

## **The Strengthening Of The Christian's Inner Man.**

Text: Eph 3:13-21

1) By His Growth In Faith

Suggested Hymns:

2) By His Growth In Love

192, 321, 373, 285, 392

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 3:13–21, <sup>13</sup> *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

<sup>14</sup> *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

<sup>20</sup> *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, <sup>21</sup> to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Paul was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote his Epistle to the Ephesians. He knew how much the Christians in all parts of the world sympathised with him, and how sorry they felt for him because his liberty was restricted, and he had to wear chains and bonds.

Paul knew how easily the Christians could be offended because of his tribulations, and grow weak and faint, and weak in the faith, because God did not deliver His chosen vessel Paul from the hands of his enemies, but had him suffer in chains and bonds.

These thoughts drive him into prayer for the Ephesians, as he says in the beginning of our Epistle, <sup>13</sup> *Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.* <sup>14</sup> *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,* <sup>15</sup> *from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*

And what is his prayer for the Ephesians? *That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man.* Was not this a most remarkable prayer? He prays for the strengthening of the inner man.

What are we to understand by the inner man? A true Christian, as you all know, is composed of the outer and the inner man. The outer man is our human nature, man as he is born into this life.

Now this outer man, according to the natural order of things, grows and develops from infancy to youth, from youth to manhood and womanhood, and then gradually wastes away and returns to dust, as the Word of God says in Psalm 103:15–16, <sup>15</sup> *As for man, his days are like grass; As a flower of the field, so he flourishes.* <sup>16</sup> *For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, And its place remembers it no more.*

But besides this outer man there is an inner man, the man of whom Christ said to Nicodemus in John 3:5, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”*

A new man has been created in us Christians by the water and the Word, a man created after God in righteousness and true holiness; a new life principle has been put into us in regeneration, and this is the inner man of whom St. Paul speaks.

This inner man is not subject to the law of death and decay as the outer man, but he is to live forever. It is God’s will that he should increase, and grow, and become stronger in us continually. Let us consider, then, with the help of God’s Holy Spirit, *The Strengthening Of The Christian’s Inner Man.* May the Lord bless our meditation.

## **1. The Strengthening Of The Christian’s Inner Man Is Accomplished By His Growth In Faith**

The Christian's inner man is strengthened, in the first place, by growth in the faith, as the Apostle says, *that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.*

By faith we are made Christians. If a person finds that he is a sinner, if he perceives that all his righteousnesses are as filthy rags, and that he is in need of a Saviour, if in his misery and wretchedness he comes to Christ who has promised forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation in the Gospel for all sinners, then his faith in Christ, the Saviour from sin, has made him a Christian.

And how happy is the person who has thus found Christ! His joy knows no bounds. He feels that he has passed from death to life. He feels as though a heavy load had been removed from his shoulders. The voice of his conscience which had accused him before is hushed. He has found grace with God. He is impelled to exclaim with the Psalmist, <sup>3</sup> *The LORD has done great things for us, And we are glad.*<sup>1</sup>

Now the faith of such beginners in Christianity seems to be a strong and mighty thing. But this is a deception. Their faith, as a rule, is very weak. The reason why they are so happy and joyful is because they feel and experience things which they had never felt and experienced before. Their faith rests on their own feeling and experience. And what is the result?

When their joyful feelings pass away, when they no longer experience the grace of God, or when they meet with differing adversities in the world, when things are not done according to their thoughts under the ruling of divine Providence, and especially when they are afflicted and the hand of the Lord rests heavily upon them, then they generally lose their faith.

Then they begin to think that they must have been labouring under a false impression when they comforted themselves with God's grace in Christ. Then they will say, *How can Christ be dwelling in me, miserable creature that I am? How can God love me when He does nothing to show me His love, but rather afflicts me and lets me suffer?* — You see, my friends, that in the beginning, the Christian's faith is like a reed tossed by the wind. It is a very weak and frail thing.

Every Christian must grow and be strengthened in the faith continually, or he will be sure to lose the faith altogether. My friends, you must advance in the

faith to such a degree that you will trust in the written Word of God all contrary experiences notwithstanding.

You must come to believe that your sins are forgiven even though you feel sin dwelling in you; to trust in God's grace and mercy even though you experience His wrath; to see in God your merciful Father, and to consider yourself His dear child, even though it would seem as if He had forsaken you; and to rely on God's help and gracious deliverance even in the face of death.

A fine example we have in the nobleman. How weak he was in the faith when he came to Christ and said "*Sir, come down before my child dies!*"<sup>2</sup> He thought Christ could not do anything for his son unless He came along and laid His hand upon him.

But how wonderfully strong he was made in the faith when Jesus said in John 4:50, "*Go your way; your son lives.*" We are told *So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.*

Christ's word had thus strengthened him in the faith that he no longer believed in Christ's help under the condition that He would have to come along with him, but Christ's mere word was sufficient for him to overcome all his doubts and fears.

Another example we have in Peter. When Peter was still a beginner in the faith, he boasted that he would go into death with Jesus, so strong did he deem himself in the faith. Alas! but a few hours later he showed his weakness; for he denied his Master three times.

He had fallen from grace and lost faith altogether. But what a different man do we find in Peter later on, when he had been made strong in the faith! How fearlessly he preached the crucified and risen Christ, and how willing he was to suffer for His name's sake! Growth in the faith is what strengthens the inner man.

## **2. The Strengthening Of The Christian's Inner Man Is Accomplished By His Growth In Love.**

And growth in love. This is the second part of our meditation.

St. Paul prayed for the Ephesians not only that by the growth of faith their inner man may be strengthened, but he also adds, *that you, being rooted and*

*grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height — <sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

Look, then, to be strengthened according to the inner man, to be firmly established in our Christianity, we must not only grow in the faith, but we must also grow in love, so that our love resembles a solid tree with its roots deep into the ground, bearing fruit in due season, and defying the strongest winds.

Love is the fruit of faith, the test of faith. By our love we are to evidence before all people that we are true Christians, true believers in Jesus Christ who said in John 13:35, <sup>35</sup> *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

But how averse to love we all are by nature! Is not every person a born egotist? And even if we are born again and made new creatures, if the inner man has been created in us, does not the outer man continually seek to gain the supremacy?

Does not our inborn natural selfishness continually come to the surface and play false with us? O how necessary therefore that we keep a watchful eye upon the tree of faith, and see that it produces the fruit of love; how necessary that we continually grow in love as we grow in the faith!

Let us see that our love be more general, more universal! If we see any one whom God has cast in our way that we should perform upon him the works of love, let us not say, What have I to do with him? He is a stranger to me; he is not worthy of my love. Let us rather say: *“I will love all people as brothers and sisters of our common ancestor Adam, even if they are my enemies.”*

One God has created us and has redeemed us all, and Christ has died for others as well as for me. Let us see that our love be more unselfish! When a good turn, a favour, is required of us, let us not ask, *“What am I to get out of it?”* Let us not do good to others in expectation of a compensation and reward. The left hand should not know what the right hand is doing.

Our hearts should be filled with love even for those who have done us the greatest wrongs. Let us see that our love be more tender, more holy and divine. We should not run out of patience with those who have sinned, with their frailties and shortcomings, but admonish them time and again in love.

We should not be ashamed to deal with the greatest and filthiest sinners to convince them, to turn them from the error of their way, and to lead them to Christ.

Let us see that we love the neighbour as we love ourselves, that we do to others as we would have them do to us, that we rejoice over the neighbour's good fortune as if it had come to us, and that we sorrow over his misfortune as if it had befallen us.

In short, let us spend our lives in well-doing, in the works of love. Thus we shall grow in love and become truly rooted in love, as the Apostle says, and be strengthened according to the inner man.

And to show forth such love we must take for a pattern *the love of Christ which passes knowledge*. So universal, so unselfish, so tender, holy, and divine was Christ's love that it truly passes knowledge, that the breadth, and length, the height, and the depth of it can never be fathomed, even though it be studied with the greatest delight, and that in its superior excellence it surpasses all the knowledge of the children of men.

The love of Christ was shown in well-doing upon this earth, and it culminated in the sacrifice of His life on the cross for us all, that we might obtain the forgiveness of our sins and have eternal life. Let us learn from Him, then, how to love! Let us follow His steps, and we shall be His true disciples in faith and in love. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 126:3

<sup>2</sup> John 4:49