

A Study On Ephesians
“A Letter of Unity”
Facilitated by Pastor Larry D. Weaver

Ephesians Chapter 3

Introduction: Ephesians 3:2–13 serves primarily as a prelude to Paul’s prayer, which formally begins in **verse 14**. Throughout these opening verses, Paul repeatedly highlights the great mystery now revealed by God—that Jews and Gentiles are united together as one in Christ, with all spiritual barriers removed between them. He introduces the revelation of this mystery in **Ephesians 3:1–3**, explains its meaning in **verses 4–6**, describes its proclamation in **verses 7–9**, and then reveals its divine purpose in **verses 10–13**. In particular, **verse 6** clearly defines this once-hidden mystery: **“the Gentiles are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”** This statement essentially summarizes the major truths Paul had already presented in **Ephesians 2:11–22**.

In **verse 14**, Paul begins a prayer for the Ephesian believers, desiring that they fully understand the spiritual resources they possess together in Christ. Yet before continuing the prayer, he pauses to restate and expand upon several truths he has already introduced. He does not actually resume the prayer until **verse 14**, where he repeats the phrase **“For this reason”** to reconnect with the thought first introduced in **verse 1**. Paul apparently sensed that the Ephesians needed a deeper understanding of these truths before they could fully grasp and apply what he was about to pray on their behalf. It was also important for him to establish his authority in teaching such a profound and far-reaching truth—the complete unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. Therefore, in **verses 2 - 7**, Paul explains that this mystery and the commission to proclaim it were given to him directly by God Himself.

In **Eph. 3:1–13**, the apostle Paul draws our attention to five important aspects of this divine mystery: **its prisoner, its plan, its proclamation, its purpose, and its privileges.**

Eph. 3:1 “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...”

Eph. 3:1 NLT “When I think of all this, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the benefit of you Gentiles ...”

- The phrase **“For this reason”** introduces the basis for Paul’s prayer, which formally begins in verse 14. It points back to the group of unifying truths he has just

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discussed in Ephesians 2: including the truths that the person in Christ becomes new in verse 15; that all believers are in one body in verse 16; that the Gentiles, who were once far away, now become near when they believe in verse 17; that all believers are equally citizens of God’s kingdom and members of His family in verse 19; and that all believers are being built into God’s temple and dwelling in verses 21 - 22. As already mentioned, however, before beginning his prayer, Paul decided to go over again some of those truths which prompted it, emphasizing their divine source. The apostle knew the value of repetition in teaching and the importance of establishing authority when teaching such new and non-traditional doctrine. None of us understands everything about a truth when we first hear it. God’s truths are so marvelous and vast that we will never comprehend them fully in this life, no matter how many times we hear and study them. Even things we come to understand to some extent, we often forget and need to be reminded of, and some truths would be unacceptable to our human minds if we did not know they came from God.

- In the opening of the letter in **Eph. 1:1** Paul gives his credentials as Christ’s apostle, but here in **Eph. 3:1** he speaks of himself as “**the prisoner of Christ Jesus.**” He had been a prisoner for some five years, two years in Caesarea and the rest in Rome. He had been arrested on false charges made by Jews from the province of Asia who were visiting in Jerusalem. They had accused him of taking the Gentile Trophimus into forbidden areas of the Temple, though he had not done so. Paul had faced hearings before the Sanhedrin, before the Roman governor Felix, before Felix’s successor, Festus, and even before King Agrippa. Had Paul not appealed to Caesar while defending himself before Festus, Agrippa would have released him. From Caesarea the apostle was taken to Rome, where he was allowed to stay in private quarters with a soldier to guard him. Although arrested on Jewish charges, Paul did not consider himself a prisoner of the Jews. Although imprisoned by Roman authority, he did not consider himself a prisoner of Rome. Although he had appealed to Caesar, he did not consider himself Caesar’s prisoner. He was a minister of Jesus Christ, bought with a price, and given the special mission of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. He was therefore **the prisoner of Christ Jesus**. Whatever he did and wherever he went were under Christ’s

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control. Without his Lord's consent, he was not subject to the plans, power, punishment, or imprisonment of any man or government. The Greek form of the phrase has been called a genitive of originating cause, to identify Paul as a prisoner **belonging** to Jesus Christ, who was the cause of his imprisonment.

- In the **b-portion** of **verse 1** it reveals Paul was imprisoned for Christ's saving purpose, which was **“for the sake of you Gentiles.”** Just as Christ was not crucified for His own sake, Paul was not imprisoned for his own sake, but for the sake of his Lord and the sake of those he had been given a special calling to serve. **Read Acts 9:15**; In **Col. 1:25 – 26** Paul told the Colossian Gentiles, **“I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the preaching the word of God, that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints.”** Paul knew he was in the ministry because he had been called by God to minister. He was not in it for his own purposes, and he did not try to carry it out in his own power. He made the supreme sacrifices of unselfish service for the sake of bringing others to glory.

Question: How does Paul's example teach believers to view trials from a spiritual perspective?

Eph. 3:2 - 4 “... if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; 3 that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. 4 And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,”

Eph. 3:2 – 4 NLT “... assuming, by the way, that you know God gave me the special responsibility of extending His grace to you Gentiles. 3 As I briefly wrote earlier, God Himself revealed His mysterious plan to me. 4 As you read what I have written, you will understand my insight into this plan regarding Christ.”

- In **verse 2** the words **“...if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you”** Paul begins to emphasize his divine authority for this teaching. The Greek first-class conditional clause indicates that the condition **“if indeed you have heard”** ... is assumed to be true. Paul is therefore saying, **“As I am sure you**

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have already heard....” That about which he implies they had **heard** was **the stewardship of God’s grace which was given** to Paul on their behalf as Gentiles. The word **stewardship** from **oikonomia** primarily referred to the **management of a household, business, or other concern on behalf of someone else**. A steward was responsible for taking care of that which belonged to someone else. He supervised such things as buying, selling, bookkeeping, planting, harvesting, storing, the preparation of meals, the assignment of duties to servants, and whatever else needed to be done.

- **Verse 2** also reveals Paul did not choose his apostleship or his ministry; he was appointed. Paul was chosen and commissioned purely by God’s grace. He was appointed a steward *by* God’s grace and then became a steward **of God’s grace**. Every believer is a steward of the calling, spiritual gifts, opportunities, skills, knowledge, and every other blessing he has from the Lord. Everything we have belongs to the Lord, and we are therefore entrusted as stewards to manage our lives and everything we possess in behalf of the One to whom we belong. We are faithful stewards when we use what we have to minister to those within the family of God and witness to those who are without. **1 Pet. 4:10 says, “As each one has received a special gift,” Peter admonishes us, “employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God”**
- In **verse 3** it reveals Paul’s stewardship was unique even for an apostle, and it was so revolutionary that he found it necessary to add that **“... by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.”** Obviously **the mystery** is that of Jew and Gentile being one in Christ, about which he **wrote before in brief**. It was an unknowable, incomprehensible truth hidden from all men until revealed by God. He says in **Eph. 3:4 “And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ.”** Paul was instrumental in revealing many mysteries to the church, but the particular mystery in view here is the one he has already mentioned in general and is about to state specifically in verse 6, namely, that in Christ, Jew and Gentile become one in God’s sight and in His kingdom and family. It was Paul’s intention not simply to declare the mystery but to explain and clarify it. When Ephesian believers, and every subsequent believer, would **read** his explanations, Paul’s hope was that they would come to **understand** his God-given **insight into the mystery of Christ**. The word

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insight from **sunesis** literally means **to bring together** and metaphorically refers to **comprehension and understanding, mentally bringing knowledge together in order to grasp its full meaning and significance**. Spiritual **insight** must always precede practical application, because what is not properly understood cannot be properly applied. Paul did not get his zeal for the gospel and his passion for souls from high emotional experiences, though he may have had many of them. His love, passion, and energetic zeal to win the lost and to build up the saved came from his great **insight** into the gospel. The more he comprehended God’s fathomless love and grace, the more he was compelled to share and exemplify that love and that grace. Paul was so filled with understanding of **the mystery of Christ** that he sacrificed his health, his freedom, and his very life in the ministry of imparting that understanding to others so that they, too, could **understand**. And for him, such sacrifice was supreme joy.

Question: What does Paul’s example teach us about faithfully handling the truth God has entrusted to us? What responsibilities come with receiving spiritual knowledge and understanding?

Eph. 3:5 - 6 “which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; 6 to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,”

Eph. 3:5 – 6 NLT “God did not reveal it to previous generations, but now by his Spirit he has revealed it to his holy apostles and prophets. 6 And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.”

- In **verse 5** Paul explains the **general meaning of mystery** as it is used in the New Testament, and in **verse 6** he **identifies the specific mystery** he is revealing to the Ephesians. The precursor of **which** is **“the mystery of Christ,”** about which the apostle had been given special revelation and insight we saw in **Eph. 3:3 - 4**. In the **a-portion** of **verse 5** Paul explains that **“in other generations this mystery was not made known to**

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the sons of men.” The words **“sons of men”** refers to mankind in general, not just to God’s chosen people, Israel. Prior to the church age, no one—not even the greatest prophets of the Old Testament—understood more than fragments of the truth Paul now unveils. The Old Testament contained hints and shadows of this mystery, but those truths could only be fully understood in light of New Testament revelation. We know the meaning of many Old Testament passages *only* because they are explained in the New Testament. For example, no one knew the full meaning of God’s promise to Abraham in **Gen. 12:3** that **“in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”** until Paul wrote in **Gal. 3:8**, **“And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations shall be blessed in you.’”** No one knew the full meaning of Isaiah’s prediction in **Isa. 49:6**, **“I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth”**, until it was explained by Paul in **Acts 13:46 – 47** to mean the offering of the gospel of Jesus Christ (the Messiah) to the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Old Testament saints had no vision of the church, the assembling together of all the saved into one united Body, in which there were absolutely no racial distinctions. The clues they had in the Old Testament were **a mystery** to them because too much information was lacking. That is why Jews in the early church—even the apostle Peter had such a difficult time accepting Gentile believers as being completely on the same spiritual level as Jews. And that is why Paul was concerned in this letter to the Ephesians to state and restate, to explain and explain again, this mystery and great truth.

- In the **b-portion** of **verse 5** it records that this truth **“has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.”** The Greek behind the words **has ... been revealed** refers to specific acts or events. Coupled with **now**, it here indicates the present immediacy of the revelation, which was given exclusively to New Testament **holy apostles and prophets**. These men were the instruments of writing Scripture. In **1 John 1:1 - 3 (Read)** it describes their unique function. The verse also reveals the **Spirit** as the divine agency of God’s revelation which flowed through these men. **Read 2 Pet. 1:20 - 21** This was the fulfillment of our Lord’s promise in **John 14:25 - 26** and **John 15:26 – 27**. **Read**

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- In **Eph. 3:6** Paul goes on to say, **“to be specific”**, the mystery is that **“the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”** / NLT says, **“And this is God’s plan: Both Gentiles and Jews who believe the Good News share equally in the riches inherited by God’s children. Both are part of the same body, and both enjoy the promise of blessings because they belong to Christ Jesus.”**
- As mentioned before, it is difficult for us to realize how incredibly revolutionary that truth was to Jews of Paul’s day. The idea of including Gentiles in one body with Jews was the spiritual equivalent of saying that lepers were no longer to be isolated, that they were now perfectly free to intermingle and associate with everyone else as normal members of society. In the minds of most Jews, their spiritual separation from Gentiles was so absolute and so right that the thought of total equality before God was inconceivable and little short of blasphemy. Yet Paul declares that, first of all, the **Gentiles are fellow heirs**. Those who once **Eph. 2:12** says, were **“excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise”** now have exactly the same legal status before God as His chosen people, the Jews. They have the same marvelous, boundless inheritance in Christ that Paul has already mentioned in **chapter 1**. They also are not occupants or strangers but sons, having the same legal status as all other believers.
- The text not only identifies believing Gentiles as **fellow heirs**, but also as **fellow members of the body**. This reveals that we are now equally blessed and joint heirs who have the same benefits as Jews. We are full **members of the body**, linked by common life with every other person in God’s holy family. We are not second-class in-laws, identification, citizenship, or are we to be acknowledged as distant relatives. We are **fellow members**, indistinguishable in God’s eyes from any other member. Every child of God is only God’s child. Spiritually, He has no genes but divine genes. **Read 1 Cor. 12:12 - 13**
- In addition to having the same legal and family status, the **b-portion of verse 6** reveals Gentiles also are **“fellow partakers of the promise in Christ through the gospel.”** What this teaches is all Christians, regardless of their status or position before being saved, are now **fellow partakers** of everything that pertains to **Christ through the gospel**—which is everything that pertains to Christ. The essence of the **gospel** is that,

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through faith in Jesus Christ, believers are made everything He is and given everything He has. This is our position and our identification. Being **in Christ** through acceptance of **the gospel** is what creates among believers our perfect and absolutely new society. There can never be true oneness apart from that reality. And there can never be practical unity in the church until Christians realize and live by the **positional unity** we already have **in Christ**, our one Lord and Savior.

Question: How does this passage challenge prejudice, division, or favoritism within the church today? How does being “partakers of His promise in Christ” affect your identity and security as a believer? Why is it important to remember that all believers stand on equal ground before God?

Eph. 3:7 – 9 “of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God’s grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. 8 To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things...”

Eph. 3:7 – 9 NLT “By God’s grace and mighty power, I have been given the privilege of serving him by spreading this Good News. 8 Though I am the least deserving of all God’s people, he graciously gave me the privilege of telling the Gentiles about the endless treasures available to them in Christ. 9 I was chosen to explain to everyone this mysterious plan that God, the Creator of all things, had kept secret from the beginning.”

- The gospel is advanced through men whom God calls and appoints to proclaim its truth, and it was this very gospel that Paul **was made a minister** to preach and teach the mystery of God and His grace. **Read Rom. 10:14** Although many Israelites heard the truth of God, they did not respond in faith or obedience to His good news. In the same way, many people today hear the gospel yet still refuse to heed its message. But it must be heard before it can be heeded, and Paul’s calling, like the calling of every preacher, was to proclaim God’s good news as a **minister, according to the gift of God’s grace**. The term **minister** in the text is from the Greek word **diakonos**, which carries the basic meaning of being a servant. It specifically speaks of a servant who waits on tables. It

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later came to refer to servants in general. By definition, a servant is one who acts on the commands of others, who recognizes and submits to a higher power. His primary responsibility is to do what he is told to do. Paul's single responsibility was to faithfully be a servant, **according to the gift of God's grace which was given to [him] according to the working of His (God's) power.** What the text reveals here is, it is the Lord who is the power behind the servant. **Read Col. 1:29** Paul emphasizes the fact that he did not make himself a minister but that he **was made a minister.** The calling, the message, the work, and the empowering were all God's. It was not Paul's education, natural abilities, experience, power, personality, influence, or any other such thing that qualified him to be a **minister** of Jesus Christ. He **was made** an apostle, a preacher, and a servant by the will and power of His Lord. God not only chooses weak and foolish people to receive salvation, but also uses weak and foolish preachers through whom He proclaims the message of salvation. Paul's calling to the ministry of the gospel, like everything else he received from the Lord, was **the gift of God's grace.**

- In the **a-portion** of **verse 8** Paul says, **“To me, the very least of all the saints, this grace was given...”** Though an apostle and a specially chosen minister of the mysteries of the gospel, Paul considered himself **the very least of all the saints.** The term **very least** is a comparative, indicating less than the least. That was not mock humility but his honest assessment of himself. Because he had such an unusually clear comprehension of God's righteousness, he also had an unusually clear understanding of how far short he himself fell of that righteousness. Paul claimed no second work of grace by which he was perfected in holiness, love, or anything else. To the end of his life he considered himself the foremost of sinners and was overwhelmed by his sense of unworthiness. **Read 1 Tim. 1:15** That attitude does not limit one's service but rather is the key to one's usefulness.
- In the **b-portion** of **verse 8** Paul says, **“... to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ...”** The words **the unfathomable riches of Christ** include all His truths and all His blessings, all that He is and has. The purpose of every preacher is to preach and declare those **riches**, to tell believers how rich they are in **Christ.** That is why it is so important for Christians to understand the greatness of **their position in the Lord.** The obedient, productive, and happy Christian life cannot be lived apart from understanding that

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glorious position. Before we can do what the Lord wants us to do for Him, we must understand what He has already done for us. We have riches beyond measure in the One who saved us. **2 Pet. 1:3** says, we have **“everything pertaining to life and godliness.”** Paul in **Col. 2:10** triumphantly reminds us that **“... in Him you have been made complete.”**

- In **verse 9** the text also reveals Paul's ministry was **“to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things.”** The word **administration** is from the same Greek word **oikonomia** as **“stewardship”** in **verse 2**. Paul is saying, in effect, “I am not only called in the vertical area to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ, but in the horizontal area to teach about the **administration**, the stewardship or dispensation, of the mystery of the church age.” The first area deals with our relationship to God and the second with our daily living and our ministry to each other as fellow believers. Paul's mission was **to bring to light**, or reveal, the full expression of the operation of this great truth of Gentile and Jews being one, a truth hidden for so long in the mind of God the Creator.

Question: Why is it important to remember that God's power—not human ability—produces effective ministry? How does Paul's transformation encourage people who feel unqualified to serve God? How does focusing on Christ's riches change the way we view earthly success and possessions?

Eph. 3:10 – 11 “... in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,”

Eph. 3:10 – 11 “God's purpose in all this was to use the church to display his wisdom in its rich variety to all the unseen rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was his eternal plan, which he carried out through Christ Jesus our Lord.”

- In **verses 10 and 11** it reveals the purpose of God's revealing the mystery of the church is **“... that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places”**, namely, the angels. In **Eph. 6:12** Paul uses similar words in regard to fallen angels. God has brought the church into being for **the purpose of manifesting His great wisdom before the**

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angels, both holy and unholy. The New Testament emphasis is on the holy angels' concern with the church, but it is obvious that the fallen angels can also to some extent see what is going on, though they have no desire or capacity for praise. In **verse 11** Paul continues to explain and says, **“This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** What this reveals is everything God has ever done has had the ultimate purpose of giving Himself glory. The church does not exist simply for the purpose of saving souls, though that is a marvelous and important work. The supreme purpose of the church, as Paul makes explicit here, is to glorify God by manifesting His **wisdom** before the angels, who can then offer greater praise to God. The purpose of the universe is to give glory to God, and that will be its ultimate reality after all evil is conquered and destroyed. Even now **Ps. 19:1** says, **“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”** The angels can see the power of God in creation, the wrath of God at Sinai, and the love of God at Calvary. But above all they see His **manifold** [multi-colored, multi-faceted] **wisdom** that is **made known through the church**. They see Him taking Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female—who together murdered the Messiah and were worthy only of hell—and making them, by that very cross of murder, one spiritual Body in Jesus Christ. They see Him breaking down every barrier, every wall that divides and making all believers one in an indivisible, intimate, and eternal union with the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and every other believer from every other age and circumstance.

Read Luke 15:10

- Every sinner who repents and turns to Christ adds another spiritual stone to God's temple, another member to His Body, and becomes another forgiven and cleansed sinner who is made eternally one with every other forgiven and cleansed sinner. The holy angels not only are interested in the salvation of men but constantly watch the face of God in heaven to see His reaction to the treatment of His saved earthly children, standing ready to carry out any mission in their behalf. **Read 1 Pet. 1:12 NLT** Angels are exceedingly concerned about the discipline needed to produce holy behavior and pure living in the church as well as godly leadership. After all, the writer of Hebrews says, in **Heb. 1:14**, **“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the**

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sake of those who will inherit salvation?” What that reveals is these angels **minister to** and **watch over** the church.

- In the classroom of God’s universe, God Himself is the Teacher, the angels are the students, the church is the illustration, and the lesson on display is **“the manifold wisdom of God.”** Make no mistake—the mystery has a divine purpose.

Question: How does God's eternal purpose in Christ provide assurance that His plans for your life are not accidental? If God is displaying His wisdom through His people, what message is your life communicating about Him?

Eph. 3:12 – 13 “... in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him. 13 Therefore I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.”

Eph. 3:12 – 13 “Because of Christ and our faith in him, we can now come boldly and confidently into God’s presence. 13 So please don’t lose heart because of my trials here. I am suffering for you, so you should feel honored.”

- Paul here teaches when we put our **faith in** Jesus Christ we can freely come to God and share in all of heaven’s unfathomable riches. He teaches this is the privilege of the mystery. Note that in Judaism only the high priest could enter the presence of God in the Holy of Holies, and that but briefly once a year on the Day of Atonement. For anyone else to come into God’s presence meant instant death. But now, Paul says, every person who comes to Christ in faith can come before God at any time and with **boldness and confident access**. That is the privilege within the mystery of the church. **Read Heb. 4:15 - 16** However, we are not to be flippant or irreverent but are to come to the Lord with an honest, open heart—in freedom of speech and freedom of spirit. The words **confident access** here speaks of a trust that knows no fear of rejection, because believers belong to God.
- In light of such great privilege, Paul says in **verse 14**, **“I ask you not to lose heart at my tribulations on your behalf, for they are your glory.”** What Paul wanted his readers plus us who are reading to understand is in and through every circumstance of His children, God is at work accomplishing His goodness, blessing, and **glory**.

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- Apparently many believers were deeply grieved by Paul’s long years of imprisonment and the continual suffering he endured for the sake of his ministry. Yet Paul reminded the Roman believers in **Romans 8:18**, saying, **“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”** In the end, Paul’s suffering brought honor rather than disgrace to those to whom he ministered.

Question: How does understanding our direct access to God affect the way we pray and worship? How can the suffering of one believer strengthen the faith of others? How does knowing Christ personally change the way a believer faces fear, uncertainty, or persecution?

Transition: Read Eph. 3:14 - 21

- It is possible to know a great deal about an automobile—to know exactly how the engine, the ignition, the transmission, and so on operate—and yet never use it to go anywhere. It is also possible to know very little about an automobile and yet use it every day to travel hundreds of miles. In the same way it is possible to know a great deal about the Bible—its doctrines, interpretations, moral standards, promises, warnings, and so on—and yet not live by those truths. In **Eph. 1:1** thru **Eph. 3:13** Paul gives the **basic truths** about the **Christian life—who we are in Christ and the great, unlimited resources we have in Him**. In these verses his focus is on **doctrine**. But, beginning in **Eph. 3:14** through the balance of the letter he exhorts believers **to claim** and **to live by those truths**. He now moves **from doctrine to the believer’s duty**.
- Paul begins in **Eph. 3:14 - 21** and gives his prayer requests on behalf of the Ephesian believers. In sharing his requests with them, he urges them to live in the full power and effectiveness of what he has stated in **Eph. 1:3** when he says, **“... who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.”** This second prayer in the book of Ephesians is **a prayer for enablement**. The first prayer in **Eph. 1:15 – 23** was for believers to **know their power**; the second prayer here in **Eph. 3:14 - 21** is for them **to use it**. Two things pastors and teachers should be most concerned about are telling God’s people **who they are in Christ** and then urging them to **live like it**. In other words, pastors and teachers are to help members of the flock **understand their**

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spiritual power, and **then motivates them** to **use it**. Like the apostle Paul in this letter, faithful pastors, teachers and leaders seeks to bring God’s people to the place of maximum power as full-functioning Christians.

- The prayer found in **Eph. 3:14 - 21** is both a heartfelt plea to God and a powerful appeal to believers. In this passage, Paul urges believers to respond to God’s sovereign provision while also praying that God Himself would inspire and empower them to do so. God is not only the provider of spiritual strength but also the One who initiates and motivates spiritual growth. Paul calls on God to activate believers’ power so that they can become faithful children and thereby glorify their heavenly Father. In this profound prayer of intercession and exhortation, Paul specifically prays for the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit, for Christ to dwell deeply within believers’ hearts, for God’s incomprehensible love to fill and permeate their lives, for them to experience the fullness of God, and ultimately for God’s glory to be revealed and proclaimed through them. Each request builds upon the previous one, creating a beautiful progression of spiritual growth and divine enablement.

Eph. 3:14 – 16 “For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man;”

Eph. 3:14 – 16 NLT “When I think of all this, I fall to my knees and pray to the Father, 15 the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. 16 I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit.”

- The words **“For this reason”** begins by repeating the words of **verse one**. The **reason** about which Paul speaks is therefore found in **chapter 2**. Christ makes us **spiritually alive in Him** in **Eph. 2:5**, we are **“His workmanship”** **Eph. 2:10**, **“no longer strangers and aliens, but ... fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household”** in **Eph.2:19**, **“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets”** in **Eph. 2:20**, and **“are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit”** in **Eph.2:22**. Paul therefore begins the verse by saying, **“For this reason,”** pointing back to our new identity as the dwelling place of God. Because believers have been made the habitation

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of the triune, all-powerful God, Paul prays that the Ephesians would fully appropriate and exercise the power available to them through their exalted position in Christ. Since God’s power already dwells within them, Paul asks that God would strengthen and enable them to live in the fullness of that divine power, so that His limitless energy might be clearly manifested in their lives.

- The truth that omnipotence dwells within human weakness is so majestic and exalted that we might expect Paul to address God with a title such as the eternal King of glory. Instead, however, he simply says, **“I bow my knees before the Father.”** Father was the title Jesus consistently used in prayer and the one He taught His disciples to use in Gospel of **Matt. 6:9**. Because God is our heavenly Father, we do not approach Him in fear, uncertainty, or with the dread that He may reject us or remain indifferent. Nor do we come attempting to appease Him, as pagans sought to appease their deities. Rather, we come before a tender, loving, compassionate, and caring Father who gladly receives His children. Even earthly fathers often welcome their children despite disobedience or ingratitude; how much more does our heavenly Father lovingly receive His own, regardless of their failures or shortcomings? Therefore, Paul approaches God with boldness and confidence, fully assured that the Father is more willing for His children to come to Him than they are willing to come to Him. He understands that God waits with a Father’s heart—filled with love, compassion, and eager anticipation for His children to draw near.
- In saying, **“I bow my knees”**, Paul is not prescribing a required posture for prayer. In Scripture, **bowing the knees** signifies and represents **an attitude of submission, of recognition** that one is in the presence of someone who is of much higher rank, dignity, and authority. **Read Ps. 95:6** As he prayed for the Ephesians while writing this letter to them, the apostle felt led to **bow [his] knees before the Father** on their behalf, not because that position or any other is especially sacred, but because it spontaneously reflected **his reverence for God’s glory in the midst of his passionate prayer**.

Eph. 3:15 “... from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name...”

Eph. 3:15 NLT “...the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth.”

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- Note here first that the words “...**from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name**” does not teach that God is the spiritual **Father** of every being in the universe. It does not, as claimed by modern liberalism, teach the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. Scripture clearly teaches two spiritual fatherhoods, God’s and Satan’s. God is the heavenly Father of those who trust in Him and Satan is the spiritual father of those who do not. The words “...**every family in heaven and on earth**” refers to the saints of every age—those now **in heaven** and those still remaining **on earth**. They are the only ones who legitimately derive their names from God the Father. Christians are no more or less the children of God than were believing Israelites, as well as believing Gentiles, before the coming of Christ. **Every family** of believers is a part of the one spiritual family of God, in which there are many members but only one **Father** and one brotherhood.
- In **verse 16** we see Paul’s first and central request for this divine family is that “**God would grant [them], according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man.**” The NLT says, “**I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources He will empower you with inner strength through His Spirit.**” The words here referring to God giving **according to the riches of His glory** are absolutely staggering, because His **riches** are limitless, completely without bounds! Yet that is exactly the measure by which Paul prays that God will empower the Ephesians. The phrase **of His glory** testifies that these riches belong to God because of who He is. Those, and many others, are the riches that every believer has in Jesus Christ. Paul is not praying for God to *give* these **riches** to believers, but **that He would grant** believers **to be strengthened** by God **according to** the **riches** we already possess. He wants us to live lives that correspond to the spiritual wealth we already possess in Christ.
- The first step in living like God’s children is to be **strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man**. Yet most Christians never seem to get to this first step, not knowing what it is to see God’s power fully at work in them. They suffer, the church suffers, and the world suffers because **the inner man** of most believers is never **strengthened with power through His Spirit**. The flaw is in **the inner man**, where man himself cannot perform a cure. Only God can reach and cure **the inner man**, and that is where He most wants to work. His

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work begins with salvation, and after that His main field of work is still **the inner man**, because that is where spiritual life exists and where it must grow. The divine nature, imparted to the believer at salvation, is at the core of the **inner man** and is the base from which the Holy Spirit changes the thinking of the believer. Although the outer, physical man becomes weaker and weaker with age, the **inner**, spiritual man should continually grow stronger and stronger **with power through His Spirit**. Only God’s Spirit can strengthen our spirits. He is the one who energizes, revitalizes, and empowers us. It is when the **inner man** is fed regularly on the Word of God and seeks the Spirit’s will in all the decisions of life, the believer can be sure he will be **strengthened with power through His Spirit**. Spiritual power is not the mark of a special class of Christian but is the mark of every Christian who submits to God’s Word and Spirit. Like physical growth and strength, spiritual growth and strength do not come overnight. As we discipline our minds and spirits to study God’s Word, understand it, and live by it, we are nourished and strengthened. Every bit of spiritual food and every bit of spiritual exercise add to our strength and endurance. **Read 2 Cor. 4:8 - 12, 16**

Question: Why do you think Paul begins this prayer by focusing on God's greatness rather than human needs? / How does a strong inner life help a believer endure suffering, temptation, and uncertainty? / Are your prayers primarily focused on external blessings or internal transformation? What does Paul's example challenge you to change?

Eph. 3:17 “...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love...”

Eph. 3:17 NLT “Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong.”

- **Eph. 3:17** begins with the phrase, “**so that**,” translated from the Greek word **hina**, which introduces a purpose clause. Paul is explaining the purpose of the strengthening he described in **verse 16**. Believers are “**strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in the inner man**” so that “**Christ may dwell in [our] hearts through faith**.” At first glance, this may seem out of order, since every believer is indwelt by Christ at salvation and receives the Holy Spirit upon trusting Him. Paul has already emphasized throughout

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Ephesians that believers are united with Christ. Therefore, he is not referring here to Christ's initial indwelling at conversion, but to His abiding presence and rule in the believer's life through sanctification. Paul's prayer is not that Christ would enter their hearts for the first time, but that He would increasingly feel at home there—exercising His influence, control, and lordship in every area of their lives as they continue to grow in faith.

- Paul uses the word **dwell** in this verse from the Greek compound word **katoikeō**, which is formed from **kata** ("down") and **oikeō** ("to inhabit a house"). The idea is much more than simply residing somewhere. It carries the meaning of settling down, making oneself at home, and taking up permanent residence. In the context of this passage, Paul is not speaking merely of Christ being present in the believer's **heart**, but of Christ being completely at home there. Every believer is indwelt by Christ at salvation, but Christ is not fully "**at home**" in a life that is not yielded to His lordship. As believers submit to the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit in the inner person, Christ's presence becomes increasingly evident and unhindered in every area of life. Until the Spirit is allowed to control and empower us, Christ may be present as a welcomed guest, yet restricted from fully governing the home of our hearts. Paul's concern is not with the fact of Christ's presence in believers, but with the quality of His presence. His prayer is that Christ would not merely reside within us, but that He would reign within us, feeling completely at home in every thought, attitude, desire, and action.
- Jesus enters the house of our hearts the moment He saves us, but He cannot live there in comfort and satisfaction until it is cleansed of sin and filled with His will. God is gracious beyond comprehension and infinitely patient. He continues to love those of His children who insist on spurning His will. But He cannot be happy or satisfied in such a heart. He cannot be fully at home until He is allowed to **dwell in** our **hearts** through the continuing **faith** that trusts Him to exercise His lordship over every aspect of our lives. We practice as well as receive His presence by **faith**.
- How awesome and wonderful that the almighty and holy God wants to live in our **hearts**, be at home there, and rule there! Yet Jesus said in **John 14:23**, "**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him.**"

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- In the **b-portion** of **verse 17**, Paul writes, **“that you, being rooted and grounded in love.”** This statement reveals the natural result of being strengthened by the Spirit and allowing Christ to be fully at home in our hearts. Spiritual strength leads to Christ's lordship, and Christ's lordship produces genuine **love**. When believers yield to the power of the Holy Spirit and submit to the rule of Christ, His love begins to flow in them and through them. As Christ settles down and takes full possession of our lives, we become **“rooted and grounded in love.”** Paul combines two powerful images here. **“Rooted”** is an agricultural term that speaks of a tree drawing nourishment and stability from deep roots, while **“grounded”** is an architectural term that refers to a building resting securely on a solid foundation. Together, these pictures emphasize a life firmly established and sustained by **love**. God's desire for His children is that they **love** one another with the same selfless love He has shown to us. Such **love** is the evidence of spiritual maturity and the fruit of Christ's presence within. In fact, **love** stands first among the fruit of the Spirit listed in **Galatians 5:22 - 23, with joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** flowing from and expressing that **love**. Biblical **agapē love** is not primarily a feeling or an emotion; it is **a deliberate choice of the will** to seek the good of others. While deep emotions often accompany true **love**, its foundation is a selfless commitment that reflects the very character of God. When Christ is at home in our hearts, that kind of **love** becomes the defining characteristic of our lives.

Question: If someone examined the "foundation" of your life, what would they discover it is built upon? / How does being rooted in God's love help believers withstand trials, criticism, or disappointment? / What circumstances tend to challenge your foundation in love?

Eph. 3:18 – 19 “... may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fulness of God.”

Eph. 3:18 – 19 NLT “And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. 19 May you

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experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.”

- Paul here explains that when we are **rooted and grounded in love**, we then become **“able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth”** of love. We cannot **comprehend** the fulness of **love** unless we are totally immersed in love, unless it is the very root and ground of our being. When someone asked the famed jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong to explain jazz, he replied, “Man, if I’ve got to explain it, you ain’t got it.” In some ways that simplistic idea applies to love. It cannot truly be understood and comprehended until it is experienced. Yet the experience and working of love that Paul is talking about in this passage is not emotional or subjective. It is not nice feelings or warm sentiments that bring such comprehension, but the actual working of God’s Spirit and God’s Son in our lives to produce **a love** that is pure and sincere, selfless and serving. To be **rooted and grounded in love** requires being rooted and grounded in God. When we are saved, **Rom. 5:5** teaches God’s love is **“poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”** **2 Thess. 3:5** reveals it is the Lord Himself who directs our **“hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”**
- Make no mistake **love** is available to every Christian because Christ is available to every Christian. Paul prays that we will become **“able to comprehend with all the saints.”** Love is not simply for the even-tempered Christian or the naturally pleasant and agreeable Christian. Nor is it for some supposed special class of Christians who have an inside spiritual track. It is for, and commanded of, every Christian meaning **“all the saints.”**
- **To comprehend ... what is the breadth and length and height and depth** of love is to **understand it in its fullness**. Love goes in every direction and to the greatest distance. It goes wherever it is needed for as long as it is needed. Its length covers the men on the upward way and its breadth reaches those drifting away on evil paths. There is not reasoning or support to believe that **breadth and length and height and depth** represent four specific types or categories of love but simply suggest its vastness and completeness. In whatever spiritual direction we look we can see God’s love. We can see love’s **breadth** reflected in God’s acceptance of Gentile and Jew equally in Christ

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found in **Eph. 2:11 - 18**. We can see love's **length** in God's choosing us before the foundation of the world found in **Eph. 1:4 - 5** for a salvation that will last through all eternity. We can see love's **height** in **Eph. 1:3; 2:6** as God's having **“blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ”** and in His raising us up and seating us **“with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.”** We can also see love's **depth** in God's reaching down to the lowest levels of depravity to redeem those who are dead in trespasses and sins found in **Eph. 2:1 - 3**. Be clear here, God's love can reach any person in any sin, and it stretches from eternity past to eternity future. It takes us into the very presence of God.

- In what may at first seems a self-contradiction, Paul says in **verse 19 “... and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge.”** Knowing Christ's **love** takes us beyond human **knowledge**, because it is from an infinitely higher source. Paul is not speaking here of our knowing the love we are to have for Christ but the **love of Christ**, His very own love that He must place in our hearts before we can love Him or anyone else. We are commanded to **love** because we are **given love**. God always gives before He commands anything in return, and love is one of Christ's greatest gifts to His church. Throughout **John 14 - 16** Jesus promises to give love, joy, peace, power, and comfort without measure to those who belong to Him. The world cannot comprehend the great love that Christ gives because it cannot understand Christ. Worldly love is based on attraction and therefore lasts only as long as the attraction. Christ's love is based on His own nature and therefore lasts forever. Worldly love lasts until it is offended or rebuffed. Christ's love lasts despite every offense and every rebuff. Worldly love loves for what it can get. Christ's love loves for what it can give. What is incomprehensible to the world is to be normal living for the child of God.
- In the **b-portion** of **verse 19** it says, **“... be filled up to all the fulness of God.”** This is truly incomprehensible, even to God's own children. It is incredible and indescribable. There is no way, this side of heaven, we can fathom that truth. We can only believe it and praise God for it. Note that it is the inner strengthening of the Holy Spirit that leads to the indwelling of Christ, which leads to abundant love, which leads to God's fullness in us. The word **filled** from **plēroō** means to **make full, or fill to the full**, and is used many

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times in the New Testament. It speaks of **total dominance**. A person **filled** with rage is totally dominated by hatred. A person **filled** with happiness is totally dominated by joy. To **be filled up to all the fulness of God** therefore means to be totally dominated by Him, with nothing left of self or any part of the old man. By definition, then, **to be filled** with God is to be emptied of self. It is not to have much of God and little of self, but all of God and none of self. This is a recurring theme in Ephesians. Here Paul talks about **the fulness of God**; in **Eph. 4:13** it is **“the fulness of Christ”**; and in **Eph. 5:18** it is **the fulness of the Spirit**. What a God, who loves us so much that He will not rest until we are completely like Him!

Question: In what areas of my life do I struggle to believe the depth of Christ's love for me? What experiences have helped me appreciate the breadth and depth of God's love? In what practical ways can I demonstrate Christ's love to those around me? If someone observed your life today, would they see evidence that you have been transformed by the love of Christ?

Eph. 3:20 – 21 “Now to Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Eph. 3:20 - 21 NLT “Now all glory to God, who is able, through his mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think. 21 Glory to him in the church and in Christ Jesus through all generations forever and ever! Amen.”

- In **verses 20–21**, Paul brings to a close all that he has been declaring about God's limitless power, grace, and provision for His children. He concludes with a magnificent doxology—a triumphant expression of praise and glory—beginning with the words, **“Now to Him.”** Having reflected on God's eternal purposes, immeasurable love, and mighty power at work in believers, Paul can do nothing but burst forth in worship, exalting the God who is worthy of all glory and honor.
- When the Holy Spirit has **empowered us**, Christ has **indwelt us**, love has **mastered us**, and God has **filled us** with His own fullness, then He **“... is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.”** Until those conditions are met, God's

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working in us is limited. When they are met, His working in us is unlimited. **John 14:12 - 14** says, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go to the Father. 13 And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.”**

- This text reminds us that there is no circumstance beyond God's ability to use for His glory and our good, provided we are fully surrendered to Him. Paul emphasizes the limitless nature of God's power through a progressive expression of divine enablement in **verse 20: He is able; He is able to do; He is able to do exceedingly abundantly; He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask; and He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or even imagine.** As believers, we readily affirm that God can do more than we can conceive, yet many fail to experience His power because they are not fully yielded to Him. Paul's ministry was effective because it was accomplished through God's power, not his own. The same Holy Spirit who empowered Paul now works within every believer. When we submit ourselves to God's will and allow His power to work through us, He accomplishes far more than we could ever **ask or imagine.** Then He receives the **glory** He deserves—in the church, in **Christ Jesus**, and throughout all **generations forever and ever.** The closing **“Amen”** is Paul's affirmation that this is the ultimate goal of every believer's life: the glory of God.

Question: How have I seen God answer prayers beyond what I expected or imagined? Are my goals and prayers large enough to reflect confidence in God's power? In what area of my life do I need to believe that God can do “more than I ask or think”? What obstacles keep believers from fully trusting God's power?