LESSON SEVEN

TO BE STRENGTHENED INTO THE INNER MAN &

TO APPREHEND THE DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST AND TO KNOW THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Scripture Reading:

- Eph. 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father,
- **Eph. 3:15** Of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named,
- **Eph. 3:16** That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man,
- **Eph. 3:17** That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
- **Eph. 3:18** May be full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth and length and height and depth are
- **Eph. 3:19** And to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ, that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God.
- **Eph. 3:20** But to Him who is able to do superabundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power which operates in us,
- **Eph. 3:21** To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all the generations forever and ever. Amen.

Questions:

Section 1

- 1. What is the cause for which Paul prayed in Eph. 3:14?
- 2. Why do we need to be strengthened into the inner man and how is this accomplished?

Section 2

- 1. What is the inner man and what is the result of being strengthened into the inner man?
- 2. What does it mean that Christ would make His home in our hearts?

Section 3

- 1. What are the steps to apprehend Christ's dimensions?
- 2. What is the difference between "the riches of Christ" and "the fullness of Christ"?
- 3. What are some examples of people having a "line" experience of Christ, and what is the result of this kind of experience?

Section 4

- 1. In our experience of Christ, we should go on from the two dimensions to three, from a "square" to a "cube." What does it mean and how does it apply to our christian life?
- 2. According to Ephesians 3:17, what is the purpose of our experience of Christ?

[Section 1]

The apostle's prayer in 1:15-23 is for the saints to receive revelation concerning the church. In 3:14-21 his prayer is for the saints to experience Christ for the church.

I. THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER FOR OUR EXPERIENCE OF CHRIST

A. "For This Cause"

The Apostle Paul begins his prayer in verse 14 with the words "for this cause." The cause for which Paul praved is hidden in the depths of chapter three. We have seen that in this chapter Paul presents himself as a pattern of one who has seen God's economy. Paul received the revelation that God's economy is God's dispensing of Himself into His chosen ones to make them the expansion, the enlargement, of Christ, who is the embodiment of God, for God's full expression. Having received such a revelation, Paul became an apostle, a sent one. He was also a prophet, one who spoke for God. Paul not only spoke for God, but he even spoke forth God. As God's spokesman, Paul ministered the unsearchable riches of Christ to others so that they might see the same revelation and also become apostles and prophets. This means that Paul's desire was to produce more apostles and prophets. For this purpose he even suffered imprisonment. But the more he was confined in prison, the more revelation he received and the more of Christ he was able to minister to the believers to make them all apostles and prophets. All this is the cause for which Paul prayed in Ephesians 3.

When some hear that all the saints can be apostles and prophets, they may wonder about 1 Corinthians 12:29, a verse which says, "Are all apostles? are all prophets?" Not all are the apostles or the prophets, but, as 1 Corinthians 14:31 says, all can prophesy. The apostles and the prophets were those who took the lead in the New Testament. The difference between us and them is that they were the leaders and we are the followers. But this does not mean that we cannot do what the leading apostles and prophets did. In

the same principle, the difference between the elders and all the other members in a local church is that the elders take the lead and the other members follow. This does not mean, however, that the other members cannot do what the elders do. On the contrary, all the members should do what the elders do, and they should do even more. How different this is from the concept in Christianity that the laymen cannot do what the ministers do! The elders are not a higher rank; rather, all are of the same rank. The only difference is that the elders take the lead, like sheep who walk at the front of the flock. Likewise, the leading apostles and prophets are not on a higher level than the rest of the saints. They take the lead, and we all follow them to do what they do.

My burden is for all the saints to become such followers. I hope that one day thousands will be sent out to speak for God. Although we cannot be the leading apostles, we can be the followers. In like manner, we cannot be the prophets, but we all can prophesy. We all can be sent, and we all can speak for Christ. What a privilege, a mercy, and a grace to be the followers of the leading apostles and prophets!

B. Unto the Father

In verses 14 and 15 Paul says, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named." Notice that here Paul does not refer to God, but to the Father. The "Father" here is used in a broad sense, signifying not only the Father of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10), but the Father of every family in the heavens and on earth (v. 15). The Father is the source, not only of the regenerated believers, but also of the God-created mankind (Luke 3:38), of the God-created Israel (Isa. 63:16; 64:8), and of the God-created angels (Job 1:6). The Jews' concept was that God was Father only to them. So the apostle prayed to the Father of all the families in the heavens and on earth, according to his revelation, not as the Jews. who prayed only to the Father of Israel, according to the Jewish concept.

Since God is the source of the angelic family in the heavens and all the human families on earth, so it is of God that every family is named, just as producers give names to their products and fathers give names to their children.

II. TO BE STRENGTHENED

In verse 16 we have the subject of Paul's prayer: "That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit into the inner man." In contrast to the prayer in chapter one, which is a prayer for revelation, this is a prayer for experience. The need in chapter one is for us to see the things related to the Body of Christ, to see how the Body comes into existence and how it is constituted. But it is inadequate simply to see the revelation; we also need the experience of what we see. Because we need to experience Christ in a subjective way, Paul prayed that we would be strengthened with power into the inner man.

A. By the Father according to the Riches of His Glory

In verse 16 the word "strengthened" is modified by four phrases: "according to the riches of His glory," "with power," "through His Spirit," and "into the inner man." Firstly, we are strengthened according to the riches of the Father's glory. Glory is the expression of God. John 1:18 says, "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten Son, Who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." In this declaration of God there is glory, for the declaration of God is the manifestation of God, which is glory. When the Lord Jesus expressed God on earth, God's glory was manifested.

All the families in the heavens and on earth express God to some extent. With their expressions of God, there are the riches of His glory. The apostle prayed that the Gentile believers might experience God in a full way according to the riches of His glory, that He might be expressed through the Gentile believers by their experiencing Him in a full way.

What then are the riches of God's glory? The riches of glory in verse 16 are related to every family in verse 15. Every family is an expression of God to a certain degree. Because the Father is the source, the origin, of every family in the heavens and on earth, every family is His expression. The family that expresses the Father the most is the family of the believers. Therefore, Paul prayed to the Father that we might be strengthened for the purpose of expressing Him to the uttermost.

B. With Power

We are also strengthened with power. This power is the resurrection power referred to in 1:19-20; it is this power which operates in us (3:20). This

power raised Christ up from among the dead, uplifted Him to the heavens, and put everything under His feet. With such a power God is strengthening us.

C. Through His Spirit

It is through the Spirit that the Father strengthens us. He strengthens us by the indwelling Spirit. This does not mean that the Spirit is not with us or that the Spirit will come down from the heavens to strengthen us. The strengthening Spirit has been with us since He regenerated us. He is still within us now. Through this indwelling Spirit, the Father strengthens us from within.

[Section 2]

D. Into Our Inner Man

Verse 16 also says that we are strengthened into the inner man. The inner man is our regenerated spirit with God's life as its life. It is our spirit regenerated by the Spirit of God (John 3:6), indwelt by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:11, 16), and mingled with the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:17). In order to experience Christ unto all the fullness of God, we need to be strengthened into the inner man. This implies that we need to get into our spirit, where we can be strengthened through the Holy Spirit.

Because human beings are souls, not spirits, our personality or our person is in our soul. This is the reason the Bible refers to men as souls (Exo. 1:5; Acts 2:41). Both the body and the spirit are vessels used by the soul. Therefore, as souls, we have an outward vessel, the body, and an inward vessel, the spirit. When we repented and believed in the Lord Jesus, the Lord came into us and regenerated us with Himself as our life. Before we were regenerated, there was no life in our spirit; we simply had our human life in our soul. But through regeneration we now have the divine life in our spirit. Therefore, our spirit is no longer merely a vessel; it has become our person with the life of God. But what about our human life and our old person in the soul? The old person, the soul with the human life, has been crucified on the cross, and now our new person is the spirit with the divine life. Our spirit regenerated with the divine life is now our inner man.

It is very difficult to remain in the spirit. We all are accustomed to going out from the spirit, not to going into the spirit and staying there. According to my experience, I can testify that I am not inclined to stay in the spirit. Because it is so easy for me to get out of the spirit, I am still learning to remain in the spirit. Whenever we stay in the spirit, we are strengthened; but whenever we go out from the spirit, we are weakened. Have you ever noticed how easy it is for your mind to wander when you are praying? When you are not praying, you may not think of certain things. But when you begin to pray, you may suddenly find your thoughts dwelling on one thing and then another. You may even make a fast trip to another part of the world. This is the reason we need to be strengthened into our inner man. The more we are strengthened, the more the parts of our inner being are brought back into the spirit, into our inner man.

We need to be strengthened in order to stay in our spirit and not to be distracted by thoughts regarding so many things. In order to pray without being distracted, we need to be strengthened into our inner man. Oh, how we need to be strengthened so that our whole being may come back to the inner man and stay there!

The revelation in chapter three of Ephesians can be seen only when we are in the spirit. As verse 5 says, the mystery is made known to the apostles and prophets in spirit. Being strengthened into the inner man is the secret of seeing the revelation of the mystery. We need to be strengthened so that our whole being might be brought back to our spirit.

In our spirit we are also filled with the riches of Christ unto all the fullness of God (v. 19). The Greek word rendered "unto" in verse 19 means "resulting in." Our being filled with the riches of Christ results in the full expression of God. This is the fullness of God.

III. CHRIST MAKING HIS HOME IN OUR HEART

The first part of verse 17 says, "That Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." Our heart is composed of all the parts of our soul—the mind, the emotion, and the will—plus our conscience, the main part of our spirit. These are the inward parts of our being. Through regeneration, Christ came into our spirit (2 Tim. 4:22). Subsequently, we should allow Him to spread Himself into every part of our heart. Our heart is the totality of all our inward parts and the center of our inward being; therefore, when Christ makes His home in our heart, He controls

our entire inward being and supplies and strengthens every inward part with Himself.

In verse 17 Paul says that it is through faith that Christ makes His home in our hearts. Faith is the substantiating of things unseen (Heb. 11:1). Christ's indwelling is mysterious and abstract. We realize it not by our physical senses, but by the sense of faith.

The first three chapters of Ephesians are on the church, and the last three chapters are on the walk worthy of God's calling for the church. However, actually only the first two chapters are on the church, for chapter three marks the beginning of Paul's exhortation concerning a walk worthy of God's calling. In Ephesians 3 Paul presents himself as a pattern of one who could carry out God's eternal purpose concerning the church. If we had only chapters one and two without chapter three, we would have the teaching and even the vision regarding the church, but we would not have the way to fulfill the vision. In chapter three we see how the church is constituted and realized in a practical way. This chapter is concerned neither with the revelation of the church nor. strictly speaking, with the walk worthy of God's calling for the church; rather, it is concerned with the practical experience of the church being constituted.

The church life is constituted of those in the pattern of the Apostle Paul. We all need to follow Paul in receiving the revelation in our spirit and in being strengthened into our inner man. When Paul bowed his knees to the Father, he was so strong in his inner man that nothing could shake him or disturb him. Because his whole being was in his spirit, nothing outward could trouble him. We also need to be strengthened to such an extent that nothing will be able to carry us away from our inner man. Furthermore, we need Christ to make His home in our hearts so that we may be wholly occupied and possessed by Him.

When we are strengthened into our inner man and Christ makes His home in our hearts, we are able to see the revelation. We need to receive the same revelation given to the leading apostles and prophets. Paul could not receive this revelation for us; we must receive it ourselves personally and subjectively by being strengthened into our inner man. This revelation concerning Christ and the church is the economy of God, the hidden mystery. Whether or not we are today's apostles and prophets depends on whether or not we have seen the revelation. If we do not have the revelation, then we cannot be apostles and

prophets. If I had come to this country without this revelation, all my speaking would have been in vain. But I did come with a revelation, and I have spoken according to this revelation. This made me a follower of the apostles and prophets in God's New Testament ministry. Today all the saints, including the young people, can be such followers.

When we were saved, Christ came into our spirit. Now we must give Him the opportunity to spread Himself throughout all the parts of our inner being. As we are strengthened into the inner man, the door is opened for Christ to spread in us, to spread from our spirit to every part of our mind, emotion, and will. The more Christ spreads within us, the more He settles down in us and makes His home in us. This means that He occupies every part of our inner being, possessing all these parts and saturating them with Himself. As a result, not only do we receive the revelation, but we also are filled with Christ. Then wherever we may go, we shall be the apostles, the sent ones, and the prophets, those who speak for Christ.

[Section 3]

IV. THE STEPS TO APPREHENDING CHRIST'S DIMENSIONS AND TO KNOWING HIS LOVE

In verses 16 through 19 the word "that" is used four times: "that He would grant you...to be strengthened...into the inner man," "that Christ may make His home in your hearts," "that you...may be full of strength to apprehend...and to know," and "that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God." In each case the Greek word rendered "that" may also be rendered "in order that."

The first "that" is the result of Paul's prayer. Paul bowed his knees unto the Father and prayed that He would grant us to be strengthened into our inner man (vv. 14-16). Thus, the result of Paul's prayer is that the Father would grant us such a strengthening.

The second "that," found in verse 17, is that Christ may make His home in our hearts through faith. This is the result of being strengthened into the inner man.

Some may say that the third "that" is parallel to the second, but I agree with those who claim that it is a further result. This means that the second "that" is the result of the first, that the third is the result of the second, and that the fourth is the result of the third.

In chapter 3 Paul prayed that we would be strengthened. If we have been strengthened into the inner man. Christ can then make His home in our hearts with the result that we are full of strength to apprehend with all the saints what the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ are and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. The result of all of this is that we are filled unto all the fullness of God. Here we see several steps. From Paul's prayer we go on to being strengthened; from being strengthened we proceed to Christ's making His home in our hearts; and from this we progress to the apprehending and the knowing and finally to being filled unto all the fullness of God. It is by these steps that we can apprehend the dimensions of Christ and know His knowledge-surpassing love.

V. THE FULLNESS OF GOD

The fullness of God is the expression of God. We have pointed out that the Body is not the riches of Christ but the fullness of Christ (1:23). As the riches of Christ are being digested and assimilated into us, they are metabolized. By this process of metabolism we become the fullness of Christ as His expression. Many Christians regard the riches and the fullness as synonymous. The riches of Christ are the various aspects of Christ for our enjoyment, whereas the fullness is the result, the issue, of the enjoyment of these riches. For example, when we eat and digest the riches of American foodstuffs, we become the fullness of America. As the fullness of America, we are the expression of America. Ephesians 3:19 does not say that we are filled with the riches of God but that we are filled unto the fullness of God. This means that we are filled with the result that we become the expression of God. The expression of God today is the church, which is the Body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Hence, the fullness of God in 3:19 is the fullness of Christ, which is the Body, in 1:23. The Body is constituted through our enjoyment of the riches of Christ.

Chapters 1 and 2 cover the revelation of the church, and chapter 3 covers the constitution of the church. In chapter 3 we see that Paul, who was a leading one and a pattern, received the revelation and enjoyed the riches of Christ. These riches were metabolically constituted into his being to make him a part of the Body. All who would follow him to be today's apostles and

prophets must be the same as Paul in these matters. Then the church will be constituted to become the fullness of Christ and the fullness of God. In order for this to take place, Paul prayed that we might be strengthened into our inner man with the result that Christ could make His home in our heart and thereby occupy, possess, permeate, and saturate our whole inner being with Himself. In this way we are filled with Christ, and we become full of strength to apprehend the dimensions of Christ and to know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ. Eventually, we will be filled with Christ to such an extent that we become the fullness of God.

As we pass through all these steps, we need to apprehend the dimensions of Christ. The Greek word translated "apprehend" means not only "to know" but also "to grasp, to lay hold of intensively." In order to grasp the dimensions of Christ, we need all the saints; for this we must lay hold of Christ corporately.

VI. THE UNIVERSAL DIMENSIONS OF CHRIST

The dimensions of Christ are the breadth, the length, the height, and the depth. These dimensions are the dimensions of the universe. Only God Himself knows the measurements of the universe. We can measure the distance from one point in the universe to another, for example, from the earth to the moon, but we cannot measure the universe itself. Now the very dimensions of the universe are also the dimensions of Christ.

Christ is our real universe. Elsewhere we have pointed out that Christ is our earth, our good land, and also our sun and morning star. Now, according to verse 18, we have the boldness to say that Christ is our universe, for His dimensions are the dimensions of the universe. Ephesians 1:23 speaks of the fullness of the One who fills all in all, and 4:9-10 reveals that He who descended into the lower parts of the earth also ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. When we enter into the new heaven and the new earth to dwell in the New Jerusalem, we all will realize that Christ the Lord is our universe.

VII. EXPERIENCING THE BREADTH AND THE LENGTH

In our experience of Christ, we first experience the breadth of what He is, and then we experience the length. This is horizontal. When we advance in Christ, we experience the height and depth of His riches. This is vertical. First, we experience Christ spreading as the breadth and the length. Later, we experience Him rising up as the height and finally descending as the depth. As we will see, our experience of Christ must eventually become three-dimensional, like a cube.

If we have only the length of Christ, without any breadth, our experience will be a "line," that is, an experience that is long and narrow to an extreme. Our experience of Christ, however, should not have only one dimension, like a line, but it should have two dimensions, like a square, and then three dimensions, like a cube. It is of great importance that we all have a twodimensional, or a "square," experience of Christ. If we have only a "line" experience of Him, this "line" will eventually continue until it reaches an extreme. All extremists are "one-liners," those whose experience of Christ is on a single "line." If you experience Christ properly and normally as the breadth and the length, you will be kept from going to an extreme. Do not go too far out on the "line" of a narrow and long experience of Christ. Rather, experience Him in a "square" way as the breadth and as the length. By experiencing Christ continually as the breadth and length, our experience will be like a solidly woven "carpet," not a long, single "thread."

Some examples will help to make this matter clear. For a number of years, I listened to a certain great Bible teacher. He was extremely knowledgeable in the Scriptures. Although he spent very little time in prayer, he was constantly reading the Word and writing notes in his Bible. After talking about the Bible for a period of time, he would excuse himself in order to smoke his pipe. Then he would resume his discussion of the Scriptures. With him there was a "line" of only one dimension—an extreme emphasis on studying the Bible—but there was not the normal spreading of Christ in two dimensions as a "square" in his experience.

A sister in my hometown also had a "line" experience. She did not read the Bible but devoted a great deal of time to prayer. Being extremely earnest in prayer, she decided to fast and pray for many days. On the seventh day some of the brothers and sisters came to me very concerned about her situation. When we visited her, she was in bed, weakened because of seven days of fasting. We encouraged her to take care of her health, but she was offended by our suggestion. On the very next day, she died. This is an example of how a "line" experience can lead people to an extreme, even lead them astray.

Sooner or later, every "line" experience leads astray. Therefore, we need to be balanced. These two examples show that we need to take time both to pray and to study the Word.

Another extreme experience relates to the church meetings. Not long ago some among us decided that they no longer needed the meetings of the church. They preferred simply to enjoy the Lord at home. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the Lord in our homes, but we should not stretch such an experience until it becomes an extreme. Others, on the contrary, care only for the meetings. In their Christian life they reserve no time for prayer, for Bible study, or for enjoying the Lord at home. All they care about is the meetings. This also is an extreme.

How easy it is to have "line" experiences of a single dimension! It seems that not many saints desire the two-dimensional experiences, like a carpet. In order to have an experience of Christ like a solidly woven carpet, we need to be balanced in many ways. To be balanced is to be enriched. We need both the breadth and the length; we need the two-dimensional, "square," experiences of Christ.

[Section 4]

In order to experience Christ in His universal dimensions, we need the church life. We need to experience Christ with all the members of the Body. In particular, we need the church meetings, for in the meetings we are balanced. Through messages and the testimonies of the saints, we are balanced. If we experience the dimensions of Christ in the church life, we will gradually be woven into a "carpet." We will not be thin lines of "thread." What is needed today is not lines of "thread" but a "carpet" woven through the balanced experience of Christ in the church.

When we experience Christ in this way, we find that His breadth and length are immeasurable. Christ is immeasurable in His spreading forth. As we experience Christ in His spreading, we come to see that the dimensions of the universe are the very dimensions of Christ.

VIII. EXPERIENCING THE HEIGHT AND THE DEPTH

After we experience the breadth and length of Christ, we begin to experience the height of Christ and then the depth. Do not think that we first experience the depth of Christ. No, first we ascend and then we descend. Before we can have the depth, we must have the height. The spiritual

experiences of the depth of Christ come from the experiences of the height of Christ. This means that first we grow upward and then we are rooted. Therefore, the proper understanding of the experience of the height and depth of Christ is contrary to our natural concept, which places depth before height.

In our experience of Christ, we should go on from the two dimensions to three, from a "square" to a "cube." A cube is solid. Both in the tabernacle and in the temple, the Holy of Holies was a cube. The dimensions of this cube in the tabernacle and temple respectively were ten cubits and twenty cubits. The New Jerusalem will be an eternal cube, twelve thousand stadia in three dimensions. The church life today must also be a "cube." Furthermore, our experience of Christ in the church must be "cubical," three-dimensional, with many lines going back and forth in all three directions. When we experience Christ in such a three-dimensional way, we are solid. In our experience of Christ we are first a "square" and then a "cube." When we become a cube, we cannot fall, and we cannot be broken. Christ is the universal cube, and the church life today is also a "cube," not a "line" or even a "carpet." What about our experience of Christ? May the Lord open our eyes to see that our experience of Him must be a "cube." As we go back and forth and up and down in our experience of Christ, we eventually have a solid "cube."

IX. ROOTED AND GROUNDED IN LOVE

In 3:17 Paul speaks of "being rooted and grounded in love." We are God's cultivated land and God's building (1 Cor. 3:9). As God's cultivated land, we need to be rooted for our growth, and as God's building, we need to be grounded for our building up. Thus, in Ephesians 3:17 Paul has in mind the matters of life and building. In speaking of our being rooted and grounded, Paul indicates that the experience of Christ is for life and building. As those who have Christ making His home in our hearts and who are full of strength to apprehend the dimensions of Christ and to know His knowledge-surpassing love, we must have both the life and the building. All that we experience of Christ must be for this.

Paul says specifically that we are rooted and grounded in love. In order to experience Christ, we need faith and love (1 Tim. 1:14). Faith enables us to receive and apprehend Christ, and love enables us to enjoy Him. Neither faith nor love are ours; they are His. His faith becomes our faith, by which we believe in Him, and His love

becomes our love, by which we love Him. The love in which we are rooted and grounded is the divine love realized and experienced by us in a practical way. With such a love we love the Lord, and with that same love we love one another. In such a love we grow in life and are built up in life. Paul's thought here regarding the relationship between the experience of Christ and the matters of life and building is surely deep and profound.

The more we grow up, the more we are rooted. Although this is opposed to our natural concept, it nonetheless corresponds to our experience. If you consider your experience, you will realize that you have had the sense not first of being rooted and then of growing up but of growing up and then of being rooted. As we grow upward, we are rooted downward.

X. KNOWING THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN EXPERIENCE

In the first part of Ephesians 3:19 Paul says, "To know the knowledge-surpassing love of Christ." The love of Christ surpasses knowledge; yet we can know it by experiencing it. According to our mentality, the love of Christ is knowledge-surpassing. Our mind is not able to know it. But in our spirit we can know the love of Christ through our experience.

The love of Christ is Christ Himself. Just as Christ is immeasurable, so His love is also immeasurable. Do not regard the love of Christ as something belonging to Christ. This love is Christ. Because Christ is immeasurable, His love is knowledge-surpassing; yet we can know it in our spirit, not by knowledge but by experience. If we compare what we have so far experienced of the immeasurable love of Christ to all there is to experience, it is like comparing a raindrop to the ocean. Christ in His universal dimensions and in His immeasurable love is like a vast, limitless ocean for us to experience.

References:

Life-Study of Ephesians msg. 32 & 33