

“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here” Continues

The Family of God

Ephesians 3:14-18

Dr. Jeff Stivason

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Jeff: Well, welcome to another episode of the Brave Men Bible study. I'm in a different place. I had to move so I wouldn't feel so bad looking in a broadly empty room. So I just moved myself into a smaller room. And I hope you're all well. I miss you and I miss getting together with you. I don't miss 6:30 in the morning. Just kidding!

Anyway, Sig yelled at me. Apparently he needed to take Don's place, who apparently isn't watching because I haven't gotten any emails from Don about the last job I took at him. But that's okay; I'm not bitter about that. Anyway, Sig is at least still watching and throwing me jabs. He didn't yell at me. But he did ask me not to direct you necessarily to the website, because the website is not always updated. But the newsletters are, and so please take a look at the newsletter in all seriousness. And look at those names there and the prayer requests that we have so that we can be praying for one another while we're in this time of hiding. *(He laughs)* Anyway, there's so much more we could say about that, but I don't think we will. And so let me get right on to the Bible study.

Let me again introduce the idea of what we're looking at today. If you'll remember back when we started in chapter 3, one of the things that we said was that you have to pay attention to the grammar, because the grammar is really the construction of the entire book of Ephesians. That grammatical structuring of Ephesians is really important in understanding the letter itself. It's really important in understanding the whole of the gospel.

What do I mean by that? Well, when you think about indicatives and imperatives it really gives you the understanding of the gospel. Indicatives are foundational. They are what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. And then the imperatives are built upon the indicatives.

If you put the imperatives foundationally before the indicatives, you have a legalistic gospel. If you only have indicatives and don't have imperatives, then you have an antinomianism. You have grace without law. You have grace without a worry about sin in terms of its effects on your life.

And that's not the gospel. The gospel is always this is what God has done for you. “Now be My people. I am your God; now be My people,” that kind of covenantal phraseology. So indicatives are foundational; it's what God has done for us. And then the imperatives are built upon the indicatives.

And so that's the way the book of Ephesians is laid out. And when we get to chapter 3, remember that we're talking here about the ministry. And I said to you that we shouldn't look at the ministry as something that we do. It is something we do. But in the course of Ephesians it's something that God has gifted to us. It's something that He's given to us and something that we exercise that brings connectivity to us because it's a gift from Him to His body.

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So all of that stands in the background of our text today. And what I want us to look at is a very small piece of Ephesians chapter 3. I want us to look at verses 14-18. And then the next time we’ll get together and we’ll finish off the chapter. But listen to these words from Ephesians chapter 3 starting at verse 14, just a few verses.

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may”, and so on. Now we’ll get to that next part the next time.

But for now I want us to look at two things. If you’re following the outline, we’re on point #4, and that is that *ministry strengthens us*. And what I want us to do is that I want us to look at two things today. I want us first of all to notice how the ministry strengthens us.

Two things about that. First of all, I want you to notice *Paul’s prayer*. And then I want you to notice *how we experience what Paul prays for*. So it’s those two things. I want you to notice Paul’s prayer and I want you to notice how we experience what Paul is praying for. And in discovering that we will then understand how ministry strengthens us. So let’s look at that today.

The first thing I want you to notice is *the prayer itself*. The prayer itself is what I read to you, or at least a part of what I read to you. And what I mainly want you to focus upon is what we find in Ephesians 3:16 ff. Notice what it says. He talks about *“being strengthened in your inner being.”*

Now the question is what’s the message? What’s the message here? In other words, is Paul saying that it is up to you to be strong? In other words, *“be strong and very courageous,”* like you would find in Joshua chapter 1. Be strong and courageous. In other words, pull yourself up by your bootstraps and be a man, that sort of thing. Is that what Paul is saying here?

Well again, think of the grammar. If the imperatives were in view here, then it would be “be strong,” and that’s something that you do. But that’s not what we’re looking at when we look at Ephesians chapter 3. Ephesians chapter 3 is about indicatives—what God has already done for us in Christ. And so the interesting thing is that when you think about the grammar in this way, it’s more like this. It’s granted to you to be strong, or that the strengthening happens to you.

Now I think that’s the way that you have to think about this. In other words, what Paul is saying, what he’s praying for, is that strengthening will happen to you. So what’s in view then is not what we do for ourselves, but it is what Paul is praying that God will continue to do in us. He’s praying that God will strengthen us.

So he’s praying that we’ll be strengthened in our inner person. Now the natural question is will I know it? How will I feel it? How will I sense it? How will I know that the strengthening is happening to me?

Well, this is where we get into the second point. *How will we know that Paul’s prayer has been answered?* First of all, his prayer has been that we be strengthened, that God

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would do the strengthening. The question is how are we going to experience that? How will we feel it? How will we know it?

Well, there are basically two answers to this, two answers to the question. How am I going to experience or know that God is strengthening me or has strengthened me? And let me first of all say that there is first of all *the objective grounds*.

Now what are the objective grounds? Well, let me give you an illustration. And it's one I'm going to be returning to periodically because it will help us.

There is a story about two theologians. One of them was dying and the other one was a friend of the man dying. And the dying man wrote to his friend and said, “I'm really struggling as I come to the end of my life. I'm struggling with trust and I'm struggling with faith, that sort of thing. Can you help me?”

And his friend wrote him back and said, “Bob, I understand your dilemma. Let me give you an illustration that might help you.”

He said, “Bob, imagine you were walking in the woods and you came to a bridge. And you stopped, paused, and you asked yourself, ‘Do I have enough faith in bridges to cross that particular bridge?’”

Now he says, “Bob, that's what you're doing. You're turning inward. And you're asking yourself, ‘Do I have enough faith to see me through this departure, this death?’ And that's the wrong way to look at this; it's the wrong question to ask. What you should be asking is this. You should be going over to that bridge. You should be examining its joints, its wood, its structure, all of those things, and then asking this question. ‘Do I have enough faith in this bridge to cross over it?’”

Now do you see the difference? The difference is really between the objective and the subjective. Think of it this way. Here is our man, and here is the bridge. Our man is asking, “Do I have enough faith in bridges to cross that bridge?” In other words, his focus is on the subjective. But his focus ought to be on the objective, the bridge itself. In other words, do I have enough faith in this bridge to cross over this bridge? Now the subjective will be brought into that, but only after the objective is examined.

Now I want you to think about that for just a minute. I want you to think about how he ought to be examining the bridge in order to understand whether or not he's been strengthened.

Now let me put it this way. When you think about whether I have enough faith to cross over the bridge of death, the first thing that you start with is not yourself. In other words, what do you start with? Well, the bridge in this illustration is a picture of Christ Himself.

Transcriber's Note: Jeff draws a picture on the board.

Jeff: In other words, Bob's friend was telling him, “Bob, examine Christ. Examine His promises. Examine His Person. Examine His work. And then ask yourself, ‘Is He worthy of my trust?’, and then cross on over.”

Now the point is that the inner strengthening will be based upon the objective Christ. And that's how you need to understand this. The inner strengthening is always based on something objective.

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This is the problem that we have with our modern world. You see, our modern world always says this. Our modern world says, “Have faith in faith,” right? That’s what it really amounts to.

And the question is well, wait a minute. If I have faith in faith, isn’t that all subjective?, because there is nothing in which I am putting my faith? There is nothing objective in which I am putting my faith. It’s all subjective. If it’s all subjective, well then I’m really in trouble, because I don’t have anything objective on which to plant my feet.

And what our friend was telling his friend Bob is, look at the objective first. The objective is important.

Now in this case that’s exactly what Paul is doing. Paul is saying, look! The objective is Christ who strengthens. He is the One who strengthens. Therefore look at the One who does the strengthening. Look at Christ.

Now look at what Paul does; look at how he says this. Paul says this. He says, *“I bow my knees to the Father, that He may give you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might as to the inner man, to wit that Christ may abide in your hearts by faith.”*

Transcriber’s Note: KJV.

Jeff: In other words, what he’s saying is this. He’s saying that the strengthening that he’s talking about, the strengthening in the inner man, is that Christ may abide in your hearts. But in order to know that you’ve been strengthened in the inner man, you need to know something about Christ who is the object.

That’s what he’s saying. Now Christ does all kinds of things throughout the Scriptures to help us to understand that He is the objective standard of our strengthening. For instance, even in John’s Gospel he talks about it to the disciples before He’s betrayed. And He says to the disciples in John chapter 14, a very familiar verse, *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”*

Now what is He saying? What’s typically understood is that He’s saying, “I’m going to heaven to prepare a place for you.” But notice what He says in that exact same chapter. In the exact same chapter in verse 23 this is what He says. *“Jesus answered them, ‘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.’”*

The word there is the same word for *room* in the previous text that I just read. He’s going there to prepare a place for us. And He’s got many rooms in this mansion, and He’s going to make one for us. And yet now in verse 23 He’s saying, “My Father and I will come and We’ll take up residence in you. We’ll take up a room in you.” In other words, the point is—and this is an important point,—the point is that Christ, the objective Christ and His Father have both made a place for us in Him, and they have a place in us. We call this union with Christ. And it’s because of our being united to Christ that we have all of the blessings that are promised to us in Him—those blessings promised to us by the Father, those blessings secured for us in Christ, and those blessings applied to us by the Holy Spirit. In other words, God, the triune God, is the objective grounds for my

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understanding of being strengthened. It’s because I stand in Christ that I’m united with the triune God, the One who strengthens me, that I am strengthened.

So I begin with the objective. I always look to God. I always look to Christ who opens up the Godhead to me, and there I find my strengthening.

So here’s the practical advice that I would say to you. I would say that if you’re lacking in strength, and you’re weak in your thinking, then study Christ. Look at His promises, look at His Person, look at His work, look at His benefits. Look at all the things that He did, that He said. And find Him to be the objective standard, the standard who is worthy to stand upon.

Now that’s first. But then I want you to notice this. I want you to notice that there’s a subjective element here. And the subjective element is that in my thinking and in my feeling, in my faith, it is through faith that Paul says that I understand this strengthening. In other words, there is a subjective experiential element by which I experience the objective. So we experience the objective how? By the subjective experience of faith.

Now that demands that we ask a very simple question. *What is faith?* Now faith is something that I’ve already told you about. I’ve already identified it a number of times when we’ve been in the midst of a study. Let me put it like this. Faith is knowledge; it is knowing. It is assent or agreement with what I know. And it is trust. And I’ve already told you that these things correspond with the unitary disposition that is a part of who we are. In other words, the knowing is something that I do with my head. The assenting is something I do with my will. And the trusting is something that I do with my affections.

And so I’m not like the demons. The demons know and assent to the things they know. But unlike the demons who hate God with their affections, I trust Him or love Him with my affections. And I am a child of God because I know, I agree with what I know, and I love the One I know. And I love the thing with which I agree. And so that’s faith. And it’s this faith that needs to be strengthened in order to experience the objective.

But again notice that knowing is a part of the subjective. But it’s also a part of the objective. I need to know the objective so that I can know and agree and love, and so be strengthened in my subjective experience.

You know, it’s interesting. The Westminster Confession of Faith in Chapter 14 section 3 says this. It says, *“This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong, may be often and in many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory.”*

In other words, let me put it like this. The great thing about it is this. I may have a weak faith. And your faith can fluctuate. It can be weak at one point in your life and strong at another point in your life. But a real and genuine faith, this saving faith always, always, always lays hold of an entire Christ. So whether my faith is weak or strong, Christ is who He is regardless. In other words, the objective remains constant and steadfast. Christ is Christ. But my subjective experience may be weak or strong. But it doesn’t matter.

Now I’d rather have it be strong so that I can experience the objective in its fullness. But my faith may be weak, and yet Christ is wonderfully strong. And the point is that I am only as secure as I feel. And if I’m focused on Christ I’ll feel way more secure than ever, because my faith is strong.

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Brothers, may your faith be strong in these difficult days, and we’ll see you again the next time.