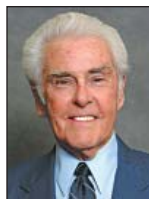


Strengthened by God's power

In the earlier chapters of Ephesians, Paul discussed deliverance from death, reconciliation at the cross and union with Christ. In this



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lesson, we turn to one of Paul's powerful prayers to gain greater understanding of how the Christian is strengthened by God's power through his Spirit in the believer's inner being.

The three-in-one God empowers all believers (Ephesians 3:14-15). In Ephesians 2:22, Paul applies his analogy of Christians "being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." The Holy Spirit empowers all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, to live in newness of life according to God's holy standards. In chapter three, Paul prayed that the Ephesians, through the Holy Spirit, might know both God's power in their lives and the depth of his love for them.

Many of us have experienced the challenge of accepting a new job with little or no training; we were left on our own to do the work. In my army duty in World War II, I was assigned to a cook's shift because I had parents who were restaurant owners. This worked well, but one day the mess sergeant asked if I could also do baking. I thought that would be a nice upgrade, so I brashly said, "Yes!" But then I had only an army cookbook and the need to experiment to fulfill my new job!

Our experiences in the Christian life are different. Jesus Christ has done everything to bring us salvation, but he does not leave us alone to figure out how to live for him. He guides and empowers us with his Holy Spirit and the Bible.

God empowers us to know and walk in his love (Ephesians 3:16-17). From his own experience with

Christ, Paul prays that Christians will be "strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in your inner being."

We are all aware that under the stimulus of great need we can draw upon reserves of physical strength that we do not use in the normal routines of life. A personal friend was in medical school. A situation developed in which a respirator was needed quickly. Sam picked it up and ran with it to the situation. Later he found that he could hardly pick it up when the need was not urgent. At one time, I was under my riding mower when the limb holding the machine up broke and pinned me under it. I tried yelling for help, but my voice was very weak because of the pressure on my chest. A woman next door heard me. She ran over and, to my amazement, lifted the mower just enough for me to slide out. She hardly believed that she had been able to do it!

In the spiritual realm, there is also power available which is realized only when the need is great enough to call it into being. Paul prays that a Christian might be strengthened within by the presence of the Holy Spirit to meet the demands of spiritual crises in life. We have to believe in his presence and availability.

When John V. Taylor was general secretary of the Church Missionary Society in England, he wrote a powerful book on the Holy Spirit, whom he called "The Go-Between God." He spoke to the neglect of experiencing the power and presence of the Spirit. "Few are they who, after their first awakening dare trust the Spirit to carry them by way of the wilderness and the dark night into a widening freedom and availability until the manhood of Christ himself is formed in them; but there are many who will either settle for religion without miracle,

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or try to live by a regular recurrence of the moment of their conversion." Taylor goes on to say that these failures to live by the Spirit "are committed not because too little power is available to us, but because the power so far exceeds the scale we want to live by. He has made us a little lower than the gods, while our highest ambition is to be a little above the Joneses" (p. 48).

God's power and love in our lives goes beyond what we can fully comprehend but is encouraged by Paul. He piles up words as a tribute to the all-encompassing love of Christ, and one's imagination is left to its own inclination in exploring the ideas suggested. In my youth days on retreats, a familiar song expressed it like this:

*"Wide, wide as the ocean;
deep, deep as the sea,
High, high as the heavens above
is his love for me.
I, though so unworthy,
still as a child of his care
For his word teaches me
that his love reaches me everywhere."*

The ultimate ideal is to press on toward the fullness of God's perfection (Ephesians 3:20-21). We walk on holy ground in seeking to understand the meaning of this petition in Paul's prayer, but we remember the desire of Jesus that the Christian is to "be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

To realize the full meaning of Christ's magnificent love for us is to realize that tremendous resources of strength are available through the Christ when we are in union with him and he dwells within us by his Spirit.

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