

God Builds His Temple

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[0:00] Ephesians 3 and verse 14. For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

! I pray that out of his glorious riches, he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church, and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. It's a great passage. It's a privilege for me to be here and to preach to you.

[1:20] Thank you for having me. I hope that some of you have had the opportunity to admire a beautiful work of architecture, a beautiful building. Maybe it's a cathedral in Paris, or maybe it's an enormous sports stadium in the United States, or maybe it's even a quaint little house in the countryside.

But there's something about seeing a building that's very well made, that draws you in, and it makes you appreciate the one who built it, the one who designed it.

It makes you say, wow, whoever built this, he was skilled. God has blessed him with the ability to build things. In the letter of Ephesians, the Apostle Paul portrays God as a master builder, an expert craftsman who is building his temple and ever continuing to build his temple that is now us, the people of God.

In the Old Testament, we saw in the tabernacle when Israel was in the wilderness, and then also in the Solomon temple, in the post-exilic temple, that God dwelt there. That's where he was.

But now as the New Covenant Church, we have the blessing of God making his dwelling place in us, in the temple. And so this temple theme runs throughout, especially the first three chapters of Ephesians, and we see it come to us today through this prayer that the Apostle Paul makes.

[2:39] And in this prayer, we see that because of his abundant love, the triune God is the designer, builder, and finisher of the temple. Therefore, our hearts ought to resound in doxological praise.

Because of his abundant love, the triune God is the designer, builder, and finisher of the temple. Therefore, our hearts ought to resound in doxological praise. We see this truth come to us in three movements of this prayer.

We see the reason for the prayer, the requests in the prayer, and the result of the prayer. The reasons for the prayer, the requests in the prayer, and the result of the prayer.

So why pray? Why should Paul pray? Well, as we said before, there is this idea of the temple running throughout the passage, and to get the reason for it, Paul begins his prayer by saying, for this reason.

And we can actually go back to the end of chapter 2 to talk about or see the reason for why he prays. If we look at Ephesians 2, starting in verse 19, Paul says this, and this is kind of what leads him into his prayer that we see before us.

[3:47] He says, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. And so as I said before, this idea of the temple is that God is building his temple in a couple different ways. He's building it on the individual level, which we saw at the beginning of Ephesians chapter 2. How does Ephesians 2 verse 1 start? It starts by saying, You were dead in your trespasses and sins, right?

But then what happens? God being rich in mercy, he makes you alive together with Christ. And so God is saving individuals and bringing them into his kingdom. But there's also a corporate aspect to the salvation that Paul talks about in the second half of chapter 2.

And that's what he's talking about here. That Christ Jesus has broke down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. He's made them both into one new man, into the temple of God.

[4:56] And so there is this corporate aspect of the salvation that we experience in Christ. And so on the thought that God is this master builder, this expert craftsman building his temple, there comes the reality that we are human beings.

that we still fall short, that we are works in progress. And so oftentimes we'll see the Apostle Paul address this problem by praying to God for spiritual growth for Christians.

We can go to the letter we have at hand. Ephesians chapter 1, Paul says this, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe.

Paul prays this for Christians. He wants them to know more. He wants them to come to a deeper and fuller understanding of who Christ is. And that picks up on the idea that we are works in progress.

We're human beings. We fall short. We're imperfect. And so God is building us, fitting us into a proper dwelling place for him. A few words of qualification may be in order.

[6:18] You don't know me very well. So just so that I can put your mind at ease when we talk about this process, of course we're not talking about our justification. We're not talking about our stance before God.

Christ has forgiven us all of our sins. We have been imputed his perfect righteousness. That stance can't change. But there is this process of sanctification under which we're all going where God is by his faithfulness, by his grace causing us to grow.

And that is what the apostle is praying for here. And so he prays to God. But why does he pray to God? Why should he ask God for these things?

The first point to realize is that God is able. Paul prays to God because God is able. Paul recognizes the power and the majesty of God even from the beginning of his prayer.

Look at what he says in verse 14. He says, For this reason I bow my knees. Now to whom do you bow your knees? Someone with power. Someone with authority.

[7:22] Someone with majesty. Someone who holds authority over you. And Paul is saying this is who God is. God is powerful. He is righteous. He is holy. We bow our knees before him.

But then look at what he says. I bow my knees before the Father. A term of intimate relation. A term of love. Familial relationship. This same God who is powerful and righteous and majestic and holy is the God who is our Father.

See what manner with which the Father has loved you that you should be called children of God. and the Christian life has that tension that God is he's beyond our thoughts. He's not like us.

He's more holy. His ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. But he comes to us in a covenant of grace. He relates to his people on the basis of the work of Christ.

And you can tell that this is a privilege to Paul. It's a privilege to Paul to bow your knees to the Father. A God who is infinitely far but so close. There's that tension of the Christian life that we realize in the gospel.

[8:33] His power is further demonstrated when Paul says from whom every family this is a God who holds power who holds sway over every family on earth. But then what does he do?

He names them. He shows them that he cares for them. So this God is a God who is able. But being able doesn't necessarily seal the deal does it?

Ability doesn't determine that this is the God we would want to ask. Let's say we could relate this to finances. A lot of us struggle with finances especially in the last five, six years this country has undergone a time of turmoil financially.

A lot of families have struggled. A lot of people have been out of work. And so let's say someone who is struggling with providing for his family let's say he gets introduced to a millionaire.

Someone who has millions and millions of dollars more than enough to help a struggling family. And this poor man goes up to this rich man and he says excuse me sir I'm so and so and I know that you own such and such business and that you have millions and millions of dollars.

[9 : 38] It wouldn't really hurt you to help out my family so I was wondering maybe if you could give us like like \$250,000. And I think most rich men have gotten to the place where they are because they've said no to situations like that.

And it's probably true that most rich men wouldn't help someone who just comes up to them on the street and asks for that kind of money. But brothers and sisters our God is a God who is not only able but our God is a God who is willing.

He's not only able to help but he is willing to help. And that is why Paul prays to him. In fact we've seen this all throughout the letter of Ephesians right?

We've seen that God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing that we have in Christ. We've seen that he has seated us in the heavenly places. He has bestowed on us his glory his riches he has made us his own.

He has shown time and time again that he is faithful that he is a God who is able to save and he is willing to save. And not only that he saves you but that he preserves you.

[10 : 46] And it is his help his grace that we need as we walk this Christian life and that is why Paul prays. We can think of promises like in Romans 8.28 the often quoted verses where we know for certain that God is working all things for our good.

He has our good in mind and so we can trust in him and we can trust in him because he's in control. He is worthy of our trust. There's a psalm that says O come let us worship and bow down infinitely far.

Let us kneel before Yahweh covenantal name of God he is close. Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. That is why Paul prays and as he asks for this spiritual maturity for the Ephesians in their walking the Christian life it is fitting that he would pray to God and ask for help because he is willing and because he is able.

So we see the reason for the prayer what about the requests in the prayer? This prayer consists of two main requests the first one is this Paul asks that God would grant the Ephesians according to the riches of his glory that they would be strengthened with power through his spirit in the inner man.

So what is the inner man? It's the part of us that doesn't experience through the senses it's the part of us that has been made alive in Christ 2 Corinthians chapter 4 the apostle says so we do not lose heart though our outer self is wasting away our inner self is being renewed day by day.

[12 : 24] This is the part of us that has experienced the new birth that wages war against the flesh and it is this part that Paul asks to be strengthened with power. Now we know how to strengthen the outer man right?

We know how to get strong on the outside you eat right you sleep right you get the proper exercise all the proper rest everything like that but how do you strengthen the inner man? There isn't a list of things that I can give you it's not as if if you read your Bible for exactly 15 minutes every day and if you pray for exactly 20 minutes every day it's not that kind of a thing.

To be strengthened in the inner man doesn't happen like that. Some in the history of the church thought that it did happen like that. There was a man Charles Finney you've probably heard of him he thought that conversion and revival was something that if you just had the right circumstances if you used exactly the right means there would be no possible outcome but that people would be converted.

He says this for a long time it was supposed by the church that a revival was a miracle an interposition of divine power. It is only within a few years that ministers generally have supposed revivals were to be promoted merely by the use of means.

and listen God has overthrown generally the theory that revivals are miracles. Now this claim by Finney is disputed all throughout the scriptures and we see that time and time again the Bible shows us that God is the one who converts his people God is the one who strengthens and

preserves his people.

[14 : 04] Psalm 28 8 says this the Lord is the strength of his people he is the saving refuge of his anointed. Listen to the promises in Isaiah chapter 41 fear not for I am with you be not dismayed for I am your God I will strengthen you I will help you I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Paul shows us again in the book of Colossians that we need to ask God for this kind of spiritual growth spiritual strength Colossians chapter 1 verse 11 he says we continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.

It's only by the grace of God that we are preserved it's only by the grace of God that we can be upheld in the Christian life. The great prince of preachers Charles Spurgeon when he would ascend to his pulpit every Sunday he would remind himself I believe in the Holy Spirit because as great of a preacher as he was he knew that there was no chance that people would be converted strengthened edified without the Holy Spirit attending to the word.

So that's the first request to be strengthened with power. The second request Paul asks that Christ may dwell in the hearts of the Ephesians through faith. We know that the Holy Spirit dwells in us and we hear that often but what is this about Christ dwelling in our hearts?

I think our Savior offers an answer to it in John chapter 14 at the Last Supper he says this I will not leave you as orphans I will come to you yet a little while and the world will see me no more but you will see me because I live you also will live in that day you will know that I am in the Father and you in me and I in you.

[16 : 13] A few verses down our Lord goes on if anyone loves me he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him. Galatians chapter 2 what does Paul say?

He says I have been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but what? But Christ lives in me. And so we see that the scriptures give us the freedom to express it in this way that through the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit coming and reminding us of the words of Christ and dwelling us with the power of Christ we can say that it is Christ dwelling in our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

If we go back to John 14 our Lord goes on the helper of the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

And so these two requests Paul asks us to be strengthened with power and then that Christ would dwell in our hearts through faith it's not something that we can attain through our own effort. We can't make our inner man be more strengthened.

We can't make Christ come and dwell in our hearts. We need to depend on God. As I was thinking about this I was reminded of a prayer an old Puritan prayer it goes like this I long to make to make some return but have nothing to offer and can only rejoice that thou doest all that none in heaven or on earth shares thy honor I can of myself do nothing to glorify thy blessed name but I can through grace cheerfully surrender soul and body to thee.

[17 : 54] And that's the proper response. We surrender to God we trust in his faithfulness we trust in his ability and his willingness to help and we trust that he will complete the work that he has started in us.

And notice thou that amidst all of that truth the apostle still prays the apostle still offers up a prayer and so don't take from this passage that it means we do nothing that there is no involvement of us. I think as we see Paul pray here that this is a good pattern for us as we heard in the sermon this morning we should pray and ask that God would be gracious to bless us and shouldn't we pray that God would give us strength in the inner man?

Shouldn't we pray that he would cause Christ to dwell in our hearts through faith? This is the kind of prayer we should be praying if we want to resist the devil if we want to resist temptation these are the kinds of prayers we should be offering up to our God but we never forget where we came from right?

Paul affirms that we're rooted and grounded in love rooted and grounded and these two words kind of play off each other the rooted is like a plant or a tree that's growing it's organic and grounded is a building term it's like a foundation and we see Paul do this with the idea of the temple right?

[19 : 21] It's a temple but it's growing it's an organic thing but it's also solid built on the foundation of Jesus Christ but he says that we are rooted and grounded in love and that's reminiscent of chapter 2 right?

The apostle says there that God because of the great love with which he loved us even while we were dead in our trespasses and sins made us alive together with Christ it's because of love we are rooted and grounded in love and see what wondrous love is this if you follow Paul's thought throughout the prayer where does he begin?

He begins at the Father and he asks the Father to give through his Spirit the Son dwelling in our hearts through faith Father Spirit Son this is a wondrous love this is a Trinitarian love this is a covenantal love this is an eternal love what wondrous love is this O my soul that the Triune God Father Son and Holy Spirit would at every turn be intimately involved in your salvation in your preservation that we frail sinful human beings would have the assurance of knowing the Triune God is working for us is there for us is faithful to us we are rooted and grounded not just in some abstract love the world has adulterated that term we are rooted and grounded in the love of the Triune God Father

Son and Holy Spirit from all eternity we see the requests of the prayer and then finally the result of the prayer if we do in fact take Paul as an example and we pray this prayer faithfully we trust that God will bless us with these things and Paul says this this is the result of the prayer in verse 18 in order that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints so you see him moving he's talked about kind of the individual aspect up until this point us being strengthened in the inner man and now he moves to the corporate so that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God now in this verse interpreters have bantered back and forth about what Paul means here by breadth length height depth

I think you can see that this idea of the temple is running all throughout this passage that Paul is using that as his foundation and I was doing some looking through the Old Testament in the Greek version of the Old Testament these words breadth length height depth they show up again and again and again in Ezekiel 40 through 48 while Ezekiel is giving his vision of the temple and so I think that Paul is picking up on that term that these are four kind of building technical terms that you would use to measure a building breadth length height depth and so what I think Paul is doing here is he's thrusting our attention to the picture that he's created this idea of a structure that God has built himself of which he is the expert craftsman the master builder he is building his temple and what he wants to say is if we are strengthened in the inner man if we experience more fully Christ dwelling in our hearts we will experience more fully we will be able to comprehend how great Christ's love is in that our God is building his church building his temple so that we may be brought to a place of awe he says that we would know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge it seems to contradict itself how do you know something that goes beyond knowledge it's because it's not just bare knowing it it's assenting to its truth it's trusting in its truth that is what it means to comprehend the love of Christ it goes beyond our knowing and then finally that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God what place is filled up with the fullness of God

[23 : 45] God's temple and so this idea is running throughout the entire passage and Paul is using it to show us how great God's love is for us it is the love of the triune God and he is faithful to preserve us and to sanctify us we see finally that as we ponder this result of the prayer we say well what's left for us to do Paul right after this prayer is going to get to chapter four where he starts talking about kind of the minutia of how we go through the Christian life he calls us to walk in a manner worthy he calls us to lay down our lives he talks about proper relationships among human beings but before he gets there he wants us to think about these things he wants us to think about the love of Christ think about what Jason said in the Sunday school hour you need the compass of the gospel you need to be properly oriented in order to walk the

Christian life the way that you ought to and so Paul says before he gets to what we call chapter four before he gets there he wants us to just think about the love of Christ he wants us to think about the love of God that goes beyond knowledge because truthfully truthfully we all have been brought from damnation to doxology really this entire discourse of the apostle began in chapter 2 verse 1 where he says you!

dead in your trespasses and sins but then what God made you alive together with Christ seated you in the heavenly places brought you into his temple brought you into his church spiritually blessed you and he ends up at the end of chapter 3 giving this doxology where we see that God is glorified not only in Christ Jesus but in the church that God uses his people as he justifies you as he sanctifies you he uses you to his glory and so we see again that he involves us he allows us to be a

part of his work and he glorifies his name in his church to all generations and so we see that that proper attitude comes from knowing Christ knowing the extent and the depth of his love and knowing that the triune God is the master builder planner finisher of the temple and to him be the glory and before we get to being able to properly walk that

Christian life as we trust in God to make us grow! we need to let our hearts resound in doxological praise each day we should remind ourselves what God has done for us and a heart that is properly praising God in doxology should sound something like this graduation in

May we pray that you would meet him in the word and have dealings with his heart lifting him up to praise and adoration even in his studies and then prepare an open door of ministry for him where he might be your man to hold your word before your people and before a lost and dying world so receive our praise as we offer it in Jesus name amen