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# Prayer for Spiritual Indwelling

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## Introduction

“Jesus loves me! This I know, For the Bible tells me so; Little ones to Him belong; They are weak, but He is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me!” Very simple song, and yet profound in meaning. In a lot of ways singing this song is like picking up a hand full of sand and proclaiming to all the world you are holding the beach in the palm of your hand. Church, do you believe God loves you? Do you love God? And do you love the people of God? This is our starting point this evening, these three questions. Let’s take each one individually and look at three possible answers to each of these questions. Let’s start with the first question, do you believe God loves you?

- 1) The first possible response for some of you in here will be a resounding yes! Just pondering that thought almost brings you to tears. Your faith is strong and you are in the “sweet spot” right now in your walk with Christ.
- 2) The second response is you say you believe God loves you but it doesn’t have quite same impact on you at this moment. The thought of God loving you has lost its luster. Maybe you are dealing with an issue of persistent sin and you just can’t seem to get rid of it. And you think, “God, why don’t you take this away from me? If you loved me then You would remove this.” Or maybe it’s because of ghosts from your past. They just seem to haunt you. Or possibly it’s the cares and concerns of everyday life have gotten the best of you. You are just

worn out and feel like you're in a constant battle with everything and everyone, including yourself.

- 3) Then there's a third response, you have become numb to those words. They have no effect on you. Maybe you hear it so often you just don't "feel" that God loves you. Those words are as routine as maybe your pre-meal prayer. You have become cold to His love for you. This can lead down some very dangerous paths.

Here is my second question for you, "Do you love Jesus?" Are your affections set on Christ, the redeemer, the Sovereign, the Creator of the universe? The possible responses here are:

- 1) Your heart does leap for Him. Your faith and love is strong for Him. If that is your response, then enjoy these times. God grants those to us and we should relish in them and enjoy these times of refreshment.
- 2) You're in the middle. You are not numb to Him, but you could use a boost. You are working hard to keep Him at the center of your affections but life keeps getting in the way. You wish you loved Him more.
- 3) You are numb. You are not sure if you truly love Him at all. You used to but all of sudden you realize you don't and the things of this world are taking precedent in your heart and mind. Doubt fills your mind and you feel like at any moment, you could abandon the faith. This is scary place to be.

Here's my third question, "Do you love everyone in this church? Do you love everyone just in your flock?" Again, the three possible responses:

- 1) You have a great love for everyone in this church and your flock! And if this is the case then we know it is from God because we are not inclined to love in this way! Enjoy this time! Pour out on everyone as you can. This is a blessed time!
- 2) Then there's another response. You love some people but not all. You love the ones who are like you. They are your friends. They are easy to love and you think if everyone could be like them then it would be easy to love everyone. What you're actually saying is if everyone was like you, they would be easy to love. We'll leave that topic for another time!
- 3) Finally, the third response, you don't enjoy coming to church. You don't find joy being around God's people. You once did. But now you don't. You just wish everyone would leave you alone. You just want to be by yourself. You follow the adage, "Church would be great if it weren't for the people."

In all three questions and responses, where and how does prayer address these? It's easy to look at two of the three responses and see how prayer fits those situations. Just pray that you would love God and others more, right? Sometimes, yes, that's an adequate prayer, but most other times, no. How do we pray biblically then in these situations? And what about those who are in the "sweet spot"? The text tonight will address these questions. How would Paul pray in these situations and then what should I learn from him. Let's **PRAY** and then we'll get started. We will be in Ephesians 3:14-21.

***14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,***

We can stop right here. "For this reason". Being well trained Bible reading Clearcreek Chapellers as you are, you know those transition words should cause us to stop and ask, what reason? "For" points us back. So we have to go back to the previous verses. If we look at verse 13, Paul uses the word, "so"

which in effect means therefore. And this will take us back to verse one and you'll see "for this reason" again. If we continue this process, following the linking words, you will end up at the very beginning of the letter. So, in order to save time and get to the point of our initial "for this reason" let's pick up with chapter 3. Here we see Paul explain the revelation of the mystery of the church, Jew and Gentile becoming united into one body with Christ as the head.

I will use Pink's summary of the first 2 chapters and 13 verses of chapter 3 to get us caught up.

*"Since the saints have been divinely quickened, reconciled to God, made members of the mystical Body of Christ, I long to see them living and acting as becomes those so highly favored of God and made partakers of such inestimable privileges. Therefore, I supplicate God on their behalf to that end."<sup>1</sup>*

Other words, by grace alone He saved us and lavished upon us countless blessings and given us full rights as his very own children. And this was the plan since the beginning of time that two opposing people would become one displaying the glory of God. So what is the ultimate reason Paul is beginning his prayer in chapter 3 then? Look at verse 13, *"I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory."* What? Don't lose heart? What does he mean? "To lose heart" grow weary or become weak. One definition said, "to become utterly spiritless"<sup>2</sup>. Keep this in mind as we move forward. This is the reason for the prayer, that they wouldn't lose heart. This is interesting because look at chapter 1:15,

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<sup>1</sup> Pink, A.W., *Gleanings from Paul*, Prisbrary Publishing; 1 edition (June 18, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> <http://studybible.info/strongs/G1573> accessed January 1, 2016

*15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers,*

Up to this point everything in this letter sounds great. There is nothing hinting to any dangers in this church or issues that need to be addressed. We know this letter is not addressing a particular set of sins but rather from these verses it is quite the opposite. Their faith and love was encouraging to Paul. They had a strong faith and love which is evidence of the power of the gospel. So why would he say, “**I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering**”? Are they looking at Paul and thinking, “Things are good here but I’m not sure this is going to be worth it after hearing what Paul is suffering? These people were not really in need of anything. They were well off economically and comfortable. And look at how passionate he is about this prayer, “***I bow my knees before the Father***”. Paul is talking about kneeling down before the Father. Now I know God does not require or command us to kneel down to pray and the bible records people praying while standing, sitting, kneeling, and even prostrate. But I ask you, have you done this before? Have you gotten down on your physical knees and prayed? Most of our prayers are not done kneeling or laying before the Lord. Usually the only time most people pray kneeling is when they are desperate, usually asking God to heal or save a life. But this is not the case for Paul here. Even though he is writing this epistle on house arrest he is not sitting here staring down the stake in which he is at any moment awaiting to be burned or hung on. Yes, that may be in his future, but it isn’t right before his eyes. There must be something he is about to pray that moves him to kneel before the King. His desperation is not a prayer that he stays alive or am even that he be released but rather his is recognizing he is fully dependent on God to do what he is about to ask. In summary, Paul says, you are doing well and I am encouraged by you but my heart longs for you

to remain strong in the Lord. Paul's words express and give a picture of this his longing for them as he explains his falling before our great King. He had an absolute dependency on God in this prayer.

### Who He is Addressing

Let's pick up again in verse 14.

**14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,**

Look at how Paul appeals to the Lord. God is the **Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named**. Paul is establishing in their minds that God is our Father. Think of how that sounds to the Gentiles! You can approach Him with boldness and confidence. He is the creator, sustainer, uniter of all things both in heaven and on earth, He is therefore the Father of angels. Paul is not saying God is the father of every human being, although He is their creator, but rather He is the father of those who are His in heaven, the angelic beings, and on earth, us, the redeemed. I say this due to chapter 2:19:

***19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,***

So he is talking about all that are His. You see we carry the name of Christ on our souls and He has sent us His spirit to guarantee our inheritance in the family of God. You and I, have this incredible privilege to access Him in all boldness and yet we do so recognizing all things that we need comes from Him, and it is only by His grace that we can do so, therefore we approach Him in utter and complete dependency.

## Based on His Abundance

Now, as Paul approaches Him in humility, in reverence, and in familial relationship, he begins to move forward with his requests.

**16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened  
with power through his Spirit in your inner being,**

But notice that before he gets to his request he qualifies it. Paul knows who God is and what He possesses. How and what you pray for is wholly dependent on your knowledge of the one you pray to. God doesn't need to be reminded of what He has and who He is, this appeal is written to remind Paul himself and the church he writing to. Paul has made glorious claims about our Father already in this letter, claims that not only bring God praise and adoration but also claims about what Christ has attained for us. We are blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, he predestined us for adoption, we have redemption through his blood, forgiveness of our trespasses, and lavished upon us the riches of His grace. And in Him, Christ has obtained for us a glorious inheritance. An inheritance that has no limitations. That will last forever. All this is secured and accomplished for us by Christ. Therefore, Paul can say, "***according to the riches of His glory.***" He knows intimately who he is praying to. If the ocean was His glory, then it is from this well that we are drawing from. We will never empty it and it has enough for all of mankind for all eternity. This ocean of God's glory is what Paul is alluding to. This is the wealth of glory we may pull from.

## 1<sup>st</sup> Petition

Now he gets to his first petition.

**16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened  
with power through his Spirit in your inner being,**

What does Paul ask for? Better health, more money, safety, or security? Paul has this bottomless ocean full of resources. Think of all the things he could have asked for. This church was an encouragement to him so he could have asked that things just remain the same and remember. But read what he asks,

**he [the LORD] may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in  
your inner being,**

He asks that the church members would be strengthened with power. Why does this church or any church for that matter need to have strength and not any strength but strength that has power? Ask yourselves church, do you feel like you need strength with power? Many of us do not ask for such requests until we feel weak and defeated. The funny thing here is the church was not weak and looking defeated. This church was not hurting. It was not like the Corinthian church which was plagued with various sins. But they were at risk of losing heart or becoming weak even though it may not have appeared that way. They needed strength with power! Now notice how this strength with power is to come, “through his Spirit”. Why? Because we can’t be strengthened any other way. We can’t make ourselves strong in the Lord. We can’t strengthen our spiritual endurance and growth. We can and should be doing things, such as praying, praising, worship, reading the Word, and fellowshiping with each other but even still, it is all dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in us to transform us and continue to work in us until the day of Jesus Christ. Paul knows, all this is done through the

Spirit, in our inner being. The flesh and its desires will continue to wage war against the Spirit. This phrase, “strength with power through the spirit” means God grants us power by the Spirit within us so that our minds and the affections of our hearts rest solely on Christ. But in order to have our affections set on Him we need to know Him. This is why Paul prays in chapter 1 that God may grant them “the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him”. We must know who He is first and foremost, “this is eternal life, to know the one true God, Jesus Christ whom you have sent” [John 17:3]. So, we need the Spirit’s work and the Spirit’s powerful strength to well up in us in order to battle the fleshly desires of our hearts.

What follows this request is the aim of his petition. I’ll read from verse 16.

**16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**

The outcome when the Spirit in our inner being is strengthened causes Christ to dwell, live, remain, in our hearts. Or in other words, Christ becomes the center of our thoughts, desires, and affections. But this can’t be done without faith, for without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Heb. 11:6). These two elements, the Spirit and faith, work together. One cannot work without the other. Think of a fire. There are three elements required to make a fire and sustain it. You need oxygen, heat, and fuel. These elements represent the Holy Spirit, the Word, and faith. And remember, all three of these are from the Father. We need all three to keep our spiritual life alive and vibrant. A.W. Pink states it this way, faith is what we exercise

but that it is not exercised unless the Spirit works. The end result Paul is looking for is that Christ may dwell in their hearts through faith.

Paul is asking not that the Ephesian church be saved, as in initial salvation, but rather that they continue to be saved. He prays that they continue to work out their salvation by their exercising of their faith that is only done by the power of the spirit. As the Spirit within us is strengthened as Christ becomes our focus. He is praying that their flame continues to burn and burn more brightly in spite of circumstances, whether they are good or bad.

This is important to remember because according to Thessalonians we can “stifle” the Holy Spirit. Paul’s prayer is essentially asking to guard against this in one sense. The world, our fleshly passionate desires and sinful inclinations pull us away from the glorious Christ as if those things will satisfy us. So pray that the spirit becomes strong within us so that we think hard upon Christ and all that He has done and will continue to do in us, and through us for His kingdom! The more our hearts, and subsequently our affections are focused on Him, the more we will be strengthened and able to resist the enemy and our very own flesh and its desires. This is the daily battle isn’t it? That our affections would not be pulled away from the infinitely valuable Christ who supplies all our needs and has blessed us in the heavenly realms with all the spiritual blessings as stated in chapter 1. This should be our greatest desire. This is the result of the Spirit’s work in our hearts, Christ dwelling in our hearts. Pink puts it like this,

*“As the eye beholds an object, an image of it is introduced and impressed upon the mind; and as the eye of the spirit—faith—is engaged with Christ, an image of Him is formed on the heart. Christ is the grand Object of faith, and faith is the faculty*

*whereby we, through the light of the Word and the power of the Spirit, receive and take into our renewed minds the knowledge of His person and perfections. Thereby He is admitted into our hearts and we have real communion with Him."*

## 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Petition

This is the essence of Paul's prayer here. But it gets better. Let's pick up at the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of verse 17:

**--that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

As Christ dwells in our hearts, we become rooted and grounded in love. This roots implies depth, security, and stability and grounded implies a strong or firm foundation. So that when the winds and storms of life come, we will not be shaken and they will come. Those storms hit me the moment I walk off this stage. And let me remind you, these storms do not have to be big. They can be as simple as a sinful desire climbing its way to take our affections off of Christ. But because we are rooted and grounded in love, we then will have the strength to comprehend the incomprehensible! We will be able to understand grace and mercy and forgiveness for those sins. This petition is not only for individuals and this church, but it is for this church and with all the saints, for all the people of God, the brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, all of us in the household of God. We are part of something so much bigger! And then Paul adds this phrase, that we would comprehend the love of Christ in its breadth, meaning

it's all inclusivity, in its length meaning from eternity past until now and onto into eternity future, in its height, meaning how God has taken us from paupers to princes, and in its depth, meaning this love overcomes even our deepest darkest sins. And secondly, that we would know this love that cannot be known except by the power of the spirit within us exercising itself through faith. The irony in Paul's prayer is he asks that we may know the love of God that surpasses knowledge. How can you know something that is too grand to know?! Only by the power of the spirit within us. It is something we should be asking for because we cannot know this love on our own. With man this is impossible but with God all things are possible. Finally, as this prayer is being prayed daily and answered over time, we become filled with the fullness of God. Not that we become mini-gods but rather we become filled with Christ so that we are more and more conformed to His image. This is the mighty crescendo of Paul's prayer.

### The Doxology

Next Paul moves into a mini doxology.

**20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.**

Paul finishes this prayer by saying, God is able to more than we ask. If we are asking that our hearts be filled with love for Christ in order to comprehend with all the saints the immeasurable love He has for us, He can do that and even more! He can do even more than we think He can. We can't even think at His level and even Paul's request here does not reach

to limits of God's power in Christ through His Spirit within us. Paul has a lofty request and God can do even more than that!

Secondly, this power is at work in us. This just reflects back to verse 14, the beginning of the prayer. This is why it is imperative that we pray that we all be strengthened with power through the Spirit because it will work within us.

And finally, because of all of this, God is glorified in His saints by our unity in the church, two become one. Complete opposites, Jew and Gentile, and even everyone in this church, loving one another deeply, becoming more like Christ together, and display His glory as we live this life together. And not only for now, but forevermore. Our functioning church will continue to push the gospel forward unto other generations after us. It will continue to do so until He returns and then we will experience this unity in eternity in His presence.

### Application

First of all, have you, not out of desperation because of a crisis, but out of sheer delight and or reverence for your Father, kneeled down to pray? Men, I challenge you, when it is possible, in your home, get on your knees if you are physically capable, and bow before our great King and bring before Him all your adoration, love, weakness, frailty, and need. And then men, I challenge you to do it again and again and then bring your spouse with you. Bow with her and pray to our Father for your family, your spouse, yourself, and this church.

Secondly, does prayer time at flock mirror this prayer? Are these the requests that are coming from the mouth of your elder and brothers and sisters in Christ? If not, why not? Why aren't we praying this kind of prayer? It's because we don't fully realize the what we

have in Christ. We may know in our minds but don't understand. This Wednesday, open Ephesians 1, and pray Paul's prayer for God to grant your flock and this church a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. Read it word for word if necessary. Using the bible to pray biblical is in no way wrong. Right?

Finally, let's end where we started. Church, do you believe God loves you? Do you love God? And do you love others?

We all need this Ephesian prayer desperately no matter how we answer these questions. We need to pray this for ourselves, for our flocks, and for our church. The thing about Christ is that the more you taste and see His goodness, the more you want of Him. But the opposite is true too. The less you taste of Him and understand His love, the less you want it. The spirit becomes squelched and you become weak ineffective.

Here is the bottom line: No matter where you are in your walk with the Lord, whether you're on a mountain top or in the deepest pit or somewhere in between, we need this prayer. And this prayer is more than saying, "Lord may we not lose heart or become tired of doing good or pursuing Christ, but it is so much more than that! We need to continually pray for one another that we would understand, comprehend, and apply the depth of the riches of the glory of God and His love for us that our spirit would become stronger and stronger and move forward in unity.

Clearcreek chapellers, Pray, pray hard and often for you and all of us to be strengthened with power through the Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith.