

Ephesians 3:14-4:16 by Wayne Barber

PREVIOUS

Ephesians 3:14-4:16: THE REVIEW OF WHAT A SPIRIT-FILLED BELIEVER IS LIKE

by Dr. Wayne Barber

NEXT

Do you realize that 3:16 through 4:16 is one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture on the Christian life in the whole New Testament? We have approached it piece by piece. Some of you may have missed something, therefore, you don't see the whole picture of what we have covered. Well, I want to put it all together. I want to review what a Spirit-filled believer is like. I want us to understand how we tap into that which we already have.

You have something; how do you tap into it? How do you appropriate it? That is what the apostle Paul is telling the Ephesian church in Ephesians 3:16 through 4:16. I really believe you can understand how to appropriate what is yours in Jesus Christ if you will just listen to what we have already studied in Ephesians 3:16-4:16.

Let me tell you something again about that prayer in chapter 3. The prayer from verse 14 to verse 21 of chapter 3 is a hinge that the whole book rests on. Chapters 1, 2 and 3 tell you **who** you are in Christ. They tell you your identity in the Lord Jesus Christ, the riches of your salvation. But chapters 4, 5 and 6 tell us about our responsibilities to Christ. Actually chapters 4, 5 and 6 would be better titled "**Whose** We Are in Christ." It is one thing to know who you are. It is another thing to know whose you are. One is identity, the other is responsibility.

Getting to the meat of the prayer in verse 16, he says, "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man." Paul is praying for the Ephesian believers that they might be strengthened with God's power, with God's ability. You have already received Jesus into your life. You say, "I want to walk in the fullness of what He has to offer. Where do I start?" It starts when you realize how weak you are and how desperate we all are to tap into His strength. You see, weakness is an absolutely necessity if you are going to be strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God. God will bring people and circumstances into your life that will cause you to get down on your face and say, "Oh, God, I can't." He says, "That's right. I never said you could. I can. I always said I would. Now tap into Me. Appropriate what is already yours."

So many Christians go before God and they beg Him, but they are never willing to bow down and say, "God, I bow before You." You can pray all you want, "God, help me." God is not going to help you until you bow down and do what He says. That is what Paul is trying to tell the Ephesian church. You have to see where you are weak first. Strong people don't pay any attention to this kind of message. Weak people do. Wise people are weak people who know what they can't do apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Maybe you are envious of someone or whatever. You can take this into any category you want. God is so faithful to orchestrate life so that we are able to identify our weaknesses. When I realize I can't be what God wants me to be in my strength, then I become a candidate to be strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God.

How does it work? It says in verse 16,

"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory."

That tells you of a level of life that most people aren't living. "According to" doesn't mean "out of." He has lavished Jesus upon us and given us every spiritual blessing. We are "to be strengthened so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith." It should really read, "Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith." What is going on in the first sentence of verse 17 is the same thing that is going on in verse 16. If I am being strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God, then Christ is dwelling in my heart by faith. Do you know what that means? The word "dwell" in verse 17 means "made to feel at home." Actually it means "to settle down and to feel at home." Christ is in your life already. He came in when you were saved. His Spirit dwells in your heart. Now, we need let Him do what He came into our lives to do.

Most of us are frustrating the very grace of God. He has given us Himself and said, "Now trust Me. You work with Me. Cooperate with Me. Obey Me. I will do what you can't do and show you what the Christian life is all about." Jealousy locks Him out. Bitterness locks Him out. Immorality locks Him out. Worry locks Him out. I must make Him at home in all the areas of my heart. He needs to be accommodated. He is already there. He needs to be able to do what He came to do.

Look at what he says in verse 17:

"so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

It means "by the means of your faith." You see, I have to learn to accommodate Him by my faith. Do you understand what that means? The word "faith" is *pistos*, which comes from *pistoo*, which comes from *peitho*. It means to obey it. I can tell you all day about

my faith, but until you see me obey it, I don't have any faith. Faith is not something you tell people about, James says; faith is something you show people that you have by your willingness to obey Him.

Surrender is the key to the Christian life

Some days my flesh does not want to obey Him. I have other thoughts in my mind, but God says, "You had better obey Me." I choose to obey and immediately step into what was already there—the presence of God. Folks, I am telling you, obedience, surrender, is the key to the whole Christian life. I have to let Him in. Purity, holiness, and cleansed hearts have to be the norm if a person is ever going to experience the strengthening of God in the inner man. I surrender my thoughts, my attitudes, my emotions, and my secrets, and through my faith I begin to appropriate and to accommodate the Lord Jesus Christ in my heart.

Now how do I do that? First of all, I confess to Him the sin of the wrong attitude. What does the word "sin" mean? Miss the mark. In other words, any time I am not strengthened by His power, I am going to miss the mark that He had for me. Not only that, but look at the word "confess." So many of us think that confession is telling God something He didn't know. Oh no, He already knows. Confession means to say the same. Confession is for my benefit, so I am reminded of the detestable direction my flesh will take me. When I confess it, I become aware there is another way of doing it. So I simply confess it and repent of it.

What does that mean, to repent? It means to change my mind. I am going to do it differently. I do what the Word of God tells me to do in whatever area I am struggling. If it is in the area of immorality, I look and see what God has to say about it. When God is not pleased, I confess it.

When God tells you what to do, do it. Do it in the power of the Spirit that lives within you and you begin to accommodate the Lord Jesus in your heart. He replaces your thoughts with His; He replaces your attitude with His; He replaces your emotions with His; and you begin to experience His power in your life by accommodating His presence.

This prayer has levels to it. You start off by saying, "God, I can't. In my weakness, strengthen me." Then you obey Him in whatever area it is and you move up to another level. You begin to experience God's preference. What do I mean by that? Folks, most Christians don't seem to understand that God prefers them. They always think God is mad at them. God prefers me even when I, in my flesh, don't prefer Him. God loves you. He is not mad at you. He may not be pleased with what you do, but He chastens and He disciplines those whom He loves. You mean He brings pain in my life because He loves me? That is exactly right. He hurts me to heal me. God loves me. You don't understand that until you have learned to trust Him by surrendering to Him. That is the way it works. It is so simple and yet it is so profound. Then you move into another level.

In verse 17 it says,

"*and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend [mentally understand] with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth."

Let me just give you some observations on that. I am supposed to live down and not up. "God, I am willing to surrender whatever it is. I will go Your way. I won't go my way." When I am willing to do that, I begin to tap into His strength and ability.

God begins to open my mind and show me the breadth of His love. Ephesians 2:11-18 has already covered that. There are only two groups of people on earth. That is the Jew and the Gentile. That is everybody. In other words, God loves them all. Any kind of prejudice, any kind of ethnic prejudice or whatever we have is something strictly of the flesh and of hell itself. It is not from God. When you begin to live the life that you say you have, then you begin to comprehend that God loves the whole world.

You see the length of God's love. It goes all the way back before the foundations of the world. He loved people before they did anything. He loves everybody and He wants them to know His Son Jesus Christ.

You begin to see the height of it. Listen, He gave us blessings out of heaven itself, every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus. He has seated us in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.

You see the depths of it for the first time, how far He had to stoop to reach down to sinful, detestable man. As the Psalmist says, "Oh, God, what is man that Thou art mindful of him?" I begin to understand His love.

But it is more than that. In verse 19 I begin to experience Him for myself:

"*and* to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge."

Nobody can teach it. You've got to experience it for yourself. Paul only uses this twice in the New Testament. The other time is in Romans 8:35, in the context of all kinds of suffering and distress. He even quotes out of the Psalm where the Jews were upset. "God, if you love us, why are you letting them kill us all the time?" He comes back and says, "In all of these things we overwhelmingly conquer. Who can separate us from the love of Christ." What is his answer? Nothing. "You mean to tell me that God

is loving me all the time?" "Do you mean He is loving me when I go through the difficult things in life?" That's right. Folks, you can't experience it or even understand it until you start living what God says is what the Christian life is all about.

We have to stop thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, and get down on our knees and say, "God, I can't. God, I am willing to do whatever You tell me to do. I am willing to break to Your will." God says, "Alright, now you can understand." We begin to see a love like we have never known before. We begin to experience it and realize God is loving us all the time. He never stops loving us.

Well, you understand the length and the depth and the height and all those things about it, but you also experience it for yourself. Now, watch this. There's another level. You begin to experience God's potential in your life. No longer is it what man can do for God; it is what God can do in a man. Look at verse 19:

"that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God."

In other words, everything that fills God fills me and controls me and satisfies me. I am living in a realm now that I didn't know was possible. I am loving people I didn't think were lovable. I have put up with people who used to give me a fit. I am handling circumstances like never before. God, what is going on inside of me? God says, "You haven't seen anything yet. Keep on trusting Me. I have other levels I want to take you to. Walk in the fullness of what I have to offer you." That is it. That is the Christian life.

You understand now why verses 20 and 21 come at the end of the prayer and not the beginning of the prayer. If they were put first, everybody would be getting on their knees so God could do exceeding abundantly beyond all things. That is not there. They are at the end of the prayer because we don't even comprehend the end of the prayer until we have gone through the levels. Look in verse 20. "Now to Him who is able [present tense] to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" "You mean all that is possible within me?" Yes. But you will never know what to ask and never even know how to think the way He wants you to ask and think until you start living like He wants you to live.

You see, Ephesians 1:1 tells us these are faithful believers. They were the faithful saints at Ephesus. Paul is telling them, "You haven't arrived." Spirituality is not an arrival. it is a pursuit. Listen, if you are living in the past, you are missing out on what God wants to do right now. If you are not pursuing Him with all your heart and your mind and your soul and your strength, you have missed the point of what Christianity is all about. Until the day we die, this truth is ours. It is exceeding abundantly beyond all that you could ask or think. That is the potential of God in our life.

Now, it is interesting to me how that flows right into chapter 4. As a matter of fact, Ephesians 4:1-16 is the continuation of this. Then it ends and he puts up another subject, the Christian's walk, the holy walk of the individual believer. You have a person living in the potential of God, filled to the fullness of God, all that fills God fills him. Go on into chapter 4 and verse 1.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."

The word "worthy" means the intrinsic value of something, the proper estimate of something, to measure up.

If in chapters 1, 2 and 3 you have a proper estimate of your salvation, then you live worthy of that, you measure up to it. If you find a Christian on Tuesday having a problem and he tries to figure it out himself and leaves God out of it, that shows you he has such a low view of salvation that he doesn't even believe God can handle it. Folks, we are telling a message to the world that is causing the world to turn their back on us. They say, "You churches, you preach it but you Christians don't live it." Mahatma Gandhi said, "I would have been a Christian had it not been for Christians." It is not a low view of self that is our problem, it is a low view of salvation, a low view of Christ, a low view of Scripture. When that view rises and I start living according to what my view is of Jesus Christ, He is, He can, He will, He is in my life, then my whole lifestyle changes. Guess what happens? I become one who begins to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Every preacher would want this. Paul certainly wanted it. Every Christian should want a church full of people who would put Jesus first and live in the fullness of God! Wouldn't that be something? It would be seen in the way we behave towards each other. All of a sudden people start learning how to resolve their differences and understand God is loving them even through people that are unlovable. God creates and orchestrates our circumstances. God is sovereign. God is in control. Do we believe it? It will show up next week how you live and how you talk and how you think.

How do we live? In verse 2 it is clear: humility is a proper attitude towards ourselves. Paul uses that in several places. In Romans 12 he says not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think. We begin to realize we fit someplace, but don't try to fit in every place. We begin to have a proper attitude of serving the other person with the gifts God has given us. It is humility of mind.

Gentleness is a proper attitude towards God. The word is sometimes translated "meekness." It is the Greek word *praiotes*. It is the idea of a wild horse being tamed. Sure you have energy. It is not weakness, it is meekness. But you see, since I have been tamed, I

am comfortable sitting in the saddle of the One who has tamed me. Here is what I am saying. When a crisis develops in your life and you panic and try to make it happen the way you want, it will tell you right quick whether or not you have been tamed by the Master. If He can tame you, He can tame the circumstance! Which means we have an inner calm inside of us that we don't react, blow up, or bail out. We say, "Okay, God. You are in control. What are you doing?"

You not only have gentleness, but you have patience. That is the attitude you have towards others. You can tolerate them and not even give up on them and say, "God, only you could tell me this. I know there is hope for that man but it is in You. It is surely not in him." You begin to be able to tolerate them and not give up on them.

If you put all three things together, it equals up to the last thing he mentions there, your forbearance, showing forbearance to one another in love. You can't be forbearing unless there is humility, gentleness and patience. Do you know what forbearing means? It means you don't fold, you are able to stand until the very provocation is over. Wow! The Spirit of God is the divine ligament. We are preserving the unity of the Spirit. You see, you can't produce it as we have said earlier. You can only preserve it. You can't take chapter 4 and disassociate it from chapter 3 and the prayer that Paul prays. Unless you have people living it in the prayer, you don't have people preserving it over here.

The second thing you will see is in the way they believe. There are seven doctrines he gives here. First of all, there is only one body. There is one Spirit. Thirdly, there is one hope of one calling. (I believe that is the rapture.) One Lord, that is our Lord Jesus Christ. One faith, the Word of God. One baptism. Finally there is one God and Father of all. Those are your seven doctrines. You will never depart from that.

If you find division in the church, I guarantee it will be around one of those seven doctrines right there. If you find a man who is right doctrinally, you will find a man that is right devotionally. But if you find a man is right devotionally, you will find him right doctrinally. They do not contradict.

Well thirdly, we will preserve the unity of the Spirit by the way we cooperate with the Spirit in the building of the body of Christ. You see, you can sit down and organize anything you want, but I guarantee you if you organize it, you are going to have to keep it running. If you get in touch with the head and be filled with His Spirit, you start, as a joint, to begin to function in the supply of the Holy Spirit of God, the ligament holding us together. Watch how marvelously the organization will take care of itself.

Well, of course, on down he says He gives gifted men to encourage them and equip them. Then in verses 14-16 here is the result. "As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, [according to, not out of] causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

Do you realize there is only one message really in Scripture? That is surrender and obey. That is it. Trust and obey for there is no other way. We can play church, do church or whatever. But the church is not to appear to the world as some fantastic organization. It is to appear to the world as an organism that reflects the visibility of the living life within it which is Jesus Christ.