

## Empowered by the Spirit

Ephesians 3:14-21

When I was around twenty and had some time off, my friend John and I would go hiking on the Appalachian Trail for a couple of days or so. We'd throw some canned beans and oatmeal in our backpacks, head out to the Caledonia State park and hop on the trail. When we hiked as far as we had time for we cut over to route 15 which paralleled the trail and then try to catch a ride back to the park.

We made it as far as Gettysburg and needed just one more lift to get us back to the car when an old, battered Chevy covered with rust and gray primer paint pulled over. There were two good ol' boys in the front wearing overalls and John Deere caps. They asked where we were going; and we told them, and they said, "Hop in."

So, we started off, and then at the edge of town we hit the last red light before the highway opened up. We were just waiting for the light to turn green when a shiny, bright orange Mustang pulled up next to us. This was when Mustangs were muscle cars with big turbo-charged engines and spoilers and that gizmo on the hood to scoop up air. The Mustang revved its engine to demonstrate its superior horsepower.

Our driver turned to his buddy and grunted, "Huh!" Then he revved his engine to indicate his willingness to race. I turned to John and whispered, "What is he thinking? This old bucket of bolts doesn't have a chance of beating that shiny, bright orange Mustang with the turbo-charged engine."

Then the light turned green and the Mustang took off. My driver turned to his buddy and smiled and grunted again, "Huh", and he took off. In only a few seconds he caught up to the Mustang, turned to his friend again and grunted, reached down and grabbed another gear and we really took off.

I'm getting pretty scared by now as I watched the needle on the speedometer move all the way over to the right and then stop because it had no place else to go – but the car was still accelerating, leaving the Mustang far behind. I buckled my seatbelt and put my hands against the front seat when I saw way far ahead a tractor-trailer jack-knifed across both lanes. My driver saw it also and he grunted again, "Huh!" Furiously, he down-shifted and hit his brakes. We finally stopped about thirty feet short of the truck. John and I immediately thanked him for the ride and got out of the car.

That's when I learned that it doesn't matter what a car looks like on the outside, it's what's under the hood that counts.

In our passage today, the Apostle Paul came to the same conclusion.

That's what he meant when he prayed, "that you be strengthened in your inner being through the power of the spirit".<sup>1</sup> It doesn't matter what you look like. It doesn't matter what kind of clothes you wear. What matters is what is under the hood. What matters is the power of God that moves through the Holy Spirit. Paul said as much in 2 Corinthians 4:16; he says, "Do not lose heart, but though our outer nature is wasting away, yet our inner nature is being renewed day by day."

I think that is what most of us are missing and what we are really looking for. We want our inner being, our souls, to be renewed every day. But, in fact, we have this verse reversed. Our outer selves are doing pretty well. We're better-fed, better-clothed and surrounded by comforts unimaginable to earlier generations. We live in nicer houses, drive better cars and join better health clubs so that our bodies resist decay. But, our inner selves, our souls if you will, often shrivel in the face of a fast paced and hectic lifestyle. Many of our technological advances have created new moral and ethical dilemmas. The last thing many of us can say is that our inner selves are being renewed day by day. Yet, that is the promise God offers.

How does the Spirit do that? Does the Spirit knock us down and bend our arms behind our backs until we cry "uncle" or "God"? Does the Spirit force us to do that which we do not want to do, to go where we do not want to go, to be what we do not wish to be?

No! I believe God's Holy Spirit respects your freedom and your integrity. In fact, it is your integrity toward which the Spirit is moving. Remember God's purpose? It is that we might be united and not divided. For Jesus said, "a house divided against itself cannot stand".<sup>2</sup> God wants you to stand tall and unashamed. God wants you to be an individual of integrity. God wants us to be a Church of integrity.

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The word, integrity, comes from the root word "integer" which is a mathematical term to indicate a whole number undivided. It is not a fraction. It is not part of something else. It is a whole number. God's Holy Spirit brings wholeness into our lives.

In the world in which we live today that is found rarely. For all of us feel pulled and divided. All of us feel the strain of trying to integrate our family life with our work life, our spiritual lives with our material lives. All of us have felt the strain of living divided lives. Nowhere is that more true than with our life in the Spirit. That is why we can all identify with Paul when he said, "For that which I would do, I do not. That which I would not, I do."<sup>3</sup>

God has given His Spirit that we might experience a new sense of wholeness and integrity in our lives. God's Spirit does that by bringing us into relationship with Christ. That's where that verse in Ephesians moves:

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 3:16

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 12:25

<sup>3</sup> Romans 7:19

"God grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;"<sup>4</sup>

The Greek word that describes this indwelling is "katoikeo". It is a compound word formed from "kata" which means "down" and "oikeo", which means to "inhabit a home or house". Literally translated, this might mean "so that Christ might get down home in your heart."

One preacher observed, "Christ cannot be at home in our hearts until our inner being submits to the strengthening of His Spirit."<sup>5</sup> We know that's true, but many times we welcome Christ in our lives only as a visitor. We'll give him the guest bedroom on Sunday morning, but remind him in a dozen subtle ways not to touch anything we think is important. There is no sense of submission, no sense of obedience to his word or will. We want to live the way we want to live and then ask him to bless the mess we make. We turn the whole thing upside down. We resist the relationship that God's Spirit tries to establish and then wonder why our souls shrivel and why we feel so empty.

God's Holy Spirit does not come into our lives to just "pump us up" and help us feel "spiritual". The Spirit is given to lead us to Christ so that he may dwell in us and so transform us into a new creation.<sup>6</sup> That transformation is a lifelong process, and the journey is determined by the choices we make at every fork in the road.

C.S. Lewis once observed:

Every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before. And taking your life as a whole, with all your innumerable choices, all your life long, you are slowly turning the central thing either into a Heaven creature or into a hellish creature. Each of us at each moment is progressing to the one state or the other.<sup>7</sup>

If that is true, what shall we do? Well, we have to decide to follow Jesus, not just once in our lives, but every day of our lives.

Paul tells us to pray:

God grant that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 3:17

<sup>5</sup> MacArthur, John: *Ephesians*. Moody Press, Chicago. pg 104.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>7</sup> Lewis, C.S.: *Mere Christianity*.

<sup>8</sup> Ephesians 3:18-19