
EPH 3:14-21 : AN APOSTOLIC PRAYER [5]

No. EE13

This prayer of the apostle Paul is so rich in content that one simply has to move through it with great care. We now look at v.16b: that the Father may strengthen the Ephesians with power through his Spirit in their inner being.

This phrase has three components that we need to look at in some detail. Firstly, Paul's prayer is that the Father may work in the Ephesians through his *Holy Spirit*; secondly, that they may be strengthened *with power*; and thirdly that this work by the Holy Spirit may be carried out in their *inner being*.

A WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

One of the ways in which the triunity of God finds expression, is the manner in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit always work together - in this case in the answering of prayer. Paul's prayer is directed at the Father, resulting in the indwelling of Christ (v.17), which, as we see here, takes place through the working of the Holy Spirit. The first prayer in Ephesians is also undeniably Trinitarian.

Our Lord urges his disciples to pray for the working of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:5-13). The only way in which our inheritance in Christ can become a reality in our lives is through the working of the Spirit. And this does not happen automatically, we have to seek it in prayer - which is what Paul is doing here.

TO BE STRENGTHENED WITH POWER

There tends to be an over-emphasis in the modern

church on power; too much concern with miracles and signs. This often leads to the sin of Simon the Sorcerer: preoccupation with the sensational (Acts 8:9-25).

Without pronouncing judgement on the rights and wrongs of miracles and signs in the church today, one can safely say that this is not where the emphasis is in the New Testament.

Paul sets out his life's ambition in Phil 3:10: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death..." (NIV), which differs somewhat from that of the sorcerer!

IN THE INNER BEING

While we should concern ourselves with an in-depth study of Biblical pronouncements, it is possible - and this is quite common - to over-analyse Biblical expressions and statements. Thick books have, for instance, been written about the so-called division of man into three parts: body, soul and spirit. We are told in detail in these books where the boundaries between each of these three divisions lie, where sin is located, which part is regenerated and which part will be resurrected.

While there are one or two pronouncements in which reference is made simultaneously to the body, soul and spirit (1 Tess 5:23), I think that this is just a way of denoting man in his whole being. More often than not the Bible speaks of the inner and the outer man (2 Cor 4:16; Rom 7:22). This is a distinction with which we can identify, because this is how we tend to see ourselves.

Without becoming too technical, we could say that the "inner man" is our non-physical side where we experience self-awareness, where we think and feel. We can also say, in the light of 2 Cor 4:16 - where the inner man is contrasted with the mortal, outer man - that this is the part of us that lives on after death, the part of us that will pass from our earthly body to our resurrected body. My inner man

is that part of me that is the real me.

□ It is in this "inner being" that we need to be strengthened, according to Paul's prayer.

We should never underestimate the importance of the outer man. Not only do we have stewardship of our body now, but we shall be living in a bodily state for all eternity! However, the Bible emphasises that it is the state of the inner man which will be important in the final analysis, while the well-being of our bodies is only "of some value" (1 Tim 4:8).

□ Why then is it so important for us to have inner strength? One could mention several reasons, but let us look at three of them which are vital characteristics of a genuine, "blue blooded" Christian. Firstly, inner strength is an essential attribute if I am to *withstand the attacks of sin* - and according to Heb 12:14 no one who does not pursue holiness will see the Lord. Secondly, we must *persevere to the end* in faith and obedience if we are to be saved. Thirdly, inner strength is vital if we are to *bear fruit* to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE BATTLE AGAINST SIN

□ In order to win this war I must be strong in my inner being. Without the necessary knowledge, convictions and determination, my inner being will soon succumb to the temptations of *Satan*, the incessant suction-powers of a God-hating *world*, and the merciless onslaughts of my *sinful nature*.

□ J.C. Ryle says of this spiritual warfare: "This warfare ... is a thing of which many know nothing ... And yet it is as real and true as any war the world has ever seen. It has its hand-to-hand conflicts and its wounds. It has its watchings and fatigues. It has its sieges and assaults. It has its victories and its defeats. Above all, it has consequences which are awful, tremendous, and most peculiar. In earthy warfare the consequences to nations are often temporary and remediable. In the spiritual warfare ...

the consequences, when the fight is over, are unchangeable and eternal" ("*Holiness*", p.51).

□ What makes the battle all the more ferocious and intense is the fact that it is waged, not only against the onslaughts of the devil and the outside world, but that it is essentially an inner battle. It is my innermost being that is so often a battleground. It is therefore my inner being that needs to be strengthened.

- This is very much like the siege of a city. The enemy maintains a bombardment from outside, but is largely intent on supporting his ally inside the city. The decisive battle is fought within the walls. As long as the Christian has the upper hand here, the onslaughts of the enemy are in vain. But when the fight inside the walls are lost - and only then - everything is over.

- The Bible refers to the inner enemy as "the flesh", "my own (evil) desires", or "indwelling sin". It refers to the inclination to sin, which remains even in a born-again believer. It is a fearful enemy which never gives up and should never be underestimated.

The inner battle to live a holy life before God is described in many different ways in the New Testament, often in very graphic and imaginative terms: Rm 6:12-14; 8:12-13; 13:14; 1Cor 9:26-27 (a boxing match); Gl 5:16-24; Col 3:5ff; Jm 1:13-15 (enticement by a prostitute); 1Pt 2:11; 4:1-2.

For this very reason it is so vitally important that I should be strengthened continually in my inner being.

THE NECESSITY OF PERSEVERANCE

□ Time and time again the Bible stresses the necessity of perseverance to the end if we are to be saved. The word "perseverance" is not used loosely, but clearly implies that we are constantly being tempted to throw in the towel - because the road we travel is often so demanding and exhausting.

□ Let us never forget our Lord's warning that we need to force our way into the Kingdom of God (Mt 11:12; Lk 16:16). We find ourselves in a race - to many of us a marathon; even more than that, an obstacle race.

□ O, how does one persuade churchgoers that one does not simply drift into eternal life on a pew? If you do not row with all your strength, you are bound to be swept down the waterfall of damnation!

- Is this an argument for salvation by works? No, of course not! But let us realize very clearly that a holy life of good works is an essential mark of true and Biblical faith - and it perseveres to the end. Therefore salvation is to be found upstream. Downstream the waterfall of judgement is waiting.

Together with the saving grace of God we receive inner strength and the drive to swim upstream. It is a package deal, as it were. It is the outflow of the new heart we receive at the rebirth.

- This inner urge to live holy and obedient is very much like the migration instinct in animals and birds. It comes from inside. And yet there is a big difference. The urge in us to forge upstream goes hand in hand with the exercising of our own responsibility. We are human beings, not animals!

- *We must therefore also employ the means of grace!* One of the most important of these is prayer. We need to pray for the necessary strength, both for ourselves and for each other, as well as the will, the wisdom and the ability to swim upstream - the very thing Paul is doing here.

THE NECESSITY OF FRUIT BEARING

□ We need to live to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ in the here and now. How do I accomplish this? Although it is more than this, bearing fruit is at the heart of it. I must make a difference by the way I live; my life needs to contribute towards the

salvation of non-believers, the edification of my fellow believers and the coming of the Kingdom.

□ Bearing fruit almost always demands perseverance. You cannot plant a tree today and expect a harvest by tomorrow. We all tend to be too hasty - and too lazy. We want to do everything at the snap of a finger. However, without patience and much hard work, very little can be accomplished. And for that we require a specific inclination - deep convictions, burning passions, holy prerogatives and firm resolutions. The inner being must be empowered and remain empowered!

Truly, without prayer our lives will yield very little by way of eternal fruit. This is what Paul realizes very, very clearly.

LET OUR HEARTS BE FILLED WITH WONDER!

For how long have you been a Christian? Is it not remarkable how the inner fire keeps burning year after year - ever higher and higher!

However, let us realize, the ultimate cause of this is not our prayers, but the One who hears them. No, even more, it is the intercession of our heavenly Priest and the willingness of our heavenly Father to heed those pleas. And it is the passion of the Holy Spirit to bring the streams of grace that flow from the throne of Christ, to reality in our lives.

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