirit? You say, well, I believe that I do.

But once again, to reiterate what we've already covered, is it reflected in prayer? Are you seeking Him because you know that there is nothing that you could engineer, nothing that you could mentally concoct that could really change the course of someone's life? God does all that He can to wean us, once again, all by ourselves, to make us earnestly dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Listen to this. It was Ravenhill years ago who said, God does not answer prayer.

He answers desperate prayer. Do we know anything of the dimension of prayer of this sort? To be dead earnest in prayer. The point I want to make is how desperately we need to be consciously aware of the Holy Spirit to make the things of the gospel real to people, real to those who are unconverted, and enliven in the hearts of those who do know the Savior.

Have you ever heard someone make the statement describing the work of the Holy Spirit? It's hard to explain. I have a difficult time articulating exactly what I sensed, what I sensed God through a manifestation of His presence was accomplishing. Spurgeon talked about at times how that there were words that came from his mouth in preaching that he did not direct.

It was like they came impulsively. I've heard people talk about the sanctifying work of the Spirit, or how he began to move in answer to prayer, and the bottom line is, well, I'll try, but I just really can't explain it. You know, perhaps we need that kind of religion today, a religion that we cannot explain in human terms.

Well, here's the major thrust and implication of the message tonight. If you would, look at the third thing with me in the text, and that is the desperate need of experimental reality. He says back in Ephesians 3, verses 17 through 19, that there are four things that will be the consequence of being strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man.

The first thing notes in verse 17, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Now, brothers and sisters, listen. What Paul is saying in essence here is that you might know a felt Christ.

A felt Christ. When the Spirit of God takes the field in genuine awakening, Jesus becomes real. There is no greater fulfillment.

Listen. You will notice the word that refers to something previous when he said that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. Something previous that has occurred once again connected with the fulfillment of this petition that they're strengthened by the Spirit.

The matter that the word points to is His work. The Spirit's work. He makes Christ real.

It is marvelous, brethren, a very marvelous thing, when the Spirit of God comes and makes one keenly aware that Jesus is in the midst. What we're looking at here in this first point of felt Christ and the other three glorious entities is radically subjective. And I would say in passing, my friend, I'm all for the intellect.

I'm all for sharpening our minds, accruing a greater theological understanding, but we cannot afford for it to stop there. Does your theology make your heart dance? Does it move you to obedience? Do you know anything of a felt Christ? It's the reward of earnest prayer in utter dependence upon the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, we know that we have the person of Jesus resident within in the person of the Holy Spirit.

But what does Paul refer to when he says that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith? Listen, he is speaking of a Spirit-wrought awareness which entails an enlivening of our faith that we might lay hold of the reality of the Christ that is about us. This is revival. This is revival.

It's the manifestation of His glory. Secondly, look at another thing that this strengthening of the Spirit produces, that you being rooted and grounded in love. In essence, what Paul is saying, that there is an unchanging posture of love in your life that you will encounter.

Now, it's interesting here the phrase makes no qualification. It's not just speaking of our love for God, but rather I believe that it addresses every relationship in our lives. Our love for sinners, our love for saints, our love in the face of hostility, even people perhaps that we have some measure of contempt or aversion for.

Don't miss the point. When the Spirit strengthens, friend, all of a sudden these issues that have divided you and somebody else begin to fade away in the light of eternity. You become so rooted and grounded in love.

Your love doesn't vacillate on the basis of how people treat you. Even when there's no tangible sense of the presence of God, you still love Him. And it's nothing short of fervence when the Spirit comes.

You see, friend, the point is to be rooted and grounded in love means that it does not fluctuate or change or vacillate depending on our circumstances. We still love God even when we don't sense His presence. Even when we're struggling to get anything out of the Word or we're having a difficult time connecting in prayer, we still love Him.

And we still love our enemies. And we love the most undesirable people in our churches. Why? Because we've been rooted and grounded in love through the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit.

You see that? The idea here is that the grace of love has been so firmly planted in our hearts that it affords a dimension of love that extends through all relationships, not just to God, but all. So here's a third thing. Paul said that they might be strengthened with might by the Spirit in verse 18, that they may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height in reference to the love of God.

To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. It's interesting the phrase, to know the love of Christ. The Greek word means to perceptively feel.

I feel it. And when he says to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, it's the picture of something being thrown beyond intellects. This, my friend, is not cerebral.

This is not mental. This, once again, is radically subjective. When he comes, when he answers this prayer to be strengthened with might, I tell you, friend, you begin to feel the love of Christ.

It's hard to measure the depth. You can't take it all in. It's an overwhelming thing.

The word comprehend here means to spiritually perceive or grasp a dimension of Christ's love that surpasses what you know mentally. Listen. Matthew Henry said it best in a very simple, very succinct way.

Where Christ dwells, he swells. He swells. And where Christ's love for us dwells, suddenly when the Spirit strengthens us, it swells.

It's like an ocean is swimming. You think these songs on the love of God were written out of pure intellect? The deep, deep love of Jesus? These people encountered something. He was underscoring that the vastness of such an infinite love is explored by faith and by the Spirit's work.

But then finally, there's a fourth glorious reality here that's the product of the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit, and that is that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. This is very interesting. Listen.

The reality is that the Ephesians and each of us might know the riches of His person, the person of God. Think about it with me. To think that God took the initiative to send His Son into the world to not only redeem us, but to give us the fullness of Himself is almost indescribable.

What does the text say? We're not only filled with God, but secondly, we're filled with the fullness of God. And thirdly, we're filled with all the fullness of God. Isn't that what you came to this meeting for? Isn't this what you desire? This is what I long for.

I'm 63 years old, friend. I don't want to creep across the finish line. I'm seeking to preach out of the passion of wanting more.

God, please answer this prayer in my life, in the lives of our people, and in the lives of the church, that they might be filled with all Your fullness. Yes, Piper had it right. God is the gospel.

By virtue of giving forth His Son, He sought to give us Himself in all of His fullness. So, think with me. To think that the very God in whom we move and breathe and have our being has given us such a promise to be filled with all the fullness of God ought to constrain us to pray.

Paul says that we might be filled with God. Have you noticed in Paul's writings, it's a favorite expression? The fullness. Fullness.

He talks about the fullness of the Gentiles. Romans 11 verse 25. The fullness of time.

Galatians 4.4. The fullness of Him that filleth all and all. Ephesians 1 and verse 23. And the fullness of Christ.

Ephesians 4 and verse 13. The fullness of the God-hidden Christ. Colossians chapter 1 and verse number 9. And it means here, and I quote Donald Barnes, that you may have the richest.

Now, this is great. Listen to this. This will make your heart dance, okay? But what the Greek implies here is that the rich measures of divine consolation and the very divine presence itself will be your lots.

What a strengthening agent that you may partake of the entire enjoyment of God in the most ample measure in which He bestows His favors on His people. That's wonderful. That's wonderful.

So, I conclude. I remind you again, which would be a very fitting reminder, that this is revival. This is real genuine spiritual awakening.

I don't know what your position is on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Some people are cessationists, but if you're a cessationist here tonight, it doesn't mean that you don't believe in the power of the Holy Spirit. He longs to enable His people, but we must ask.

We must ask earnestly in faith for Him to come and give us this sense of a felt Christ, an unmovable love, and all the fullness of God. That's my prayer. Would you join me now in prayer? Let's look to the Lord.

Let's all stand to our feet. Let us let the benediction of this session be that just a few of you, men and women, if you feel led right now, maybe three or four, would you close this part of the meeting in prayer by asking God to come and by His Spirit strengthen us with might that we might know these realities in Ephesians chapter 3.

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