Our Strength in Christ

LIFE IN CHRIST #6 - Pastor Gary Combs - October 25, 2026 - Ephesians 3:14-21

INTRO: Good morning church! We're continuing our series this morning entitled, "**LIFE IN CHRIST: An Exposition of Ephesians."** We'll be finishing up the last part of chapter three today, and then we're going to take a break from this series and come back to it next year.

Over these past five weeks, we've learned about our blessings in Christ, our enlightenment in Christ, our transformation in Christ, our peace in Christ, and our mission in Christ. We've discovered that our identity, our worth, our relationships, and our purpose are all transformed by being in Christ.

The key phrase in Ephesians is "in Christ." Paul uses some form of this expression some 36 times in his letter.

As we conclude chapter three today, Paul moves from explaining what God has done for us in Christ to praying for what God will do within us through Christ.

Remember how chapter three began? Paul wrote, "For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus..." (3:1). But before he could finish his thought, he paused to explain the mystery of the gospel and his mission to proclaim it to the Gentiles. Now, in verse 14, he returns to that thought: "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father." This is the second time Paul paused to pray for the Ephesians in his letter (the first being 1:15-23). But for this prayer, he falls to his knees.

Paul is writing from Roman imprisonment. Yet he doesn't pray for the prison doors to open. He prays for the believers' hearts to be strengthened! Why? Because he knows that the Christian life requires a power greater than anything we possess in on our own.

Need: Yet sometimes, we slip back into thinking of the Christian life as a list of things we must do. Pray more. Read our Bibles more. Be more loving. Be more patient. Share our faith more. And while these are all good things, we soon discover that knowing what we ought to do doesn't give us the power to do it.

Trans: This is where the gospel continues to matter for us. Thee gospel isn't merely the entry point for the Christian life. It's the sustaining message for living the Christian life. It's the promise that God will finish what He started in us.

Because the gospel is good news, not good advice! Good advice tells us what we need to do. Good news tells us what God has already done for us. We don't need better advice. We need God's power!

That's what Paul prays for in our passage today. Instead of telling the Ephesians to try harder, he bows his knees before the Father and asks Him to strengthen them through His Spirit. As we study his prayer, we'll discover that the God who has given us new life in Christ also supplies the power to live it.

BODY: In the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he prayed that believers would be strengthened by God's power in Christ Jesus. We can be strengthened by God's power in Christ. How can we be strengthened by God's power in Christ? The text reveals **three ways** that God's power strengthens us in Christ.

Read text: Ephesians 3:14-21 (ESV) 14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

THREE WAYS GOD'S POWER STRENGTHENS US IN CHRIST:

1. By empowering us inwardly through His Spirit.

EXP: (14-17a) Paul begins with the words, "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father" (14). His kneeling expresses humility, reverence, and earnest dependence upon God. Paul understood that the spiritual strength believers needed could only come from their heavenly Father.

"**Every family…is named**" (15) - Paul makes a deliberate wordplay between the Greek words πατήρ (*patēr*, "father") and πατριά (*patria*, "family" or "lineage"). Paul reminds us that every family owes its existence and identity to God. And this is the Father to whom Paul bows his knees, the One whose glorious riches are more than sufficient to strengthen His children.

"**That… He may grant**" (16) (δίδωμι, *didōmi*) - to grant, give to one asking, let have; to supply, furnish. A gift. This is the 1st of 4 "that" purpose or result clauses.

"**Strengthened**" (16) (κραταιόω, *krataioō*) - to be made strong, to increase in strength, to grow strong

"With power" (16) (δύναμις, *dynamis*) - inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature

"**Inner being**" (16) (ἔσω ἄνθρωπος, *esō anthrōpos*) - Lit., "inner man." Of mind, will, heart, affections…

"So that…dwell" (17) - This is the 2nd "that" clause. (κατοικέω, *katoikeō*) - to dwell, settle. Stott points out that Paul uses a word describing permanent residence rather than a temporary visit (John Stott, T*he Message of Ephesians*, 135). Paul isn't praying that Christ would enter their hearts for the first time. They're already believers! He's praying that Christ would increasingly make Himself at home in their hearts. The question is not whether Christ is present in you, but whether your life is increasingly shaped by His presence and rule.

ARG: **Paul is distinguishing the inward spiritual person from the outward physical person.**

2 Corinthians 4:16 (ESV) So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

Paul had learned the secret of depending on Christ's strength in all things.

Philippians 4:13 (NKJV) I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

ILL: **Remember the story of Zacchaeus?** Jesus said, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today" (Luke 19:5). And what happened when Jesus entered his home? Everything changed! And Jesus declared, "Today salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9).



APP: Where do you need God's strength today? Are you facing a trial that has left you exhausted? Are you struggling with a temptation you cannot seem to overcome? Are you carrying burdens that nobody else knows about? Stop relying solely on your own determination. Ask your heavenly Father to strengthen you. The Christian life is not lived by trying harder, but by depending more fully on the Spirit of Christ in you!

2. By enabling us to grasp the greatness of His love.

EXP: (17b-19a) Now we come to the 3rd "that" clause: "that you, being rooted and grounded in love" (17)… "may have strength to comprehend" (18)… "and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (19).

"**Rooted**" (17) (ῥιζόω, *rhizoō*) - to cause to take root. An agricultural metaphor.

"**Grounded**" (17) (θεμελιόω, *themelioō*) - to lay the foundation, establish. An architectural metaphor.

"Love" (17, 19) (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) - love, God's unconditional love, sacrificial love. "Love is to be the soil in which their life is rooted; love is to be the foundation on which their life is built" (Stott, 136).

"**Strength**" (18) (ἐξισχύω, *exischyō*) - to have full strength, i.e. be entirely competent:—be able.

"**Comprehend**" (18) (καταλαμβάνω, *katalambanō*) - to lay hold of so as to make one's own, to attain to.

"**With all the saints**" (18) - "All the saints—rich and poor, black and white, young and old—should think on the love of Christ together. Discuss His love; share stories of His love; study the Bible together. This is another reference to the importance of the church. God intends to shape us through community as we reflect on His gospel. We are not intended to live the Christian life in isolation" (Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, 89).

"**Breadth and length and height and depth**" (18) - Paul expresses the 4 dimensional love of Christ.

"Wide illustrates his accepting love… Long his lasting love… High, his exalting love… and Deep, his sacrificial love" (Richard Coekin, *Ephesians For You*, 104-105).

"Broad enough to encompass all mankind, long enough to last for eternity, deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and high enough exalt him to heaven" (Stott, 137).

"**Know the love of Christ**" (19) (γινώσκω, *ginōskō*) - to know, understand, perceive, have knowledge of.

"**Surpasses knowledge**" (19) (ὑπερβάλλω γνῶσις, *huperballō gnōsis*) - Lit., "to surpass in throwing." To surpass knowledge. It is not a mere intellectual appreciation of the love of Christ that Paul is after.

"Paul is not asking that his readers might become more able to articulate the greatness of God's love in Christ Jesus or to grasp with the intellect alone how significant God's love is in the plan of redemption. He is asking God that they might have the power to grasp the dimensions of that love in their experience. (D.A. Carson, *Spiritual Reformation*, 191).

What a wonderful paradox! Paul is praying that we might truly know Christ's love while recognizing that we will never exhaust its immeasurable greatness.

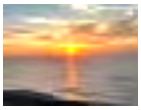
ARG: **Paul said nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ!**

Romans 8:38-39 (ESV) 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When we begin to grasp Christ's love for us, we live a crucified life. As Paul said:

Galatians 2:20 (NLT) My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

ILL: **Here's a photo I took of the Atlantic Ocean.** You can see the water stretching toward the horizon, but you cannot see its end. You can dive into the water and genuinely experience the ocean without ever knowing the full measure of its breadth or depth. So it is with Christ's love.



APP: Do you really believe that Christ loves you? Not merely that He loves the world, or that He loves the church, but that He loves you? Some of us believe in God's love intellectually but struggle to rest in it personally. But God's love is not measured by how we feel. It is demonstrated by what Christ has done. When you are discouraged, remember His love. When you have failed, return to His love. When you feel alone, rest in His love. And don't try to grasp His love in isolation. Grow in that understanding alongside other believers as you worship, pray, serve, and encourage one another.

The more deeply we grasp Christ's love for us, the more securely we can rest and live in Him.

3. By growing us into the likeness of His Son.

EXP: (19b-21) Now we come to the climax of Paul's prayer and his 4th and final "that" clause: "that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (19). What does that mean? It means to become like Jesus!

"**Filled**" (19) (πληρόω, *plēroō*) - to make full. Also, to cause to abound, to render full, i.e. to complete.

"**Fullness of God**" (19) (πλήρωμα, *plērōma*) - Noun form. That which has been filled. Completeness. Does that mean we become gods? Of course not! It means that God intends to fill our lives increasingly with His own character and holiness, bringing us toward spiritual maturity in Christ.

Then in verses 20–21, Paul concludes with one of the greatest doxologies in all of Scripture:

- **His ability:** God is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think.
- **His power:** It is the very power already at work within us.
- **His purpose:** That God might receive glory in the church and in Christ Jesus forever.

Paul has prayed an extraordinary prayer. But he concludes by reminding us that God's power is more than sufficient to answer it.

"**Now to him who is able**" (20) (δύναμαι, *dunamai*) - to be able, to be capable, strong and powerful.

"**Far more abundantly**" (20) (ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ, *huperekperissou*) - beyond measure; greatly, exceedingly.

"**Glory**" (21) (δόξα, *doxa*) - glory, honor, praise, worship. Also, splendor, brightness.

ARG: **God chose us to become like His Son!**

Romans 8:29 (NLT) For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son…

God is still working in us, and He will bring His saving work to completion.

Philippians 1:6 (ESV) And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

ILL: **Sculptor working on a large block of rough marble.** To the untrained eye, it appears to be nothing more than a heavy, shapeless stone. But the sculptor has a vision of what that stone will become. With every careful strike of the chisel, he removes what does not belong, gradually revealing the image he intends.



In a far greater way, God is at work in us. He sees not only what we are, but what He has purposed for us to become in Christ. God has given us new life in Christ, and He is bringing that life toward maturity.

APP: Are you becoming more like Jesus? When you look back over your life, can you see evidence of God's transforming work? Are you growing in love, patience, humility, forgiveness, and holiness?

Perhaps you are discouraged because you still see so many imperfections. But remember, God hasn't finished His work in you yet.

We must cooperate with His sanctifying work through faith and obedience. But we must never confuse our cooperation with the source of our transformation. God is the One who supplies the power. God is the One who produces the growth. And God is the One who will bring His work to completion.

Don't lose heart when the process seems slow. Keep trusting the Lord and yielding yourself to His transforming work. God isn't finished with us yet. And what He has begun, He is able to bring to completion!

CONCLUSION: As we conclude the first three chapters of Ephesians, we've discovered the incredible blessings that are ours in Christ. But how can we possibly live out all that God has called us to be?

Not in our own strength! That's why Paul ends this section on his knees, praying for God's power to work within us.

And here's the good news! The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in those who belong to Him!

Jesus died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again so that we might be forgiven, reconciled to God, and given new life in Him.

Seeker: Have you received that new life? You cannot live the life of Christ without first receiving the life that Christ gives. Will you repent of your sins and put your faith in Him today?

And believer, are you trying to live the Christian life in your own strength? Will you surrender to Him and depend on His power at work within you?

Remember, the gospel isn't just how we begin the Christian life. It's how we live it out!

The God who saved us by His grace is the God who strengthens us by His grace, and He will finish what He started!

Let's pray.