



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

- February 16th, 23rd
- March 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th
- April 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

The Goal of Ephesians:

Ephesians 4:1 Unity in the Body of Christ

4 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

WHAT PROBLEMS WOULD EXIST FOR THESE TO BE THE ANSWERS?

- **REDEMPTION 1:7** (Salvation, Restoration)
- **DIVINE INTENTION for the human race 1:3-14** (God’s plan for us)
- **GRACE 1:2** (God’s favor that we never can earn)
- **PREDESTINATION 1:4-5** [The Tree DNA in the seed and...]
- **RECONCILIATION 2:1-21**
- **UNION WITH CHRIST 2:1-21**

Week 1: Welcome to Ephesus – Understanding the History

Week 2: Understanding the Culture of the Time: Individual Self/Collective Self

- WHO they were,
- WHOSE they were and how each Ephesian fit in with the whole of their group,
- WHERE they were,
- And the context, WHEN they were—in the timeline of history,
- Then WHERE were they headed,
- And to WHOM were they trying to reach,
- Once there, WHAT WERE THEY SUPPOSED TO DO?

Week 3: Understanding JC Headship of the Church. How/When/Why of being a member of a church.

Week 4: His Genesis – Predestination, What happened before Genesis and how it affects us today

Week 5: Ephesians 2:11-22 Being One – Not Two

Step #1: Remembering what WAS

Step #2: NOW, Declaring what IS

- a. Declaring His redemption in our life
- b. Declaring Him as the *peace* in our life
- c. Declaring Him as the *unity* in our life
- d. Declaring Him through reconciliation--“There is no closure without accountability.” Police Officer

Step #3: Access the Holy Spirit TRY

Week 6: Paul’s life with God.

- Being inspired by Paul’s humanity and humbled by his dedication.

Week 7:

Ephesians 3 NKJV



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

The Mystery Revealed

3 For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—² if indeed you have heard of the ^[stewardship] dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, ³ how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), ⁵ which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, ⁷ of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.

Purpose of the Mystery

⁸ To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to make all see what is the ^{stewardship, dispensation} fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; ¹⁰ to the intent that now the ^{[variegated many sided,} manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the ^[rulers] principalities and powers in the heavenly places, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. ¹³ Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Appreciation of the Mystery

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The CHURCH

Ephesians 3 NKJV

The Mystery Revealed

3 *For this reason I, Paul,*

- Paul interrupts this message to say:

the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—

- Paul = prisoner OF Christ Jesus = GOD IS SOVEREIGN, my navigating, internal Master (He was in a Roman prison – physical master- but who really was his master?)

[ARE WE TO SEE OUR LIVES THIS WAY? WHY OR WHY NOT?]

- FOR YOU, on your behalf, because of....BEING THE BODY OF CHRIST/THE CHURCH. THIS IS WHY I AM DOING AS MY PART.....



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

2 if indeed you have heard of the ^[stewardship] **dispensation of the grace of God** which was given to me for you,

- Same introductory phrasing as in verse 7
- Introduces a PRIVILEGE OF REVELATION:

3 how that by revelation He made known to me the **mystery** (as I have briefly written already, ⁴ by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the **mystery** of Christ),

5 which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: ⁶ that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel,

Paul has purposely listed three related words that share the “same” root of CO:

- Gentiles are ‘co-heirs’ (*synklēronoma*), ‘concorporate’/body (*syssōma*) and ‘co-sharers’/partakers (*symmetocha*) of the promise.
- Linguistically as well as substantially communicating:

“Gentile and Jewish Christians together are now fellow heirs of the same blessing, fellow-members of the same body and fellow-partakers of the same promise. And this shared privilege is both in Jesus Christ (because it is enjoyed equally by all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, provided that they are in union with Christ) and through the gospel (because the gospel proclamation includes this unity and so makes it available to those who believe).”

Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [God's new society: the message of Ephesians](#) (pp. 113–141). InterVarsity Press.

7 of which I became a minister according **to the gift of the grace of God** given to me by the effective working of His power.

- Same introductory phrasing as in verse 2
- Introduces a PRIVILEGE OF COMMISSION/responsibility:

Purpose of the Mystery

8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

- I KNOW, NOW, I SHARE. As the Mystery is Revealed/Ministry Happens

“The major lesson taught by this first half of Ephesians 3 is the biblical centrality of the church.”

Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [God's new society: the message of Ephesians](#) (pp. 113–141). InterVarsity Press.

The Church is central to World History: HISTORY IS THE COMPLETED JOURNAL OF THE HERE & NOW

The Church is central to the Gospel: DO I VIEW THE BIBLE AS FOR ‘ME’ OR AS FOR ‘US’?

The Church is central to Christian Living: WE LIVE AS ONE – “US”

The Church’s Role, Our Mandate as the inheritors of this Mystery....wait, there’s more



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

The SPIRITUAL REALM

Mystery: Vs. 3, 4, 9.

- English: A puzzle, A secret – Illusionist use to create drama
- Greek: Mysterion = Was a secret but is now a truth into which someone has been initiated [OPEN SECRET].

9 *and to make **all see** what is the *stewardship, dispensation* fellowship of the **mystery**, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;*

- Greek: Mysterion = Was a secret but is now a truth into which ALL can be initiated/can be revealed to ALL **by the creator of all things.**

“In Christianity there are no esoteric ‘mysteries’ reserved for a spiritual élite.” J.R.W. Stott
 Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God’s new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 113–141). InterVarsity Press.

10 *to the intent that now the *variegated many sided*, **manifold** wisdom of God might be made known **by the church** to the ^[rulers]principalities and powers in the heavenly places, ¹¹ according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him. ¹³ Therefore I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

- Manifold = Joseph’s coat of many colors...INCLUDES EVERYTHING!

The word for ‘manifold’ (*polupoikilos*) means ‘many-coloured’, and was used to describe flowers, crowns, embroidered cloth and woven carpets. The simpler word *poikilos* was used in the LXX of the ‘coat of many colours’ (AV) or ‘richly ornamented robe’ (NIV) which Jacob gave to his youngest son Joseph (Gn. 37:3, 23, 32).

Everything Wisdom (Christ’s Mysteries)

BE MADE Known: BY THE CHURCH

- By WHO we are
- By WHAT we do

TO.....

- To the Principalities and Powers in Heavenly Places

“This is the circle of divine communication, for the good news was passed from God to Paul,
 from Paul and others to all mankind,
 and from the church on earth back to heaven again, to the cosmic powers.”

Stott, J. R. W. (1979). *God’s new society: the message of Ephesians* (pp. 113–141). InterVarsity Press.

1 Peter 1:12

*It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels **long** to look.*

Was this mystery of/miracle of the Church becoming, shown only to the Angels of the LORD?

Did evil see it happening too?

“Every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (**1 John 4:3**, NKJV).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

CLOSING:

Christ’s Mysteries Made Known:

- To the Jews
- To the Gentiles
- To All Men
- To the Principalities and Powers in Heavenly Places

This is done: BY THE CHURCH

- There is power in the church operating as it has been created, destined to be: **“The Power of US”**.
- Is the church, **operating as it should**, thee most affective piece of warfare tool we have here on earth?

Paul’s Message in Ephesians 3:1-13 is TWO FOLD:

- 1.) What do I **know** about Christ, about life with Christ, the Mysteries of Christ...THE REALITY OF CHRIST so much so that I **NOW MUST SHARE?**

I KNOW, NOW I SHARE... DO I?

Most powerful miracle...SALVATION IN CHRIST JESUS

Galatians 6:15 *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.*

- 2.) How am I living “as the Church”?

a. Can I say as Paul states... “this is for you!” 2b “*was given to me for you*”

LIVING IN COMMUNITY

LIVING AS US...this was given to me for you

Is the human propensity for “us” & “them” grounded in self-aggrandizement?

Is Paul’s struggle to communicate to the known world of Jews & Gentiles that God was not interested in what makes them separate [The Tower of Babel = Separating mankind so God’s timeline could be established]

ANGELS

Abraham’s heavenly visitors, Genesis 18:1–10.

Amenities to angels, Genesis 19:1–4.

Angels spoken of as men, Genesis 19:1–13.

Angelic authority, Genesis 22:11–12.

Guidance by assigned angel, Genesis 24:7.

Personal angel, Genesis 24:40; Genesis 48:16 (Berk.); Acts 12:11, 15.

Give heed to angels, Exodus 23:20–23.

Donkey, angel, Numbers 22:23–28.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Commander of the Lord's army, Joshua 5:13–15.
Angelic guidance, Judges 2:1–5 (LB).
Angel's secret name, Judges 13:16–18.
Mistaking angel for God Himself, Judges 13:21–23.
Alluding to angels, 2 Kings 6:16.
Association with Satan, Job 1:6; 2:1.
Anonymous spirit, Job 4:15–16.
Angels mistrusted, Job 15:15 (CEV).
Innumerable host, Job 25:3 (GNB).
"One of a thousand angels," Job 33:23 (CEV).
Give praise to God, Psalm 29:1.
Deliverance for those in need, Psalm 34:7.
Bread of angels, Psalm 78:25.
Role of guardian angels, Psalm 91:9–12; Exodus 23:20.
Angels obedient to the Lord, Psalm 103:20.
"Servants of fire," Psalm 104:4 (LB).
Soldiers destroyed by angel, Isaiah 37:36.
Angel subdued lions, Daniel 6:22.
Gabriel, Daniel, Daniel 9:20–21.
Strengthening angel, Daniel 10:15–19.
National guardian, Daniel 12:1 (LB).
Angels, dreams, visions, Zechariah 1:7–17.
Ministry of angel to prophet, Zechariah 1:8–21 (Note continuing chapters).
Guiding angel, Zechariah 3:1 (AB).
Encouraging angel, Zechariah 3:6 (CEV).
"Catch you in their arms," Matthew 4:6 (CEV).
Ministry following temptation, Matthew 4:11.
Agent of judgment, Matthew 13:41–42.
Children's angels, Matthew 18:10.
"Bright as lightning," Matthew 28:3 (NIV).
Angelic protection, Mark 1:12–13.
Angel described as "a young man," Mark 16:5–7 (LB).
Angelic birth announcements, Luke 1:5–38.
Frightened by angel, Luke 1:11–12.
Gabriel's two assignments, Luke 1:11–38.
Firstborn's name given by angel, Luke 1:13.
Rejoicing angels, Luke 15:10.
Angelic intervention, Acts 5:17–20; 12:4–11.
Human face resembled angel, Acts 6:15.
Guided by angel, Acts 8:26.
Angel seen in vision, Acts 10:3–4.
Ministering angels, Acts 12:8–10; 27:21–25.
Possible reference to angels, 1 Corinthians 4:15.
Demons masquerade as angels, 2 Corinthians 11:14–15.
New Testament apocrypha, 1 Timothy 1:3–4 (LB).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Christ superior to angels, Hebrews 1:4–8.
Status of angels, Hebrews 1:5–14.
Unaware encounter with angels, Hebrews 13:2.
Angels' curiosity, 1 Peter 1:12.
Chained angels, Jude 6.
Mighty deliverance, Jude 14–15 (GNB).
Message delivered by angel, Revelation 1:1.
Assigned to God, Revelation 3:5.
Angel choir, Revelation 5:11–12.
Illuminating presence, Revelation 18:1.
Do not worship angels, Revelation 19:10; 22:9.
One angel versus Satan, Revelation 20:1–3.
*See Archangel, Demons, Guardian.*¹

ARCHANGEL

Voice of resurrection, 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
Archangel versus Satan, Jude 9.²

GUARDIAN

Household guardians, Genesis 14:14.
Guardian of the people, Esther 10:3.
Shielded by God's power, 1 Peter 1:5.³

DEMONS

Informed by divination, Genesis 30:27.
Protected by blessing, Numbers 22:12.
God's use of demons, 1 Samuel 16:15.
"Evil spirit from God," 1 Samuel 16:16 (NIV, NKJV).
Exorcism, Acts 19:11–13.
Demon use of bodies, Matthew 8:28–33; Mark 5:1–5.
Jesus accused of demonism, Matthew 9:32–34; 12:22–32; John 8:48–52.
Depraved spirits, Matthew 10:1 (Berk.).
Authority over evil, Matthew 10:1–8; Romans 8:37–39; Colossians 2:15; Jude 9.
Shrieking demons, Mark 3:11 (LB).
Satan versus Satan, Mark 3:20–26.
Name of demon, Mark 5:8–9 (GNB).
Demon rebuked, Mark 9:25.
Demons recognized Jesus, Luke 4:33–36, 41.
Mary Magdalene's seven demons, Luke 8:2.
Multiple demon possession, Luke 8:30.
Demon confronted Jesus, Luke 9:37–43.

¹ Anderson, K. (1996). [Where to Find It in the Bible](#). T. Nelson Publishers.

² Anderson, K. (1996). [Where to Find It in the Bible](#). T. Nelson Publishers.

³ Anderson, K. (1996). [Where to Find It in the Bible](#). T. Nelson Publishers.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

- Mute demon, Luke 11:14.
- Crippled by demon, Luke 13:10–16.
- Controlled by Satan, Luke 22:3; John 13:27; 1 Timothy 5:15.
- Jesus accused of demon possession, John 10:19–21.
- Tormented by demons, delivered, Acts 5:16.
- Contending sorcerer, Acts 13:6–8.
- Reverence to demons, Acts 17:22 (AB).
- Demons cause physical harm, Acts 19:13–16.
- Pagan idols, 1 Corinthians 10:20.
- False angels, 2 Corinthians 11:14–15.
- Enslaved by demons, Galatians 4:8–9 (NRSV).
- “Cosmic powers,” Ephesians 6:12 (NRSV).
- Satanic cause of anger, Ephesians 4:26–27.
- Armor of God, Ephesians 6:10–18.
- Cosmic powers, Ephesians 6:12 (Berk.).
- Rescue from darkness, Colossians 1:13–14.
- Hindered by Satan, 1 Thessalonians 2:18.
- Possessed by Satan, 1 Timothy 1:18–20.
- Demon theology, 1 Timothy 4:1–4 (See CEV).
- Deceived widows, 1 Timothy 5:11–15.
- Satan’s trap, 2 Timothy 2:25–26.
- Resisting Satan, James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8–9.
- Testing false spirits, 1 John 4:1–6.
- Angels versus demons, Revelation 12:7–9.
- Global control, 1 John 5:19; Revelation 16:13–14.
- Demon residence, Revelation 18:2.⁴

Angels in the Bible

Appears to	Name of Angel(s)	Reference
Hagar	Angel of Yahweh	Gen 16:1–16
Lot (and family)	The (two) angels	Gen 19:1–22
Abraham	Yahweh; “three men”	Gen 18:1–33
Abraham	Angel of Yahweh	Gen 22:1–22
Jacob (dream)	Angels of God	Gen 28:11–12
Jacob	Angel of God; “a man”	Gen 31:11–13; 32:22–32

⁴ Anderson, K. (1996). [Where to Find It in the Bible](#). T. Nelson Publishers.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Moses	Angel of Yahweh	Exod 3:2
All Israel	Angel of God	Exod 14:19
Balaam and Donkey	Angel of Yahweh	Num 22:22–35
Joshua	Commander of the army of Yahweh	Josh 5:13–15
All Israel	Angel of Yahweh	Judg 2:1–4
Gideon	Angel of Yahweh	Judg 6:11–23
Manoah and Wife	Angel of Yahweh	Judg 13:1–25
David	Angel of Yahweh	2 Sam 24:15–17; 1 Chr 21:16–18
Elijah	Angel of Yahweh	1 Kgs 19:1–8
Daniel	“God sent His angel”	Dan 6:22
Daniel	Gabriel	Dan 8:15–17
Zechariah (vision)	two angels	Zech 2:1–5
Zechariah	Gabriel	Luke 1:5–25, 57–64
Mary	Gabriel	Luke 1:26–38
Joseph (dream)	An angel of the Lord	Matt 2:13
Shepherds	An angel of the Lord ; “a multitude of the heavenly army”	Luke 2:8–15
Women at Jesus’ Tomb	An angel of the Lord ; “a young man”; “two men in gleaming clothes”	Matt 28:5–7; Mark 16:5–7; Luke 24:4–7
Mary Magdalene	Two angels in white	John 20:11–13
Jesus’ followers	Two men dressed in white	Acts 1:10–11
The Apostles	An angel of the Lord	Acts 5:17–21
Philip	An angel of the Lord	Acts 8:26–39



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Cornelius (vision)	An angel of God	Acts 10:1–8
Peter	An angel of the Lord	Acts 12:1–19
Paul	An angel of God	Acts 27:21–25
N/A	Michael the Archangel	Jude 9
John (vision)	Angels of the seven churches	Rev 1:20
John (vision)	A powerful angel	Rev 5:2
John (vision)	Many angels around the throne	Rev 5:11; 7:11
John (vision)	Four angels at the four corners of the earth	Rev 7:1
John (vision)	An angel ascending from the east	Rev 7:2
John (vision)	Seven angels with seven trumpets	Rev 8:2; 8:6–9:14; 11:15
John (vision)	An angel with a golden censer	Rev 8:3
John (vision)	Four angels who kill a third of humanity	Rev 9:14–15
John (vision)	An angel holding a little scroll	Rev 10:1–11
John (vision)	Michael and his angels	Rev 12:7
John (vision)	Three angels with three messages	Rev 14:6–12
John (vision)	An angel that comes out of the temple	Rev 14:15
John (vision)	An angel that comes out of the temple with a sickle	Rev 14:17–20
John (vision)	Seven angels with seven plagues (one of whom speaks to John)	Rev 15:1; 16:1–21; 17:1; 21:9, 15; 22:6–11
John (vision)	An angel announcing the fall of Babylon	Rev 18:1–2
John (vision)	An angel who throws a boulder the size of a millstone into the sea	Rev 18:21
John (vision)	An angel standing in the sun	Rev 19:17



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

John (vision)	An angel holding a key and a chain	Rev 20:1
John (vision)	Twelve angels at the gates of the new Jerusalem	Rev 21:12 ⁵

Psalm 8: 4-5a NKJV

*What is man that You are mindful of him,
And the son of man that You visit him?
⁵ For You have made him a little lower than the angels,*

“every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:3, NKJV).

Is There Activity of Demonic Spirits in the World Today?

Ghosts, hauntings, séances, tarot cards, Ouija boards, crystal balls—what do they have in common? They are fascinating to many people because they seem to offer insight into an unknown world that lies beyond the limits of our physical existence. And, to many, such things seem innocent and harmless.

Many who approach these subjects from non-biblical perspectives believe that ghosts are the spirits of dead people who, for whatever reason, have not gone on to the “next stage.” According to those who believe in ghosts, there are three different kinds of hauntings: (1) residual hauntings (likened to video playbacks with no actual interaction with any spirits). (2) Hauntings by human spirits, whose natures are a combination of good and bad (but not evil). Such spirits may simply want to get a person’s attention; others may be pranksters, but, in either case, they do not truly harm people. (3) Interaction with non-human spirits or demons. These entities can masquerade as human spirits, but they are harmful and dangerous.

When reading about ghosts and hauntings from non-biblical sources, remember that, just because an author may refer to the Bible or to Bible characters (such as Michael the archangel), it does not mean he approaches the subject from a biblical perspective. When no authority is given for an author’s information, the reader has to ask himself, “How does he/she know this to be so? What is his/her authority?” For example, how does an author know that demons masquerade as human spirits? Ultimately, those who address such subjects from non-biblical sources must base their understanding on their own thoughts, the thoughts of others, and/or the experiences of the past. However, based on their own admission that demons are deceiving and can imitate benevolent human spirits, experiences can be deceiving! If one is to have a right understanding on this subject, he must go to a source that has shown itself to be accurate 100 percent of the time—God’s Word, the Bible. Let’s take a look at what the Bible has to say about such things.

1. The Bible never speaks of hauntings. Rather, it teaches that when a person dies, the spirit of that person goes to one of two places. If the person is a believer in Jesus Christ, his spirit is ushered into the presence of the Lord in heaven (Philippians 1:21–23; 2 Corinthians 5:8). Later, he will be reunited with his body at the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). If the person is not a believer in Christ, his spirit is put in a place of torment called hell (Luke 16:23–24).

Whether a person is a believer or an unbeliever, there is no returning to our world to communicate or interact with people, even for the purpose of warning people to flee from the judgment to come (Luke 16:27–31). There are only two recorded incidents in which a dead person interacted with the living. The first is when King Saul of Israel tried contacting the deceased prophet Samuel through a medium. God allowed Samuel to be disturbed long enough to pronounce judgment upon Saul for his repeated disobedience (1 Samuel 28:6–19). The second incident is when Moses and Elijah interacted with Jesus when he was transfigured in Matthew 17:1–8. There was nothing “ghostly” about the appearance of Moses and Elijah, however.

2. **Scripture speaks repeatedly of angels moving about unseen (Daniel 10:1–21).** Sometimes, these angels have interaction with living people. Evil spirits, or demons, can actually possess people, dwelling within them and controlling them (see Mark 5:1–20, for example). The four Gospels and the Book of Acts record several instances of demon possession and of good angels appearing to and aiding believers. Angels, both good and bad, can cause supernatural phenomena to occur (Job 1–2; Revelation 7:1; 8:5; 15:1; 16).

3. **Scripture shows that demons know things of which people are unaware (Acts 16:16–18; Luke 4:41).** Because these evil angels have been around a long time, they would naturally know things that those living limited life spans would not. Because Satan currently has access to God’s presence (Job 1–2), demons might also be allowed to know some specifics about the future, but this is speculation.

4. Scripture says Satan is the father of lies and a deceiver (John 8:44; 2 Thessalonians 2:9) and that he disguises himself as an “angel of light.” Those who follow him, human or otherwise, practice the same deceit (2 Corinthians 11:13–15).

⁵ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., Whitehead, M. M., Grigoni, M. R., & Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). *Faithlife Study Bible*. Lexham Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

5. Satan and demons have great power (compared to humans). Even Michael the archangel trusts only God's power when dealing with Satan (Jude 1:9). But Satan's power is nothing compared to God's (Acts 19:11–12; Mark 5:1–20), and God is able to use Satan's evil intent to bring about His good purposes (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 12:7).

6. God commands us to have nothing to do with the occult, devil worship, or the unclean spirit world. This would include the use of mediums, séances, Ouija boards, horoscopes, tarot cards, channeling, etc. God considers these practices an abomination (Deuteronomy 18:9–12; Isaiah 8:19–20; Galatians 5:20; Revelation 21:8), and those who involve themselves in such things invite disaster (Acts 19:13–16).

7. The Ephesian believers set an example in dealing with occult items (books, music, jewelry, games, etc.). They confessed their involvement with such as sin and burned the items publicly (Acts 19:17–19).

8. Release from Satan's power is achieved through God's salvation. Salvation comes through believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 19:18; 26:16–18). Attempts to disentangle oneself from demonic involvement without salvation are futile. Jesus warned of a heart devoid of the Holy Spirit's presence: such a heart is merely an empty dwelling place ready for even worse demons to inhabit (Luke 11:24–26). But when a person comes to Christ for the forgiveness of sin, the Holy Spirit comes to abide until the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30).

Some paranormal activity can be attributed to the work of charlatans. It would seem best to understand other reports of ghosts and hauntings as the work of demons. Sometimes these demons may make no attempt to conceal their nature, and at other times they may use deception, appearing as disembodied human spirits. Such deception leads to more lies and confusion.

God states it is foolish to consult the dead on behalf of the living. Rather, He says, "To the law and to the testimony!" (Isaiah 8:19–20). The Word of God is our source of wisdom. Believers in Jesus Christ should not be involved in the occult. The spirit world is real, but Christians do not need to fear it (1 John 4:4).

What are the different types of angels?

Angels fall into two categories: the "unfallen" angels and the fallen angels. Unfallen angels are those who have remained holy throughout their existence and accordingly are called "holy angels" (Matthew 25:31). In Scripture, generally when angels are mentioned, it is the class of holy angels in view. By contrast, the fallen angels are those who have not maintained their holiness. Holy angels fall into special classes, and certain individuals are named and mentioned. Michael the archangel is likely the head of all the holy angels, and his name means "who is like unto God?" (Daniel 10:21; 12:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7–10). Gabriel is one of the principal messengers of God, his name meaning "hero of God," and was entrusted with important messages such as those delivered to Daniel (Daniel 8:16; 9:21), to Zacharias (Luke 1:18–19), and to Mary (Luke 1:26–38).

Most holy angels are not given names but are described only as "elect angels" (1 Timothy 5:21). The expressions "principalities" and "powers" seem to be used of all angels whether fallen or holy (Luke 21:26; Romans 8:38; Ephesians 1:21; 3:10; Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15; 1 Peter 3:22). Some angels are designated as "cherubim," which are living creatures who defend God's holiness from any defilement of sin (Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:18, 20; Ezekiel 1:1–18). "Seraphim" are another class of angels mentioned only once in Scripture in Isaiah 6:2–7 and are described as having three pairs of wings. They apparently have the function of praising God, being God's messengers to Earth, and are especially concerned with the holiness of God. Most of the references to holy angels in Scripture refer to their ministries which cover a wide field of achievement. They were present at creation, the giving of the Law, at the birth of Christ and at His resurrection, at the Ascension, and they will be present at the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming of Christ.

In stark contrast to the company of holy angels, the fallen angels are also innumerable and are described as fallen from their first estate. Led by Satan, who was originally a holy angel, the fallen angels defected, rebelled against God, and became sinful in their nature and work. Fallen angels have been divided into two classes: those who are free and those who are bound. Of the fallen angels, Satan alone is given particular mention in the Bible. When Satan fell (John 8:44; Luke 10:18), he drew after him one third of the angels. Of those, some are reserved in chains awaiting judgment (1 Corinthians 6:3; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6), and the remainder are free and are the demons, or devils, to whom reference is constantly made throughout the New Testament (Mark 5:9, 15; Luke 8:30, 1 Timothy 4:1). They are Satan's servants in all his undertakings and share his doom (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

What Do Angels Look Like?

Angels are spirit beings (Hebrews 1:14), so they do not have any essential physical form. But angels do have the ability to appear in human form. When angels appeared to humans in the Bible, they resembled normal males. In Genesis 18:1–19, God and two angels appeared as men and actually ate a meal with Abraham. Angels appear as men many times throughout the Bible (Joshua 5:13–14; Mark 16:5), and they never appear in the likeness of women.

Other times, angels appeared not as humans, but as something other-worldly, and their appearance was terrifying to those who encountered them. Often, the first words from these angels were "do not be afraid," because extreme fear was such a common reaction. The keepers of Jesus' tomb became as dead men when they saw the angel of the Lord (Matthew 28:4). The shepherds in the fields in Luke 2 were "sore afraid" when the angel of the Lord appeared and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

As for physical characteristics, angels are sometimes described as winged. The images of cherubim on the ark of the covenant had wings that covered the mercy seat (Exodus 25:20). Isaiah saw winged seraphim in his vision of the throne of heaven, each one having six wings (Isaiah 6:2). Ezekiel, too, saw visions of winged angels. Isaiah 6:1–2 depicts angels having human features—voices, faces and feet. Angel voices are heard singing and praising God in several other passages. One of the most complete descriptions of an angel is in Daniel 10:5–6: "I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude." The angel at Jesus' tomb was similarly described: "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow" (Matthew 28:3).

Whatever appearance angels take on, there is reason to believe they are incredibly beautiful. Ezekiel tells us that Lucifer was "lifted up" in pride over his beauty. In addition, beings such as angels, who are continually in the presence of God, would be expected to have extraordinary beauty because God's glory is reflected upon all that is around Him.

What does the Bible say about angels?



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Angels are personal spiritual beings who have intelligence, emotions, and will. This is true of both the good and evil angels (demons). Angels possess intelligence (Matthew 8:29; 2 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Peter 1:12), show emotion (Luke 2:13; James 2:19; Revelation 12:17), and exercise will (Luke 8:28–31; 2 Timothy 2:26; Jude 6). Angels are spirit beings (Hebrews 1:14) without true physical bodies. Although they do not have physical bodies, they are still personalities.

Because they are created beings, their knowledge is limited. This means they do not know all things as God does (Matthew 24:36). They do seem to have greater knowledge than humans, however, which may be due to three things. First, angels were created as an order of creatures higher than humans. Therefore, they innately possess greater knowledge. Second, angels study the Bible and the world more thoroughly than humans do and gain knowledge from it (James 2:19; Revelation 12:12). Third, angels gain knowledge through long observation of human activities. Unlike humans, angels do not have to study the past; they have experienced it. Therefore, they know how others have acted and reacted in situations and can predict with a greater degree of accuracy how we may act in similar circumstances.

Though they have wills, angels, like all creatures, are subject to the will of God. Good angels are sent by God to help believers (Hebrews 1:14). Here are some activities the Bible ascribes to angels:

They praise God (Psalm 148:1–2; Isaiah 6:3). They worship God (Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:8–13). They rejoice in what God does (Job 38:6–7). They serve God (Psalm 103:20; Revelation 22:9). They appear before God (Job 1:6; 2:1). They are instruments of God's judgments (Revelation 7:1; 8:2). They bring answers to prayer (Acts 12:5–10). They aid in winning people to Christ (Acts 8:26; 10:3). They observe Christian order, work, and suffering (1 Corinthians 4:9; 11:10; Ephesians 3:10; 1 Peter 1:12). They encourage in times of danger (Acts 27:23–24). They care for the righteous at the time of death (Luke 16:22).

Angels are an entirely different order of being than humans. Human beings do not become angels after they die. Angels will never become, and never were, human beings. God created the angels, just as He created humanity. The Bible nowhere states that angels are created in the image and likeness of God, as humans are (Genesis 1:26). Angels are spiritual beings that can, to a certain degree, take on physical form. Humans are primarily physical beings, but with a spiritual aspect. The greatest thing we can learn from the holy angels is their instant, unquestioning obedience to God's commands.

When did God create the angels?

Trying to determine when God created the angels is somewhat tricky because anything God did “before the foundation of the world” puts the event outside of time itself. Time and space are characteristics of our world, not God's. He is not limited by hours, days and years as we are. In fact, the Bible tells us that “with the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day” (2 Peter 3:8).

We do know that God created the angels before he created the physical universe. The book of Job describes the angels worshipping God as He was creating the world: “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4–7).

If we consider the function of angels, we might conclude that God created the angels just prior to the creation of mankind because one of their duties is to be “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14). We also know they existed prior to the Garden of Eden, because Satan, who was formerly the angel Lucifer, was already present in the Garden in his fallen state. However, because another function of angels is to worship God around His throne (Revelation 5:11–14), they may have been in existence millions of years—as we reckon time—before God created the world, worshipping Him and serving Him.

So, although the Bible does not specifically say when God created the angels, it was sometime before the world was created. Whether this was a day before, or billions of years before—again, as we reckon time—we cannot be sure.

What does the Bible say about demons?

Revelation 12:9 is the clearest scripture on the identity of demons, “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” Satan's fall from heaven is symbolically described in Isaiah 14:12–15 and Ezekiel 28:12–15. Revelation 12:4 seems to indicate that Satan took one-third of the angels with him when he sinned. Jude 6 mentions angels who sinned. The Bible indicates that the demons are fallen angels who, along with Satan, rebelled against God.

Satan and his demons now look to destroy and deceive all those who follow and worship God (1 Peter 5:8; 2 Corinthians 11:14–15). The demons are described as evil spirits (Matthew 10:1), unclean spirits (Mark 1:27), and angels of Satan (Revelation 12:9). Satan and his demons deceive the world (2 Corinthians 4:4), attack Christians (2 Corinthians 12:7; 1 Peter 5:8), and combat the holy angels (Revelation 12:4–9). Demons are spiritual beings, but they can appear in physical forms (2 Corinthians 11:14–15). The demons/fallen angels are enemies of God, but they are defeated enemies. Greater is He who is in us, than those who are in the world (1 John 4:4).

Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Logos Bible Software.

Next Week:

INTERCESSION

Appreciation of the Mystery

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

NOTES

AMP

Paul's Stewardship

3 For this reason [because I preach that you and believing Jews are joint heirs] I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was entrusted to me [to share with you] for your benefit; ³ and that by [divine] revelation the mystery was made known to me, as I have already written in brief. ⁴ By referring to this, when you read it you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, ⁵ which in other generations was not disclosed to mankind, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets by the [Holy] Spirit; ⁶ [it is this:] that the Gentiles are now joint heirs [with the Jews] and members of the same body, and joint partakers [sharing] in the [same divine] promise in Christ Jesus through [their faith in] the good news [of salvation]. ⁷ Of this [gospel] I was made a minister by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of His power. ⁸ To me, [though I am] the very least of all the saints (God's people), this grace [which is undeserved] was graciously given, to proclaim to the Gentiles the good news of the incomprehensible riches of Christ [that spiritual wealth which no one can fully understand], ⁹ **and to make plain [to everyone] the plan of the mystery** [regarding the uniting of believing Jews and Gentiles into one body] which [until now] was kept hidden through the ages in [the mind of] God who created all things. ¹⁰ **So now through the church the multifaceted wisdom of God [in all its countless aspects] might now be made known [revealing the mystery] to the [angelic] rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.** ¹¹ *This is in accordance with [the terms of] the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,* ¹² **in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him** [that is, our faith gives us sufficient courage to freely and openly approach God through Christ]. ¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart at my sufferings on your behalf, for they are your glory *and* honor.

¹⁴ For this reason [grasping the greatness of this plan by which Jews and Gentiles are joined together in Christ] I bow my knees [in reverence] before the Father [of our Lord Jesus Christ], ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth [a] derives its name [God—the first and ultimate Father]. ¹⁶ May He grant you out of the riches of His glory, to be strengthened *and* spiritually energized with power through His Spirit in your inner self, [indwelling your innermost being and personality], ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through your faith. And may you, having been [deeply] rooted and [securely] grounded in love, ¹⁸ be fully capable of comprehending with all the saints (God's people) the width and length and height and depth of His love [fully experiencing that amazing, endless love]; ¹⁹ **and [that you may come] to know [practically, through personal experience] the love of Christ which far surpasses [mere] knowledge [without experience], that you may be filled up [throughout your being] to all the fullness of God [so that you may have the richest experience of God's presence in your lives, completely filled and flooded with God Himself].**



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

²⁰ **Now to Him who is able to** [carry out His purpose and] do superabundantly more than all that we dare ask or think [infinitely beyond our greatest prayers, hopes, or dreams], according to His power that is at work within us, ²¹ to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Footnotes

- a. [Ephesians 3:15](#) In Greek, the word for family is *patria*, which is derived from *pater*, the word for “father.” The concept of family originates with God.

THEMES: THE CHURCH, THE SPIRITUAL REALM (ANGELS/SPIRITUAL BEINGS) In vs1-13. INTERCESSION in vs 14-21.

5. Paul’s unique privilege 3:1–13

At this stage in his argument Paul introduces himself, and explains his unique personal role in God’s purpose for the Gentiles. It is not for nothing that he has come to be known as ‘the apostle to the Gentiles’.

In the second half of Ephesians 2, as we saw in the last chapter, he painted a vivid contrast between the double alienation the Gentiles endured before Christ (from God and from Israel) and their double reconciliation through Christ. For by his death Christ demolished the Jew-Gentile and God-man barriers, and is now creating in relation to himself a single, new multi-cultural human society, which is both the family God loves and the temple he lives in. Paul’s Gentile readers must have read with joyful amazement this exposition of the gospel of peace.

Now, abruptly, he turns their attention away from themselves to himself. In doing so, he styles himself *I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles* (verse 1). Humanly speaking, he was not Christ’s prisoner but Nero’s. He had appealed to the Emperor, and so to the Emperor he had been committed for trial. But Paul never did think or speak in purely human terms. He believed in the sovereignty of God over the affairs of men. Therefore he called himself (literally) a ‘prisoner of Christ Jesus’ (verse 1) or a ‘prisoner for the Lord’,³ so convinced was he that the whole of his life, including his wearisome imprisonment, was under the lordship of Jesus. He may also have thought of himself as ‘Christ’s prisoner’ much as he thought of himself as ‘Christ’s slave’, in which case his self-description expressed a ‘combination of external and internal captivity’.

[ARE WE TO SEE OUR LIVES THIS WAY? WHY OR WHY NOT?]

He then adds a second descriptive phrase, to indicate the nature and purpose of his imprisonment. **He was Jesus Christ’s prisoner on behalf of you Gentiles.** This was a matter of fact. What had led to his arrest in Jerusalem, his imprisonment there and in Caesarea, his successive trials and his subsequent appeal to Caesar which had brought him to Rome, was fanatical Jewish opposition to his mission to the Gentiles. Luke, his friend, doctor and travelling companion, was with him at the time and faithfully recorded the details in his Acts record.

[ACTS 25:11-12] ¹¹ *For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar.”*

¹² *Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, “You have appealed to Caesar? To Caesar you shall go!”*

He explains that what prompted the Jews to stir up the crowd against Paul was his reputation for ‘teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place’ (*viz.* the temple). **How can he have acquired such a reputation? Doubtless by teaching exactly what he has just taught in Ephesians 2, namely that by abolishing the divisive elements of the law Jesus was creating a new people and building a new temple.** So he was arrested. And when the tribune allowed him to make his public defence to the Jewish people, they listened to him quietly until he got to the point in his story where Jesus had said to him: ‘Depart; for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ At this they shouted, ‘Away with such a fellow from the earth!’

So what led to Jewish opposition to Paul was his bold, uncompromising espousal of the Gentile cause. He not only preached his vision of the new and undivided humanity and wrote about it; he was at that moment suffering for the very truths he was expounding.

It seems likely that the apostle was intending to go on to pray for his Gentile readers. He began his sentence: *For this reason I Paul* ... But he interrupted himself,

[WHY?]



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

and did not begin his prayer until verse 14. Meanwhile, he elaborated his self-description in order to emphasize the unique privileges God had given him in the outworking of his purpose for the Gentiles.

Twice in these verses he uses the same expression, indeed an identical combination of Greek words, which are translated *God's grace that was given to me* (verses 2 and 7). He is referring to two privileges which God in unmerited favour had given to him.

The first was a certain revelation, as a result of which he had come to know something. Verses 2–3: *You have heard of ... God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation.*

The second was a certain commission, as a result of which he had a responsibility to make something known to others. Verses 7–8: *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace which was given me by the working of his power.*

It is clear that these two gifts of divine grace, the revelation and the commission, the 'mystery' revealed to him and the 'ministry' entrusted to him, were closely related to each other. For once he had received his special revelation from God, he knew that he was under obligation to make known to others what had been made known to him. **[MYSTERY REVEALED. MINISTRY ENTRUSTED]**

1. The divine revelation to Paul, or the mystery made known to him (verses 1–6)[MYSTERY REVEALED]

Three times in this short paragraph Paul uses the word 'mystery': *how the mystery was made known to me by revelation* (verse 3) ... *you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ* (verse 4) ... *to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery* (verse 9). It is a key word for our understanding of the apostle Paul. We need to realize that the English and Greek words do not have the same meaning. In English a 'mystery' is something dark, obscure, secret, puzzling. What is 'mysterious' is inexplicable, even incomprehensible. The Greek word *mystērion* is different, however. Although still a 'secret', it is no longer closely guarded but open. Originally, the Greek word referred to a truth into which someone had been initiated. Indeed it came to be used of the secret teachings of the heathen mystery religions, teachings which were restricted to initiates. But in Christianity there are no esoteric 'mysteries' reserved for a spiritual élite. On the contrary, the Christian 'mysteries' are truths which, although beyond human discovery, have been revealed by God and so now belong openly to the whole church. More simply, *mystērion* is a truth hitherto hidden from human knowledge or understanding but now disclosed by the revelation of God.

If that is the general meaning of 'mystery' in the New Testament, what is the particular open secret or revealed truth, which was *not made known to the sons of men in other generations* but *has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit* (verse 5) and uniquely, Paul adds, *made known to me by revelation* (verse 3)? He calls it in verse 4, as in Colossians 4:3, *the mystery of Christ*. So evidently it is a specially revealed truth 'of which Christ is both the source and the substance'. Its exact nature Paul spells out with force and clarity in verse 6. It is how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. *Thus the mystery concerns Christ and his one Jewish-Gentile people. In order to define it more precisely, Paul assembles (and in one case invents) three parallel, composite expressions. Each has the same prefix syn, 'together with', and indicates what Gentile believers now have and are in partnership with Jewish believers. What is this? Gentiles are 'co-heirs' (synklēronoma), 'concorporate' (syssōma) and 'co-sharers' (symmetocha) of the promise. But these three unusual Greek words need to be spelled out a little. What Paul is declaring is that Gentile and Jewish Christians together are now fellow heirs of the same blessing, fellow-members of the same body and fellow-partakers of the same promise. And this shared privilege is both *in Jesus Christ* (because it is enjoyed equally by all believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, provided that they are in union with Christ) and *through the gospel* (because the gospel proclamation includes this unity and so makes it available to those who believe).*

To sum up, we may say that 'the mystery of Christ' is the complete union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through the union of both with Christ. It is this double union, with Christ and with each other, which was the substance of the 'mystery'. God had revealed it specially to Paul, as he had written briefly (verse 3) in the previous chapter. But it had also been made known to God's *holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit* (verse 5), and through them 'to his saints' (Col. 1:26). It was now therefore the common possession of the universal church.

It was a new revelation. For it was *not made known ... in other generations* (verse 5) but was *hidden for ages* (verse 9). These statements have puzzled Bible readers because the Old Testament did reveal that God had a purpose for the Gentiles. It promised, for example, that all the families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's posterity; that the Messiah would receive the nations as his inheritance; that Israel would be given as a light to the nations; and that one day the nations would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and even 'flow to it' like a mighty river. Jesus also spoke of the inclusion of the Gentiles and commissioned his followers to go and make them his disciples. But what neither the Old Testament nor Jesus revealed was the radical nature of God's plan, which was that the theocracy (the Jewish nation under God's rule) would be terminated, and replaced by a new international community, the church; that this church would be 'the body of Christ', organically united to him; and that Jews and Gentiles would be incorporated into Christ and his church on equal terms without any distinction. It was this complete union of Jews, Gentiles and Christ which was radically new, and which God revealed to Paul, overcoming his entrenched Jewish prejudice.⁹



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

2. The divine commission to Paul or the ministry entrusted to him (verses 7–13) [MINISTRY ENTRUSTED]

At the end of verse 6 Paul has virtually equated ‘the mystery’ with ‘the gospel’. At least he writes that it is ‘through the gospel’ that Jewish and Gentile Christians become united to Christ. This can be so only because the gospel announces the mystery, so that people come to hear it, to believe it and to experience it.

Now this equation of ‘mystery’ and ‘gospel’ is significant, because the mystery was essentially truth revealed *to* Paul, while the gospel was essentially truth proclaimed *by* Paul. Paul himself made the connection, because he was convinced that the good news had been revealed to him only in order to be communicated. He says so plainly: *Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God’s grace which was given me* (verse 7). Thus if the first gift of God’s grace to him was ‘the mystery’ itself which had been revealed to him (verses 2–3), the second was the ministry which had been entrusted to him and by which he would share it with others. He had received it by God’s grace, and would exercise it *by the working of his power*.

This commission or ministry Paul regards as an enormous privilege. For what he calls *this grace*, which we might call ‘this privileged gift of God’, had been given to him, in spite of the fact that he was *the very least of all the saints* (verse 8), or ‘the meanest member of the holy people’. It is a very striking expression. He takes the superlative (*elachistos*, ‘least’ or ‘smallest’) and does what is impossible linguistically but possible theologically; he turns it into a comparative (*elachistoteros*, ‘leaster’ or ‘less than the least’). Perhaps he was deliberately playing on the meaning of his name. For his Roman surname ‘Paulus’ is Latin for ‘little’ or ‘small’, and tradition says he was a little man. ‘I *am* little,’ he may be saying, ‘little by name, little in stature, and morally and spiritually littler than the littlest of all Christians.’ In affirming this he is neither indulging in hypocrisy nor grovelling in self-depreciation. He means it. He is deeply conscious both of his own unworthiness because he ‘formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted’ Jesus Christ and of Christ’s overflowing mercy towards him. A good indication that his modesty was neither sham nor morbid is that it did not hinder him from taking responsibility as an apostle. On the contrary, in this very passage he twice uses the self-conscious apostolic *egō* ‘I’ (3:1; 4:1). Thus, he combined personal humility with apostolic authority. Indeed, while ‘minimizing himself he magnified his office’.

The privileged ministry of spreading the gospel, entrusted to him by the grace of God, **he now elaborates in three stages:**

a. Making known Christ’s riches to the Gentiles (verse 8)

Since the mystery revealed to him concerned God’s plan to incorporate the Gentiles in Christ, it was only logical that the ministry entrusted to him should be directed first and foremost to them. He was commissioned *to preach to the Gentiles*. ‘Preach’ here is *euangelizō*, to ‘announce good news’, for he was well aware that his gospel was a message of great good news for the Gentiles. It consisted of *the unsearchable riches of Christ*, the riches which he possesses in himself and which he bestows on those who come to him. What these riches are we may judge from Paul’s exposition in Ephesians 1 and 2. They are riches freely available because of the cross. They include resurrection from the death of sin, victorious enthronement with Christ in the heavenlies, reconciliation with God, incorporation with Jewish believers in his new society, the end of hostility and the beginning of peace, access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, membership of his kingdom and household, being an integral part of his dwelling place among men, and all this only a foretaste of yet more riches to come, namely the riches of the glory of the inheritance which God will give to all his people on the last day.

No wonder Paul terms Christ’s riches *unsearchable*. The word *anexichniastos* means literally ‘not to be tracked out’. In the Greek version of Job 5:9 and 9:10 it was applied to the wonders of God’s creation and providence, which are beyond our understanding, and Paul himself has already used it in Romans 11:33 of the deep mysteries of God’s plan of salvation. The riches of Christ are similar. Like the earth they are too vast to explore, like the sea too deep to fathom. Translators and commentators compete with one another in their attempt to find a dynamic equivalent in English. The riches of Christ, they say, are ‘unsearchable’, ‘inexplorable’, ‘untraceable’, ‘unfathomable’, ‘inexhaustible’, ‘illimitable’, ‘inscrutable’ and ‘incalculable’. Perhaps GNB’s ‘infinite’ is the simplest, for what is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives is that we shall never come to an end of it.

Indirectly in these past verses the apostle has indicated two of the strongest incentives to evangelism. He began by emphasizing that the revelation and the commission which had been given to him belong indissolubly together, for what had been made known to him he must without fail make known to others. All revealed truth is held in stewardship. It is given to be shared, not monopolized. If men cannot keep their scientific discoveries to themselves, how much less should we keep to ourselves the divine disclosures? Paul then went on to emphasize the valuable content of the message itself. He was convinced, as we must be, that Christ never impoverishes those who put their trust in him, but always immeasurably enriches them. Here then was the double obligation Paul felt, first to share God’s truth and secondly to share Christ’s riches. So what is needed today for a recovery of evangelistic zeal in the church is the same apostolic conviction about the gospel. Once we are sure that the gospel is both truth from God and riches for mankind, nobody will be able to silence us.

b. Making known the mystery to all men (verse 9)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

The second part or stage of Paul's privileged ministry he expresses in these terms: *to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things*. Verse 9 does not simply repeat verse 8. There are three significant differences.

First, the preaching of the gospel is now defined not as *euangelizō* (to 'announce good news') but as *phōtizō* (to 'enlighten'). Paul has already used the verb in his prayer in 1:18. So the thought shifts from the content of the message (good news) to the condition of those to whom it is proclaimed (in the darkness of ignorance). Jesus himself had characterized Paul's commission in these terms, since he told him he was sending him to the Gentiles 'to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God'. Paul never forgot this. His own conversion on the road to Damascus had resulted from the bright shining of a light from heaven, not just externally but internally. As he put it later: 'It is the God who said "Let light shine out of darkness" who has shone in our hearts.'⁵ Indeed, *phōtismos* is the word he uses there to describe his 'enlightenment' involved in his conversion. We ourselves must always remember in our evangelism that 'the prince of darkness' holds men and women in darkness, and that only by a divine enlightenment will their eyes be opened to see. Our responsibility is to be faithful in spreading the gospel, since this is the means which God has ordained by which to bring light to those in darkness.

A second difference between verse 8 and verse 9 lies in Paul's description of his message. In verse 8 he calls it *the unsearchable riches of Christ*, in verse 9 *the plan of the mystery*. These are not just divergent expressions for the same thing; again they indicate a shift of emphasis. One may say that Christ's 'unsearchable riches' is the broader of the two concepts. It embraces Christ's remedy for the two Gentile alienations (from God and from Israel) and therefore the totality of his salvation. The 'mystery' concentrates on only one of the two reconciliations. True, the mystery is 'the mystery of Christ'; it centres on Christ. But what it declares about Christ is that through him and in him Jews and Gentiles are incorporated on equal terms in the same single community. Let me point the difference more sharply in this way: according to verse 8 Paul's message was Christ, according to verse 9 it was the church.

The third difference between verses 8 and 9 is that Paul directs his ministry in the former verse to *the Gentiles*, and in the latter to *all men*. This was necessary because the mystery concerned both Jews and Gentiles. It was a message of mutual reconciliation and of joint membership in God's new society, which was also the new humanity he was creating. Perhaps this is the reason why in verse 9 Paul describes God as the One *who created all things*. He who created the universe has now begun a new creation and will one day finish it. Indeed, the 'mystery' includes the great promise that finally God will unite all things in and under Christ. So in verse 9 Paul brings creation and redemption together in his mind. The God who created all things in the beginning will recreate all things in the end.

c. Making known God's wisdom to the cosmic powers (verse 10)

[ANGELS. SPIRITUAL BEINGS.]

The apostle's perspective broadens further. He tells us that, although the gospel is addressed primarily and directly to humans, it brings a message indirectly to angels also, *to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*. What does he mean?

The first result to be expected from the preaching of 'Christ's unsearchable riches' and 'the mystery' would be the birth and growth of the church. Gentiles and Jews would embrace the gospel, be converted, and find themselves joint members of the family of God and the body of Christ. Indeed, this had already happened, as Paul was writing. He was not theorizing. **'The mystery' was not an abstraction. It was taking concrete shape before people's eyes.** And in this new phenomenon, this new multi-racial humanity, the wisdom of God was being displayed. Indeed, the coming into existence of the church, as a community of saved and reconciled people, is at one and the same time a public demonstration of God's power, grace and wisdom: first of God's mighty resurrection power, [SECONDLY] **next of his immeasurable grace and kindness,⁸ and now thirdly of his manifold wisdom.** The word for 'manifold' (*polupoikilos*) means 'many-coloured', and was used to describe flowers, crowns, embroidered cloth and woven carpets. The simpler word *poikilos* was used in the LXX of the 'coat of many colours' (AV) or 'richly ornamented robe' (NIV) which Jacob gave to his youngest son Joseph (Gn. 37:3, 23, 32). The church as a multi-racial, multi-cultural community is like a beautiful tapestry. Its members come from a wide range of colourful backgrounds. **No other human community resembles it. [CAN WE SAY THIS TODAY?] Its diversity and harmony are unique. It is God's new society. And the many-coloured fellowship of the church is a reflection of the many-coloured (or 'many-splendoured', to use Francis Thompson's word) wisdom of God.**



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

So then, as the gospel spreads throughout the world, this new and variegated Christian community develops. It is as if a great drama is being enacted. History is the theatre, the world is the stage, and church members in every land are the actors. God himself has written the play, and he directs and produces it. Act by act, scene by scene, the story continues to unfold. But who are the audience? They are the cosmic intelligences, *the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*. We are to think of them as spectators of the drama of salvation. Thus ‘the history of the Christian church becomes a graduate school for angels’.

Our knowledge of these spiritual beings is limited, and we must be careful not to go beyond what Scripture teaches into idle speculation. It is clear, however, that they are not omniscient. The apostle Peter tells us that they did not fully understand the teaching of either the Old Testament prophets or the New Testament apostles regarding the good news of salvation in Christ, for these are ‘things into which angels long to look’. Similarly, we may infer from verse 10 here that God had not revealed to them directly his master plan for the church, but intended rather to make it known to them *through the church* itself, as it came into being and grew. It is through the old creation (the universe) that God reveals his glory to humans; it is through the new creation (the church) that he reveals his wisdom to angels. It seems legitimate to say that though we cannot see them, they can see us. They watch fascinated as they see Gentiles and Jews being incorporated into the new society as equals. Indeed, they learn from the composition of the church not only *the manifold wisdom of God* (verse 10) but also his *eternal purpose* (verse 11). This purpose *he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord*, in the arena of history, through his death and resurrection, the gift of his Spirit, the preaching of the gospel and the emergence of the church. For *in him* (Christ) and *through our faith in him* all of us, whether Jews or Gentiles, **have boldness and confidence of access (verse 12).**

[HOW IS THIS LIVED?]

This universal access of all Christian people to God through Christ is what the sixteenth-century reformers termed ‘the priesthood of all believers’; it is a foundation privilege of all who are in Christ, in fact of ‘the church’, the universal Jew-Gentile community, of which Paul has just been writing.

I do not think I can leave these verses, especially verse 10, without at least mentioning a quite different interpretation which is gaining popularity. It rests on an understanding of ‘the principalities and powers’ as being not cosmic intelligences (*i.e.* angels and demons) but rather the politico-economic structures of human society. I shall reserve a full exposition and critique of this view until we reach the warfare with the ‘principalities and powers’ in 6:12, but I cannot altogether ignore it here. Its importance may be gauged by G. B. Caird’s statement about verse 10: ‘It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any interpretation of Ephesians stands or falls by this verse.’ He believes that God’s purpose is to use the church not only to *inform* ‘the powers’ but actually to *redeem* them, since ‘even such structures of power and authority as the secular state are capable of being brought into harmony with the love of God’. Markus Barth elaborates this concept of the far flung, ‘cosmic’ influence of the church: ‘Political and social, cultural and religious forces, also all other institutions, traditions, majorities and minorities are exposed to her testimony.’ Dictatorships and democracies, organizations promoting racism and civil rights, *etc., etc.* ‘all these and other powers are given a unique chance by God: they are entitled to see in their midst the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth’. He is referring to the church’s role as indicated in verse 10. Naturally, I feel very diffident about disagreeing with scholars of this calibre but, having weighed the matter carefully, I feel bound to declare myself on it: **I do not believe either that Paul was referring to social structures on earth when he wrote of principalities and powers in the heavens, or that, whatever their identity, he intended the making known to them of God’s manifold wisdom to be understood as a redemptive (as opposed to an informative) activity.** But I will say no more on this topic here.

Looking back over Paul’s exposition of the peculiar privilege which had been given him by God’s grace to be the apostle to the Gentiles, it is instructive to note the different media and phases of God’s communication.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

First, he made known the mystery of his plan to Paul himself (and the other apostles and prophets, verse 5) by revelation.

Secondly, he commissioned Paul (and others) to preach the gospel to everybody throughout the world.

Thirdly, his manifold wisdom and eternal purpose were made known to the principalities and powers through the fact of the church as they watched it grow.

This is the circle of divine communication, for the good news was passed from God to Paul, from Paul and others to all mankind, and from the church on earth back to heaven again, to the cosmic powers.

At each stage the medium changes. It is by direct revelation that God disclosed his plan to Paul, by the verbal proclamation of the gospel that the message spreads today, and by a visual model (the multi-cultural Christian community) that it finally reaches the unseen angelic spectators. Nothing is more honouring to the gospel, or more indicative of its surpassing importance, than this programme for its universal communication.

Conclusion

The major lesson taught by this first half of Ephesians 3 is the biblical centrality of the church.

[DO I AGREE WITH PAUL ON THIS? IF SO, HOW DOES THAT AFFECT MY LIFE? HOW I TREAT OTHERS? MY INVOLVEMNT WITH THE CHURCH? ETC.]

Some people construct a Christianity which consists entirely of a personal relationship to Jesus Christ and has virtually nothing to do with the church. Others make a grudging concession to the need for church membership, but add that they have given up the ecclesiastical institution as hopeless. Now it is understandable, even inevitable, that we are critical of many of the church's inherited structures and traditions. Every church in every place at every time is in need of reform and renewal. But we need to beware lest we despise the church of God, and are blind to his work in history. We may safely say that God has not abandoned his church, however displeased with it he may be. He is still building and refining it. And if God has not abandoned it, how can we? It has a central place in his plan. What then does this passage teach about the biblical centrality of the church?

a. The church is central to history [HISTORY IS THE WRITTEN/COMPOSED/OLD/COMPLETED JOURNAL OF THE HERE & NOW]

Verse 11, as we saw, alludes to *the eternal purpose* of God. It is also called his 'plan' or 'the plan of the mystery' (verse 9). What we are told is that this plan or purpose of God, which was conceived in eternity, kept 'hidden for ages' (verse 9) and 'not made known to the sons of men in other generations' (verse 5), he has now *realized in Christ Jesus our Lord*, first through his historical work of salvation and then through its subsequent proclamation in the world. What is this eternal purpose which is now being worked out in history, this divine plan which thus belongs to both history and eternity? It concerns the church, the creating of a new and reconciled humanity in union with Jesus Christ. This is the 'mystery', hidden for ages but now revealed.

Is this our view of history? We have all studied history at school and may have found it (as I did) abominably dull. Perhaps we had to memorize lists of dates or of the kings and queens who ruled our country. But what is the point of history? Was Henry Ford right when in 1919, during his libel suit with the *Chicago Tribune*, he said, 'History is bunk'? Is history just the random succession of events, each effect having its cause and each cause its effect, yet the whole betraying no overall pattern but appearing rather as the meaningless development of the



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

human story? Was Marx right in his dialectical understanding of the historical process? Or has history some other clue?

Christians affirm, in contrast to all other views, that history is ‘his story’, God’s story. For God is at work, moving from a plan conceived in eternity, through a historical outworking and disclosure, to a climax within history, and then on beyond it to another eternity of the future. The Bible has this linear understanding of time. And it tells us that the centre of God’s eternal-historical plan is Jesus Christ, together with his redeemed and reconciled people. In order to grasp this, it may be helpful to contrast the perspective of secular historians with that of the Bible.

Secular history concentrates its attention on kings, queens and presidents, on politicians and generals, in fact on ‘VIPs’. The Bible concentrates rather on a group it calls ‘the saints’, often little people, insignificant people, unimportant people, who are however at the same time God’s people—and for that reason are both ‘unknown (to the world) and yet well-known (to God)’.

Secular history concentrates on wars, battles and peace-treaties, followed by yet more wars, battles and peace-treaties. The Bible concentrates rather on the war between good and evil, on the decisive victory won by Jesus Christ over the powers of darkness, on the peace-treaty ratified by his blood, and on the sovereign proclamation of an amnesty for all rebels who will repent and believe.

Again, **secular history** concentrates on the changing map of the world, as one nation defeats another and annexes its territory, and on the rise and fall of empires. The Bible concentrates rather on a multi-national community called ‘the church’, which has no territorial frontiers, which claims nothing less than the whole world for Christ, and whose empire will never come to an end.

[WHAT DO I FOCUS ON?]

No doubt I have painted the contrast between the secular and the biblical views of history too starkly. For the Bible does not ignore the great empires of Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome; and a true secular history cannot ignore the fact of the church. Yet it is a question of perspective, of priorities. The living God is the God of all the nations of the world, yet within the universal human community there exists a ‘covenant community’, his own new society, the beginning of his new creation. It is to this people only that he has pledged himself with the everlasting promise: ‘I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’

b. The church is central to the gospel. [DO I VIEW THE BIBLE AS FOR ‘ME’ OR AS FOR ‘US’?]

The gospel which some of us proclaim is much too individualistic. ‘Christ died for me,’ we say, and then sing of heaven: ‘Oh, that will be glory for me.’ Both affirmations are true. As for the first, the apostle Paul himself could write, ‘The Son of God ... loved me and gave himself for me.’ As for the so-called ‘glory song’, the gospel does promise ‘glory’ for believers in heaven. But this is far from being the full gospel. For it is evident from Ephesians 3 that the full gospel concerns both Christ and the ‘mystery’ of Christ. The good news of the unsearchable riches of Christ which Paul preached is that he died and rose again not only to save sinners like me (though he did), but also to create a single new humanity; not only to redeem us from sin but also to adopt us into God’s family; not only to reconcile us to God but also to reconcile us to one another. Thus the church is an integral part of the gospel. The gospel is good news of a new society as well as of a new life.

c. The church is central to Christian living. [WE LIVE AS ONE, AS ‘US’]

It is noteworthy that Paul concludes this section as he began it (verse 1), namely with a reference to his own sufferings in the Gentile cause. He addresses to them the following exhortation: ***So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory*** (verse 13). Now ‘suffering’ and ‘glory’ are constantly



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

coupled in the New Testament. Jesus said that he would enter his glory through suffering, and that his followers would have to tread the same path. Here, however, Paul writes something different, namely that *his* sufferings will bring *them* (his Gentile readers) glory. He is suffering in prison on their behalf, as their champion, standing firm for their inclusion in God's new society. So convinced is he of the divine origin of his vision that he is prepared to pay any price to see it become a reality. That is the measure of Paul's concern for the church.

Now of course it may be argued that Paul was exceptional. He was after all the apostle to the Gentiles. He had received a special revelation and a special commission. So one would expect him to have to suffer for the church. Nevertheless, the principle is applicable to all Christians. **If the church is central to God's purpose, as seen in both history and the gospel, it must surely also be central to our lives. How can we take lightly what God takes so seriously?** How dare we push to the circumference what God has placed at the centre? No, we shall seek to become responsible church members, active in some local manifestation of the universal church. We shall not be able to acquiesce in low standards which fall far short of the New Testament ideals for God's new society, whether mechanical, meaningless worship services, or fellowship which is icy cold and even spoiled by rivalries which make the Lord's Supper a farce, or such inward-looking isolationism as to turn the church into a ghetto which is indifferent to the outside world and its pain. If instead (like Paul) we keep before us the vision of God's new society as his family, his dwelling place and his instrument in the world, then we shall constantly be seeking to make our church's worship more authentic, its fellowship more caring and its outreach more compassionate. In other words (like Paul again), we shall be ready to pray, to work and if necessary to suffer in order to turn the vision into a reality.

6. Confidence in God's power [INTERCESSION]

[Paul's 2nd prayer already in Ephesians...1:16-23]

3:14–21

One of the best ways to discover a Christian's chief anxieties and ambitions is to study the content of his prayers and the intensity with which he prays them. **We all pray about what concerns us,**

[WHAT DOES MY PRAYER LIFE SAY ABOUT ME?]

and are evidently not concerned about matters we do not include in our prayers. Prayer expresses desire. For example, when Paul prayed for the salvation of his Israelite kinsfolk, he wrote of his 'heart's desire and prayer to God for them'. As the hymn puts it, 'Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, uttered or unexpressed.'

This is certainly true of this second prayer of Paul's in Ephesians in which he pours out his soul to God. He has been explaining both Christ's peace-making work, which resulted in the creation of the new society, and his personal involvement in this because of the special revelation and commission he had received. **Now he turns from exposition to intercession.** He prays that God's wonderful plan which he has been elaborating may be even more completely fulfilled in his readers' experience. Prayer and preaching should always go together. As Jesus watered with prayer the good seeds of instruction he had sown in the Upper Room, so Paul follows up his teaching with earnest prayer, and by recording it enables us to overhear him. As Bishop Handley Moule put it: 'Who has not read and re-read the closing verses of the third chapter of the Ephesians with the feeling of one permitted to look through parted curtains into the Holiest Place of the Christian life?'³

1. The introduction to his prayer (verses 14–16a)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

The apostle begins *For this reason ...*, resuming his train of thought where he had left it in verse 1. What ‘reason’ is in his mind? **What is it that moves him to pray?** Surely it is both the reconciling work of Christ and his own understanding of it by special revelation? These are the convictions which undergird his prayer. This being so, an important principle of prayer emerges. **The basis of Paul’s prayer was his knowledge of God’s purpose.** It was because of what God had done in Christ and revealed to Paul that he had the necessary warrant to pray. **For the indispensable prelude to all petition is the revelation of God’s will. We have no authority to pray for anything which God has not revealed to be his will.** That is why Bible reading and prayer should always go together. For it is in Scripture that God has disclosed his will, and it is in prayer that we ask him to do it.

Paul goes on: *I bow my knees.* The normal posture for prayer among the Jews was standing. In Jesus’ parable of the Pharisee and the Publican both men stood to pray (Lk. 18:11, 13). So kneeling was unusual. It indicated an exceptional degree of earnestness, as when Ezra confessed Israel’s sins of penitence, Jesus fell on his face to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Stephen faced the ordeal of martyrdom. Scripture lays down no rule about the posture we should adopt when we pray. It is possible to pray kneeling, standing, sitting, walking and even lying, although we may feel inclined to agree with William Hendriksen that ‘the slouching position of the body while one is supposed to be praying is an abomination to the Lord’.⁶

I bow my knees before the Father. Already the apostle has called God ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ and therefore because we are in Christ ‘our Father’, from whom all blessings flow. He has also declared that Jews and Gentiles are fellow members of the Father’s family, who enjoy equal access to their Father in prayer.⁸ Here he goes on to affirm that from this Father, before whom he kneels in reverent humility, **every family in heaven and on earth is named.** At least, this is the RSV and NEB translation, and **pasa patria** may quite properly be rendered ‘every family’. Yet there is something inherently inappropriate about this reference to a multiplicity of families, since the dominant theme of these chapters is that through Christ the ‘one God and Father of us all’ (4:6) has only one family or household to which Jewish and Gentile believers equally belong. It seems better, therefore, to translate **pasa patria** ‘the whole family’ (AV), ‘his whole family’ (NEB margin) or ‘the whole family of believers’ (NIV). Then the addition of the words *in heaven and on earth* will indicate that the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven, though separated by death, are nevertheless only two parts of the one great family of God.

At the same time, there is a deliberate play on words in the Greek sentence, since ‘father’ is *patēr* and ‘family’ is *patria*. In consequence, some translators have tried to preserve the verbal assonance in English, and have rendered the phrase ‘the Father from whom all fatherhood ... derives its name’ (JBP, NIV margin). Commentators point out that the word *patria* does not normally mean ‘fatherhood’, but rather ‘family’. Nevertheless, it is a family descended from the same father, and so the concept of fatherhood is implied and ‘the abstract idea of *paternity* seems uppermost here’. It may be, then, that Paul is saying not only that the whole Christian family is named from the Father, but that the very notion of fatherhood is derived from the Fatherhood of God. In this case, the true relation between human fatherhood and the divine fatherhood is neither one of analogy (‘God is a father like human fathers’), nor one of projection (Freud’s theory that we have invented God because we needed a heavenly father figure), but rather one of derivation (God’s fatherhood being the archetypal reality, ‘the source of all conceivable fatherhood’).¹

To this Father Paul prays that he will give his readers certain gifts *according to the riches of his glory*. Both ‘riches’ and ‘glory’ are characteristic words of this letter, and here as in 1:18 are in combination. **Paul has no doubt either that God has inexhaustible resources at his disposal or that out of them he will be able to answer his prayer.**

[DO I?]



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

2. The substance of his prayer (verses 16b–19)

I like to think of the apostle's petition as a staircase by which he climbs higher and higher in his aspiration for his readers. His prayer-staircase has four steps, whose key words are 'strength', 'love', 'knowledge' and 'fullness'.

[WHAT IS A LIFE WITH THESE FOUR IN IT LOOK LIKE? DO? EXHIBIT?]

More precisely, he prays first that they may be **strengthened by the indwelling of Christ through his Spirit**; secondly that they may be **rooted and grounded in love**; thirdly that they **may know Christ's love in all its dimensions**, although it is beyond knowledge; and fourthly that they may be **filled right up to the very fullness of God**.

a. Strengthened with might

The prayer opens: *that ... he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith (verses 16–17a)*. These two petitions clearly belong together. Both refer to the Christian's innermost being, his 'inner man' on the one hand and his 'heart' on the other. Then, although one specifies the strength of the *Spirit* and the other the indwelling of *Christ*, both surely refer to the same experience. For Paul never separates the second and third persons of the Trinity. To have Christ dwelling in us and to have the Spirit dwelling in us are the same thing. Indeed, it is precisely by the Spirit that Christ dwells in our hearts, and it is strength which he gives us when he dwells there. Moreover, the experience of 'Christ in you' was a part of the 'mystery' and so of the privilege of Gentile believers.³

Some are puzzled by this first petition when they remember that Paul is praying for Christians. 'Surely', they say, 'Christ dwells by his Spirit within every believer? So how can Paul ask here that Christ may dwell in their hearts? Was Christ not already within them?'. To these questions we begin by replying that indeed every Christian is indwelt by Christ and is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless as Charles Hodge rightly comments, 'The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees'.⁵ So also is the inward strengthening of the Holy Spirit. **What Paul asks for his readers is that they may be 'fortified, braced, invigorated'**, that they may 'know the strength of the Spirit's inner reinforcement' (JBP), and may lay hold ever more firmly 'by faith' of this divine strength, this divine indwelling.

That this is Paul's meaning is further confirmed by his choice of word for the 'dwelling' of Christ in the heart. There are two similar Greek verbs, *paroikō* and *katoikeō*. The former is the weaker. It means to 'inhabit (a place) as a stranger' (AG), to live in fact as a *paroikos*, the very word Paul has used in 2:19 for an alien who is living away from his home. *Katoikeō*, on the other hand, means to settle down somewhere. It refers to a permanent as opposed to a temporary abode, and is used metaphorically both for the fullness of the Godhead abiding in Christ and for Christ's abiding in the believer's heart (here in verse 17). Bishop Handley Moule draws out the implications: 'The word selected (*katoikein*) ... is a word made expressly to denote residence as against lodging, the abode of a master within his own home as against the turning aside for a night of the wayfarer who will be gone tomorrow.' Again, it is 'the residence always in the heart of its Master and Lord, who where he dwells must rule; who enters not to cheer and soothe alone but before all things else to reign'. Thus Paul prays to the Father that Christ by his Spirit will be allowed to settle down in their hearts, and from his throne there both control and strengthen them. For the fourth time in the letter one is struck by the natural **trinitarian structure** of the apostle's thought.⁹

b. Rooted and grounded in love



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

If we had the opportunity to ask Paul for what purpose he prayed that Christ would control and strengthen his readers, I think he would reply that he wanted them **to be strengthened to love**.

[HAVE I EVER PRAYED TO BE STRENGTHENED TO LOVE?]

For in the new and reconciled humanity which Christ is creating love is the pre-eminent virtue. The new humanity is God's family, whose members are brothers and sisters, who love their Father and love each other. Or should do. They need the power of the Spirit's might and of Christ's indwelling to enable them to love each other, especially across the deep racial and cultural divide which previously had separated them.

To express how fundamental Paul longs for their love to be, he joins two metaphors (one botanical, the other architectural), both of which emphasize depth as opposed to superficiality. **These Christians are to be rooted and grounded, or to have 'deep roots and firm foundations'** (NEB). Thus Paul likens them first to a well-rooted tree, and then to a well-built house. In both cases **the unseen cause of their stability will be the same: love**. Love is to be the soil in which their life is to be rooted; love is to be the foundation on which their life is built. One might say that their love is to be of both a 'radical' and a 'fundamental' nature in their experience, for these English words refer to our roots and our foundations.

c. *Knowing Christ's love*

We observe that the apostle **now passes from our love (in which we are to be rooted and grounded) to Christ's love (which he prays we may know)**. Indeed, he acknowledges that we need strength or power for both, strength to love and power to comprehend Christ's love. **Certainly the two cannot be separated, and it is partly by loving that we learn the meaning of his love.** A/DA

Paul prays that we *may have power to comprehend* the love of Christ in its full dimensions—its *breadth and length and height and depth*. Modern commentators warn us not to be too literal in our interpretation of these, since the apostle may only have been indulging in a little rhetoric or poetic hyperbole. Yet it seems to me legitimate to say that the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass all mankind (especially Jews and Gentiles, the theme of these chapters), 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven. Or, as Leslie Mitton expresses it, finding a parallel to **Romans 8:37–39**: 'Whether you go forward or backward, up to the heights or down to the depths, nothing will separate us from the love of Christ.' Ancient commentators went further. They saw these dimensions illustrated on the cross. For its upright pole reached down into the earth and pointed up to heaven, while its crossbar carried the arms of Jesus, stretched out as if to invite and welcome the whole world. Armitage Robinson calls this a 'pretty fancy'.² Perhaps he is right and it is fanciful, yet what it affirms about the love of Christ is true.

We shall have power to comprehend these dimensions of Christ's love, Paul adds, *only with all the saints*. The isolated Christian can indeed know something of the love of Jesus. But his grasp of it is bound to be limited by his limited experience. **It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God, all the saints together**, Jews and Gentiles, men and women, young and old, black and white, with all their varied backgrounds and experiences.

Yet even then, although we may 'comprehend' its dimensions to some extent with our minds, we cannot 'know' it in our experience. It is too broad, long, deep and high even for all the saints together to grasp. **It surpasses knowledge**. Paul has already used this 'surpassing' word of God's power and grace;⁴ now he uses it of his love. Christ's love is as unknowable as his riches are unsearchable (verse 8). Doubtless we shall spend eternity exploring his inexhaustible riches of grace and love.

d. *Filled up to God's fullness.* [BE, BEING FILLED...EPHESIANS 6:18]



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

5:18 The tense of the Greek for **be filled** makes clear that such a Spirit-filled condition does not stop with a single experience, but is maintained by “continually being filled,” as commanded here.⁶

Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.

18 And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, NKJV

‘Fullness’ is a characteristic word of Ephesians, as it is of Colossians. In Colossians Paul tells us not only that God’s fullness dwells in Christ, but also that in Christ we ourselves have come to fullness. At the same time, he makes it plain in Ephesians that we still have room for growth. As individuals we are to go on being filled with the Spirit,⁶ and the church, although already the fullness of Christ, is still to ‘grow up into him’ till it reaches his fullness.⁸ ‘Growth into fullness’ is therefore the theme of Paul’s fourth and last petition for his Asian readers. He prays that they *may be filled with all the fullness of God*. It is uncertain how this genitive should be understood. If it is objective, then God’s fullness is the abundance of grace which he bestows. If it is subjective, it is the fullness which fills God himself, in other words his perfection. Staggering as the thought may be, the latter seems the more probable because the Greek preposition is *eis*, which indicates that we are to be filled not ‘with’ so much as ‘unto’ the fullness of God. God’s fullness or perfection becomes the standard or level up to which we pray to be filled. The aspiration is the same in principle as that implied by the commands to be holy as God is holy, and to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect.

Such a prayer must surely look on to our final state of perfection in heaven when together we enter the completeness of God’s purpose for us, and are filled to capacity, filled up to that fullness of God which human beings are capable of receiving without ceasing to be human. Another way of expressing the prospect is that we shall become like Christ, which is God’s purpose and promise, for Christ is himself the fullness of God. Yet another way of putting it is to say that we shall attain the fullness of love, of which Paul has just spoken in his prayer. Then Jesus’ own prayer will be fulfilled: ‘That the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.’

In saying that Paul’s last petition points to heavenly perfection, we have no liberty to try to evade its contemporary challenge. For God expects us to be growing daily towards that final fullness, as we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christ’s image from one degree of glory to another.

As we now look back down the staircase which we have been climbing with Paul, we cannot fail to be struck by his audacity. He prays that his readers may be given the strength of the Spirit and the ruling presence of Christ, the rooting of their lives in love, the knowledge of Christ’s love in all its dimensions, and the fullness of God himself. These are bold petitions. Climbers of this staircase become short of breath, even a little giddy. But Paul does not leave us in suspense.

3. The conclusion of his prayer (verses 20–21)

We notice now that the apostle’s four petitions are sandwiched between two references to God. In verses 14–16 he is the Father of the whole family and possesses infinite riches in glory; in verses 20 and 21 he is the one who works powerfully within us. Such a God can answer prayer.

God’s ability to answer prayer is forcefully stated by the apostle in a composite expression of seven stages.

- (1) He is able to *do* or to work (*poiēsai*), for he is neither idle, nor inactive, nor dead.
- (2) He is able to do what *we ask*, for he hears and answers prayer.

⁶ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). [Spirit filled life study Bible](#) (electronic ed., Eph 5:18). Thomas Nelson.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

(3) He is able to do what we ask *or think*, for he reads our thoughts, and sometimes we imagine things for which we dare not and therefore do not ask.

(4) He is able to do *all* that we ask or think, for he knows it all and can perform it all.

(5) He is able to do *more ... than* (*hyper*, ‘beyond’) all that we ask or think, for his expectations are higher than ours.

(6) He is able to do much more, or *more abundantly* (*perissōs*), than all that we ask or think, for he does not give his grace by calculated measure.

(7) He is able to do very much more, *far more abundantly*, than all that we ask or think, for he is a God of super-abundance. This adverb *hyperekperissou* is one of Paul’s coined ‘super-superlatives’. English equivalents which have been proposed are ‘immeasurably more’ (NIV) or ‘vastly more than more’, but perhaps the feel of it is best conveyed by ‘infinitely more’ (AG, JBP). It states simply that there are no limits to what God can do.

The infinite ability of God to work beyond our prayers, thoughts and dreams is *by the power at work within us*, within us individually (Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith) and within us as a people (who are the dwelling place of God by his Spirit). It is the power of the resurrection, the power which raised Christ from the dead, enthroned him in the heavenlies, and then raised and enthroned us there with him. That is the power which is at work within the Christian and the church.

Paul’s prayer relates to the fulfilment of his vision for God’s new society of love. He asks that its members may be strengthened to love and to know the love of Christ, though this surpasses knowledge. But then he turns from the love of God past knowing to the power of God past imagining, from limitless love to limitless power. For he is convinced, as we must be, that only divine power can generate divine love in the divine society.

To add anything more would be inappropriate, except the doxology. *To him be glory*, Paul exclaims, to this God of resurrection power who alone can make the dream come true. The power comes from him; the glory must go to him. To him be glory *in the church and in Christ Jesus* together, in the body and in the Head, in the bride and in the Bridegroom, in the community of peace and in the Peacemaker, *to all generations* (in history), *for ever and ever* (in eternity), *Amen*.⁷

“Mystery”

- Eph 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; 5:32; 6:19

The mystery language in Ephesians is a development from Paul’s discussion of the mystery in Romans and 1 Corinthians. In Romans, Paul explains that Israel in part is hardened until the fullness (or “fulfillment”) of the gentiles has entered into Israel (Rom 11:25). The mystery is that God has worked out a plan to unify Jew and Gentile together into one body under the Messiah, Jesus the Lord (compare Eph 2:13–18). The concept in Romans itself represents a development of Paul’s discussion of the mystery of God’s plan earlier expressed in 1 Cor 2:7–10, which the “political rulers of the age” did not understand (Fee, *Exegesis*, 84–89). This mystery is the plan of God preached as gospel to both the Jew and Greek, but perceived as weak and foolish

[WHAT TODAY IS CONSIDERED WEAK AND FOOLISH IN OUR SOCIETY? IN OUR CHRISTIAN SOCIETY?]

for which Paul is not ashamed (1 Cor 1:21–23; compare Rom 2:6–11; 3:29; 1:16). In Ephesians, this notion is further developed in view of Paul’s imprisonment and suffering—these things should not discourage believers (Eph 3:1, 13).

⁷ Stott, J. R. W. (1979). [*God’s new society: the message of Ephesians*](#) (pp. 113–141). InterVarsity Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

It is also possible that the mystery motif in Ephesians 3 is related to imperial mystery cults in Asia Minor, celebrated within Dionysian cult settings (Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*, 46–48, 271–75). This central word “mystery” in Eph 3:3, 4, 9 is connected with words relating to writing/reading, revelation, knowledge, illumination, internal power, and eternity (Eph 3:3–4; ἀποκάλυψις, *apokalypsis*; in Eph 3:3; ἀποκαλύπτω, *apokalyptō*; in Eph 3:5; ἀποκρύπτω, *apokryptō*; in Eph 3:9; γνωρίζω, *gnōrizō*; in Eph 3:3, 5, 10; νοέω, *noeō*; and σύνεσις, *synesis*; in Eph 3:4; σοφία, *sophia*; in Eph 3:10; φωτίζω, *phōtizō*; in Eph 3:9; ἐνέργεια, *energeia*; and δύναμις, *dynamis*; in Eph 3:7; co-heirs and co-partakers of promise in Eph 3:6; eternity in Eph 3:11; divine access in Eph 3:12 and glory in Eph 3:13).

These are religious terms, used in the mystery cults of the time (see Bowden, *Mystery Cults*; Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*; Martin P. Nilsson, “The Bacchic Mysteries of the Roman Age”; *idem*, “Royal Mysteries in Egypt”; H. W. Pleket, “Imperial Mysteries”). Light and illumination of the mind are also symbolically associated with mystery cults in the common use of lamps and torches in worship (Nilsson, “Lampen und Kerzen”). Such lamps illuminated the εἰκῶν (*eikōn*) “image” of the mystery’s deity, and in imperial mysteries, the image of the emperor (Pleket, “Imperial Mysteries,” 343–45). One mutilated ancient text from Ephesus describes that “Dionysius and the emperor, together with many other gods and goddesses, were the objects of μυστήρια (*mystēria*)” (Pleket, “Imperial Mysteries,” 337). The work of Harland has also confirms such a view (“Imperial Cults within Local Cultural Life,” 85–107).

“Filling” or “Fullness”

- Eph 1:10; 1:23; 3:19; 4:10, 13

The inscriptions to the emperors Augustus and Nero also shed light on the “fullness” language in Ephesians. First, in Eph 1:10 “the fullness of the time(s)” (KJV, RSV, NASB95, NRSV, ESV) should be translated as “fulfillment” (NIV84). The phrase comes from Jewish apocalyptic thought, but is also found in New Testament texts (Luke 21:23–24 [compare Acts 1:6–8]; Rom 11:25; 2 Baruch 40:3; Tobit 14:5; 4 Ezra 4:33–37; 1QpHab 7:13–14; compare 1QM 1.12; Gal 4:4; *T. Benj.* 11.3). **The phrase refers to the end of the nations’ dominance over the Jewish people.** Often these texts speak of this “fulfilled time” apocalyptically, in an attempt to explain the need to await the justice of God for deliverance. Paul now affirmed that God has placed the crucified, risen, and ascended Messiah in charge of the ongoing fulfillment of the times—the Gentiles are brought into God’s people, the church, comprising both Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14–18). This church-body is the “fulfillment of the One who fulfills all things/events” (Eph 1:23; 4:10; compare Eph 1:10). Part of this fulfillment lies in making the unified Jew-Gentile body into a holy temple (Eph 2:19–21). This language climaxes in Eph 3:15–19—the believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit, indwelt by Christ, knows Christ’s sacrificial love, and is filled with God. In Ephesians 5:18, believers are exhorted to be filled with the Holy Spirit. **The last two references may be the only times where “fullness” is the right translation**, expressing the idea that the believer is the residence of God’s presence—a temple (compare Eph 2:19–21). Ephesians 4:13 also describes the church body as growing up “into the measure of the stature of the fulfillment of Christ.” The fulfillment here refers to Christ’s life as exemplary person, the Perfect Man. Jesus fulfills humanity, and we are radically called to follow his example of that fulfillment (see esp. Eph 4:20–24, 4:31–5:2; compare 1 Cor 11:1).

The emperors—especially Augustus and then again Nero—were thought of as ushering in a return to past glory, fulfilling long held expectations and hopes (Wallace-Hadrill, “The Golden Age”). The Priene inscription (translated above) also spoke of Providence filling (πληρῶω, *plēroō*) Augustus with virtue—the same verb that is used in Ephesians. In another inscription—dated 2 BC during Augustus’ reign in Asia Minor at Halicarnassus—it was affirmed that Augustus was “Savior” [σωτήρα (*sōtēra*)] of the common human race in whom Providence has not only fulfilled [ἐπλήρωσε (*eplēroōse*)] but even surpassed [ὑπερῆρεν (*hyperēren*)] the



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

prayers of all people” (BMI 894). Then, also Augustus is “the acme ... of contentment for the present affairs of people who have been filled [ένπεπλησμένων (*enpeplēsmenōn*)] with public games and with statues and with sacrifices [θυσίαις (*thysiais*)] and with hymns [ῥυμοίς (*hymnois*)] ...” Ephesians addresses a dual notion: divine events fulfilled in Christ the Messiah, and the filling of human beings with divine presence (God, Christ, Holy Spirit) resulting in singing “hymns” (Eph 5:18). **Both ideas have a pronounced parallel with the ideology of the imperial cults as was published on many monuments well known across Asia Minor.**

Rulers and Ages

- “Ruler” (ἄρχων, *archōn*)—Eph 2:2
- “Rule” (ἀρχή, *archē*)—Eph 1:21; 3:10; 6:12
- “Authority” (ἐξουσία, *exousia*)—Eph 1:21; 2:2; 3:10; 6:12
- “Age” (αἰών, *aiōn*)—Eph 1:21; 2:2, 7; 3:9, 11, 21

There are two questions about these passages. First, whether Ephesians envisions a spiritual realm and a layered or tiered heaven with intermediate beings or rulers that is different than the undisputed Pauline letters and closer to dualistic Gnosticism; second, whether Ephesians represents an escapist or overly-realized view of the future (i.e., realized eschatology).

First, Dunn has squarely and rightly assessed that the language of spiritual beings in Ephesians aligns well with the undisputed Pauline Letters (*Theology*, 104–10). “There is sufficient overlap with terms and ideas elsewhere in Paul that we can include the later lists [in Colossians and Ephesians] without fear of any significant misrepresentation of Paul’s own views” (*Theology*, 104–05). **Moreover, Paul’s uses of “ruler” and “rulers of this age” likely describe human rulers** (Eph 2:2; Rom 13:3; for 1 Cor 2:6, 8, see Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 84–93; see Miller, “ΑΡΧΟΝΤΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΑΙΩΝΟΣ ΤΟΥΤΟΥ, ARCHONTŌN TŌU AIŌNOS TOUTOU,” 522–28 and Carr, “The Rulers of This Age,” 20–35). Ephesians describes a trumping of all positions of power and rule and authority, not just spiritual powers (1:21–23; regardless of Arnold, *Ephesians: Power and Magic*). This includes human rulers, who in the ancient context, were believed to be the “regent” of the gods and directly appointed by Jupiter, the father of the gods (see Seneca, *De clementia* 1.1–2). This combination—ruling emperor and Jupiter—is likely the pair of entities that Eph 2:2 references as Paul describes the former influences affecting how the Gentile audience lived—“you once lived ... in accordance with the ruler (i.e., emperor) of the authority of the air (i.e., Jupiter), the spirit now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Long, “Roman Imperial Rule”). **Double-entendre is likely in play, as the Jews believed that Satan was behind the Roman Empire. The Qumran community described the coming conflict with Rome as a struggle between the sons of Light and sons of darkness** (see War Scroll, 1QM, 4Q491–96). **To the Romans and the Greeks, the power behind Rome was none other than Jupiter—known as Zeus in Greek—a god controlling and having authority over the air, or identified as “air” (ἀήρ, *aēr*) itself** (as in the Stoic allegorical commentaries or *scholia* of Homer, Hesiod, etc.; see numerous examples in Long, “Roman Imperial Rule”). Thus, the statement in Eph 3:10 that “the church is the display of God’s manifold wisdom to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly realms ...” envisions two groups (each have their own definite article in Greek)—the human rulers (on earth), and “the authorities in the heavenly realms.” Likewise, the list of foes with which the church struggles includes both human and spiritual foes, the list beginning with the human and escalating and ending with the spiritual (Eph 6:12; see esp. Gupta and Long, “Politics of Ephesians,” 124–26).

Second, Ephesians’ eschatology is not escapist or over-realized. Ephesians urges believers to resist the evil empire by fidelity and allegiance to God in Christ, **who epitomizes prophetic living and sacrificial proclamation even in the face of death** (Eph 2:13–18; 4:32–5:2; Gupta and Long, “Politics of Ephesians”). Also, the future is not all realized in the present—Ephesians values hope and anticipates future ages in which God’s grace will be extended to believers (1:15–18; 2:12; 4:4; 2:7; 5:5–6; compare 3:21). Instead, the current vision is



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

of the church as a witnessing, truthful body (Eph 4:16, 20, 25) by aspiring to imitate God’s love and example in Jesus Christ (4:20–24, 4:31–5:2; compare 1 Cor 11:1).

So-Called “Spatial” Eschatology

- Indicated by recurring reference to the “heavenly realms”—Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12

The repeated descriptor “heavenly” (ἐπουράνιος, *epouranios*) in Ephesians is one of the categories for the pagan gods, who by ancient authors were either categorized as heavenly (ἐπουράνιοι, *epouranioi*), earthly (ἐπίγειοι, *epigeioi*), subterranean (καταχθόνιοι, *katachthonioi*), or sometimes as marine-sea (ἐνάλιοι, *enaliioi*; see Long, “Ekklesia in the Heavens”). Thus, the first three categories of beings depicted bowing to Jesus as Lord in Phil 2:10 envisions abject pagan gods (see Rev 5:3; Long, *Exploring Ephesians*). The Roman Caesars were often—along with other divine prerogatives and symbolic titles—claimed to be among the heavenly gods—and they were depicted visually as heavenly (e.g., the famous *Gemma Augustea*).

Thus, in the eastern Roman Empire, “heavenly” (ἐπουράνιος, *epouranios*) was used of Caesar Augustus both while he was alive and after his death. Such ascription affirmed Augustus’ place among the gods, from where he was thought to have descended and to where he was believed to have departed at death in apotheosis (i.e., ascending as and being declared a god). At Erythrai—a coastal Ionian city of Asia Minor—there was a dedication reading “The Demos to Gaius Julius Augustus Caesar Heavenly God” (ὁ δῆμος Γαίωι Ἰουλίω Σεβαστῶι Καίσαρι θεῶι ἐπουρανίωι, *ho dēmos Gaiōi Iouliōi Sebastōi Kaisari theōi epouraniōi*; Erythrai 63). Dating from AD 45–54 is another bi-lingual inscription in Greek and Latin from Pontus and Paphlagonia (northern Asia Minor) which starts by acknowledging the “peace” (εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*) of Augustus and offering honor to Caesar Claudius before referring to an imperial cult priest Gaius Aquila as “the high priest of the heavenly god Augustus [ὁ τοῦ ἐπουρανίου θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ ἀρχιερεὺς (*ho tou epouraniou theou Sebastou archiereus*)]” (Marek, *Kat. Amastris* 1, c; compare 1, a). The Latin inscription makes no reference to “heavenly” and simply has *divi Augusti* “divine Augustus,”—the Greek perspective found it more necessary to associate Augustus with the “heavenly” to support his divine status. Furthermore, Nero is hailed “heavenly Zeus” (οὐρανίωιο Διός, *ouranioio Dios*) in AD 62 in an epigram of Leonides of Alexandria, one of Nero’s flattering clients (Page, *Further Greek Epigrams*, 533 No. XXIX, translated in Sherck, *The Roman Empire*, 110, no. 70A). This same Leonides gave (circa AD 63) a celestial globe or “heavenly model” (Οὐράνιον μείμημα, *Ouranion meimēma*) to “Poppaea, wife of Zeus (Nero), Augusta” [Ποππαία (*Poppaia*), Διὸς εὐνι (*Dios euni*), Σεβαστιάς (*Sebastias*)] (Page, *Further Greek Epigrams*, 535 no. XXXII). The notion that Caesar is a heavenly god is represented in coinage that shows the emperor’s image with that of a god. For example, Nero struck a coin near his inauguration depicting the recently deceased emperor Claudius as a god (*divus*) gloriously radiate (having a pointed crown) with the already dead Augustus acclaimed god on thrones riding the four-elephant chariot (indicating god-like status) in heavenly splendor (BMC 7).

The heavenly placement and residence of the deceased emperor and select family members (see Lozano, “*Divi Augusti*”) is presupposed in the dozens of imperial temples and shrines found in Asia Minor (see Price, *Rituals and Power*). Augustus was depicted as Jupiter-Zeus as his wife Livia as Juno-Hera. Augustus was also paired with the goddess Roma—representing the Roman People—as at the imperial temple at Caesarea Maritima, where Paul most likely wrote Ephesians while awaiting trial (Acts 21–23). Such a temple existed also in Pergamum. A coin struck in Ephesus under Claudius depicts an imperial temple with Augustus and Roma (RPC 2221//RIC 120).

Artifacts such as the *Gemma Augustea* vividly portrayed a two-tiered reality of an exalted ruling emperor being crowned by the goddess of the inhabited world (*Oikoumenē*). He was seated next to the personified and deified Roman people, Roma, overseeing in the lower half the Roman victory over the barbarian, long-haired captives from the nations.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Ephesians uses ἐπουράνιος (*epouranios*) as a sphere over which God rules in Christ (Eph 1:3, 20; 2:6)—this confronts and trumps “heavenly” affirmations made about the gods and the new earthly gods, the Roman Caesars (Eph 3:10; 6:12). This usage also reflects the understanding of heavenly beings affecting earthly rule.⁸

41

The Social and Geographical World of Ephesus

Acts 18:19–21, 24; 19:1–41; 20:16–17; Ephesians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:3; Revelation 1:11; 2:1

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Key Points

- Ephesus was a major commercial port city and an important node on the north-south and east-west road system, and thus a strategic hub for the immediate and ongoing work of a missionary/church planter like Paul and his team.
- The worship of Artemis and the city’s identity and pride were intertwined from the founding of Ephesus, making devotion to Artemis a natural rallying point against an invasive monotheistic cult.
- Ephesus enthusiastically and devoutly supported the Roman imperial cult, with a marked upsurge toward the end of the first century as it was awarded its first provincial imperial temple. This is the climate and situation to which John’s Revelation would appear to respond most directly for Ephesian Christians.
- The commercial structures and activity of Ephesus, particularly as a collection point for shipments heading west to Greece and, most especially, Rome, is another important point of connection with Revelation’s critique of the Roman imperial economy and the practices that sustain it.

9

Ephesians 3:1–13

The Secret Revealed

PREVIEW

⁸ Long, F. J. (2016). [Ephesians, Letter to the, Critical Issues](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Kloppenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

⁹ deSilva, D. A. (2019). [The Social and Geographical World of Ephesus \(Acts 18:19–21, 24; 19:1–41; 20:16–17; Ephesians 1:1; 1 Timothy 1:3; Revelation 1:11; 2:1\)](#). In B. J. Beitzel, J. Parks, & D. Mangum (Eds.), *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation* (pp. 537–553). Lexham Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

In Ephesians 3:1–13 we encounter Paul as one of the most important building blocks in the *foundation of the apostles and prophets* (2:20; 3:5). He is *the* guide into the mystery of God’s grace toward Gentiles. The secret he has been charged to divulge is that Gentiles have become part of God’s inner circle (3:6; cf. 2:19–22). Paul’s trustworthiness has been tested in suffering as *prisoner of* and *for Christ* and for the sake of his beloved Gentiles (3:1, 13). The theme of Paul’s suffering frames this passage.

Structurally, verse 1 is an incomplete sentence, taken up again in verse 14 (see next section). It serves, nevertheless, as the opening to the lengthy digression on Paul’s task and message as an apostle (3:2–13). Verse 2 begins the digression with another incomplete sentence that does not end till verse 7. Verses 8–12 form a full sentence, restating the content of verses 2–7 while shifting the focus to the cosmic arena in which, not Paul, but the church makes known the wisdom of God with boldness and confidence. Verse 13 forms the closing parenthesis to this digression by bringing the sufferings of the apostle back into view, as an *inclusio* (bracket).

Some see this as “by far the most personal” section in Ephesians (e.g., Houlden: 294; cf. Best, 1998:293); others see all the hallmarks of an official portrait by the respectful hand of a follower of Paul. Lending support to this view are several observations: There is a rather stylized presentation of Paul as guide into the mysteries. The text shows evident dependence on Colossians 1:23–29 (TBC, Chart 2). It implies that readers might lack familiarity with Paul’s task and message (3:2). Finally, the text possibly refers to previous writings (3:3; TBC, Chart 1, for suggested points of contact with other Pauline letters; cf. Lincoln: 168; R. Martin, 1991:39–40; Schnackenburg: 131).

Structure of 3:1–13

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ for you—(3:1)

assuming you have heard
of the mystery made known to me
(as I wrote earlier in brief),
now revealed to his holy apostles and prophets,
that the Gentiles fully share in the promise in Christ. (3:2–7)

To me, the least of all the saints, this grace was given,
to bring to light the plan of the mystery,
in order that now the multivariied wisdom of God be made known
to the rulers in the heavenlies through the church. (3:8–12)

I ask not to lose heart in my sufferings for you, which is your glory. (3:13)

OUTLINE

Paul the Prisoner, 3:1

Paul the Steward of the Secret, 3:2–7

The Church Makes God’s Wisdom Known, 3:8–12

A Request Not to Lose Heart, 3:13

EXPLANATORY NOTES



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Paul the Prisoner 3:1

Verse 1 begins, *For this reason*. This phrase might refer to the immediately preceding description of God's inclusion of Gentiles in the house of God (Best, 1998:294; Lincoln: 172). Yet there is every reason to see the author as bringing the whole of the first half of the letter, which sets the basis for the exhortation in chapters 4–6, to a climactic and prayerful conclusion. Verse 1 is, after all, an incomplete sentence, continued in verse 14, where the prayer-report begun in 1:16 is brought to conclusion with a doxology that provides a fitting complement to the eulogy of 1:3–14.

Before that prayer finds full expression, the focus shifts from the mystery of God's work of peace to Paul, who has been entrusted with giving away the secret. The shift is forceful: *I, Paul, the prisoner of (or for) Christ*. The emphatic *I* draws our attention toward Paul. The definite article before *prisoner* has the effect of further highlighting the special status of Paul as *the* prisoner of Christ par excellence. There is here a special irony, entirely consistent with Paul's understanding of his apostleship. *Prisoner* would normally suggest the opposite of special status, if it were not for Paul's frequently stated view that suffering, not glory, marks the true apostle of the Christ who went to the cross (cf. 2 Cor. 11).

Is Paul a prisoner *of* Christ or *for* Christ? Both translations are equally possible. The first implies a metaphorical understanding, the second physical imprisonment. Paul was quite capable of referring to his imprisonment in both senses. Philemon 1 and 9 and Philippians 1:12–17 show that for Paul actual imprisonment also had theological importance. Later texts show that being a prisoner became part of the character profile of the great apostle (2 Tim. 1; Col. 4:3, 18), reflecting a constant in Paul's life, but also the *necessity* with which he performed his duty as an apostle to the Gentiles (cf. 1 Cor. 9:16–17). "He is Caesar's prisoner because he is first of all Christ's prisoner" (Best, 1998:296).

Paul is a trustworthy guide into the mystery of God's grace precisely because he is *a messenger in chains* (cf. 6:20, TRYN). This is much more than a "detail in the Pauline façade" (Houlden: 297). However incomplete as a sentence, it provides a fitting introduction to the portrait of Paul's mission that now grammatically interrupts the flow of the sentence.

Paul the Steward of the Secret 3:2–7

A certain lack of familiarity with Paul's mission and message is suggested with *assuming you heard*. This is puzzling if the letter was written to Ephesus by Paul himself. Acts 19:10 and 20:31 indicate that Paul spent up to three years in Ephesus. The phrase is less jarring if the letter was intended not for Ephesus but for a wider circle of congregations, some of which may have had little knowledge of Paul (Introduction; 1:1–2, notes). On the other hand, if this letter was written after Paul's death, then such a phrase acknowledges the need for following generations to come to appreciate or, as the case may be, not to lose their appreciation for Paul (Lincoln: 173).

Perhaps the reference in verse 3 to *brief words written earlier* sheds light on this matter. Some take this to refer to earlier parts of the letter, notably 1:9–10 and 2:11–22 (Barth, 1974:329; Best, 1998:302; Lincoln: 175; Schnackenburg: 133; so also NRSV). But it is also possible that this is a pointer to Galatians 1:11–12, where Paul speaks similarly of his gospel coming through "a revelation of Jesus Christ" (cf. Gal. 1:16! Houlden: 298).

In Galatians, this identification of Paul's gospel by revelation is immediately followed by a phrase similar to the one we find in Ephesians 3:2: *You have heard, no doubt ...* (Gal. 1:13, NRSV). This statement presupposes, however, that readers of Ephesians, knowing only secondhand of Paul's work (3:2), are nevertheless familiar with the letter to the Galatians. That would be less likely during Paul's lifetime than for a time *after* Paul, when readers could be assumed to be familiar to some extent with letters of Paul already in wider circulation. The



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

emphasis on *reading* so as to assess Paul's *insight* also suggests a context after Paul's death, when his writings were increasingly becoming the object of study and reflection (cf. 2 Pet. 3:15–16).

Two key phrases describe Paul's mission: *the administration of God's grace* (3:2) and *the mystery made known according to revelation* (3:3). *Administration* is a translation of *oikonomia*. In NRSV, *oikonomia* is also translated as *plan* (1:10; 3:9), *management* (Luke 16:2), and *training* (1 Tim. 1:3). In NASB, *oikonomia* is *stewardship* (Eph. 3:2) and *administration* (3:9). Curiously, NJB does not translate the term in 3:2 and offers *inner workings* for 3:9. NIV has *administration*. Obviously the term is elastic. *Oikonomia*, the ancestor of our word *economy*, literally means "rule or law (*nomos*) of the house" (on *oiko-*, 2:19–22, notes). It is the work of an *oikonomos*, one who oversees or manages the household (cf. 1 Cor. 4:1; Gal. 4:2). Thus we have a variety of possibilities in translation: *administration*, *commission*, *stewardship*, and even *office* (BAGD:559; Eph. 1:3–14, notes).

Paul's apostleship is here related to God's "economy of grace" in the sense that he has been given the task of managing or administering the grace of God on behalf of the Gentiles. We might call him an "economist of grace" or, with Letty Russell, the "housekeeper" in God's household (57). *oikonomia* can also refer to the *arrangement* or *plan* of God's economy, and thus it parallels the *mystery*, or *secret*, made known to Paul. As apostle, Paul has been given management responsibilities, but he has also been given *insight* into the economy of God's grace toward Gentiles.

This economy of salvation is said to have remained a secret *in other generations* until God decided to divulge it to *his holy apostles and prophets in spirit* (or *by the Spirit*, 3:5). Giving structure to this thought is a "revelation schema" (Lincoln: 170, 177), present in 1 Corinthians 2:7–10 and notably in Colossians 1:26–27, familiar from Jewish and especially apocalyptic writing. In such a schema, what was *once* hidden, God has *now* finally disclosed. The present manifestation of grace is a long-held secret, a plan hatched before the dawn of time (cf. Eph. 1:3–14).

Holy apostles and prophets are identified in 2:20 as the *foundation* upon which God's house is built. The fact that they are called *holy* here in verse 5 suggests dependence on Colossians 1:26, where the mystery has been revealed to *his saints* (lit., *holy ones*). In our passage the more general label *saints* is reserved for the church as a whole. With the term *holy apostles*, the author may also want to show respect for apostles and prophets of the church as special recipients of revelation (Barth, 1974:335; Best, 1998:307–8; Lincoln: 179).

These *holy apostles and prophets* have received this mystery *in spirit*. This is not enough to provide a basis for a theory of revelation, but the text makes it absolutely clear that the information given to the apostles and prophets was mediated from God *by the Spirit* (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10–13; Fee, 1994:692–3).

Ephesians makes an important claim regarding Paul, one we might miss given his prominence in Christian tradition. Paul at times had to fight fiercely for his place among the apostles (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10–4:21; 15:3–11; 2 Cor. 10–12; Gal. 1–2). In Ephesians we find him firmly inside the circle of recipients of divine revelation, with the *holy apostles and prophets*. His version of the secret and his administration of it are consistent with that made known to the larger community of apostles and prophets.

Paul's administration of the mystery is *according to revelation* (*kata apokalupsin*, 3:3). The author wants to draw attention both to *how* Paul came to know the secret (Best, 1998:299–300) and to the fact that his *administration of God's grace* (3:2) is consistent with the "norm" of *revelation* (Lincoln: 175). Paul's *insight* into the secret of God's grace is not something for which he is taking credit or being credited, but it is rooted in the initiative of God to make the secret known to him and to the *holy apostles and prophets*.

The secret hitherto hidden from *humankind* (lit., *sons of humans*, a Semitic expression) was earlier identified as the *secret* or *mystery of Christ* (3:4). This leads some to interpret the mystery in Ephesians in light of the closely related Colossians 1:26–27, where the secret is identified as *Christ in you, the hope of glory* (Barth, 1974:331; E. Martin: 91–2). However, while verse 6 suggests that Christ is clearly at the center of the mystery



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

(cf. 1:9–10), the specific content of the secret in Ephesians is news regarding Gentiles: *in Christ*. Gentiles have become *coheirs* (cf. 1:13–14, 18), *comembers* of [Christ's] body (cf. 1:23; 2:16), and *co-sharers* of the promise (cf. multiple use of prefix *sun-* in 2:5–6, 19–22; 4:16).

Numerous points of contact with preceding chapters indicate that *mystery* subsumes the whole of what the author has been laying out in the first three chapters, as 1:9–10 anticipates. Even so, under the impact of 2:11–22, *mystery* is in this case related specifically to the inclusion of Gentiles.

The final words of 3:6—*through the gospel*—reemphasize Paul's work as bringing *good news*. *Gospel*—both proclamation and content—is the means by which the inclusion of the Gentiles is being realized. Paul's work is thus an essential component of Christ's own proclamation of peace (2:17, notes; cf. Rom. 10:14–15, where Paul applies Isa. 52:7 to himself!).

Verse 7 pursues this thought further by identifying Paul now not as a prisoner or steward, but as a *servant* (*diakonos*) of this gospel, a term also well suited to the administration of household matters (cf. Russell's "housekeeper," 57). NIV and NRSV make 3:7 part of the next paragraph, but grammatically it brings the sentence begun at verse 2 to an end. It also returns to the theme of Paul being given the task of stewardship.

Paul is *servant* (lit.) *according to the gift of the grace of God* (3:7). God is the gracious giver; his gift of grace makes the ministry and message of Paul authoritative and trustworthy. This gift of grace is, moreover, given *in keeping with (kata) the energy of [God's] power*. *Energy (energeia)* and *power (dunamis)* are encountered together in 1:19, where with two more power terms they serve to describe the overwhelming might of God at work for the sake of believers (1:19, notes). These two terms also appear together in 3:20, where they again identify the power of God in believers.

Thus in 3:7 Paul's ministry is credited to the dynamic energy of God. There is a special irony here, given that Paul has been introduced as *prisoner* in verse 1. This would be a surprising characterization of one so empowered were it not for the Christ whose ambassador he is. The irony is encountered again in 6:20, where Paul appears as an *ambassador in chains*.

The Church Makes God's Wisdom Known 3:8–12

The second sentence in this section (3:8–12) is a reprise of the first (3:2–7), but by no means simply a repetition. Paul has been *given the grace* to tell to the Gentiles the good news of the *unsearchable wealth of Christ* (3:8), and to divulge *the plan of the mystery hidden from the ages in (or by) God* (3:9). The revelation schema again provides the structure: what was *once* hidden is *now* made known (3:9–11).

Familiar terms are now recast. The *mystery of Christ* encountered in verse 4 is now referred to as the *wealth of Christ* (3:8; *mystery* and *wealth* are held together in Col. 1:27). The Greek term *oikonomia* appears here in immediate relation to *mystery*; in this case it refers to God's economy of grace and not specifically to Paul's administration of it—hence *plan* (Best, 1998:319). The *mystery* has been hidden in and/or by the God *who created all things* (3:9), clearly evoking 1:9–10, where the *mystery* is identified as God's strategy to *gather up all things in Christ* (1:9–10, notes).

While verses 8–12 restate the thought of verses 2–7, we notice an important shift of focus. Even though the emphatic *To me* begins verse 8, highlighting the apostle as in verse 1, the text subtly redirects attention from Paul to the church. Paul is now *the very least of all the saints* (lit., *the leaster*), bringing to mind 1 Corinthians 15:9, where Paul calls himself "the least of the apostles." That obvious exaggeration is here intensified, first by adding a comparative to what is already a superlative—*less than the least*—and second by comparing Paul, not with the apostolic elite, but with *all the saints*. This is especially noticeable given the highlighting of the *holy apostles and prophets* in verse 5 (cf. 2:20). Paul puts himself, or is put by the author, at the very back of the line.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

As in 1 Corinthians 4:8–13, Paul does not cease to be the leader. It is only as one at the back of the line that he wants to be imitated (cf. 1 Cor. 4:16; cf. also Phil. 2:1–11; Rom. 15:1–3). Being *less than the least* goes to the very heart of what it means to serve a Christ who emptied himself and took on the form of a servant (Phil. 2:6–11). It is also consistent with Paul's conviction that he is little more than a facilitator in bringing about the *new human*—the church (cf. 2:15). Even so, Paul and his followers knew full well that he could only be that facilitator, that *servant* (3:7), that *foundation* (2:20), that *economist of grace* (3:2), if he was recognized as carrying the full authority of a divine emissary, a *holy apostle* (3:5). To safeguard the authority of this suffering servant of grace is, in the end, the main purpose of this passage.

Whatever the phrase *least of all the saints* might say about Paul, it also serves to draw attention to those saints who come into view as the *church* in 3:10. At the time of the writing of Ephesians, a *church* made up of old stock Jews and Gentile outsiders must still have been a source of wonder (see 2:11–22). Such a church is by its very existence (Best, 1998:325; Arnold, 1989:62–4) and by its proclamation a witness to *the multivariied wisdom of God* (Wink, 1992:84–5; J. H. Yoder, 1994:147–9). Bengel refers fittingly to the church as a “theater of God's works” (cited in Barth, 1974:364). The church is thus not simply a beneficiary of God's peace in Christ, but an active participant in the realization of that divine economy of grace, “tending to God's housekeeping chores,” as Letty Russell puts it so well (1984:59).

The revelation schema is here employed to show the significance of the church in the process of revelation. What was *once* hidden is *now* being brought to light *through the church*, not only through the ministry of Paul and his fellow apostles and prophets. The church is the secret disclosed, the realized mystery cf. 2:7; cf. 2 Cor. 3:1–6, Paul's image of the church as a revelatory “letter of Christ”). The church's task is nothing less than to make known the *multivariied wisdom of God* [*Wisdom*].

Wisdom may in this instance refer to Christ (1:3–14, notes). At the same time, we should remember that *wisdom* is called *multi-varied* (*polupoikilos*, 3:10), which means “many-sided” or “much variegated,” a warning against limiting too much what the author has in mind. This is, after all, the *wisdom* of the God who created *all things* (3:9) and the God whose wisdom extends to reclaiming *all things* (1:10). *Wisdom* may thus refer more generally to what God is up to in reconciling and re-creating the world *in Christ*. It draws less on the tradition of personified wisdom and more on the notion of God's wise will undergirding and guiding the economy of grace from creation (3:9) to re-creation (2:14–16; so Best, 1998:322).

However varied the divine wisdom is here, it is particularly important that the *church* is at the center of making this *wisdom* known in the cosmos. Here this point is made compactly; its transformative aspect will be more fully explored in 5:3–21, and its confrontive dimension in 6:10–18.

The church's audience is *the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies* (3:10; cf. 1:21; 2:2; 6:12). Recall that these rulers and authorities are not simply invisible spiritual realities residing in a distant heaven, but centers of power deeply affecting human life. In Ephesians, their impact is experienced largely as evil (contra Barth, 1974:365 who reads this text too much in light of Rom. 13 and Col. 1; cf. Arnold, 1989:62–4; Wink, 1992:68, 85) [*Powers*]. The church's participation in making God's wisdom known takes place, as we will also see in chapters 4–6, in the everyday contexts of social, political, and cultural life, and at the same time, at the highest levels (Wink, 1992). The author of Ephesians has prepared the readers for this thought by placing the believers with Christ *in the heavenlies*, meaning in a sovereign position of power (2:6, notes).

On the content of the wisdom the church communicates to the powers, there is no need to restrict it to news of the inclusion of Gentiles (contra Best, 1998:324), as critically important as that is in this passage and indeed in the letter. For that, the adjective *multivariied* would hardly have been necessary.

All this is taking place *according to the plan of the ages which [God] made in Christ Jesus our Lord* (3:11; cf. 1:11). The central importance of Christ in this drama of salvation is shown in verse 12, which brings the sentence begun in verse 8 to a close: *in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through his faith[fulness]* (or



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

through faith in him; on *faith* and *faithfulness*, see notes on 1:1–2; 1:15–23). On one hand, this draws attention to both the status and the intimacy believers now enjoy *in* and *with Christ* (cf. 2:18!). On the other, we can read the final verse in light of the overwhelming task laid upon the church, to confront the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies with the world-changing multivaried wisdom of God.

To do this, the church needs every amount of *boldness*, *access* (to God's power), and *confidence* it can receive (3:12). *Boldness* (*parrēsia* with its verbal form *parrēsiazomai*) appears again in 6:18–20, in the context of Paul's request for prayers on behalf of himself and of all the saints engaged in the task of proclaiming the *mystery of the gospel*.

We note that whereas in 3:1–11 readers are addressed in the second person plural (*you*), in verse 12 the first person plural *we* reappears. The apostle and the church *together* share in this boldness and confidence (cf. Phil. 1:29–30).

A Request Not to Lose Heart 3:13

Verse 13 is the final sentence in this section. While it seems to change the subject rather abruptly, the *therefore* indicates that it follows from what has preceded. Indeed, as stated in the Preview, it forms an *inclusio* by bringing the apostle's suffering *for you* back into focus (cf. 3:1).

A number of ambiguities confront the translator. First, NRSV translates *aitoumai* as *pray*, implying that God is the one to whom the request is made *not to lose heart* and further that the readers are the ones who are not to lose heart (so also Barth, 1974:348–9; and others).

However, another view is possible: Paul may be praying that *he himself* not lose heart in his sufferings on behalf of Gentile believers, much the way he requests prayers on his behalf in 6:18–20 (cf. 2 Cor. 4:1, 16, where Paul relates “not losing heart” to his apostolic ministry). Such an interpretation makes verse 13 flow more smoothly from the preceding verses.

Finally, *aitoumai* need mean no more than *ask* or *request*, and since the prayer does not properly begin until the next verse, *ask* or *request* may be the more likely translation (Lincoln: 191). In this case, Paul is pleading with his readers that *they* not lose heart in face of his suffering on their behalf (so NIV).

As often in Ephesians, translators should find a way of preserving the ambiguity, since each of these is grammatically possible (Best, 1998:330–1). At the center of the verse is the motif of the apostle's suffering on behalf of Gentile believers. As such, the verse builds on a notion that comes to startling expression in Colossians 1:24, where Paul's “sufferings (*pathēmata*) for your sake” are said to complete what is lacking in the “sufferings (*thlipseis*) of Christ.” In our text, then, the *sufferings* (*thlipseis*) of the apostle participate in some way in the passion of Christ, even if Ephesians does not state it as explicitly or as radically as does Colossians.

The clause *which is your glory* poses more riddles. For one, it is not clear to what *glory* refers. Is it Paul's sufferings? NRSV's loose translation *they are your glory* (similarly NIV) makes the connection between sufferings and glory immediate. This implies a highly ironic understanding of glory: Paul's suffering on the Gentile believers' behalf is their glory. Believers can glory in suffering, in this case not their own, but Paul's—a notion close to the irony of speaking of the power of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:17–25.

On the other hand, does *glory* refer more generally to Paul's efforts on behalf of the Gentiles, which will result in eschatological glory (so Lincoln: 192; Schnackenburg: 142; cf. 2 Tim. 2:10)? *Glory* figures prominently in chapter 1, where at least one case can be taken to refer to the eschatological inheritance (1:18). Most of the instances, however, suggest less eschatological hope than awe and wonder at the grandeur and power of God's *present action in Christ* (1:6, 12, 14, 17). *Power* and *glory* are twins in the Bible, especially in Ephesians 1:15–23.

Colossians 1:24 and 27 are more to the point: the sufferings of Christ, participated in by the apostle, are juxtaposed with the *glory of the mystery of Christ in you, the hope of glory*. Comparison with Colossians suggests



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

that one should not force a choice between a present and a future understanding or between sufferings and the larger administration of the mystery (Eph. 3:2). In the end, they are inseparable. Both the present and the future are filled with glory, even if presently the glory is refracted through the suffering of Christ’s apostle and his church.

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Paul the Apostle

Verse 3 draws attention to what was *written briefly beforehand*. As indicated in the notes, this may refer to earlier parts of the letter or to Paul’s earlier letters. There are many points of contact with both other parts of Ephesians and Pauline letters. The features of the portrait offered here are typical of Paul’s characterization of his mission, as indicated in Chart 1 (the pastoral letters, written after Ephesians, are placed in brackets). This text’s special affinity with Colossians 1:23c–29 is shown in Chart 2.

		Chart 1	
<i>Eph. 3:1–13</i>		<i>Eph. 1–6</i>	<i>Related Pauline Texts</i>
v. 1	Paul, prisoner	4:1; 6:20	Philem. 1, 9 (2 Tim. 1:8)
1	you Gentiles	2:11–22	Rom. 11:13; Gal. 1:16
2, 9	commission, plan (oikonomia)	1:10	1 Cor. 4:1; 9:17 (1 Tim. 1:4)
3, 4, 9	mystery	1:9; 6:19	Rom 11:25; 16:25; 1 Cor. 2:7–8; 4:1
3	revelation	1:17	Gal. 1:16
5	apostles, prophets	2:20; 4:11	1 Cor. 12:28
6	heirs	1:14, 18	Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29
6	fellow (<i>sun-</i>)	2:5–6, 19, 21–22; 4:16	Rom. 8:17
7	servant according to the gift		Rom. 15:15–16
8	the least of		1 Cor. 15:9



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

8	boundless riches of Christ	1:7	Phil. 4:19
10	rulers and authorities	1:21; 2:2; 6:12	1 Cor. 15:24–28
10	wisdom	1:17	1 Cor. 1:24, 30
11	purpose, plan	1:11	Rom. 8:28 (2 Tim. 1:9)
12	boldness, access	2:18	2 Cor. 3:12
13	suffering, glory, not losing heart		2 Cor. 4:1, 15; Phil. 3:8–4:20

Chart 2

(Clear affinity between the two letters shown in bold.)

Colossians 1:23–29 (NRSV)

Eph. 3:1–13

²³ **I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.** 3:1, 7

²⁴ I am now rejoicing in my **sufferings for your sake,** 3:1, 13

and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's

afflictions for the sake of his body, that is the church. 3:13

²⁵ **I became its servant according to God's**

commission that was given to me for you, 3:2, 7

to make the word of God fully known,

²⁶ **the mystery that has been hidden** 3:4–5, 9

throughout the ages and generations



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

but has **now been revealed to his saints.** 3:5, 8

²⁷ To them God chose to make known

how great **among the Gentiles are the riches**

of the glory of this mystery, 3:8–9

which is **Christ in you,** the hope of glory. 3:11–12

²⁸ It is he whom we proclaim,

warning everyone and teaching everyone **in all wisdom,** 3:10

so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

²⁹ For this I toil and struggle with all **the energy**

that he **powerfully** inspires within me. 3:7

In its major emphases, our present text is consistent with the way Paul presents himself in his letters. This is particularly true of the main features of the portrait of Paul as suffering and bound messenger, as one whose message has been given by revelation, and finally, as one whose message is good news for Gentiles. Reading Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Philippians shows that virtually all the features of this portrait were often sources of great controversy and difficulty for Paul. This trouble appeared in Paul's relationships either with his congregations or with fellow missionaries (cf. 1 Cor. 4; 2 Cor. 3–12; Gal. 1–2; Phil. 3:2–4:1).

Good News for Gentiles

One fundamental difficulty in Paul's apostolic ministry lay at its very core: the breathtaking distance God was evidently willing to cross to bring in the harvest of Gentiles *as Gentiles* (explored in relation to 2:11–22, above). Galatians shows the tenacity with which Paul pursued his mission, which he saw as nonnegotiable because it was rooted in divine revelation (Gal. 1). In Romans 9–11, Paul is more nuanced in presenting his mission, showing much concern for his fellow Jews and impatience with emerging Gentile-Christian arrogance. In our text the profile of Paul as administrator of grace to Gentiles has become an essential part of his portrait; here he is more a cause for celebration than a source of strife. Nevertheless, this matter continued to be a source of strife in the church into the second century.

The Suffering Apostle



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Another official part of the portrait in Ephesians 3 is the irony at the heart of God's economy of grace: God has chosen to make a new start with humanity via the shameful death of his Messiah rather than through the elimination of rebellious humanity. Second, God has chosen to make that message known through a suffering prisoner, *the least of the saints* (3:8), rather than through a "super-apostle" (2 Cor. 11:5). As Paul's wrenching second letter to the Corinthians shows, he was fully aware that their inability to accept such irony in his style of apostleship was nothing less than inability to accept the kind of Lord they had been given. This also meant that they did not really accept their own calling (see esp. 2 Cor. 10–13; Shillington: 202–52).

The Gospels also attest to difficulty with this crucial irony, most notably in Mark. There the disciples' difficulty with the notion of a suffering Son of Man, a Messiah who dies, is consistent with their difficulty in accepting the cross for themselves (8:27–38).

As we see in our present text, suffering had become part of Paul's heroic profile. This can be observed also in the report of Paul's farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:18–35), as well as in 2 Timothy. Is the pervasiveness of this theme in the late writings within the Pauline letter collection evidence that Paul's ironic view of weakness and power, humility and glory, had won the day? Perhaps. But the vulnerability of such success is that the church made such suffering the *unique* characteristic of its great hero, much as happened with its crucified Lord.

In contrast, by placing the church at the center of the divine strategy of salvation, here as elsewhere in Ephesians, the author does not allow the church simply to glory in the suffering of its hero (3:13). When they remember their hero, they are forced to count the cost of their own calling to make known the wisdom of God (3:10). The Paul encountered here as elsewhere is to be imitated. The church will find its leader, as it will its Lord, at the back of the line (cf. Matt. 20:25–28; Mark 10:42–45; John 13:3–10). In the least among its membership, the church has a fitting hero—the only hero who could be an emissary of the crucified Messiah.

The Multivaried Wisdom of God

The mention of *the multivaried wisdom of God* in 3:10 is, however brief, a window on a rich and variegated tradition in Israel. For a Jewish author, *wisdom* is overflowing with meaning (cf. notes on 1:3–14 and 1:17–19a). Wisdom encompassed the wise designs of God for the world (Prov. 8:22–31; Wisd. of Sol. 6–7; cf. Eph. 3:9!), expressed most succinctly in the Law (Ecclus./Sirach 6:23–31; 24:1–23; cf. Matt. 11:19, 28–30). Wisdom could also be personified as God's daughter or even companion in the creation of the world (Prov. 8:30) and as a companion for faithful human beings (e.g., Prov. 9:1–6; Ecclus. 24; Wisd. of Sol. 7:1–14). The reference in 3:10 can only be appreciated within the expansive context of the biblical wisdom literature as a whole (canonical and apocryphal) [*Wisdom*].

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Heroes of Faith and Action

No matter what the church tradition, heroes of faith and action have played a significant role in the moral and spiritual imagination of the church through the centuries. The cloud of witnesses and martyrs (the same term in Greek) is large indeed. One of the most significant influences on the Anabaptist wing of the believers church tradition has been van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, a treasury of suffering heroes of the faith (Waltner: 148–50). Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, and Oscar Romero are more recent examples (Waltner: 153–4). In 1998 Guatemalan bishop Juan José Gerardi was added to this great cloud of



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

witnesses. Beyond the confines of the church, one of the greatest modern examples is Nelson Mandela, who while in prison for a quarter of a century served as a rallying point for a people struggling against injustice.

There are countless witnesses in this cloud, some heroes known to only a few for whom they have been life-giving models of faith and courage. Our greatest moral and spiritual models appear to be those who voluntarily subject themselves to hardship or who bear up with great courage under the hardship and suffering their commitments have brought with them.

Such heroes play double and somewhat contradictory roles in church culture. On one hand, they are models for everyone in that they are seen to live up to the values that everyone in the church holds dear. On the other, heroes are *heroes* because they are different, set apart from ordinary folk who live in the real world and have to make practical decisions, who often accommodate and compromise with values prevailing in the larger society. In the Roman Catholic tradition, this is illustrated in the arduous process by which extraordinary persons become saints.

Our text begins with a heroic Paul and then pushes him to the back of the crowd of saints. The implication is that church members are not simply to venerate those whom God has blessed in a special way—even if their names are Paul, Teresa, or Oscar. Christians are *saints together* on the front lines, as it were, encouraged, pushed, and prodded *from behind* by their heroes in the faith.

The church as a community of *holy ones* shares the profound calling of informing those in high places of the endlessly varied and manifold wisdom of God. This is a task as important as that assigned to Paul, even if his is foundational in a distinctive and normative apostolic way. In the end, the church's character will not be measured by its heroes but by the extent to which it heeds their word and emulates their example. Only such a church is in a position to inform those in high places of the mystery of Christ, the manifold wisdom of God.

Informing the Powers of God's Wisdom

How does the church inform the powers of the wisdom of God? (on the *powers*, see 6:10–20, notes) [*Powers*]. First, the church communicates God's wisdom in Christ by the quality of its existence (see Arnold, 1989:62–4; Berkhof: 41–2; Wink, 1992:85; J. H. Yoder, 1994:147–53). “Let the church be the church!” (J. H. Yoder, 1994a:168–80). The church is most powerful in its “communicative being” when it is diverse ethnically, racially, culturally, and socioeconomically—when it is made up of those who should not be able to coexist.

Such a church is the peaceable body of the Christ who embraces in himself people and peoples at odds with each other and re-creates them into one new human in himself. By *being* that way, the church sends a strong message to the powers that control and nurture hostilities that divide humanity: a new order is invading the earth and the heavens. A homogeneous church is severely hampered in its ability to carry out this evangelistic task.

Second, the church communicates this wisdom by being itself, and yet to *be* the church of Christ as described above also requires a great deal of *work*. Such a church *exists* only when its members *participate* in taking up the cross in relation to those outside their fellowship and especially in relation to each other. For the church to be a peaceable community requires the reenactment in large and small ways of the drama of salvation so forcefully expressed in 2:11–22 (cf. 4:32–5:2). The church's *being* is inseparable from its *doing*.

The church also specifically goes beyond merely maintaining itself in its courageous *confrontation* of the powers with the wise gospel. Its message is that God is reclaiming humanity and all that God has created from the grip of evil and rebellion. A faithful church can never simply be a passive recipient of grace. When believers receive the peace of Christ (2:14), they are set at odds with the rulers and authorities in charge (even if only apparently) of this present age. Communication is thus often confrontation. Hence, the church needs boldness and confidence (3:12; cf. esp. 6:18–20).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

The Comprehensiveness of the Church's Witness

Whenever the church's critique of oppression and injustice, violence and destruction, emerges from its own transformation into a new humanity in Christ, then it is proclaiming the *good news* of God's wisdom. Such communication will be as varied as the multivaried wisdom of God. It will be as specific as the resistance to that wisdom. The church's grasp of good news, of wisdom, and thus its task of informing the powers is not restricted to a few slogans or to a narrow agenda. The formulation of 3:10 invites a broad agenda, an ever-widening articulation of wisdom.

The key element is God's action in Christ. But as 1:10 already indicated, that action is the gathering up of everything and everyone into Christ. There can be no room for cynicism and hopelessness, even if there clearly is ample room for the honest probing of why the gathering up in Christ is taking so long and appears to be so hidden.

Such a stance may well collide head-on with "the wisdom of this world" (Paul's language, 1 Cor. 1:18–30), as the second half of Ephesians repeatedly suggests (e.g., 4:17–24; 5:6–17; and esp. 6:10–20). At other times, thankfully, the church finds a hearing.

For example, the commitment to peace among the offspring of Anabaptism was once largely restricted to nonresistance and simplicity of life. Today this passion is being applied to arenas as diverse as domestic violence, sexual and power abuse within and outside the church, judicial correctional systems, and national and international conflict. A body of practical wisdom has emerged as a direct result of the *practice* of the wisdom of God as it relates to peace and justice. It is finding institutional expression in Victim-Offender-Reconciliation Programs (VORP), numerous academic programs for the study of peace and the transformation of conflict, JustaPaz in Colombia, and Christian Peacemaker Teams.

Such wisdom is finding ready acceptance well beyond the church community—an important reminder that not all informing of *rulers and authorities in the heavenlies* need be experienced as confrontation "down on earth." Nonetheless, the vulnerability of such popularity is that this wisdom will lose its moorings in the mystery of Christ and thus cease to truly inform those in high places of *God's* multivaried wisdom. In the end, God's multivaried wisdom is nothing more or less than the *gathering up of all things in Christ* (1:10).

Ephesians 3:14–21

An Apostolic Prayer

PREVIEW

The sentence begun in 3:1 is now brought to completion. The prayer initiated in 1:16 is thereby also brought to a conclusion, and with it the end of the first panel of Ephesians (Introduction). Capping the prayer, and indeed the first half of the letter, is a doxology.

Verses 14–19 constitute one lengthy sentence. Directed to *the Father (patēr)* who has named every *family (patria)* in the universe, the prayer consists of three related requests, increasing in intensity (Schnackenburg: 146). The first is that believers might be renewed at the core with power and love (3:16–17; note the importance of how *the inner human [anthrōpos]* is interpreted). The second is that they might have the power to grasp



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

reality (*the width, length, height, and depth*) and the love of Christ (3:18–19a). The third request is that believers might experience the fullness of God (3:19). The prayer concludes with a joyous and confident doxology offered to the God who is able to exceed any and all needs and expectations (3:20–21).

Structure of 3:14–21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, (praying)—

- that (*hina*) he might strengthen you in (to) the inner person,
- that (*hina*) you might be able to grasp the width and length and height and depth,
- that (*hina*) you might be filled into the whole fullness of God.

To the one who is able to do more than all we can ask or think,
be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus.
AMEN.

OUTLINE

Kneeling Before the Father, 3:14–15

Empowerment, Love, and the Indwelling Christ, 3:16–17

Power to Grasp and to Know, 3:18–19a

Power to Be Filled with/into God's Fullness, 3:19b

Doxology: Praising the Empowering God, 3:20–21

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Kneeling Before the Father 3:14–15

Verse 14 takes up the sentence begun in 3:1 and shows us the imprisoned apostle at prayer. The specific term for prayer here is *bow* or *bend the knees*, a somewhat unusual prayer stance since Jewish prayer was usually performed standing. Perhaps it emerges from the motif of the imprisoned apostle. In Luke-Acts bending the knee is associated with impending death (e.g., Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; 20:36; Perkins: 88). Bending the knees is also, however, an expression of awe and reverence before God (e.g., Isa. 45:23; cf., Phil. 2:10–11). Such a sense of awe is present here in that prayer is directed to the God who is *Father of every family in heaven and on earth*. The concluding doxology fittingly gives the whole the ambience of grand worship.

The picture of Paul on his knees serves an important theological interest as well. It provides some sense of balance to the strong assurances of full access and boldness of sons and daughters of God that we see in the previous verses. Believers can approach God with the confidence and freedom of family members (2:18–22; 3:12); nonetheless, they come with prayer into the presence of the Creator and Savior of the whole universe (3:9). The intimate way Jesus taught his followers to address God as Father—*Abba*—was well known to Paul and his churches (cf. Mark 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). In this case, however, *Father* is more a term of respect than of intimacy. It expresses the recognition that all families in the cosmos, in heaven as on earth, owe their existence to God and are under his authority.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Not surprisingly, God is called the same name in the opening eulogy and in the first prayer-report in chapter 1: *our Father* (1:2); *the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ* (1:3; some manuscripts expand *Father* in 3:14 to conform to that wording); and especially *Father of glory* (1:17). The wording in our text also anticipates 4:6—*one God and Father of all*.

Related to the word *Father* (*patēr*) is *family* (*patria*), an unusual word and thus likely a play on words. It is not an abstraction like “fatherhood,” as it is erroneously translated in NJB, but instead it denotes every family, group, tribe, people, or nation that claims the same ancestor (*BAGD*: 636; Barth, 1974:368, 382; Gnilka: 181; Lincoln: 201). NIV mistakenly translates *every family* as *the whole family*, which has a quite different sense. The absence of the article before *pasa* (*every*) demands, however, that it be translated as *every* and not *whole* (Barth, 1974:381; Best, 1998:338; Lincoln: 202).

This reach of God’s parenthood should not be obscured, even if it presents us with some difficulties. For one, these families reside in the whole cosmos—in *heaven and on earth*. With respect to earthly families, the most dramatic expression of God’s parental reach has been explored in relation to Jews and Gentiles in 2:11–22. “Social groups” rather than “families” might thus be a preferred translation (Best, 1998:338). Speculation is rife as to who the heavenly families are, however. Are they angelic families? (e.g., Lincoln: 202; Schnackenburg: 149). Are they churches of which some members have already died and gone to heaven? (Mitton: 237–9).

Furthermore, how many is *every*? Does it mean that God is Father of *every* family on earth, even those outside the boundaries of the church? Does it mean that God is Father of *every* family in the heavens, including the hostile rulers and authorities (cf. 1:21; 6:12)? If so, what is the meaning of such paternity? Since there is not the slightest interest on the part of the author to speculate on these questions, let alone to argue for some kind of universalism, the answer may lie in the prevailing ambience of worship and adoration. The formulation *every family in heaven and on earth* uses the lavish expression of worship to indicate the extent of God’s care as Creator and Savior of the *whole* cosmos, heaven and earth (Perkins: 89). It also serves to reassure believers that God is directly Lord of heaven and earth and those who inhabit them (Best, 1998:339).

God’s relationship to all these families has been established by *naming*. In the ancient world, to give a name could mean to claim paternity. But it could also mean to claim authority over, to establish dominion over. Closely related to this is the sense that those who bear a name are given the power and authority that such a name carries. Names are potencies (cf. esp. 1:21; 5:3; also Phil. 2:9–10; Rev. 2:17; 14:1; 19:12).

Two important ideas combine in this case. One is that in some mysterious sense, God is progenitor of all families in heaven and on earth and gives them their names. That says nothing, of course, about the state of the relationship between those families and their divine parent. In the view of Ephesians, many or perhaps most of these families or groupings are living in broken relationships with God (e.g., 2:1–3, 12; 6:12). However, the fundamental conviction that God is the parent of *all* families and groups corresponds to the conviction that God’s designs for redemption and restoration also know no limits. Hence, we see the repeated *all things* (*ta panta*) at crucial points where God is mentioned as Creator, Lord, and Savior (e.g., 1:10, 23; 3:9; 4:10). God is reclaiming *all* of creation, and that surely includes every grouping of human beings.

The second idea is related: God’s claim on creation is being asserted in his work in and through Christ. So the naming of all families is God’s act of asserting authority and dominion over all the families of heaven and earth. This is couched in patriarchal terminology. In the first century, a father was considered the ruler of the household. If we think of the cosmos as in some sense God’s household (2:19–22; Russell, 1984; 1985), even if presently still in disarray, then we should think of God’s *naming* of families as the reestablishing of lordship over them. In the end, this conviction underlies the confidence with which the church undertakes to confront the rulers and authorities residing in the heavenlies (3:10, 12). God is Lord over them all, and they need to be *informed* of that great life-giving wisdom—a wisdom as multifaceted as there are families to be reconciled.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Empowerment, Love, and the Indwelling Christ 3:16–17

The first part of the tripartite petition is that the church be empowered by God. This is the core concern of this prayer and of the whole letter (so also Arnold, 1989:137–9; R. Martin, 1991:44; Schnackenburg: 150). The concern is so important because of the breathtaking scope of the church's calling and task. The church is to be the body of the Messiah (1:23; 2:16), the *new human* (2:15), the holy temple of God (2:21). It is charged with making the wisdom of God known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenlies (3:10) and, finally, with taking them on in battle (6:10–20). Hence, the author makes the concern for empowerment the center of his prayer, just as it was in 1:15–23 and will be again in 6:10–13.

God is asked to *empower the church with power*, a typical redundancy with which the author intends to strongly emphasize his point (cf. notes on 1:19 and 6:10). Readers are thereby reassured and bolstered in confidence. Not surprisingly, we observe this in the militant literature of Qumran (1QM 10.5–6; 11.4–5, 9). Such heaping up of synonyms for power, as we see here, ironically witnesses to the inadequacy of human words to measure the power, grace, and love of God in Christ (as made explicit in 3:19–20).

Believers are divinely empowered *according the wealth of [God's] glory* (cf. 1:18; Rom. 9:23; Phil. 4:19; Col. 1:27). God's *glorious wealth* (3:16) is an inexhaustible source of power as much as it was of grace in 1:7 and of mercy in 2:4. God's *glory* is God's power at work within and for believers (2:5–6). Ralph Martin's apt rendering of glory as "God's presence-in-power" captures the connections of glory and power perfectly (1991:45).

The means of empowerment is God's *Spirit*, which could be captured just as well by Martin's phrase cited above. Just as *glory* and *power* are virtual equivalents in the Bible, so the word *spirit* is also a way of speaking of the palpable presence of God's power (Fee, 1987:695). In Greek, *pneuma* is the word for "spirit" as it is for "wind." God's Spirit is power that moves.

A most difficult phrase in 3:16 is (lit.) *into the inner human* (or *person*). Both NIV and NRSV translate the phrase as *in your inner being*. If this is the correct understanding, then we have a glimpse into the anthropology of the author, one he would have shared with many others in his day: a person is made up of an outer being and an inner being. The inner being is that part of a person with which God communes, "the base of operation at the center of a person's being where the Spirit does his strengthening and renovating work" (Lincoln: 205; so also Best, 1998:340–1; cf. Rom. 7:22; 2 Cor. 4:16). The immediately following reference in 3:17 to Christ dwelling *in your hearts* is then taken to parallel being strengthened *in the inner being*. *Inner being* and *heart* thus complement each other (Fee, 1987:695–6).

However, close attention to the exact vocabulary invites a rather different understanding in 3:16. The phrase is literally *into the inner human* (or *person*, *anthrōpos*). *Into* suggests a direction in which the prayer asks the power of God to move the believers. Further, we already know *anthrōpos* from 2:15, where it is the term for reconstituted humanity *in Christ* (2:15, notes). If such a meaning of *anthrōpos* informs its use here (so Barth, 1974:388–94; rejected by Fee, 1987:696; Lincoln: 205), then God is being asked to empower the believers so that they might become more like the one who inhabits them—Christ.

The coexistence of notions of *being in Christ* and *Christ being within* (understood both individually *and corporately*) is typical of Paul (cf., e.g., Gal. 2:20; 4:19). In Ephesians, the emphasis falls more on being *in Christ* (cf. 4:13, 15–16). At the same time, the church carries the fullness of Christ (1:23). The complement to *the inner human* is thus not the *heart* of the believer, but the *Christ* who has become a "permanent tenant" (Best, 1998:341) in the heart, as made explicit in 3:17. The author's concern is Christology—or the church in light of Christology, not anthropology. To speak of *inner* is therefore to speak of social, public, and communicative reality, not of private reality. The Christ who lives *within* finds expression in the *outer* social reality of a holy community made up of reconciled enemies—the new humanity of whom the rulers and authorities in high places must take note (3:10).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

This latter point is emphasized by the phrase *rooted and grounded in love* (cf. Col. 1:23; 2:7). Botanical and architectural imagery are combined (cf. 2:20–22). Believers are *rooted* in God’s love as experienced in Christ (2:4), in the sense that they owe their very lives to it and continue to draw strength from it. But they are also *established upon* it as their foundation (*tethemeliōmenoi*, 3:17; cf. *themelios, foundation*, 2:20). Their existence is thus governed and shaped by the love that finds expression in their own lives. There is no need to decide, as many commentators do, between God’s love, Christ’s love, or the believers’ love (cf. Best, 1998:343; Lincoln: 207). In the end, the one is meant to effect the other. That is the consequence of being *in Christ*.

Power to Grasp and to Know 3:18–19a

The second request is again couched in the vocabulary of power: that *you may have power to grasp what is the breadth and length and height and depth*. *Grasp* can mean “comprehend,” an adequate rendering of *katalambanomai* (middle voice). In other contexts, active forms of this verb can mean “grasping,” “taking hold of,” “seizing,” even “overpowering” (e.g., Mark 9:18; John 1:5; 1 Thess. 5:4). For this, the divine power stressed throughout is clearly required.

The “four dimensions” (Best, 1998:344, rejects this since there are only three spatial dimensions) are preceded by only one article and thus should be taken together as four facets of one whole. They have been the source of a great deal of speculation. Some see in this an allusion to the cross (Houlden: 304–5), others to the new Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 48:16; Rev. 21:16), and others an adaptation of a magical formula intended to conjure up the powers of a deity (Arnold, 1989:89–96). More in keeping with the concerns of Ephesians, the four dimensions have been related to dimensions of the cosmos, to the mystery of Christ, to Christ himself (cf. esp. cosmic dimensions implicit in 1:10), and to the love of Christ, mentioned in the following clause (3:19; discussion and citations in Barth, 1974:395–7; Best, 1998:344–6; Lincoln: 208–13).

Most connect the four dimensions to the love of Christ, as do many translations (e.g., NAB, NIV, REB, TEV). The immediately preceding reference to being *rooted and grounded in love* (3:17) and the immediately following text, *to know the love of Christ, which surpasses knowledge*, would commend such an understanding. After all, in the end it is the love of God (2:4) as it comes to expression in the love of Christ (2:13–18) that is the core of the mystery now revealed.

However, there is also a persistent emphasis on wisdom in Ephesians, not least in 3:10, where wisdom is referred to as *multivaried* (cf. also 1:17; notes on *wisdom* for 1:3–14; 3:1–13 [*Wisdom*]; for background on dimensions of wisdom, see esp. Job 11:5–9; Ps. 139:8–10; Perkins: 90). By its very nature, the biblical understanding of wisdom is holistically and comprehensively related to the will of God as expressed in creation, law, and salvation. This letter’s vision emerges out of that conviction perhaps more than the vision of any other NT document.

We thus should understand grasping the four dimensions as an invitation to grasp reality fully. That includes viewing reality from the vista of God’s secret now disclosed in Christ, and also taking hold of reality in the sense of participating in the gathering up of all things in Christ (1:10). The grasping of the four dimensions should thus be seen in the light of the church’s experience of being saved and reconstituted in Christ and in light of its task as articulated in 3:10. Such an interpretation does not rule out a close connection to the love of Christ in verse 19. On the contrary, the love of Christ is limitless, beyond grasping, and extends to *all things* and thus to the edges of the four dimensions of the cosmos.

Nowhere does the infinite wisdom of God come to more creative expression than in the love of Christ, which like all true wisdom surpasses human comprehension. At the same time, believers are to be empowered to grasp reality and to know the unknowable—the incomprehensible love of Christ—because it is their task to communicate that fathomless wisdom to the rulers and authorities in high places.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Once again, the brevity of the vocabulary invites comprehensiveness, not precision. The biggest mistake would be to force a choice between a wide range of possible understandings. In the end, comprehending and knowing are not an intellectual exercise, even if they require all of the intellectual powers God has granted humans. Such knowing is nothing other than receiving God's gracious gift of revelation. Further, such knowing encompasses the experience of the love of Christ and also a life and a mind nurtured by and built upon the exercise of such divine love. To know is to love.

This is not a private or individualistic empowerment or knowledge. Believers get hold of the true nature of reality and participate in its gathering up in Christ (1:10) *together with all the saints*. Christian knowledge is not private; it is public and social, and thus it is intimately related to living out the love of Christ in the community of the saints (Barth, 1974:394–5).

Some see in this a polemic against the Gnosticism beginning to take root in Pauline churches (Houlden: 305). Both the emphasis on *knowledge (gnōsis)* and its rootage in *love (agapē)* would have found resonance as well as resistance in Gnostic circles. But nothing in this text, including the highly allusive reference to the four dimensions, represents an invitation to the speculations of the privileged few, as in the Gnosticism of the second and later centuries.

Power to Be Filled with/into God's Fullness 3:19b

The three-part petition reaches its climax in verse 19: *that you may be filled into all the fullness of God*. Again the grammar allows for a number of interpretations. As already indicated at 1:23, *fullness (plērōma)* can refer to that which is filled and to that which fills it. Here the passive form of the verb *to fill*, meaning *that you may be filled*, is first followed by the preposition *eis*, usually translated "into" or "toward," implying process or direction (BAGD: 228–9). NRSV has *with all the fullness*, obscuring this important point (so also KJV, NJB, REB). We understand the text to imply that believers are *to be filled up to all the fullness of God* (so, e.g., Best, 1998:348; Lincoln: 214; cf. also similarly NAB, NASB, NIV). This more careful translation also preserves the element of growth and development, visible also in 4:13.

The church is *already* the body of Christ, bearing his fullness (1:23, notes; 3:19 is in close contact with Col. 2:9–10). At the same time, the apostle must still be in constant prayer (1:16–17) for the church that it might in fact be so filled. We catch the sense of Ephesians this way: as the filled body of the filled Christ, the church is in constant need of being filled **toward** all the fullness of God. The element of direction and process must not be obscured in this text.

Even with such qualification, this request is breathtaking in its implications. It suggests a level of "participation in divinity" that might make us nervous. Such reticence does not fit the author of Ephesians, however. Whereas the awesome holiness and the love of God are beyond measure and understanding, the wondrous extent of that love is shown most profoundly, first, by drawing rejects into God's family (chap. 2) and, second, by graciously making them the receptacles of God's own fullness in Christ.

Doxology: Praising the Empowering God 3:20–21

The final two verses of chapter 3 provide a conclusion to the prayer of verses 14–19. They take up the theme of power by glorifying the giver of power. Such power is said to exceed infinitely what can be asked (referring to prayer) and thought (alluding to the theme of knowledge and understanding throughout the prayer-report, 3:14–19).

This doxology is surely a fitting conclusion to the first half of Ephesians. Much as in Romans 11:33–36, the recitation of the grace of God provokes a doxology—an expression of praise to the God who has made it all



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

happen and who will bring the work to completion. Further, as in Romans 11, the doxology prepares the ground for the exhortation that follows. It is a reminder that all ethics, all *walking in good works* (2:10), is possible *only* because of God's grace and power. A gracious God stands before and after all doing of good. All ethics, all discipleship, must begin with praise and worship. More, ethics itself is to be worship.

A number of features of this doxology reflect the character and vision of Ephesians as a whole. First is the emphasis on *power*, an essential component of the preceding prayer-report (3:14–19; cf. 1:15–23). The English terms *dynamic* and *energy* are reflected in the Greek: *To the one who is able (dunamēnos) according to the power (dunamis) at work (energoumenē) within us (cf. energeia and dunamis together in 3:7; 1:19)*. The phrase *within us* holds particular interest because in 1:19–20 God's power is at work *in Christ*, but *for us*. That such power is now at work *in us* shows the extent to which the church has taken an exceedingly prominent place in Ephesians. This will explain the unique inclusion of *the church* in the final clause of this doxology (see below).

Second, *the power at work in and through us ["In"]* brings about more than we can ask or imagine or, as the NRSV puts it, *abundantly far more than all ...* Lincoln captures well the deliberately preposterous language: "infinitely more abundantly above all" (216). Once again, the hyperbolic style of the author serves him well. It illustrates that even the most exaggerated human language cannot possibly provide adequate expression for what the power of God is able to bring about. In Ephesians, exaggeration is understatement. "Neither the boldest human prayer nor the greatest power of human imagination could circumscribe God's ability to act" (Lincoln: 216). Again, we must stress the author's emphasis: this power is at work *in and through us*. Doxology is thus in the end thanksgiving.

Third, the glory ascribed to God is *in the church and in Christ Jesus*. The prominence of the church in such a doxological climax fits the overall emphasis in Ephesians on the church. As such, it is unique among the doxologies of the NT (cf. Rom. 16:25–27; Jude 24–25). It is open to question whether the Greek *en* should be taken simply as *in* (NRSV and other versions) or instrumentally as *through* or *by* ["In"]. We see the stress on Christ as the agent by whom God's power is at work and the stress on the church as the recipient of God's grace and power and also as a participant in it. Both these emphases invite us to see the church as a means by which God is glorified (so also Houlden: 305). Thus God's glory is visible *in* the church and *in* Christ and also is generated, so to speak, by Christ and the church. God is glorified in the life and mission of the church.

All this plays itself out against the background of eternity. The author uses two motifs already familiar from the earlier part of chapter 3—*generations (geneai, 3:5)* and *ages (aiōnes, 3:9)*. Here they are combined with *all* in a way typical of the style of Ephesians. Just as God will show forth his overwhelming wealth of grace to *coming ages* (2:7), so in and through the church and Christ, glory will be given to God *for all coming generations and ages. Amen*—so be it!

THE TEXT IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT

God the Father

One of the most prominent features of this prayer is the way God is referred to without qualification as *the Father* ("Father," TLC for 1:3–14). As the notes explain, the motif of God as Father is prominent in this letter (cf. 1:2, 17; 2:18; 4:6; 5:20; 6:23). This is particularly distinctive. The term is found everywhere in Paul's letters as a designation for God, characteristically as a way of addressing God at the beginning of his letters (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; Philem. 3). More broadly, the designation of God as Father is conspicuous in the Gospels, especially in Matthew and John. This often shows in the way Jesus refers to God as *his* Father, and also in the way he invites others to relate to God (e.g., Matt. 5:16, 45, 48; 7:11, 21; 11:25–27; John 3:35; 10:15; 14:23).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

The rare personal form of address, *Abba*, which appears in the Gospels only in Mark 14:36 in connection with Jesus' wrestling with his impending death, was evidently retained for prayer also in Pauline churches (cf. Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). However, it is clear in Ephesians 3:14 that *Father* is used to describe God as Creator, sustainer, and restorer of creation as a whole, in particular the groupings that make up the varied network of relationships in the world—all families on earth as in the heavens (cf. also 2:18). It is not focusing on *Father* as a title of intimacy or familiarity.

Prayer

The Gospels Matthew and John contain two other important examples of prayer. The Lord's Prayer is found in Matthew 6:9–13 (cf. shorter form, Luke 11:2–4). Jesus models how one prays to the divine Father. Ephesians 3:14–21 shows clearly that same confidence, boldness, and access to God that Jesus attempted to instill in his followers (cf. Eph. 2:18; 3:12). The postbiblical form of the Lord's Prayer, as it is known and recited today, concludes with ascriptions of power and glory to God similar to those in the Ephesian prayer—for thine is the power and the glory, for ever and ever, Amen (cf. Didache 8).

One might ask whether the prayer of 3:14–21 (begun in 1:16) is also meant to teach the church how to pray. This is how the church is to pray in light of its identity and task: with boldness and confidence the church is to request power, knowledge, love, and fullness. Might this be a Pauline "Our Father"?

The prayer in Ephesians also has points of similarity with Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17. It also begins with an address to the *Father*. It touches on themes we see in Ephesians 3, such as *glory* (John 17:1, 4, 5, 22, 24), *power* (17:2, 18), *knowledge* (17:3, 7, 8, 25, 26), the *name* (17:6, 11, 12, 26), *holiness* (17:17, 19), *sharing Christ's task in the cosmos* (17:18, 21, 23), *love* (17:26), *oneness with God and Christ—being in God and Christ* (17:21, 24), and *Christ and his love being in the believers* (17:10, 13, 22, 23, 26).

I am not suggesting dependency of one prayer on the other. Nevertheless, both emerge out of profound care for the church. That might be the greatest point of similarity between these two prayers. The prayer in Ephesians can rightly be seen as the Pauline high priestly prayer. Such a view of the prayer is equally compelling if it is seen as a post-Paul retrospective on the great apostle's relationship to the church as a whole and a crystallization of his pastoral concern.

To liken the prayer in Ephesians 3 with both the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 and the high priestly prayer in John 17 fits well the designs of the author of Ephesians. Here the great apostle intercedes on behalf of the church. In 6:18–20, the tables are turned, and the recipients of the letter are asked to pray for all the saints, but especially also for the apostle himself, that he might be given the boldness to fulfill his calling to speak the good news fearlessly.

THE TEXT IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Praying to God the Father

The content of this prayer is as timely in our day as it was then. Believers today are just as much in need of empowerment, renewal, knowledge, and the courage to fulfill the church's task as believers were then. Sadly, because the prayer is directed to God as *Father*, many cannot hear its profound and majestic strains. For most of the church's history, the fatherhood of God has not been a matter of controversy. *Father* has been a term of respect for God's authority and generativity, but mostly it has offered an opportunity for believers to practice in prayer their status as daughters and sons with full access to God their heavenly parent. To begin a prayer with *Father* witnesses as much to a personal relationship with God as it does to God's lordship.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

In recent years, naming God as *Father* has been caught up in great social change (“Father,” TLC for 1:3–14). Fatherhood is often equated with patriarchy, which literally means “the rule of the father.” *Father* can carry the burden of hierarchy, domination, and top-down models of relationship, and thus imply the victimization and abuse of the less powerful, notably women and children. So in some churches, God is seldom if ever addressed in prayer as Father.

Much is at stake. On one hand, those who have been injured by male privilege, especially as concentrated in the role of the father, may find the terminology of fatherhood as encountered in Ephesians to be unhelpful or even offensive. The critique often goes beyond individual experiences of power and sexual abuse, however. It encompasses the ideological and cultural undergirding for such structures and behaviors. In many circles, patriarchy holds pride of place as a chief example of the wicked *principalities* and *powers* (6:12, KJV) with which especially women in the church must contend (5:21–6:9, notes). On the other hand, some have sounded the alarm that rejecting the image of God as Father lays siege to fatherhood as a cultural institution and also one of the essential foundations of the faith (Kimmel; J. W. Miller).

To call God *Father* recognizes God as creator and sustainer of all that is. It recognizes God’s relationship to “the all” as one of authority. It implies that God can make demands on “his” families. That much would have been taken for granted in the first century as inherent in the meaning of father. Letty Russell believes such a perspective too easily views fatherhood as the power to dominate, a view of authority she rejects for human fathers as for God (Russell: 30–32, 62, *passim*).

Today one might search for a better way to express God’s sovereignty. Yet such authority and lordship, power and glory, are, in the view of Ephesians, the basis of the confidence with which the church undertakes its mission. God’s grace, kindness, forgiveness, love, and peace are strong and authoritative initiatives, not to be separated from the conviction that only God can guarantee the ultimate success of the assault on evil, hostility, and brokenness.

After all, it is the *Father of glory* who raises the crucified one from the dead and with him all those who belong to him (1:17, 20; 2:4–6). Whatever difficulties such a view may present to us and our contemporaries, the conviction that God can and will see to it that things will turn out right in the end is one that pervades the biblical imagination *at its core*. This conviction cannot be removed without dismantling the gospel (cf. Rom. 8:28, NRSV note; 8:38–39).

As an alternative to a patriarchal view of authority, Russell proposes “partnership.” With that term she has, perhaps ironically, hit on by far the most important implication of fatherhood in Ephesians, as she herself recognizes (32, 62). In addition to the explicit summons to *imitate God* (5:1), such partnership is implicit in the understanding of the church that underlies this passage and indeed all of Ephesians. That is what it means to sit *with Christ*, indeed *with God*, in the heavenlies (2:6–7), informing rulers and authorities in high places of the wisdom of God, thus participating with God in the “naming” of reality (3:10).

Most strikingly, the church is being filled up to and with the very fullness of *God* (3:19)! As applied to God, *fatherhood* in Ephesians first and foremost a way to signify that God’s authority, power, and glory is *for us*, for God’s sons and daughters (1:19; 3:20). To call God *Father* also communicates the kind of respect for God’s daughters and sons that implies partnership, to the extent of flirting dangerously with divinizing human beings (see 3:19; cf. Col. 2:9). But such is the measure of a love that *exceeds understanding*. This is a Father who liberates and empowers those who have hitherto been outside the family (2:11–22).

Only *after* seeing God’s fatherhood in such terms should we approach the image critically. Alternative ways of addressing God should be no less profound in their capacity to evoke the mix of access, assurance, hope, and glory (see also Swartley, 1990; Volf: 167–90).

To apply *Father* to God is, of course, an analogy drawn from the realm of human experience. Are we permitted to turn the analogy around and ask to what degree the divine Father becomes normative for human



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

fathers? Are human fathers encouraged to see themselves as “fathers of glory” through whom and to whom all things in the family are to be oriented? The answer may lie in the fact that when the issue of male family behavior is specifically raised in Ephesians, the injunctions are not that fathers imitate the Almighty, but rather the *Christ* who gives up his life for his bride, the church (5:25). Fathers are not to provoke their children to anger, but rather to nurture them to be Christlike (6:4). So God in the role of father is not the model for human fatherhood in any obvious sense.

Only one place in Ephesians *explicitly* calls for the imitation of God (4:32–5:1), a feature unique in the Pauline writings and a strong witness to the high level of partnership this letter envisions for believers. *All* the saints, men and women alike, including fathers, are to be tenderhearted, forgiving, kind, and loving to the utmost. A notion of fatherhood premised on such a foundation would ill fit a patriarchy slanted to serve the interests of fathers at the expense of mothers and children.

Doxology as the Basis of Ethics

The location of the doxology of 3:20–21, *after* a lengthy recitation of God’s gracious intervention in Christ (chap/s. 1–3) and immediately *before* the exhortation (chap/s. 4–6), carries some significant lessons. First, any recitation of God’s grace appropriately results in grateful worship. A deep awareness of God’s love and grace should make a hearty “Thanks be to God!” a constant in the lives of believers.

The second lesson follows from this and is related to the doxology’s location as a preamble to the exhortation. Worship, however much shaped by gratefulness, is not complete or true without a life in which “obedience” is experienced, not as compulsion, but as the free expression of gratitude to God. Such an insight is not easy to appreciate in a tradition such as Anabaptism, for example, which has viewed Christian ethics as obedience and discipleship rather than as worship. This text is intended to instill in readers a disposition of active gratitude, regardless of how costly and struggle-ridden it might be.¹⁰

3:1 Paul had already discussed the union of Jewish and Gentile believers into a new entity—the church. He began to pray that they might experience the power and the love of Christ that they would need to live in practical unity with one another in this life.

3:2–7 Paul reminded the Ephesians that by revelation God gave him a special stewardship (lit., “dispensation”) that was for their benefit. This stewardship, which he had written about earlier, is a “mystery” (Gk. *mysterion*), referring to God’s wise plan that was previously hidden (v. 9; see Eph. 2:11–22). The focus here is on the union of Jew and Gentile as equal partners in the church—the body of Christ (Eph. 3:6).

3:10 Paul’s reference is to the new relationship between believing Jews and Gentiles in one body.

¹⁰ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 138–168). Herald Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

3:14, 15 Although God is the Creator of all human beings and angels, only those who have placed personal faith in Jesus Christ are His children and may call Him Father (John 1:12; Rom. 8:15, 16). The idea of a “father” is derived from God and not from human beings. He is the first Father, and none existed before Him.

3:16–19 Paul’s prayer has two parts. First, he prayed that God, whose resources are limitless, would grant believers inner strengthening in their present experience (Eph. 3:16). As a result of this empowering, Christ would become fully at home in their lives (v. 17) with access to each area of their lives and as the governing factor in their attitudes and conduct. Paul’s second petition was based on the fact that believers have already been placed in the body of Christ, being rooted and grounded in love (v. 17). He prayed that they might be empowered to grasp the immensity of Christ’s love and to know that love in their personal experience (vv. 18, 19).

4:1–16 Paul extensively presented the doctrinal basis of the Christian life (Eph. 1–3). He then gave practical applications of these doctrines (Eph. 4–6), with emphasis on a believer’s “walk” or lifestyle.

We never cry out to God and receive a returned check stamped “Insufficient Grace.”

Sandy Smith

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS: A QUALITY PRECIOUS TO GOD

Those who walk in the Spirit possess a quality of gentleness that is one of the hallmarks necessary for Christian unity. Paul challenges believers to a life worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus that is characterized by lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, mutual forbearance, and peace (Eph. 4:1–3).

“Gentleness” or “meekness” (Gk. *prautes*) refers to a humble, submissive attitude that is the opposite of pride. Not to be confused with weakness, gentleness is strength that is submitted to God and channeled into service to others. The Old Testament characterizes God as gentle (2 Sam. 22:36; Ps. 18:35). The New Testament describes Jesus as “gentle and lowly [humble] in heart” (Matt. 11:29; 2 Cor. 10:1). Believers, like their Lord, should pursue gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11) and wear it like a garment (Col. 3:12).

The godly virtue of gentleness, which is a quality of the heart, is counted as being more influential than outward beauty in winning an unbelieving husband to Christ (1 Pet. 3:1–4). A gentle spirit is precious to God. Gentleness is a fruit of the Holy Spirit necessary for godliness (holy, Christlike living), goodness (kindness toward others), and giftedness (service in the name of Jesus).

See also notes on Encouragement (Eph. 4); Fruit of the Spirit (Ps. 86; Rom. 5; 15; 1 Cor. 10; 13; Gal. 5; Col. 3; 2 Thess. 1; Rev. 2); Humility (Phil. 2); Submission (1 Pet. 3); Wives (Prov. 31)



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

4:12–16 These gifted individuals seek to equip other believers to do the work of the ministry by leading them into doctrinal and practical stability. This mutual edification (v. 12) will continue until the church reaches maturity and unity (v. 13). The mature church will no longer be led astray doctrinally (v. 14) and will exhibit the character qualities of Christ by mutually edifying itself (vv. 15, 16).

4:17–19 The Ephesians were admonished to avoid the lifestyle typical of unbelieving Gentiles all around them. This lifestyle was characterized by “futility,” being empty and without purpose. The understanding of unbelievers had been darkened because they had chosen not to receive God’s revelation (Rom. 1:21; 2 Cor. 4:4); they were “alienated” or separated from the life of God and so were unable to hear His voice; they were willfully ignorant of God and His truth (see 2 Tim. 3:7; 1 Pet. 1:4); and their hearts had become blinded and calloused so that they were insensitive to God and had no fear of the consequences of their actions (see John 12:37–40). They had given themselves over to self-indulgent immorality characterized by an insatiable desire for more.

4:22–24 Unlike the unbelievers described, the Ephesians had learned life-changing new truth in Christ: Believers are to put off “the old man,” a phrase referring to the sinful lifestyle driven by desires that deceptively promised joy but did not give it; they are to allow the Holy Spirit to renew their thought patterns, changing them from impurity to holiness (Rom. 12:2; Phil. 4:8); they are to put on “the new man,” a phrase referring to a new lifestyle of holiness and righteous living. This new lifestyle is put on positionally when a person receives Christ and needs to be lived out experientially through the Spirit’s empowering (Col. 3:9, 10).

4:26, 27 God has a plan for dealing with anger (see Ps. 13, Healing; Eccl. 7, Anger; chart, How Can You Prevent Inappropriate Anger).

ENCOURAGEMENT: A GIFT FOR YOUR HEARER

Paul’s words admonish us to speak only good, not corrupt, words—ones that build up, encourage, and edify. Our words are to constitute a gift to the hearer (Eph. 4:29).

Jesus and Paul are examples for us in their use of uplifting words to encourage. Even when his ship started to sink, Paul gave words of encouragement (Acts 27:22). When Jesus’ disciples were sinking, He spoke encouragement to them (Matt. 14:27). When Paul was being persecuted, the Lord appeared beside him and encouraged him (Acts 23:11).

Many people are bowed down under heavy emotional loads and are weary of life’s struggles. How eager they are to hear a word of encouragement (1 Thess. 5:11)! Often we turn the other way, but the Lord wants to give us kind words to say if we are willing to make ourselves available (Is. 50:4).

In Proverbs, the book of wisdom, much is written about the value of encouraging words (Prov. 16:24; 25:11). Not only do pleasant words taste sweet, but their use can lift us up to high places (Prov.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

22:11). Whether we want to be encouragers because Jesus said “be of good cheer,” because Paul urged us to “take heart,” or because we are simply called to lift up the weary, edify the saints, and evangelize the lost—whatever our reason for wishing to bring sweetness to the soul, now is the time to start (James 4:17). See also Deut. 1:21, 29, 30; Ezra 10:4; Ps. 145:14; Mic. 2:7; Luke 22:32; Acts 13:15, note; Heb. 3:13; notes on Communication (Prov. 15); Love (1 John 4); Spiritual Gifts (Rom. 12)

4:30 Believers should not grieve the Holy Spirit through sins such as unwholesome speech (v. 29) and the outpouring of repressed anger (v. 31). Since only persons can be grieved, this verse affirms the fact that the Holy Spirit is a Person.

4:32 The basis for believers forgiving others is the fact that they themselves have been graciously forgiven by God (Gk. *charizomai*), and released from any *obligation* to make restitution (see Ps. 133, Healing).

GOD’S WILL: CONFORMING TO HIS PURPOSE

A mature Christian seeks God’s will and asks for God’s wisdom when she is facing a major decision. Believers must pray about decisions—especially life decisions such as “Where shall I go to college?” “Should I marry this man?” “Should I bring my ailing parent to live in my home?” Such decisions have serious consequences, and they deserve the prayerful seeking of God’s perfect wisdom. But knowing God’s will does not happen solely in prayer. It also requires a commitment to knowing His Word.

The Bible teaches that realizing (or proving) God’s will is the result of habitually conforming your thinking and behavior to God’s Word over a lifetime. As a Christian woman reads the Bible day by day, her mind is renewed with a new way of thinking about life. Worldly ideas, attitudes, and prejudices are replaced by thoughts that conform to God’s ways. This process takes time, and there are no shortcuts. The transformation is never complete until death.

The Christian who has ongoing fellowship with the Lord through His Word comes to decisions equipped with a biblically informed way of thinking. Knowing God’s will at major decision points is much easier if you are seeking God’s will every day in Bible reading and prayer.

See also Dan. 2:23, note; Rom. 12:1, 2; Eph. 1:9; Col. 1:9; notes on Access to God (Rom. 10); Change Points in Life (Eccl. 3); Decision Making (1 Cor. 8)

CHILDREN: OBEDIENCE: DO IT GOD’S WAY



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

Children are to obey both their parents. This relationship exists “in the Lord,” and the implication is that children and parents live under the authority of Jesus Christ (Eph. 6:1). Children cannot be subject to their parents in a way that is contrary to the obedience they owe to Jesus Christ. They should obey their parents because this is “right” in God’s eyes, as illustrated by the fourth Commandment (vv. 1, 2). A child’s education would typically include the Ten Commandments; so Paul is drawing attention to truth children would already know. The word “honor” includes the ideas of respect and esteem (v. 2). Life lived in submission to legitimate authority would benefit the child with a better and longer life (v. 3; see Deut 5:16). The term “father” can be used to represent both parents (see similar usage in Heb. 11:23). Unreasonable demands by parents will provoke children to anger and can push them to perpetual bitterness with the result that children lose hope of ever performing well enough to please (Col 3:21). Parents should instead rear their children in an atmosphere of nurturing: godly training in what is right, correction of what is wrong, and encouragement at every turn.

See also chart on The Ten Commandments Throughout Scripture; notes on Children (Ps. 128); Parenthood (Prov. 10)

5:18 The command to be filled applies to all believers. The passive voice of the verb indicates that this is not a manufactured experience; the Holy Spirit fills and controls them. Further, the present tense of the command indicates that there can be many, successive fillings. This filling is not to be confused with the “baptism of the Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13), which occurs at the point of conversion.

5:19–21 As a result of the Spirit’s filling, believers will communicate with one another in an edifying manner. The Greek verb used includes all sorts of speech—singing of “psalms” (OT psalms), “hymns” (praises composed by Christians), and “spiritual songs” (spontaneous, Spirit-inspired praise). Second, they will sing praises to the Lord (see chart, Hymns and Songs Associated with Women). Third, they will continually give thanks to the Father (Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:18). Fourth, they will mutually submit to one another.

5:22–6:9 As Paul elaborated on the subject of submission, he showed what would happen in specific relationships within the family (see 1 Pet. 3, Submission; charts, Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission).

5:22–24 The exhortation specifies that wives are to submit themselves to their “own” husbands (v. 22). Paul in no way suggests that wives are inferior to their husbands or that they, as women, must submit to all other men. The wife’s submission is voluntary rather than forced (v. 22). God does not ask a wife to submit herself to her husband in violation of her Christian responsibility to walk in holiness and righteousness before Him. The marriage relationship is raised to lofty heights as Paul compared it to the relationship of Christ and His church (v. 23). The husband is not the Savior of the wife’s body. Nevertheless, the analogy holds that the husband is to be the protector of his wife (see Gen. 2:15–17, note). In voluntary submission, the wife can serve her husband, just as the church serves Christ, with freedom and dignity.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians
 Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

ROLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

**Original Relationship:
Creation**

Man and woman are perfectly related to one another and to God (Gen. 2:25).

**Distortion of the Relationship:
The Fall**

The relationship between the man and the woman and their relationship to God are distorted by the presence of sin (Gen. 3:7, 8).

**Restoration of the Relationship:
Redemption**

Jesus Christ as Redeemer models both servant leadership for the man and selfless submission for the woman (Eph. 5:23–27; Phil. 2:5–8).

According to the egalitarian position, no difference existed between the man and the woman prior to the Fall. They were equal in personhood (as is also true in the complementarian position) and the same in role and function (while the complementarian position maintains a difference in role assignment for the man and for the woman).

See also Gen. 1:26; 2:24; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 5:22–24, 25–31, notes; notes on Headship (Gen. 1); The Creation of the Woman (Gen. 2); Complementarity (Eph. 5); Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

5:25–31 Paul’s exhortation is equally clear to husbands: They are to love their wives (an admonition expressed six times in vv. 25–33) in the same manner in which Christ sacrificially loved the church (v. 25). Husbands must not be “bitter” or harsh with their wives (Col. 3:19). Christ’s love for His church is presently manifested in His work of atonement (Eph. 5:25) and sanctification (v. 26) so that He might in the end times present her as a pure and spotless bride (v. 27). Returning to the marriage relationship, Paul explained that the husband should love his wife as his own body because the two are actually one (v. 28; see Gen. 2:24). “Body” is used here, as elsewhere, to refer to the whole person (Rom. 12:1; Phil. 1:20). God prescribed that marriage provide a picture of the ultimate and eternal love between Christ and His church.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 7: Ephesians 3 – The Church, The Spiritual Realm & Intercession

5:33 Paul summarized by reminding each husband to love his own wife sacrificially as himself and by reminding each wife to show respect to her husband as the God-ordained leader of the family “as to the Lord” (v. 22; see charts, Role Relationship Between Men and Women; Theological Foundation for Headship).

COMPLEMENTARITY: *EQUAL BUT DIFFERENT*

Male and female were created as equal and complementary expressions of the image of God. Both bear His image fully, though in different ways. Their different roles in relationship to each other provide a picture of who God is and how He relates to His people.

Christ Jesus is equal with God the Father, yet submissive and responsive to Him (Phil. 2:6–8). God the Father loves the Son and exalts Him. The pattern is repeated in the relationship between Christ and the church. Christ provides loving, servant leadership; the church responds with respect and submission as Christ’s “Bride” (Eph. 5:22–33). Another counterpart to the picture is the relationship between church leaders and local bodies of believers (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Sin has distorted the relationship between man and woman at every level, but believers are called to relate according to the Creator’s plan instituted in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world (Gen. 2:15–25). This plan is marked by a holy reciprocity in which the husband’s loving headship awakens a responsive submission from the wife just as a wife’s submissive cooperation draws from her husband sensitive leadership. The realities of headship and submission are to be enacted within loving, equal, complementary male-female roles. In this, the image of God is properly reflected.

See also Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Pet. 3:1–7; charts on Role Relationships Between Men and Women; Submission; notes on Egalitarianism (Rom. 9); Equality (Gal. 3); Headship (Gen. 1); Marriage (Gen. 2; 2 Sam. 6; Prov. 5; Hos. 2; Amos 3; 2 Cor. 13; Heb. 12); Submission (1 Pet. 3)

FATHERHOOD: *PROTECTOR AND PROVIDER*

The earliest concept of God for a child is greatly impacted by the relationship she has with her own father. Fathers in the Bible were the supreme authoritative figures in their families. With but a word they could determine the fate of their offspring. In contrast to this autocratic image of fatherhood, Paul’s advice to fathers emphasizes patience (Eph. 6:4). The father Jesus describes, just as our heavenly Father, loves unconditionally, forgives without strings attached, and gives abundantly (Luke 15:11–32).

Still, Scripture presents a tender side to fatherhood: A temple official came to Jesus frantic for his daughter’s healing (Matt. 9:18–26); Jacob and David displayed deep sorrow at the loss of their sons (Gen. 37:33–35; 2 Sam. 13:35–39); both¹¹

¹¹ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman’s Study Bible* (Eph 3:1–5:33). Thomas Nelson.