

Epiphany 2
January 17, 2010
Ephesians 3:14-21

Dear people in whom God dwells by faith, dear fellow saints –

These words are part of a prayer St. Paul prayed for the Christians in Ephesus. St. Paul knew these Christians well because he had worked among them for three years, a longer period of time than the Apostles probably spent at any other mission location.

Obviously, St. Paul asked God for blessings on these Christians, the kind of blessings all Christians need. So, let's make Paul's prayer also our prayer for one another and for all followers of our Lord Jesus.

And let's pray in the manner Paul prayed. He prayed absolutely confident that God would grant what he was asking, even though he was asking for some really big, important things. In fact, the Apostle was sure God would bless them even beyond Paul's prayer, because that's the way God is "able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or even imagine." God is our holy, perfect, almighty Father. Whatever qualities

Paul Prayed to This Wonderful Father for Believers in Jesus.

And what did the Apostle pray for? He prayed first that the Father would strengthen the believers with power through the Holy Spirit in their inner being so that Christ would live and stay in their hearts through faith.

St. Paul already earlier in this letter had pointed these Christians to this power of God. St. Paul was not asking that the Father start giving them His power. Further on the Apostle says that God's power was already at work within all the believers.

They could not ever have been believers in Jesus unless God's power had already worked on and in them. It was the power of God in the Gospel that had called them to Jesus and that worked faith in Jesus. By faith in Jesus the new self, the inner being, had been created in them. Paul, in chapter four, says this new inner self was created by God to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

What Paul is asking is that the Father would keep strengthening the new inner self. This tells us that we always need to keep growing, increasing maturing in our newness. There is always room for spiritual growing up. This is especially true on account of our old, sinful self, which always tries to reassert itself over the new self.

Adam was created holy and righteous but would have grown and matured in his righteousness had he not put on the brakes with his deliberate sinful disobedience.

"Let him who thinks he is standing take heed lest he fall." This is just why we, like Paul, ought to ask God to strengthen us and all other Christians with His power.

The Father does this strengthening through the Spirit. The Spirit is credited with working faith in Jesus in people's hearts. It is necessary also to know that the Holy Spirit uses His chosen tools for this work He does. Paul told the Ephesian Christians that they were included in Christ when "They heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of their salvation." The Gospel, the Good News of Jesus concerning Jesus and His work and blessings, the Gospel in Word and Baptism and Holy Communion and Holy Communion, is the tool the Holy Spirit uses also to bring God's ongoing strengthening to us.

The result of such Gospel strengthening by the Holy Spirit's work is that Christ will dwell in our hearts.

Christ dwelling in our hearts, what a blessing! Christ living in our inner being means that we will be sure of our complete forgiveness, that we can rejoice in our Savior no matter what the circumstances, that we can be sure of our Lord's constant presence to lead us and guard us, that we will have His love to motivate us in our new way of living, and that we will eagerly look forward to His second coming, induction day, body and soul, to glory, to everlasting joy, peace, and life. All of this and more is included with Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith.

Living still in our sinful flesh, in this evil world, with satan and his army still around, you can surely see why we need to be strengthened every day, through the Spirit, for faith in Jesus, with God's own power, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead, the power by which Jesus ascended into heaven, the very same power Jesus uses to rule everything for the good of all His Church, His Bride, His Body.

This leads us to the other thing for which Paul prayed. He asked the Father to grant the Christians, the Ephesian saints and all the saints, all believers, power to grasp how high and deep and wide and long Christ's love is. It's Christ's love for all sinners that moved Him willingly to come here, to live here, to suffer and die here and then to raise Himself from the dead here. He earned our saving righteousness because He loves us. He earned our forgiveness because He loves us. He earned eternal life and joy and glory for us because He loves us. How big is that love? Bigger than we can ever measure. But, let us never forget that love; never take it for granted, for that is only a step away from losing it.

Jesus for us. Then we will continue personally to know it, to experience it. Jesus' love for sinners certainly surpasses, goes beyond our knowledge, our comprehension, but let it never go out of our knowledge.

With our Redeemer's love, we will keep and always have the fullness of God, His fullness of love, mercy, grace.

All those who trust in Jesus Christ are the Church. Every believer is evidence of God's salvation, so the Church, by its very existence, brings glory, praise, honor, and thanks to the Father. And, of course, since all of these blessings come from what Jesus did for all, all glory to God comes from our Savior. This is true throughout all generations, even to

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our generation. And this honor to God for being our Savior will not stop when we die. In fact, forever and ever in heaven, we will honor our Savior. We'll do an even better job of it, then, for finally there'll be no old, sinful self connected to us anymore.

Join Paul's saying, "Yes, this is so" with the final word to his prayer – Amen!