

True Church (5)- A People Filled by the Spirit

(Ephesians 3:16- 21)

I. Introduction

- A. One of the early issues our churches fought over was stained glass windows.
 - 1. It really wasn't the stained glass, but what the stained glass represented.
 - a. We were a frontier movement with a simple idea—simple Christianity.
 - 1) We sought to set aside denominational traditions to be NT church.
 - 2) That meant simple—simple worship, simple preaching, simple music
 - b. It also meant simple building— stained glass and steeples weren't simple.
 - c. These were worldly and materialistic; church was supposed to be simple
 - 2. But gradually our members became more educated, successful and social.
 - a. We crossed the tracks, and we came to embrace the values of our culture.
 - 1) We lived in big houses, drove cars, and dressed in fine clothes.
 - 2) We built buildings w/ stained glass, steeples and indoor plumbing
 - b. We still preached a “*simple gospel*” as we embraced our modern culture.
 - 3. But the more we trusted the values of the culture, the less we trusted God.
 - a. For many of us, God's power in world was reduced to pages in a book
 - 1) I was taught that Holy Spirit only interacts with us through the Bible.
 - 2) To be filled, led or indwelt by the Spirit was only figure of speech
 - b. The power of the gospel was us, our preaching, arguments and obedience
 - 4. To really believe that God gives us power through Spirit was HERESY.
- B. Yet, NT constantly speaks about power (*Rom 15:13, 1 Cor 4:20, 1 Thess 1:5, Col 1:11*)
 - 1. Do we really see our lives as characterized by the power of God in us?
 - a. Or is it easier to see faith as a system of belief that often lacks power
 - b. Christianity as a lifestyle or belief system can seem pretty puny at times
 - 2. The first readers of the book of Ephesians must have felt that way.
 - a. Paul calls them to live holy lives that are worthy of their calling (**4:1**).
 - b. But how were they to live holy lives (last week) in such a pagan world?
 - 1) In **Eph 3:16-21**, Paul prays we will have the power that we need
 - 2) Power wasn't from positive thinking or education— it was of God!

II. First, Power Is Through the Spirit (3:16-17a)

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

- A. Paul asks God to give these Christians power in their spirit through His Spirit
1. Paul has already affirmed some important things about Spirit here:
 - a. Spirit in us is the seal, the deposit of our coming salvation (1:13)
 - b. The Spirit gives us the wisdom/revelation that we know God (1:17)
 - c. The church is temple in which God lives through His Spirit (2:22)
 - d. Mystery of Christ has been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit (3:5)
 2. But in our text, Paul prays that God will strengthen is through His Spirit.
 - a. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit not in some mystic, mysterious way
 - b. Paul sees the Spirit in a very practical way—leads us into a spiritual life
 3. Paul here prays for the Spirit to give us spiritual power. **Notice 3 things:**
 - a. **First**, God will give us spiritual power directly to our inner spirit.
(This isn't about self-help, self-hypnosis or self education. It's not about self at all)
 - b. **Second**, that power comes through the Holy Spirit who lives within us.
(Teacher: Don't believe Spirit really in you or else you'll expect him to do something)
 - c. **Third**, that Spirit power is available to us through the avenue of prayer.
(Paul is praying for others to receive power; probably good for us to pray that too!)
- B. Paul didn't expect the Ephesians to generate spiritual power through willpower.
1. Sure, spirituality does require discipleship and willpower (*and won't power*)
 - a. Christianity is all about obedience—*God created us to do!* (Eph 2:10)
 - b. Clearly, this emphasis on God's power isn't about absolving us of work
 2. But Paul clearly expects for God to give spiritual power (1 Cor 2:4-5)
 - a. You've read those stories about flood, plagues, Goliath, healings, etc.
 - b. Are those stories there to show us how powerful God **WAS** in past?
 - c. Or do they have something to do about how powerful God **IS** today?
 3. We get hung up on the "HOW" when we think about God's power today
 - a. We know that when we lack wisdom, we are supposed to pray (Jam 1:5)
But how can God do that? Bible flops open just to the right verse?
 - b. When we pray for God to heal, we pray, "for the hands of the doctors"
Is this is the only way God can heal? (Some doctors think they are God)

III. Second, Power Comes Thru Love (3:17b-19)

¹⁷ And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

- A. We are given power by God when we are “*rooted and established in love.*”
(I like the NLT here— “Your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love”)
 - 1. We gain spiritual power as our lives become more in tune with God’s love
(The NCV translates this verse “your life will be strong in love and be built on love”)
 - a. Paul wants us to know that God gives the spiritual power that we need
 - b. But the tool that the Spirit uses to strengthen us is the power of love.
 - 2. To understand the power that God gives, we have to know the love He gives
 - a. The experience of God’s power is in the context of relationship with Him
 - b. Says we can know a love that’s so great that it surpasses all knowledge
- B. How can we hope to know something beyond knowing? *2 kinds of knowing*
 - 1. **Intellectual:** We can never fully understand or comprehend God’s love
 - a. Paul says God’s love is too big— “*wide and long and high and deep*”
 - b. You’ll never understand, comprehend, delineate and explain all of that
 - c. God’s peace “*transcends all understanding*” (**Phil 4:7**). So does his love
 - 2. **Experience:** We do “*know*” God’s love in the sense of a relationship
 - a. In the Bible, the word “*know*” is a euphemism for sex (“*Adam knew Eve*”)
 - b. In that way, knowledge is something that is experienced in relationship
 - 1) Sometimes Lynn will say, “*Hey, I know you*” (*Usually in an argument*)
 - 2) She has experienced me enough to know who I am (*as opposed to say*)
 - c. We can’t comprehend God’s love, but can experience it and share it!
- C. Paul prays for them to be empowered by Spirit and then to know God’s love
 - 1. Paul combines all three of these—Spirit, Power, Love—in **2 Timothy 1:7**
 - a. Translations differ whether the “spirit” here is our or the Holy Spirit
 - b. Is it that the Holy Spirit doesn’t lead is to timidity, but power & love
 - c. Later in same context, Paul does stress the Holy Spirit (**2 Tim 1:14**)
 - 2. Point is that we have God’s power and love, so we aren’t to be timid
 - a. The self-discipline we must have to obey comes from God’s power and love
 - b. When we really know that God love us, that empowers us to live for Him

IV. Conclusion

- A. It's hard to live in our POST-world (post-Christian, postmodern, post-911)
1. Sometimes it looks for all the world like the deck is stacked against us—
 - a. On the one hand, the world attacks our values (*move to redefine marriage*)
 - b. On the other hand, we fail to live out those values (*Christian divorce rate*)
 2. What we want to do is throw a pity party, “*It's so hard today to live today!*”
 - a. Just look at what the President is doing and what Congress isn't doing
 - b. Look how bad the economy is doing (*my 401K says that I owe it money*)
 - c. Look how the media belittles and lampoons our faith and morality.
 - d. Look at how American prestige has fallen and Islamic power rises
 3. We fret and fear, worry and wring our hands... *all the while we are singing*
How great is our God, sing with me, how great is our God, and all will see how great is our God
Shine, Jesus, shine, fill this land with the Father's glory. Blaze, Spirit, blaze, set our hearts on fire.
You are awesome in this place, Mighty God, You are awesome in this place, Abba Father
 - a. Does God still reign? Is His love and power real? If not, quit singing
 - b. If it is true, then we live today like we are children of God (**1 John 4:4**)
You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.
- B. We've been looking at what it means to live as “**the True Church Today.**”
1. We have suggested that being a true church is relational, not institutional
 - a. A true church is one who finds its identity in God— *Church of Christ*
(A People Under the Word, A Community of the Cross, A People who are Holy)
 - b. Today we add, “*true church is a people who are powered by the Spirit*”
 2. Paul ends our text with one of his most dramatic statements (**Eph 3:20-21**)
²⁰ *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, ²¹ *to him be glory in the church and*
in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.
 - a. Do we really believe that? Is God really able to do more than we ask?
 - b. If we really believe in God's power and love, it take away two things
 - 1) **FEAR:** We won't have to fear what the world thinks, says or does
 - 2) **EXCUSES:** Can't excuse ourselves as too weak and powerless
 3. Do we really believe we are “*filled with Thy Spirit, wisdom and power?*”