

# THE CHRISTIAN'S STRENGTH



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A REVISION STUDY FROM  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

*The Christian's Strength*

The Christian's Strength  
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## Welcome to *The Christian's Strength*

One of the most recurrent exhortations in the Bible is, "Be strong!"

God commands us to be strong, and He shows us how, by what means, and to what ends we should seek the strength of His might. If we're not seeking to become strong in the Lord, we're missing the best of what God intends for us.

The strength of the Christian begins within, where God brings us into His glory and, by the power of His Spirit, transforms us into the image of Jesus Christ. Then, in the Spirit's power, we live in the likeness of Jesus, filling all the places and spaces of our lives with the fragrance of Christ.

This is just the normal Christian life, but we need to apply ourselves diligently to living in the strength God provides.

*ReVision* studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 According to God's Glory

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...* Ephesians 3.14-16

*Be strong!*

One of the most frequent exhortations in all of Scripture is the exhortation to “be strong.” So often does this charge appear in Scripture, that there can be no mistaking God’s intention: He wants His people to *be strong*.

The command to *be strong* runs like a thread through the Old and New Testaments. God commanded the people of Israel to *be strong* in doing His commandments (Dt. 11.8). Moses commanded Joshua to *be strong* in leading the people of Israel into the land of promise (Dt. 31.23). The exhortation to *be strong* was imposed as a charge on Solomon (1 Kgs. 2.2), Asa (2 Chron. 15.7), Amaziah (2 Chron. 25.8), all the anxious-hearted of Judah (Is. 35.4), Daniel (Dn. 10.19), Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest (Hag. 2.4), the returning remnant of Israel (Zech. 8.9), the churches at Corinth and Ephesus (1 Cor. 16.13; Eph. 6.10), the young pastor Timothy (2 Tim. 2.1), and, in one form or another, many others throughout Scripture.

*Being strong* is an expectation God holds out for all those who are called to obey and serve Him. Undoubtedly with this in mind, Paul prayed that God would strengthen the believers in Ephesus, and we can be sure that God intends the same for believers in every age. *Being strong* is thus a commandment we need to take seriously.

God command us to *be strong*. But what does that mean?

*What kind of strength?*

In our day of muscle, money, moxie, and military might, being strong can mean different things. We rightly suspect that God, in exhorting His people to be strong, does not intend that they should simply latch onto some idea of strength that appeals to them, and then go for it. While often, *being strong* will require physical or material power or ability, the kind of strength God has in mind goes far beyond these.

Paul is clear: we are to be strong *with power* and *according to the riches of God's glory*. The kind of strength the believer is to seek is that which redounds to the glory of God and operates by His power. It is strength that glorifies God through the exercise of spiritual power. The end we seek in being strong is that *God might be glorified*, and the way we pursue that end is through *spiritual power*, the power of God’s Spirit working within and through us.

We are strong as the Lord intends when, by the inward working of His Spirit, we glorify Him in our lives. Glory and power are thus the hallmarks of the kind of strength God commands of us.

We need to examine these ideas more closely.

*The glory of God*

Let’s begin with *glory*. Like some other terms in the Christian vocabulary, *glory* is one with which all believers are familiar. But understanding what glory is, and how we relate to it is another matter.

The glory of God is but the presence of God, made manifest in ways that weigh heavily upon us. The word *glory* comes from a Hebrew root that means, “to be heavy.” In the Scriptures, God is always present, but His glory is not always manifest. Whenever the glory of God is revealed, people are conscious of it and react with

fear and trembling, rejoicing and praise, obedience and service. God is glorified in His people by the power they realize from being in the presence of His glory.

We must *know* the glory of God before He will give us the power to *show* His glory to the world. The *power* we require to be strengthened with God's might must be in line with the glory of God. It must be power which comes from God, and enables us both to *experience* God's glory and to *express* it in ways that reveal His presence. The glory of God is manifest and expressed on *His* terms and according to *His* methods and means. Unless God *reveals* His glory to us, we can have no awareness of or benefit from it. Knowing the glory of God is thus requires that we consult His revelation, beginning in His Word. The Scriptures reveal the glory of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18). As we read, meditate, and study the Scriptures, looking for the revelation of Jesus Christ on every page (Jn. 5.39), God's Spirit will lead us into the glory of God, so that we see and know Him present with us, instructing, convicting, and shaping us into the image of Jesus Christ.

Further, the revelation of God's glory in Scripture is complemented by the glory of God in the creation all around us (Ps. 19.1-4), the light of God in creation which we see and understanding in the light of God in Scripture (Ps. 36.9). Just as we may enter the glory of God in His Word, so we may enter it in His world, discerning and experiencing His presence in the things He has made (Prov. 25.2).

Thus, if we are to fulfill this crucial exhortation to be strong, we must turn to the glory of God in His Word and the glory of God in the creation, to discover there what God intends in laying this awesome charge upon us. For unless the strength we *seek* is "according to the riches of His glory," we can be sure that the strength we *wield* will be feeble, faint, and fading at best.

*For reflection*

1. Describe a time when you especially sensed the glory of God as you were reading His Word. What did you experience? How did this affect you?
2. Describe a time when you sensed the glory of God in creation. What did you experience? How did this affect you? Do you think it's possible to *recognize* the glory of God in creation apart from *experiencing* the glory of God in Scripture? Explain.
3. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10.31. What would you expect this to look like in your life?

*Next steps – Transformation: Begin keeping a journal or notebook recording specific times you have entered the glory of God, whether in His Word or in creation. Write down what you were doing, what you experienced, how you sensed the presence of God more than normally. Review each of these experiences with the Lord in prayer.*

## 2 Power in the Spirit

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man... Ephesians 3.14-16*

### *The strength of His might*

God commands His people to be strong. Obedient servants of the Lord aspire to such strength, and act in ways that allow the might of God, not their own strength, to show through. Knowing we *can* be strong in the might of the Lord, it is our duty to *seek* that strength, that we might live, not ordinary, nondescript lives, but to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10.31).

The strength we seek is that which accords with the revelation of God's glory, in His Word and in the creation. In the presence of God's glory, as He makes Himself known and draws us by His promises to partake of His own being (2 Pet. 1.4), we are imbued with the strength He intends us to know and express. By bringing us into His glory, God strengthens us with His might, so that we live for His glory in every area of our lives.

But that strength is not, in the first instance, physical or material. We cannot gin up the strength of God's might by our own efforts, whether individually or in collaboration. Rather, as Paul explains, the strength of the Christian, which he gains in the presence of God and His glory, is the power of God's Spirit at work in us, willing and doing of His good pleasure (Phil. 2.13). God has invested us with power, exceedingly abundant power (Eph. 3.20), the power of His Spirit (Acts 1.8), so that we might be strong in *His* might, by and for His glory.

The strength of the Christian is the experience of God's glory and the demonstration of God's might, by the power of the Holy Spirit, and unto the glory of God.

When we are thus strengthened, we go beyond our own abilities and experiences into manifestations of the Spirit's power which testify to the reality of Jesus Christ, alive from the dead and ruling in our lives.

### *Manifestations of strength*

This power flows by the might of God unto certain specific manifestations. Above all, the power of the Spirit is God's rule, bringing forth in us righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom. 14.17, 18). We have no strength of our own for such things. Only as God strengthens us by His Spirit can we expect the righteousness of Christ to flower in us, His peace to obtain in our souls and lives, and His joy to be our prevailing attitude and outlook. We seek to be strengthened by the Lord's might for these ends, as we come before His glory and earnestly plead that we may be transformed into His image.

Further, the power of the Spirit is power to worship God in a manner acceptable to Him, and of maximum benefit to us (Jn. 4.24). Without the power of God to worship, the focus of our worship too easily turns to ourselves, and what we want or enjoy. As God's power operates in us in worship, we grow strong to lose our own lives that we may exult in the life of Jesus, celebrating Him, exalting Him, submitting to Him, partaking of Him, and being renewed in Him, as we worship Him in Spirit and in truth, and He brings us into the presence of the Father with joy.

As we grow strong in the power of God's Spirit, we will walk in all the commandments of God, and thus bring holiness and love to greater and greater fulfillment in our lives (Ezek. 36.26, 27; 2 Cor. 7.1; Matt. 22.34-40). As He teaches us the Law, and thus imparts His mindset (Rom. 8.5-9), the Spirit of God blossoms into

### *The Christian's Strength*

that fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control which characterizes His presence and increasing rule in our lives (Gal. 5.22, 23).

Filled with the Spirit and overflowing with His power (Jn. 6.63), we offer to God thanksgiving and praise, and submit ourselves to one another, so that we might serve and edify one another with the various spiritual gifts the Spirit is pleased to bestow (Eph. 5.18-21; 1 Cor. 12.7-11).

In the power of the Holy Spirit we bear witness to Jesus Christ, proclaiming and living the Gospel of the Kingdom in a power that goes beyond mere words (Acts 1.8; 1 Cor. 4.20).

Finally, the power of the Spirit is power to illuminate the revelation of God in His Word and world, exposing our sins, immersing us in God's glory, and transforming us, from glory to glory, into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 16.8-11; 2 Cor. 3.12-18). In reading and meditation, study and prayer, we know the power of the Spirit as the source and seedbed for all other expressions of the might of God. We cannot expect to be strong in the Lord if we neglect to seek His glory and might in His Word and prayer.

#### *Evidence of faith*

Here is power that issues in supernatural strength, strength that is the might of God, not our own strength, and that can come to expression in every situation and setting of our lives. We have no strength of our own to do any works of righteousness, worship, ministry, witness, or understanding. Only as God, by His Spirit, unleashes such power in us, will we be strengthened by His might for glorious good works. By faith we seek the power of God, enabling us to go, in every area of our lives, exceedingly abundantly beyond where we have ever been before. Thus we show abundant evidence of a lively faith in every area of our lives (Heb. 11.1).

Even though we may be weak in the world's eyes, bereft of the world's strength or assets, and under oppression by enemies or detractors, we may be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, as we yield to the inward rule of Christ by His Spirit, waiting on and obeying Him Who makes all things new (2 Cor. 5.17; Rev. 21.5).

The strength of the Christian comes to expression as power that the world knows nothing of, and in the presence of which it can only wonder, marvel, lash out, or submit with joy to the Lord. Do you long to know such power? To be strengthened with God's might, to live for His glory? The true believer understands what God requires, and what He offers, and daily seeks to be strengthened by the Spirit, in the might and power of God.

#### *For reflection*

1. Does it seem to you that Christians today are living in the might and power of God? Explain.
2. How important are daily times in the Word of God and prayer for being strengthened in the Lord? How would you counsel a new believer to use these times to gain that strength that can allow him to go beyond his own abilities into the might of the Lord?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 3.20 and Philippians 2.12, 13. How should you expect to know this power, strengthening you to live for God's glory?

*Next steps – Transformation: Identify some areas of your life where you would like to be strengthened with God's might to live for His glory. What will your life look like in these areas as God begins to strengthen you?*

### 3 Inward First

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...* Ephesians 3.14-16

#### *The power of the Spirit*

Believers in Jesus Christ have been redeemed for good works (Eph. 2.10). Jesus taught us to think big, to aspire to greatness, and not to grow weary of doing good works (Jn. 14.12; Matt. 5.17-19; Gal. 6.9, 10).

But to live this way requires a strength we do not naturally possess. The strength that God commands His people to seek takes the form of the power of His Spirit, as He works within us to will and do of God's good pleasure, exceedingly abundantly above all that we've ever dared to ask or think, and according to the riches of God's glory (Phil. 2.13; Eph. 3.20). God shows us His glory, filling us with joy and transforming might, so that we can live for His glory in all the everyday details of our lives. This means becoming new people across the board in our lives, so that the glory we *experience* in God's presence becomes the glory we *express* in good works of love.

We must emphasize, with the Apostle Paul, that this strength *arises from within us*. It is not something we can purchase with money, although Simon of Samaria hoped he might (Acts 8.9-24). Nor is it a power we can acquire just by imitating what we see in others – even the Lord Himself. The sons of Sceva learned this the hard way (Acts 19.11-16).

The strength God commands of us, and the power by which that strength comes to light, come only through the long and diligent work of *inward transformation*. Unless we are truly and continuously transformed within, in our soul, we will not be able to know the strength God requires of His people. We must, therefore, understand the components of our “inner” person, and make sure we are devoted to being transformed there, in whole and in part.

The soul consists of three parts. Paul mentions them in the larger context of our passage.

#### *A pure heart*

First in importance is the *heart* (Prov. 4.23). The goal of transformation here is to make of our heart a dwelling place for Christ (Eph. 3.17), in which the fear of God, and love for God and neighbors are the primary affections, and all other longings, aspirations, hopes, attitudes, and feelings are in submission to these (Ps. 86.11-16). By nature, our hearts are deceitful, and desperately wicked (Jer. 17.9). The law of sin within our soul (Rom. 7.21-23) seeks ever to pollute our affections, leading us to love and desire wrong things, and to nurture self-interest as the commanding prospect for our lives.

By His glory, as He speaks to us from His Word and creation, God illuminates the dark and calloused places of our heart, shows us the virtues and affections He intends to place there instead, makes us willing and able to submit our heart to His Law (Phil. 2.13; Ezek. 36.26, 27), and leads us through repentance and earnest seeking to gain the new heart where Christ feels right at home.

Our affections thus aligned with the heart of God, the power of the Spirit can move us in the direction of pure and holy desires.

*A renewed mind*

Second in the soul is the *mind*, and Paul says the strength God wants us to have will entail our being able “to comprehend” all the love of God that surpasses knowledge (vv.18, 19). We grow strong in the Lord as our mind sheds old ways of thinking, and every vain idea of worldly happiness, and as we instead take on the new mind of Christ and the Biblical worldview (1 Cor. 2.16; Eph. 4.17-24).

Paul urges us to think on the kind of things that can renew our mind in the mind of Christ – things true, noble, just, pure, lovely, virtuous, praiseworthy, and of good report (Phil. 4.8). Such intellectual furnishings complement a pure heart, and generate Spirit-driven power to envision new possibilities, make new plans, and work through every obstacle that keeps us from being strong in the might of the Lord.

*A resolute conscience*

Finally, we grow strong as the Lord changes our priorities, so that knowing and serving Him becomes the driving force of our *conscience*, the guiding light of our *will*. The conscience houses the default priorities of the soul, and, under the powerful influence of the Spirit and glory of God, a firm resolve to *know* the Lord in His glory, and to *live* in ways that glorify Him becomes increasingly the determining factor in how we live.

The conscience, consistently bathed in the light of Christ and the glory of God, wants nothing more than more of the same (Ps. 37.3-6), and offers a firm and true “set of the saw” for the heart and the mind.

The strength of the Christian begins in the soul, where the heart, mind, and conscience are continually being renewed by the Word and works of God, and the Spirit replaces love of self with love for God and neighbor as the dominate operating motifs. The renewed soul can generate the affections, thoughts, and priorities that allow the might of God to flow by His Spirit into all our words and deeds, so that we are strong to serve the Lord beyond what we’ve ever known.

There are no shortcuts or quick-fixes for achieving this transformation of our inner being. It requires long hours of waiting on the Lord in prayer, meditation, and listening for the prompting of the Spirit. But the strength such an investment can yield makes for experiencing God’s might that is new and expansive every day.

*For reflection*

1. How can you see that all three components of the soul work together in our every word or deed? That is, in everything we say or do, thoughts, affections, and values or priorities come into play. Can you give some examples from your own experience?
2. Can we expect to know renewal in our soul apart from daily time in God’s Word, and in prayer? Explain.
3. What can happen if we do not guard our thoughts, affections, or priorities as we should? How does the law of sin within, coupled with the warring against our soul by spiritual forces of wickedness in high places, affect the condition of our soul? What must we do to countermand this?

*Next steps – Transformation: How diligent are you in paying attention to all the components of your soul? What might you do to improve in this? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.*

## 4 More and More about Jesus

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...* Ephesians 3.14-17

### *Into His image*

If we had to boil down to one crisp summary the strength God commands His people to seek, it would be the strength of His might, enabling us to be like Jesus. The Christian's strength is the inward work of the Holy Spirit, transforming us into the image of Jesus Christ, so that He lives His life through us every day.

We come to the glory of God, in His Word and His world, seeking the face of Jesus there (2 Cor. 4.6). We want to see Jesus, and to have Jesus fill our soul and life with His presence (Eph. 4.8-10). We earnestly desire for Him to overflow from us by His Spirit in rivers of living water to heal, bless, and strengthen those to whom God sends us each day (Jn. 7.37-39).

As Christ dwells ever more fully and richly in our heart, we know His love more truly, and show it more consistently. In all our words and deeds, we demonstrate the new life with which He clothes us, a new life of speaking the truth in love and doing good to all people, beginning with the members of the household of faith (Eph. 4.15; Gal. 6.10).

We are to be transformed into the image of Jesus Christ, from *encountering* God's glory to *living* for His glory, increasingly, in every area of our lives (2 Cor. 3.12-18; 1 Cor. 10.31).

Thus, like John the Baptist, our overarching hope and vision is that Jesus Christ might increase in us and we in all our fallenness and folly, might become less and less visible to the people around us (Jn. 3.30; cf. Eph. 4.17-24).

### *Contemplating Jesus*

But how does Jesus come to dwell thus in our hearts by faith?

For acquiring the strength to live as God commands, there is no substitute for contemplating Jesus. Like those ancient Greeks (Jn. 12.20, 21), we would see Jesus ever more clearly, and have Jesus thus be ever more at home in our hearts.

This is a work of daily meditation. As we set our minds on the things that are above, where Christ is seated in the heavens, and meditate on the beauty and goodness of the Lord (Col. 3.1-3; Ps. 27.4, 13), the glory of God emanating from Jesus works to transform us heart, mind, and conscience, so that our lives refract the light of His growing presence in us.

The gospels show us the character and love of Jesus. Here is a four-faceted portrait of Jesus that offers a clear and compelling overview of His character, works, and teachings. Daily reading and meditation in some section of the gospels will provide good grounding for recognizing Jesus in other places in God's Word. Jesus declares Himself to be the Good Shepherd, and explains what that entails (Jn. 10). When we read the shepherd's psalm, or God's promise of a coming Shepherd for His people in Ezekiel 34, we see Jesus, and rejoice to be among His sheep. Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God in the gospels, and when we read the promises to Judah, David, Solomon, and Daniel about a coming King and Kingdom, we see Jesus. Then, as we return to the gospels, our vision of Jesus is greatly enlarged, and we see even more of His great beauty, wisdom, and power.

We can learn about Jesus by studying the lives of the great saints of Scripture – from Abraham to Paul, Moses to Peter, Joshua and David to Timothy and James. Moreover, the types, prophecies, and foreshadowings of Christ in the Old Testament, together with the clear expositions of Luke, Paul, John, Peter, and the other apostles, round out our picture of Jesus, and help us see Jesus more clearly, so that we strain toward the mark of the upward calling of God in Him (Phil. 3.14).

Remember, Jesus said the entire Bible is about Him (Jn. 5.39). Therefore, we should expect our meditations on every portion of the Scripture to yield profitable insights into the character and work of Jesus, and should enable Him to dwell more fully in our hearts by faith. Be patient, be persistent, be prayerful, and let Jesus show Himself to you from every part of His Word.

As you read God's Word every day, wait on the Lord, looking to see what He is revealing about Jesus. Give thanks for what He shows you. Take it into your soul by thinking often about it, surrounding your growing image of Jesus with your love, and making a point to return there as often as possible throughout the day.

*More about Jesus*

Set as your goal to become strong in Jesus – in seeing Him, and growing in His character, works, and words. Seek Him daily in every section and passage of His Word. He will make Himself known to you, and will make His dwelling in your soul, so that, increasingly, you think about Jesus, delight to see Him, and submit your will to Him at every moment.

My favorite hymn is "More About Jesus" – "...more of His saving fullness see, more of His love, Who died for me." More about Jesus let me know! More about Jesus let me learn! Here is a prayer we can take up each day with profit, as we grow in the strength God commands.

*For reflection*

1. What is meditation? How does it differ from just reading the Bible? Why is it so important?
2. Can you think of a passage of Scripture, other than the gospels, where Jesus has revealed Himself clearly and powerfully to you? Explain.
3. How can you add more meditation in your time with the Lord each day?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some Christian friends about the practice of meditation. What do they do to meditate on Christ?*

## 5 With All the Saints

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3.14-19*

### *Not a solo project*

The Christian life is not a solo project. God has called us together into communities – the Body of Christ – because He knows we only grow strong when we are in company with all the saints.

As Paul indicates, we will increase in the power of the Spirit unto Christlikeness as we learn and grow together with other believers. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* explains (26.1): “All saints, that are united to Jesus Christ their head, by His Spirit, and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory: and, being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other’s gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as do conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man.”

Together, the saints of the Lord correct, teach, admonish, help, encourage, strengthen, pray for one another, and stimulate one another to love and good works. If we hope to grow in the strength of Christ, then we must do so in company with other believers, for only in the fellowship of the Church will God enable us to realize the strength of Christlikeness to which He calls us.

Which makes the Church, despite its many shortcomings, an indispensable means for growing strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.

### *Beyond the local church*

But not simply the local church. More is available to us from the company of all the saints than what any local church can supply. God uses the work of many believers beyond the local fellowship to help His people grow strong in Him. In our day, as never before, resources for growth and ministry exist beyond the local fellowship that can strengthen believers in their walk with and work for the Lord, and local churches as signs and outposts of the Kingdom.

Many fine Christian writers, teachers, and servants in various callings are available to us through a wide range of publications and ministries. We should seek out such believers, and learn from them, to build into our souls the strength we need to grow into Christlikeness. In my early years as a believer, Dr. Joel Nederhood was a constant weekly companion on the radio, and Francis Schaeffer was a daily instructor in print. These two servants of God helped to form important aspects of my soul at a crucial period in my own development. Since then, many others have been of invaluable insistence as well.

At the same time, the example of faith, courage, and perseverance by believers suffering in the Soviet Union, which I read about in various forms of *samizdat* literature, strengthened my own faith and bolstered my resolve to seek the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, believers beyond our local churches need the strength they can gain from the fellowship and ministry we extend to them. Whether laboring to win the lost and build new churches, struggling to overcome adversity or hardship, or suffering through persecution, believers in other places look to the rest of Christ’s Body to help them be strong in the Lord and the power of His might.

*Strength from the past*

But also available to us are the works and example of great saints from every age of the Church, and we should seek out ways of learning from their writings as well. The writings of Augustine, à Kempis, Calvin, Edwards, Wesley and many others have survived as long as they have because Christians have found them to be sources of great strength for growing into Christ and living for God's glory. Similarly, the example of tireless servants, determined martyrs, and everyday believers living for Christ in their individual callings, can inspire us to faithfulness in our own.

We are not wise to ignore or neglect the resources of our Christian past. The more we can "comprehend with all the saints" the depths and breadth of God's love and mighty power, the more we will grow "to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge," and "be filled with all the fullness of God."

The saints of the present, together with the saints of the past, constitute a treasury of wondrous gifts of God, and means of grace whereby He helps us to grow strong according to the riches of His glory. And saints in the present look to us for strength through prayer, giving, and help in their ministries and lives. The love of Christ is expressed in the unity of His Body, and His strength is made perfect as all His members unite in prayer, mission, and mutual encouragement in our journey toward Christlikeness.

Let us not overlook the benefits to be gained from regularly submitting to the teaching and writing of those whom God has approved, nor to share as we are able in strengthening our fellow believers, locally and around the world. For only in company with all the saints will we realize our fullest potential for growing strong in the Lord.

*For reflection*

1. What role has the fellowship of other believers played in your own walk with and work for the Lord?
2. The Church is the Body of Christ, and as with every body, needs all its members working together. What are the implications of this for your discipleship?
3. What is your responsibility in reaching out to other believers to strengthen them with might for growing into Christlikeness?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some fellow believers about ways you might encourage one another to grow stronger in the Lord.*

## 6 Filling Out the Fullness of God

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3.14-19*

### *To fill the world*

Early in the book of Ephesians, Paul makes a passing comment, the scope of which is breathtaking and amazing.

In Ephesians 1.22 and 23 Paul says that everything in heaven and earth has been made subject to the rule of King Jesus. His is an *upholding* rule, a rule designed to allow the goodness and might of God to flourish on earth, as in heaven (Heb. 1.3).

Paul says that Jesus is ruling all things – every creature, all nations and cultures, every moment of every day – to the Church. The best translation of that Greek construction is *for the sake of* the Church. Jesus is ruling everything to use it in building His Church, which is His declared agenda in this time before His soon return (Matt. 16.18). The Church is the *sign* that the Kingdom of God has come to earth, and it is the *outpost* from which that Kingdom advances in the strength and might of God.

But it's what follows that is so alarming: Paul says that the Church "is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." At the right hand of the Father Jesus is ruling over all created things, using them to build His Church, which He then engages in the task of filling the world – all nations, cultures, places, and times – with Himself (cf. Eph. 4.8-10).

In our text Paul says essentially the same thing: As we grow in the strength of the Lord, and as the power of the Spirit brings out the riches of God's glory through our lives, in every aspect of our lives, we experience and express the love of Christ so completely that we become filled "into" – that's the word – all the fullness of God.

### *A profound mystery*

Now this is a profound mystery, but to me it indicates that God is strengthening us according to His riches in glory so that, by the power of the Spirit, as we grow in Christlikeness, we will fill all of society and culture with the presence and fullness of Christ; and thus we will ourselves fill up the fullness of God on earth as He is in heaven!

Believers in Jesus Christ, doing nothing more than living their daily lives in the strength that comes from the indwelling Spirit, fill the spaces and places of their lives with the reality of Jesus, risen from the dead. In all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities, a presence is manifest, a presence of hope, joy, excellence, and love, which stands out like a light, and transforms like leaven, everything and everyone it touches. As believers go about their daily lives in the strength of the Lord, Jesus fills them, and through them, fills their world with His joy.

Here, indeed, is a great incentive for us to pursue growing strong in the Lord: as we do so, together with all the saints, we bring to fuller and more visible expression the reality of God in all His glory.

*This is God!*

At the end of Psalm 48 the generation to come is invited to inspect the magnificence of the glorious City of God – its towers, walls, and ramparts – and to consider her majesty and beauty. The tour guides then say that we should explain to the generation to come, “This is God, our God forever and ever!”

Where God is present in and with His people, bringing them into His glory, and exerting His power in them and His might through them for living like Jesus Christ, the reality of God in our midst becomes palpable and undeniable. The City of God is the Body of Christ, and as we grow up into Him in all things, we show His glory and resurrection to our world.

The closest the people of this world will get to seeing the fullness of God in this life is what they will see in us as the Body of Christ, as we become strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. What a privilege and challenge, and what a lofty goal to set for ourselves, community by community, church by church, nation by nation!

*For reflection*

1. Meditate on Ephesians 5.18-21. What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit of Jesus?
2. Do you think it's God's intention that the Body of Christ in a local community – all the churches as one Body – should be visible as such? Explain.
3. Have you identified your Personal Mission Field, that sphere of places and relationships where God sends you day by day? What is your plan for bringing the fullness of God into your Personal Mission Field?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with some fellow believers about ways you might encourage one another to be more consistent in working your Personal Mission Field for the fullness of God.*

## 7 Made Strong through Prayer

*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Ephesians 3.14-19*

*A prayer for all believers*

We do not want to overlook one very important aspect of the text we have been considering: Paul believed that the strength of the Christian is aided by and realized through prayer.

Our text is a prayer that, we can believe, Paul regularly prayed for the Church in Ephesus. He believed that his prayers for the members of that community would be instrumental in helping them to grow strong in the power of God's Spirit. So he got down on his knees and pled with the Father of all peoples that He might do in and for the Ephesians what He commands of all His children, that they should be strong.

What would happen if every Christian took up this prayer for every believer he knows, as well as for the leaders of the Christian movement worldwide? Czeslaw Milosz has described prayer as bridge to the "shores of the great reversal." In prayer we transcend the trials and disappointments of our day and enter the eternal presence of Him Who is filling all things with Himself. Do we believe that God can use our prayers to bring about a sudden reversal in the sad trends of recent years, in which the faith of Christ seems to be declining in the Western world, and in America as well, and the voices of secularism, relativism, and mere sensuality are on the rise?

*Begin with yourself*

Perhaps we should begin by praying this prayer for ourselves. Psalm 138.3 reads:

*In the day when I cried out, You answered me,  
And made me bold with strength in my soul.*

Since we know God wants us to be strong, we know that such strength comes from His Spirit, and we understand what it looks like as we grow strong, does it not make sense to turn to God, calling out to Him in prayer to enable us to realize the charge He has laid upon us?

Indeed, it does.

*Three conditions*

But whether believers will take up this prayer depends on three things. First, do we *believe* that God commands us to be strong in the inner person, as we have described? Is this command for Christians to be clothed with the strength of Christlikeness true and valid for every believer? Do we accept this as a charge from God, a mandate each of us must pursue as of the highest priority?

Believing is more than agreeing, or nodding approvingly at the text. Believing is receiving, laying hold on, making plans for, and launching out each day into the strength that comes from God's Spirit, so that we live the life of Christ unto the glory of God in our Personal Mission Field. Do we believe God commands us to be strong like this?

Second, do we believe that prayer is a *vehicle powerful to help us* fulfill what God commands?

Prayer is work, or, as medieval monks would say, *orare est laborare*. If we're not working at prayer – asking, seeking, knocking, not growing weary, praying without ceasing, taking no rest and giving God no rest – not taking prayer seriously, we can hardly expect God to take our prayers any more seriously than we do.

And, third, is our own prayer life such as to *make room for this kind of prayer*, both for ourselves and for the other members of the Body of Christ? Dare we pray the apostle's own words for ourselves and our fellow believers? And dare we take the bold, ambitious, visionary prayers of the psalms as our own prayers, as we seek the Lord for strength to live Jesus before the watching world?

The Apostle James assures us that the prayer of a righteous man or woman can be very powerful as it works according to the purpose of God (Jms. 5.16). Do we believe this? Are we persuaded that all that stands between us and greater strength to serve Christ, to proclaim His Kingdom and make His grace and truth known, is prayer for ourselves and one another, according to the pattern outlined by Paul?

If we are, then we will pray. And if we pray, then God will work, just as Paul believed, to fulfill His charge in us, and to make us strong in Him, so that the world sees and hears Jesus with a power and persuasiveness we have not witnessed in our lifetime.

*For reflection*

1. How do you plan to incorporate Paul's prayer into your own prayer life?
2. Why do you think many Christians have such a low regard for prayer? Why is prayer such hard work?
3. Make a plan to pray daily for the people in your Personal Mission Field, using Paul's prayer and prayers from the Psalms and elsewhere. Begin praying these every day.

*Next steps – Transformation: Begin to let your prayers be guided by God's Word – from Paul, the psalmists, and elsewhere. Let Him guide you to more consistent, visionary, and powerful praying. How would you expect this to help you grow in the strength of the Lord?*

*The Christian's Strength*

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What is the Christian's strength? Put another way, when the Christian is strong, what does he look like?
2. Christians live *from* glory *to* glory, manifesting the strength of the Lord. Explain.
3. How does the power of the Spirit work to strengthen believers in their soul?
4. What do we mean by "Personal Mission Field"? What does this have to do with the fullness of God and the strength of the Christian?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study about the Christian's strength? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.