

037 - "Apostolic Prayer for Strength" - Ephesians 3:16 - 2015-03-29

Call to Worship: Psalm 89:6-7

Scripture Reading: Psalm 89:8-18

Sermon: "Apostolic Prayer for Strength" Ephesians 3:16

Benediction: Psalm 31:24

INTRODUCTION

We see in the book of Ephesians that before the Lord's apostle tells us Christ's commands for us to obey, He recounts to us the wonderful things God has done for us in Jesus Christ, by His death and resurrection. When He has done that, he still doesn't start issuing commands, but, instead, after teaching us of the amazing grace of God toward us, and before teaching us of the righteous commands of God for us, the apostle Paul pauses to tell us that he prays for God to help us.

So we are considering together this apostolic prayer found in Ephesians 3:14-21.

Last time we studied its general characteristics:

1. Apostolic prayer asks God not for what we think we want, but for what we really need
2. Apostolic prayer bows to God, not trying to bend Him to our will, but bending us to His will
3. Apostolic prayer appeals to God the Father, our wise, loving, rich, powerful Father
4. Apostolic prayer asks that God gives to us, admitting that we are very needy

This time we begin to study its particulars. Here is the structure I see in this prayer, a structure in five parts.

that He may give you [two things] (16)
 -to be strengthened [G2901] (16)
 -Christ dwell in your hearts (17)
that you be able [to do two things] (18)
 -to comprehend (18)
 -to know (19a)
that you be filled [with one thing] (19b)

The first part of the apostolic prayer is a request that God grant us to be strengthened.

TEXT

Ephesians 3:16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

BODY

The first part of the apostolic prayer is a request that God grant us to be strengthened.

- I. Contemplate with me the concept of strength
 - A. In general terms
 1. considered in an active sense, strength is the ability to move something, to change something
 - a) there is strength in your arm; you can take hold of your hymnal and pick it up
 2. considered in a passive sense, strength is the ability to resist being moved, to resist being changed
 - a) there is strength in this church building; the wind has blown, but in a hundred years this building has not moved from this spot
 - B. The need for it
 1. in an active sense,
 - a) there are things that are not where you need them to be; you need them to be moved
 - (1) illus. earlier this morning your car was not where you needed it to be; you needed it to be here at the church meeting house, but it was at your house; you needed it to be moved
 - (2) illus. even earlier this morning the cereal was not where you needed it to be; you needed it to be in your mouth, but it was in a box on the shelf
 - b) there are things that are not how you need them to be; you need them to be changed
 - (1) illus. this morning the eggs were raw; you needed them to be cooked
 - (2) illus. this morning your hair was messy; you needed it to be neat
 - c) there are things that are not under your control; you need them to be under your control
 2. in a passive sense
 - a) there are things that are where you need them to be; you need them not to be moved

(1) illus. the roof of this church building is right where we need it to be; we need it not to be moved

b) there are things that are how you need them to be; you need them not to be changed

(1) there are flowering plants and vegetable plants growing in beds around the church yard; we need them not to be uprooted and eaten by raccoons and possums and skunks and not to be trampled by young men playing

C. The lack of it

1. in an active sense

a) there are things that you need to be moved, but there is a lack of the strength to move them

(1) illus. you need your car to be moved from your house to the church meeting place, but there is a problem with the car's engine and transmission; they lack the strength to move the car

b) there are things that you need to be changed, but there is a lack of the strength to change them

(1) illus. you need the raw eggs to be cooked, but your propane tank is empty, so your stove lacks the strength to change the eggs

2. in a passive sense

a) there are things that are where you need them to be; you need them not to be moved; but there is a lack of strength to keep them where they are

(1) illus. the body parts of your car were right where you needed them to be; but when someone wrecked into the back of your car, those parts lacked the strength to stay where they were; they were pushed all out of place

b) there are things that are how you need them to be; you need them not to be changed; but there is a lack of strength to keep them from being changed

(1) illus. your internal organs are just how you need them to be; but when cancer cells act on them to change them, there is a lack of strength to keep them from being changed

D. The adding of it

1. in an active sense

a) there are things you need to be moved; there has been a lack of strength to move them; now strength is being added sufficient to moving them

(1) illus. The high school student on the power lifting team needs the barbell to be moved from his shoulders up to

over his head; he has lack the strength to move it; now, through his exercise and diet, strength is being added sufficient to move it

- b) there are things that need to be changed; there has been a lack of strength to change them; now strength is being added sufficient to changing them

- (1) illus. The plumbing company needs the figures on paper invoices to be changed to computer spreadsheets; they have lacked the strength to make that change; now, by hiring a part-time data entry clerk, strength is being added sufficient to change them

2. in a passive sense

- a) there are things you need not to be moved; there has been a lack of strength for them to resist being moved; now strength is being added sufficient to stop them being moved

- (1) illus. The cows have been having their way with the droopy old barbed-wire fence; the fence lacked the strength to resist being moved by them; now, by replacing some posts and re-stretching the wire, strength is being added sufficient for the fence to resist being moved

- b) there are things you need not to be changed; there has been a lack of strength for them to resist being changed; now strength is being added sufficient to stop them being changed

Having contemplated the concept of strength

II. Contemplate the strength of God our Heavenly Father

A. Active

- 1. He can move anything that needs to be moved, change anything that needs to be changed

B. Passive

- 1. He can resist anything that would move Him or change Him

C. So, whether considered actively or passively, God has all strength; He is all powerful, omni-potent, omnipotent

D. God's Holy Spirit works inside Christ's people, wielding this infinite strength, this omnipotence, both active and passive, in the inner being of the saints

Having contemplated the concept of strength

Having contemplated the strength of God our Heavenly Father

III. See that the apostolic prayer is for the Father to **grant** you to be strengthened by His Spirit

- A. In this very letter to the Ephesians, as also elsewhere in the scriptures, you are commanded to be strong

- B. But before commanding you to be strong, the apostle prays that God the Father will grant you to be strengthened
- C. So, when there is need for you to be strong, you will not be conjuring up strength of your own; you will be drawing on strength granted you by your loving Father in heaven

The apostolic prayer is for the Father to **grant** you to be strengthened by His Spirit, and

- IV. The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **with might through God's Holy Spirit**
 - A. the strengthening for which we pray is a strengthening with might or power
 - B. this is an explanation or expounding of the idea of being strengthened, because the adding of power really is just the mechanism of strengthening
 - 1. an engine is not strong enough; what does it need? it needs additional power
 - a) use a better fuel
 - b) make adjustments to the mixture
 - c) improve the exhaust flow
 - 2. when a Christian is not strong enough, what does he need? He needs additional power, which power is supplied not by adjustments to his fuel system, but by the work of the Holy Spirit of God; the Holy Spirit has all power, He IS all power, and He adds power to your inner man; this is the mechanism by which you are strengthened, so that if you ask, "How am I strengthened?" the answer is, "You are strengthened with might or power through God's Holy Spirit."

The apostolic prayer is for the Father to **grant** you to be strengthened by His Spirit

The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **with might through God's Holy Spirit**, and

- V. The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **in the inner man**
 - A. we typically pray for God's strength not in the inner man, but in the flesh
 - 1. relief from pain or sickness
 - 2. opportunity and capacity to earn money
 - 3. safety as we travel
 - B. it is not wrong to pray for such things; in fact, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."
 - C. often, indeed, the Father grants that we are strengthened in our bodies
 - D. strength in our physical existence is important, and I don't mean to communicate that it is nothing---that is not true; it's just that the strength of the inner man is so much more important than the strength of your physical body, that to care about the body more than about the inner man is ludicrous
 - 1. illus. again back to your car; its main purpose is to transport you from place to place

- a) I have been learning this lesson since our Toyota suffered body damage down one side
 - b) sometimes you see a young man with an old car or truck, and he puts on really expensive wheels and installs a rocking sound system, but the car's engine and transmission only barely work, if at all
- E. God does not, in this life, overturn all the effects of sin on our bodies; our bodies get old and waste away; sometimes they get sick or injured even before they are old
- F. as a matter of fact, our Father often sends us physical weakness, weakening our bodies rather than strengthening them
 - 1. so that when we are physically weak, we depend on God's strength inside us
 - 2. thus is He glorified, when He shows us and other people that what we are doing is not by our own strength, but by His working in us
- G. ill: I mentioned earlier an athlete on the power lifting team
 - 1. there are 200 pounds on the bar, and he cannot lift it
 - 2. he does not win anything by just asking the coach to remove weight until it is easy for him to lift
 - 3. a program of training is undertaken involving many painful repetitions of lifting lighter weights, until the day comes when he can lift the 200 pounds
- H. so, to pray always for strengthening of your physical state, and not much else, is very rudimentary praying; that is very elementary Christianity; the apostolic prayer we are considering teaches us to pray for strengthening of the inner man
- I. so a more mature practice of our faith in Christ is to look more for strengthening of the inner man than that of the body

The apostolic prayer is for the Father to **grant** you to be strengthened by His Spirit
 The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **with might through God's Holy Spirit**,
 The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **in the inner man**

- VI. APPLICATION: Brothers and sisters, see our lack of strength and join with each other to pray that God the Father will grant us to be strengthened
 - A. There are things where we do not need them to be; they need to be moved; but we see in ourselves, and in all the saints, the lack of the strength to move them; pray that the Father will grant us to be strengthened to move them
 - 1. there are religious ideas of our own human invention, in high positions in our minds, exalting themselves against the knowledge of God as revealed in His word; pray that the Father will grant us the strength to cast them down (2 Cor 10:5a)

2. there are thoughts in our minds that are running wild out of control; pray that the Father will grant us the strength to make every one of those thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5b)
- B. There are things in a state we do not need them to be in; pray that the Father will grant us to be strengthened to change them
1. the sinfulness of our own flesh is well nourished and flourishing, but we need it to be put to death, mortified; pray the Father will grant us the strength to mortify our members on the earth (Col 3:5)
- C. We Christians are being moved from the sound doctrines of the Christian faith by many things, showing we lack the strength to resist being moved by them; pray that the Father will grant us to be strengthened, so as not to be moved from the hope of the true gospel of Jesus Christ
1. we are drawn away by our own desires (James 1:14)
 - a) that feels good; I like the way that makes me feel
 2. we are carried about by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14), put forth in very persuasive words (Col 2:4)
 - a) a wind will blow saying, "Come on, seriously? There's no such thing as resurrection from the dead." Pray that the Lord will grant us to be strengthened, that we not be moved by such a wind.
 - b) a wind will blow saying, "Philosophy is the way to understand things; it is better than revealed truth as found in the bible." Pray that the Lord will grant us to be strengthened, that we not be moved by such a wind.
 - c) a wind will blow saying, "Christians should circumcise their baby boys. Christians should follow the food laws and festival days from the Old Covenant law." Often this wind blows so hard it turns whole households upside down. Pray that the Lord will grant us to be strengthened, that we not be moved by such a wind.
 - d) a wind will blow saying, "I have a vision of this, a vision for that; God told me this; God told me that." Pray that the Lord will grant us to be strengthened, that we not be moved by such a wind.
 3. we are tossed to and fro by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting (Eph 4:14)
 - a) "You know, if you and I did this and that, I think we could get ourselves into the positions we want to be in, and get the share of the respect and money that we deserve in this legislature, in this government agency, in this company, in this family, in this missions board, in this city council, in this church."
 - b) "Don't let Dad and Mom know about this. Don't let the boss know we're talking about this. Don't let the church elders know about this."

- c) Oh, Christians, pray that the Lord will grant us to be strengthened, that we are not tossed to and fro by the deceitful plotting of men!
- 4. we are shaken by afflictions (1 Thess 3:3)
 - a) afflictions come in natural forms, like sickness and accidents, even those sicknesses and accidents leading to death
 - (1) Christians need the strengthening of the inner man by the Holy Spirit, so that we are not devastated by such things, but are able to rejoice that God is faithful, and that He is treating us as beloved sons, adopted in Christ Jesus. Pray for that strengthening!
 - b) afflictions come in persecutions, whether light or severe
 - (1) Christians need the strengthening of the inner man with might by the Holy Spirit, so that we can rejoice in sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Pray for that strengthening to be done in us!
- VII. APPLICATION: learn from this prayer that Christ's people are to aspire to inner strength, and work toward gaining inner strength, far more than material strength
 - A. of the body For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. (1 Timothy 4:8)
 - B. of money and goods: Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness (Mat 6:33)
 - C. of anything on the earth: set your mind on things above, where Christ is, not on things of the earth (Col 3:1-2)

CONCLUSION

Strength is the ability to move what you need to be moved, and to resist being moved yourself.

God has all strength, being able to move anything and not being moved Himself by anything.

The apostolic prayer is for the Father to **grant** you to be strengthened by His Spirit
 The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **with might through God's Holy Spirit**,
 The apostolic prayer is to be strengthened **in the inner man**

The first request of the apostolic prayer is that God grant us to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.

2 Corinthians 4:5-18 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. (6) For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (7) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels,

that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (8) We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- (10) always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (11) For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (12) So then death is working in us, but life in you. (13) And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED AND THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe and therefore speak, (14) knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. (15) For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. (16) Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Colossians 1:28-29 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. (29) To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily.

JRY:

Illus: a weight lifter who cannot lift 200 pounds doesn't just ask that the weight be removed praying not so much that God will change the circumstances, but that God will strengthen the Christian

strength: to move or to resist being moved

What do we need to move?

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (4) (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) (5) Casting down **imagination, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought** to the obedience of Christ;

Colossians 3:4-5 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (5) Mortify therefore your **members which are upon the earth**; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

What would move us?

Ephesians 4:14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

Colossians 1:23 if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Colossians 2:4 Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.

Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Colossians 2:11 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ,

Colossians 2:16-17 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, (17) which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

Colossians 2:20-23 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- (21) "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," (22) which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? (23) These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, (3) that no one should be shaken by these **afflictions**; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. (4) For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

So, we are to be like strong things that cannot be moved

-tree

-full-grown man

“with might” G1411 *dunamis* ESV, NIV: power

“through His Spirit”

“in the inner man”

2 Corinthians 4:16-17 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the **inward man** is being renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

Romans 7:15-25 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. (16) If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. (17) But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. (19) For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. (20) Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. (21) I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. (22) For I delight in the law of God according to the **inward man**. (23) But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (24) O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? (25) I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

Colossians 1:9-12 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; (10) that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; (11) strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; (12) giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

JRY (from RWP and YLT):

that He may give you [two things] (16)
-to be strengthened [G2901] (16)
-Christ dwell in your hearts (17)
that you be able [to do two things] (18)
-to comprehend (18)
-to know (19a)
that you be filled [with one thing] (19b)

JRY

strength/might
faith
love
fullness

“in the inner man”

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. (17) For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, (18) while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

JRY:

We are in need of God's help!
We are praying for things that will be to the glory of God by Christ Jesus!
Prayer is a bowing of yourself to God (as “Thy will be done”)

Learn these things:

-what to pray for, for yourself

- what to pray for, for others
- what to see in your mind as the ideal of Christianity
- what to strive for in your daily walk

Clarke:

That he would grant you - You can expect nothing from him but as a free gift through Christ Jesus; let this be a ruling sentiment of your hearts when you pray to God.

JRY (from RWP and YLT):

that He may give you [two things] (16)

-to be strengthened (16)

-Christ dwell in your hearts (17)

that you be able [to do two things] (18)

-to comprehend (18)

-to know (19a)

that you be filled [with one thing] (19b)

Isaiah 41:8-14 "But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend. (9) You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its farthest regions, And said to you, 'You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: (10) Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' (11) "Behold, all those who were incensed against you Shall be ashamed and disgraced; They shall be as nothing, And those who strive with you shall perish. (12) You shall seek them and not find them-- Those who contended with you. Those who war against you Shall be as nothing, As a nonexistent thing. (13) For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.' (14) "Fear not, you worm Jacob, You men of Israel! I will help you," says the LORD And your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.

Sam Owens

biblical prayers have God as central

this is a prayer essentially for power, but of a certain kind

Ephesians 3:14-21 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, (16) that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with might through His Spirit**

in the inner man, (17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, (18) may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- (19) to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (20) Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, (21) to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

“strengthened” G2901 *krataioo*

Luke 1:80 [of John the Baptist] So the child grew and became strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his manifestation to Israel.

Luke 2:40 [of the Lord Jesus Himself] And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.