

Did You Grow?

By David de Bruyn

Ephesians 3:14-19

“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; ¹⁷That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

There is a condition that some people contract or inherit called protracted infancy. In this condition, the body and sometimes the mind is not developing in correspondence with the years. Though they may be 16, they look and sound 11. There are some treatments for what is often a disturbing and strange condition.

Amazingly enough, protracted infancy is a common condition amongst Christians in a spiritual sense. Now, time works differently in the spiritual realm. Two 6-month old Christians won't necessarily be at the same level spiritually. But what so often happens is to find a 5 or 10 year old Christian exactly the same as they were at 6 months. Their development has been stunted. Christians are supposed to get more and more mature spiritually, not remain at the same level.

Why does it happen? Two reasons:

- 1) The Christian himself does not seek to grow.
- 2) Other believers are not praying for him.

We tackle both these issues as we look at Ephesians 3 today. It's a prayer for spiritual growth. We can both seek to apply the principles here, and pray it for other believers.

Paul takes up a thought he began in verse 1, “for this cause I”. Paul has been describing the tremendous position of the believer. He now seeks to pray for spiritual growth for his readers, that they would live out what they are in Christ.

He asks God to grant these things according to the riches of His glory, it is limitless and infinite. There are four stages Paul mentions, each designated by a ‘that’. Four stages, the final being maturity in Christ. That is what Paul means when he talks about being ‘perfect’, mature.

Stage 1: Strengthened.

“That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man”

Literally, the Greek says “power to become mighty in the inward man through His Spirit.” We could re-phrase that. The Holy Spirit gives you power to be mighty in the inward man. The inward man is our soul and spirit that have been regenerated and given new life. A new nature. The request is: may God grant that inner man to be made stronger and stronger by the Holy Spirit.

We know that when you are born again, you are not filled immediately with maturity, wisdom and experience to overcome temptation. You are a baby Christian with an adult sinful nature. The flesh is still resident, and the foundation of Christian maturity is for your new nature to be strengthened and grow by the power of the Holy Spirit, to be fed and exercised until it is stronger and more dominant than your flesh.

How does this happen?

Well, the Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us on the day we received Jesus Christ. He is now working in us to weaken the sinful nature and its grip on us, and strengthen the new nature. Yet He works with us, with our co-operation.

The Holy Spirit's control over your life is exactly proportional to how much you co-operate with Him.

It's a bit like a battery. It's said to have 'potential difference'. But it is only when the circuit is completed does it flow. There is power available, but the circuit must be complete. Likewise, the Spirit's power is available, but only when we obey God from His Word does His power flow through us. He gives you the power to say 'yes' to God, and 'no' to sin. Sometimes we think that dying to self, or resisting temptation is a human work. But Romans 8:13 tells us that we mortify the flesh through the Spirit. The Spirit works positively and negatively.

The Holy Spirit will definitely do His part, but we must do ours. Sometimes we think that because it is His power through us, we can be passive. No! He fills and controls in proportion to what we want. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled".

It's like a syringe, the more you pull, the more of a vacuum, the more will be filled up. Likewise, if you are half-hearted about the Christian life, expect that the Holy Spirit will fill you in proportion. Follow hard after God, put 100% into it, expect to see major leaps in spiritual growth.

The pattern is simple for Christians young and old, learn, trust, obey.

Learn, I Peter 2:2. Learn the Word as often as possible, take in as much as you need.

Read it. Study it. Memorise it. Meditate on it. Discuss it. Listen to it. But take it in, so that the Holy Spirit can bring it back to your mind, so you can flee from sin and follow after righteousness.

Trust, be filled or controlled by Him. Trust Him for the strength to obey. Do this by acknowledging I in prayer. Continual prayer, abiding in Christ keeps us mindful of why we are obeying. To trust Him is to remember Him and rely on Him. That's why we need a daily quiet time to start the day in prayer and the Word.

Obey, if you are remembering Him, in fellowship with Him, obeying will be easier. Do what pleases Him, avoid what displeases Him. Do this with all your heart, learn, trust, obey. Do it consistently, and the Holy Spirit will be strengthening you more and more.

You see, Satan's tactics haven't changed. When he wanted to get rid of Christ, when did he first try to have Him killed? When He was a baby. Before he could grow and begin ministering. Satan does the same, he will attack baby Christians, because if you do not get this foundational stage right, all else will be weak and partial at best. Satan will attempt to keep us tripping over one particular area of disobedience to prevent us from moving on. We must pray for each other, that we be strengthened.

Next we see, ‘that..’ In other words, when stage 1 is operating, not necessarily perfected, but occurring consistently it leads us on to stage 2 in verse 17.

Stage 2: Surrendered

‘That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith’ Now doesn’t Christ dwell in our hearts already? Yes, but the word for dwell is different from in Romans 8:9 where it refers to His permanent indwelling. This word has a preposition added which denotes intensity. It means to ‘house-down’, i.e. to ‘really dwell’. To put it another way, that He may be at home.

Think of that, Christ is living in us by the Holy Spirit, but because of our lives, He may feel uncomfortable, He may not feel at home. What would cause Him to feel that way?, Sin. Our disobedience naturally grieves Him.

But there’s another level. What would make you feel uncomfortable in someone else’s home? Selfishness on the part of the host. Ignoring you. Acting like you are not there. Being selfish with the rooms and possessions in the house. That’s how Jesus may feel when we live for ourselves. So this stage refers to a deeper, fuller surrender to Him. Surrender, to hand over control to someone else. It is to admit He is the Lord of our lives, to renounce my identity, my possessions, my comforts. Jesus must come into every room of our lives and take over. Every room, every closed cupboard now becomes his to re-arrange as He pleases.

Galatians 2:20 tells us I have no life of my own: it’s Christ’s life that lives in me. I now live by faith toward Christ. That means I do everything for Him, as He would do it. Christ through me.

We must live like this –seeing ourselves as belonging to Him. But read Luke 14, and you will find it is the qualification of a disciple, giving up all for the one you follow.

Stage 1 is concerned mostly with sin and obedience. Stage 2 is mostly concerned with surrender, with priorities, with Christ being Lord and Master over everything.

Abraham and Isaac is an example. Abraham’s call to sacrifice Isaac was not a sin issue, but a surrender issue. Isaac had perhaps become an idol to Abraham.

That leads us to stage 3

Stage 3: Surrounded

“that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; ¹⁹And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge”

As the Holy Spirit is controlling us, consequently we are giving more of ourselves to God. As this happens we are growing in love for Him. Our Christian experience is causing us to live lives of love. Consequently we begin to behold the love of God more and more.

As you are more obedient, Jesus is more at home, and consequently manifests Himself in a greater way. Notice v 19, literally ‘know the surpassing knowledge and love of Christ’. Wasn’t that Paul’s goal in Philippians 3:10? We’d like to start here, wouldn’t we? But God manifests and reveals Himself to the obedient (John 14:23). When He is at home, we will understand Him and His love.

Notice God's love is 4-dimensional love, it's beyond articulation. Paul says he wants his readers to be literally strengthened to grasp God's love. God's love is so massive, it requires strength to grasp it!

Naturally Satan will not want a believer to come to this point. For from here, they flow naturally into stage 4. Living in and growing in the love of God leads us to the final stage:

Stage 4: Settled

“that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”

The word filled literally means furnished, covered, finished. The idea is one of completion or maturity. The Bible often uses the word ‘perfect’ - not in the sense of sinless perfection, but Christlike. Consistently Christlike. Obedience is the norm. Surrender is natural. Sin is the exception, though we are more aware of it.

How are we furnished? With Him! He completes us. Colossians 1:28: “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:” “Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.” (4:12). Later in the letter, Paul elaborates on what Christlike maturity is: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: ¹³Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: ¹⁴That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:”

Maturity is being Christlike, knowing Him and imitating Him, when we are grounded in the Word and our life is one of truth and love. Maturity doesn't mean growth ends! It means Christlikeness is the norm, not the exception.

So often we are content to say, “No one's perfect” or “We all sin” But Jesus said, “Be ye perfect”. We are to follow after this, not resign ourselves to where we are now. It is God's will for us all to reach maturity as Christians. God can then use us over and above what we ask or imagined.

There are two applications:

- 1) Personally, we must seek to be controlled by the Spirit. Learn, Trust and obey. We must surrender to Christ, grow in the knowledge of Him, and so become like Him.
- 2) We must pray for others that they grow daily in obedience to the Spirit, that they surrender to Christ, that Christ's love and Person become more real to them, that they reach the fullness of Christ.

Pray big, not small. Pray over new believer, and over old ones. Realise that all four stages are so closely linked that you can't pray for one in isolation.

As Paul said: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ

Jesus. ¹³Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, ¹⁴I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”