

“Strengthened by the Promise”
Grow Up Series, Part 3

How many people here have put up their Christmas decoration? How many have not yet? How many won't put up decorations? Yesterday we decorated the church for Christmas. Like many of you have done or will be doing I put the star on the tree. The only problem was the star kept moving. I had to keep adjusting. Finally, I took one more little branch and shoved it up in there and got it to be perfectly straight. Then I said, “Now, nobody mess with it!” Allow me to use this tiny example to illustrate what Paul is doing in Ephesians. The Apostle Paul spends the first three chapters explaining great theology and doctrine. Now in chapter three he is going to pray for believers in a sense of saying, “Now that I have told you about the promise of God, don't mess with it!”

Our study through the book of Ephesians so far has been a little interesting and spread out. Just as a reminder, our study through the book of Ephesians is to help us reflect on some foundational aspects of our faith so that we can pray about areas we need to grow in. The series is titled “Grow Up” and it is not a negative saying. I am not telling immature Christians to get it together and grow up. I am asking the body of Christ to reflect and pray. Ephesians is broken down into three sections. The first is chapters 1-3 which are all about theology. Chapter 4-5 are all about putting that theology into practice with right behavior. The final chapter of Ephesians is about guarding yourself against spiritual warfare. Today we will be in chapter 3, the final chapter of the theology section. This chapter accomplishes two things. The first is that the Christian life is not about you. We are ministers and servants of Christ the King. The second is the Old Testament promise we have in Christ in which all people can accept Jesus as Savior and partake of the inheritance of God, belonging to His family and body. In other words, this chapter helps us take inventory to see if our heart is a place where Christ longs to dwell.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles— 2 if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.

I have heard many pastor friends speak about this passage of Scripture meaning that we are called to suffer and live as a prisoner of Christ. However, the original language doesn't have the word “of.” The word “prisoner” here is not something criminal. It is more of the sense of what Paul was suffering as a result of living for Jesus. We all know that Paul suffered hundreds of trials and sufferings. He was a willing servant and prisoner for Jesus and the Gospel.

Being in my forties is funny. I have some friends are starting to become grandparents and I have some friends who are still having babies! We have one friend who has six kids the oldest being twenty-three and the youngest being two. Can you imagine? Many of our friends wait a while to say the announcement publicly that they are pregnant. There is one problem with their strategy. If they are keeping their pregnancy a secret and they get around Nikki, it won't be a secret anymore. Nikki is prophetic about knowing when a friend is pregnant. I can't tell you how many times we have had a friend over, and Nikki will look the wife dead in the eye and say, “You're pregnant aren't you.” And the face couldn't hide it. One time we had a friend over just to drop something off and one of her little girls looks up and says out loud in front of us, “Mommy, do

they know about the secret?” Th mom said, “They do now haha.” A secret is only a secret until it is revealed publicly. When the Apostle Paul is speaking about the “mystery” it would be better translated “secret.” The promise of God was a mystery in the Old Testament, but Jesus made salvation abundantly clear with His resurrection.

One thing we know for certain is that this great mystery is what made Paul transform his life. No one suffers and dies for a lie. Paul was completely convinced of the Gospel and the mystery in Christ.

4 By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ,

In context, Paul is speaking about a mystery that goes back to the Old Testament. There was this *promise* of the Messiah in the Old Testament for the Jews. But Jesus death and resurrection allowed all people who would call on His name to be saved and therefore belong to the body of Christ. In other words, because of Jesus' sacrifice, everyone has access to the promise of God.

Did you notice that the Apostle Paul described himself in three distinct different ways? He called himself a prisoner, a minister, and the least of all saints. Paul can confuse me at times. Which is it Paul? In Romans 8, Paul says we are all more than conquerors. Yet in 1 Timothy 1:15 he calls himself the chief of sinners. Here in Ephesians, he calls himself the least of all the saints. Yet, in 2 Corinthians 11:5 that he is not inferior to the most eminent apostles.

I can only assume why I think Paul has so many contrasting self-titles. The first is that Paul may have been reminded of his past. He used to arrest, kill, and even cause Christians to blaspheme. I find this position hard to believe because Paul said in Philippians 3:13, “One thing I do forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead.” Colossians 3 says our life is hidden in Christ so that can't be it. The second idea of Paul's self-titles is his desire to walk in humility. In 2 Corinthians 12 when the devil sent Paul a thorn in the flesh it was “because of the surpassing revelations and to keep him from exalting himself.” Paul may have used these titles to keep him humble. But you see, I don't like that explanation either. Because I don't want to say negative things about me to make myself look humble. As an example, there was a preacher who got off the stage after delivering a fiery sermon. A church member approached the pastor and said, “That was a great word, I needed to hear that.” The pastor then said, “How it wasn't me, that was all God.” To which the church member said, “It wasn't that good.” Sometimes when we talk bad about ourselves in the name of humility it is not humility but a subtle form of pride. We are still bringing the attention on ourselves, and I don't believe this is what Paul was trying to do. So what was his meaning behind his self-titles? I personally believe Paul was explaining the contrast of the flesh versus the spirit. In our spirit we are saved, healed, delivered, and holy. In our flesh we sin, deal with sickness and battle sin. So Paul was not being hypocritical here; he was explaining the need to live from your true identity in Christ.

I don't want to focus on the negative title but on the positive. Paul said he was a "minister of the promise of God." Paul made it his ministry to see the promise of God come to pass which was salvation for Jews and Gentiles and that all would have unity in Christ. The word "minister" here does not mean "pastor" but is more like the word "deacon." A deacon is a leader that serves. Paul was referring to himself as a servant of the Gospel and I believe that role is not reserved for only apostles but for every Christian.

The apostle Paul concludes his chapter here with a prayer. Let's look at verse 13:

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.
– Ephesians 3:1-8; 14-21 NASB

POINT #1 – Strengthened in Inner Man.

I say this a thousand times, you are made in three parts just like God. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – three Persons in One. You are spirit, soul, and body – three persons in one. Your spirit is what is saved, healed, forgiven, and holy. Your spiritman was resurrected with Jesus and your spiritman is where the Holy Spirit dwells. Your soul is your mind will and emotions. Your body is just a puppet. Your physical body, or what the Bible calls the flesh, does whatever rules your heart. So, what is Paul talking about when he says strengthen your inner man? In the Greek this part is vague. "Inner" means "inside" or "inner part" and "man" means "human, or humanity." Let me give you my holy hypothesis. I believe the spiritman is perfect and completely holy. If this is true, then we do not need to be strengthened in our spirit. Our body will always follow and never lead. I personally believe that when Paul said "work out your salvation" in Philippians 2, he was referring to the soul. So, with this logic I am assuming Paul is speaking of the soul when he is praying that we would be strengthened in our inner man. It makes sense because our soul is our thoughts, will, mind, and emotions. The Bible says multiple times that we need to keep our minds renewed and our thoughts toward heaven not of this earth.

How many know that keeping your mind renewed and staying strengthened can be hard in this crazy world. This is why the apostle Paul prayed for the believers. God offers us supernatural help and strength to stay the course. So, I would encourage you to do two things. The first is when you wake up and spend time with God, pray that He would give you strength. The Bible says in Matthew 7 "ask and it will be given to you." Other places say, "If you ask in His name, you will receive. Ask for strength. The second thing is to follow the example of Paul. Paul prayed for the Ephesians. Who is your Paul. Who do you have praying that you would be

strengthened. Sometimes we fail or struggle to walk right with the Lord. This is why having a friend that is committed to praying for you is so important.

POINT #2 – Christ may dwell in your heart.

Think about all the Scriptures about the heart. Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your *heart*. Proverbs 4:23, “guard the heart for from it is the wellspring of life.” Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in *heart* for they shall see God.” The list goes on and on. The biggest question then is, “How at home does Jesus feel in your heart?” When Paul prays that Christ may dwell in our hearts, he uses the Greek word *katoiko* and it is used about 45 times in the New Testament. In many other places in the Bible this word is translated as “lived” or “inhabitants.” Paul is praying that our hearts are a home for the Lord. That Jesus would desire to live in our hearts.

Years ago, I was at a pastor’s retreat in Big Bear Mountain, California. We were in a large cabin on the lake and spent three days planning the next year of ministry. The cabin we were staying in was so big that each staff member had their own bedroom. When everyone was settling in the first night, we noticed the Spanish pastor going outside and bringing in the patio furniture cushions into his room. It was so strange, so we asked him what in the world he was doing. He said that there was no bed in his room, so he was using the cushions. We went into his room to show him how a murphy bed works. It made for a good laugh. If you invite someone to stay at your house, you go out of your way to make sure they have all that they need. You clean up, straighten up, and make sure there is more than enough if you know someone is staying with you. We need to do the same for the Lord if our hearts are His home. The other day I was reading in Psalm 140 and in verse 13 it said something really awesome. Verse 13 says, “Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name; the upright will dwell in Your presence.” We can be proactive to ensure that what we watch on our phones glorifies God, the music we listen to, the thoughts we have all create a heart where God longs to dwell.

POINT #3 – Rooted and Grounded in Love.

I have an 8-second video I want to show you. (Video contains a husband and wife. The wife is attempting to build a small piece of furniture. When she stands the unit up, it completely falls apart and they both laugh). The word “grounded” here in Ephesians is a construction term. It means setting the foundation. Is the love of God the foundation of your life? Bottom line, you cannot grow in love if you are not growing in the time you spend to know the one you love.

POINT #4 – Filled to the fulness of God.

How are you “full” of God? Think about it this way...in Romans it speaks of walking in the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit means to be controlled by the Spirit. Being full of something means you are 100% percent of something. Here’s an example. We got some good rain the last week or so. There is a large trench next to the Kroger in Cedar Hill. The other day that very deep trench was flooded. Another way of saying it is “That trench was *full* of water.” Now, let’s use our imagination. Let’s pretend that next to that trench as it was raining hard, a semitruck carrying milk crashed, tipped over, and spilled all the milk in the trench. You would then have to change

your observation to say, “That trench is filled with water and milk.” Then you would have to add, “Ewww.” Walking in the Spirit means you are doing everything possible to have a clean heart so that the Holy Spirit has access to all your heart. It is not mixed with other distractions, sins, or worries. Part of guarding your heart means guarding what you allow in. The more space you give to the Lord the more controlled by the Spirit you are.