



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

- February 16th, 23rd
- March 2nd, 9th (Baptism), 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

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

Week 6: Paul's life with God.

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

Week 8: Angelology

Week 9: Ephesians 3 – Intercession

TOPICS: Vocational Calling (4). Conflict (speaking truth in love 4). Sanctification (4). Sexual impurity/Covetous (5). Submission (5). Husband/Wives (5). Armor of God (6).

EPHESIANS 3:1-13

For this reason I, Paul, ^(A)a prisoner of Christ Jesus ^(B)on behalf of you Gentiles— ²assuming that you have heard of ^(C)the stewardship of ^(D)God's grace that was given to me for you, ³^(E)how the mystery was made known to me ^(F)by revelation, ^(G)as I have written briefly. ⁴^(H)When you read this, you can perceive my insight into ^(I)the mystery of Christ, ⁵which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. ⁶This mystery is ^(J)that the Gentiles are ^(K)fellow heirs, ^(L)members of the same body, and ^(M)partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

⁷^(N)Of this gospel I was made ^(O)a minister according to the gift of ^(P)God's grace, which was given me ^(Q)by the working of his power. ⁸To me, ^(R)though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, ^(S)to preach to the Gentiles the ^(T)unsearchable ^(U)riches of Christ, ⁹and ^(V)to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery ^(W)hidden for ages in ^(X)God, ^(Y)who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold ^(Z)wisdom of God ^(AA)might now be made known to ^(AB)the rulers and authorities ^(AC)in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was ^(AD)according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹²in whom we have ^(AE)boldness and ^(AF)access with ^(AG)confidence through our ^(AH)faith in him. ¹³So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering ^(AI)for you, ^(AJ)which is your glory.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

INTERCESSION—the act of petitioning God or praying on behalf of another person or group.

WORD WEALTH

Jeremiah 27:18 make intercession, *paga·* (pah-gah); Strong's #6293: To reach; to meet someone; to pressure or urge someone strongly; to meet up with a person; encounter, entreat; to assail with urgent petitions. This verb occurs 46 times. In some passages it is translated "meet," as in Josh. 2:16. In Josh. 19:27, *paga·* refers to the extent to which a tribal boundary is reached. Sometimes the verb refers to "falling upon" someone in battle, that is, to meet up with the enemy with hostile intent (1 Kin. 2:29). *Paga·* is also translated "make intercession," the idea being that a supplicant catches up with a superior, and reaches him with an urgent request. Thus, intercession involves reaching God, meeting God, and entreating Him for His favor.

Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Je 27:16). Thomas Nelson.

NOTE: The request for power. From whom? To? For?

Ephesians 3:14-21 NKJV

PAUL IS NOW PICKING UP WHERE HE LEFT OFF IN VERSE 1:

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the ^(B)Father ^(A)of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, ^(C)according to the riches of His glory, ^(D)to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in ^(E)the inner man, ¹⁷ ^(F)that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, ^(G)being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ ^(H)may be able to comprehend with all the saints ^(I)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 ^(J)with all the fullness of God.

[one sentence]

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

Footnotes

f. [Ephesians 3:14](#) NU omits of our Lord Jesus Christ

Appreciation of the Mystery **ESV**

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family^[a] in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:14-21 NKJV

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

[Most versions end after the word Father.]

1. Kneeling

Was this a thing done in the church?

Or was it more of a pagan form?



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Genesis 41: Pharaoh made Egyptians bow to Joseph

2 Kings 1:1-14

¹³ Again the king sent the captain of a third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up and came **and fell on his knees before Elijah and entreated him**, “O man of God, please let my life, and the life of these fifty servants of yours, be precious in your sight. ¹⁴ Behold, fire came down from heaven and consumed the two former captains of fifty men with their fifties, but now let my life be precious in your sight.”

2 Chron 6 Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

¹² Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands. ¹³ Solomon had made a bronze platform five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the court, and he stood on it. **Then he knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel**, and spread out his hands toward heaven, ¹⁴ and said, “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven or on earth, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart,

Ezra 9

⁴ Then all who trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the faithlessness of the returned exiles, gathered around me while I sat appalled until the evening sacrifice. ⁵ And at the evening sacrifice I rose from my fasting, with my garment and my cloak torn, and **fell upon my knees** and spread out my hands to the Lord my God, ⁶ saying: “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens.

Psalms 95:6

Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us **kneel** before the Lord, our Maker!

Isaiah 45

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.

²³ By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: **‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’**

Daniel 6:10

When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. He got down on his **knees** three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Matthew 17:14 Jesus Heals a Boy with a Demon

And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and, **kneeling** before him,

Matthew 20 A Mother's Request

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and **kneeling** before him she asked him for something.

Matthew 27:29

and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand.

And **kneeling** before him, they mocked him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

Mark 1:40 Jesus Cleanses a Leper

And a leper came to him, imploring him, and **kneeling** said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.”

Mark 15:19

And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and **kneeling** down in homage to him.

Luke 5:8

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' **knees**, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Acts 7

⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And **falling to his knees** he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Acts 21

⁴ And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there for seven days. And through the Spirit they were telling Paul not to go on to Jerusalem. ⁵ When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And **kneeling down on the beach**, we prayed ⁶ and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.

Romans 11:4/1Kings 19

¹⁴ He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts. For the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword, and I, even I only, am left, and they seek my life, to take it away." ¹⁵ And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus. And when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. ¹⁶ And Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel, and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. ¹⁷ And the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael shall Jehu put to death, and the one who escapes from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha put to death. ¹⁸ **Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.**"

This is where our minds go:

Philippians 2:10-11

¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

- Only in Ephesians 3:14 does Paul refer to himself kneeling...Why?
 - Addressed to mainly Gentiles
 - Was Paul using a familiar stance of worship to communicate the amount of obeisance [o.bay.suns] due to Christ? [i.e. Organ for music. Christmas trees]
 - Was Paul communicating submission to God's will...before one utters a word.

In Paul's time Hellenistic rulers, creditors, masters, and on occasion the Lord Jesus, but also several gods or deities, even Satan and devilish beings, were worshiped in this manner. Bending one's knees was the **initial step** in approaching the person worshiped; further movements included embracing his feet and/or kissing the hem of his garment or the ground. It is rather unusual that 1 Kings 8:54 assumes Solomon was kneeling "with hands outstretched to heaven." According to 1 Kings 8:22, Solomon "stood" when he prayed this way.

In Eph 3:14 Paul is most likely thinking of the crouching position, **that is, of utter humiliation before God.**

Barth, M. (2008). *Ephesians: Introduction, translation, and commentary on chapters 1-3* (Vol. 34, pp. 348-397). Yale University Press.

Philippians 2:10-11 [Isaiah 45]

¹⁰ *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,* ¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

• 1 Kings 18

⁴¹ And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." ⁴² So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. ^(A) **And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees.** ⁴³ And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times.

Have I ever bowed in prayer?



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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**,

- Family: (*patrā*), “lineage,” “descent from a common father.” It may also mean “clan.”
- The Phrase: Heaven and Earth – Unique to the N.T.

1. FATHER

The above two concepts combined with the word FATHER:

- Abba, Father (of Believers) (Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:15) – Not a wide enough, all inclusive title for here.
- Cosmic Father of all – Creator Father

However, in biblical language the terms “father” and “son” denote basically an economic, legal, moral, educational or religious relationship which may or may not be based on common blood. Philo and Josephus use the nouns “father” and “creator” as equivalents. Barth, M. (2008).

- Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [variant thesis]

A formula that is used frequently by Paul

Invokes the Trinitarian aspect of this prayer

Covers the concept that families on earth take this family name from Christ

Most other versions omit *of our Lord Jesus Christ*

2. FAMILY

- Family: (*patrā*), “lineage,” “descent from a common father.” It may also mean “clan.”
- In the NT the noun “family” occurs only:

Mark 3:21 – And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.” (**Jesus’ earthly family**)

Acts 4:6 - Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the **high-priestly family**.

Acts 7:13 - And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and **Joseph's family** became known to Pharaoh.

Acts 13:26 – “Brothers, sons of the **family of Abraham**, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation.

Acts 16:33 – And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was baptized at once, he and all his family. (**Philippian Jailer**)

Romans 16:10 – Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the **family of Aristobulus**.

Romans 16:11 – Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the **family of Narcissus**.

Ephesians 3:15 – from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,

WHY IS THIS? SO DIFFERENT IN EPHESIANS?

- Family in heaven means.....are we back to the principalities conversation?

The created world does not only consist of men and things; to its substance belong some systems, structures, and institutions. He who names these powers intends to include “all things” (*ta panta*) under their sway. Barth, M. (2008).

3:10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Our Heavenly Father is the Creator and Sustainer of it all!

*¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the **Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom **the whole family** in heaven and earth is **named**,*

3. Named

A name defines your character

A name gives you identity

A name disclosed your function

A name communicates your essence

The one who names you has dominion over you (Man naming the animals in Genesis 2:20)

i.e. Jesus giving Simon the name Peter (Stone/Rock) Matthew 16:18 [Word for Peter and Rock sound similar in Greek]

- When we bow to the Father
- He is now Our Father
- Who has dominion over us: Put under His protection and care and rule.

Now that we are established as one family with one Father....

*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,*

- How rich is God?
- Could we say, it is from those riches that answers to pray are retrieved from.
- What are these riches of His glory? That things that give Him His glory?
{Character of God = Study the names of God}
- Is not the Holy Spirit already with them? “That they may know the strength of Spirit’s inner reinforcement.” [Divine strength, Divine indwelling]
- Is the knowing more of the strength of the Holy Spirit a nod to growing, process, movement. Not experience once and done?

Spirit. Wisdom. Knowledge. Power.

Cf: Romans 7:22 For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,

[NOTE: a verb expressing movement is necessary for clarity. Versions and commentaries that **fail to make clear the movement “toward the inner man,”** and instead point to the strengthening “of the inner man,” or the increase of strength “in” him, are not doing justice to the Greek text.]

Barth, M. (2008). [*Ephesians: Introduction, translation, and commentary on chapters 1–3*](#) (Vol. 34, pp. 348–397). Yale University Press.

[Note: Paul teaching God as a Trinity again.]



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Strengthened by His Spirit, now add:

*¹⁷ that Christ may **dwell** in your hearts through faith; that you, being **rooted and grounded in love,***

1. Dwelling

Ephesians 2:19

So then you are no longer strangers and **aliens**, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

- Greek verb, *paroikō*:
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. J. Stott BST
- Greek verb, *Katoikeō*:

It 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). J. Stott BST

I am living here, this is my home V.S. I am staying here.

- So, what are the **consequences** of Christ, via the Holy Spirit, settling down in your heart?
Establishing His throne right there.
To reign.

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

2. ROOTED IN LOVE GROUNDED IN LOVE

HAVE I EVER PRAYED TO BE STRENGTHENED TO LOVE?

TO GROW ROOTS SO MORE LOVE CAN BLOOM?

Why is Paul specifically asking for these things?

Strengthened by His Spirit, developing deep roots of love, now add:

*¹⁸ may be able to **comprehend** with all the saints what is the **width and length and depth and height**—*

1. Comprehend

May you have access to the Divine power to grasp...comprehend...take hold of...seize...overpower

(e.g., Mark 9:18; John 1:5; 1 Thess. 5:4).

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).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

2. Width – Length – Depth – Height of Christ’s Love

Width: Thickness, Size, Girth

Length: Distance, Measurement, Dimension

Depth: Complexity, Intensity, Strength

Height: Pinnacle, Stature, Apex

[Image of the Cross?]

Romans 8:37-39

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Written 5 years prior to Ephesians]

These four dimensions are usually mentioned when an author wants to point out that God and his wisdom cannot be traced but remain inscrutable—“a perfect antithesis to the Gnostic theme which treats knowledge of the cosmos as equivalent to the knowledge of God.”¹²⁷ Since Ephesians is replete with borrowings from Wisdom tradition, Eph 3:18 may reflect the same influence. In this case Paul wants to show in 3:18 how impossible it is ever to grasp fully the manifold wisdom of God.

¹ Barth, M. (2008). [Ephesians: Introduction, translation, and commentary on chapters 1–3](#) (Vol. 34, pp. 348–397). Yale University Press.

Strengthened by His Spirit, developing deep roots of love, so you can comprehend this mosaic of God’s Wisdom, now add:

¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled ~~with~~ all the fullness of God.

[instead of with...to be filled up toward all the fullness of God = growth and development.]

God participates in us:

- By accepting ALL (even us rejected)
- Then, making us ALL containers, vessels of this ‘God’s own fullness’ that is in Christ

The expansion of our love has been prayed for

Now, get to know Christ’s supernatural love

Ephesians 5:18

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

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.

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

Strengthened by His Spirit, developing deep roots of love, so you can comprehend this mosaic of God’s Wisdom, which becomes supernatural knowing that goes beyond human knowledge, FILLED towards Go...continual process...keep pouring!, now add:



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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,

The One Who Can Act

Is The One Who Can Answer Prayer

That power that works in us is an everyday reminder to trust (do I recognize this?)

(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.

(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.

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

Strengthened by His Spirit, developing deep roots of love, so you can comprehend this mosaic of God's Wisdom, which becomes supernatural knowing that goes beyond human knowledge, FILLED towards Go...continual process...keep pouring!, TRUSTING HIM – He not only wants to He can, now add: WORSHIP

Now that we know this, what is our **response**:

²¹ to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

- This is an US event.

THE Church

In 3:16–19 Paul does not explicitly say why he considers the birth or increase of knowledge a social rather than a private event. But the contents of Eph 2 and 3 supply a reason: the mode of gaining knowledge is determined by that which is to be known. The secret revealed is that the outsider has been included together with the insider in God's love and the Messiah's realm. **The revelation of the secret is not just an act of intellectual information but takes place in the actual salvation and unification of Jews and Gentiles.** The result and celebration of the revealed secret consists in the worship offered to God by Jews and Gentiles together, and by the evidence which their peaceful community gives the world. Therefore the very act of knowledge cannot take place except when the saving knowledge also granted to one's fellow man is gladly recognized, endorsed, and celebrated.

Barth, M. (2008). *Ephesians: Introduction, translation, and commentary on chapters 1–3* (Vol. 34, pp. 348–397). Yale University Press.



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Paul's Intercessor Process in Ephesians 3:14-21

Tells us WHO we are (15)

By telling us WHO we BELONG to (14)

And WHO answers/bequeaths (16)

Things that He already owns (16)

As we are THE TEMPLE, where Christ dwells (17)

His love resides IN US and creates a foundation (17)

So we wrap our belief around ALL THAT CHRIST IS (18)

That supernatural being of Christ continual fills us as a Church(19)

And goes beyond any comprehension we may have (20)

That which fills us, works in us, through us – a witness (20)

To this God, and no other thing in the heavens or earth, this is where worship belongs (21)

“We have no authority to pray for anything which God has not revealed to be his will.”

John Stott BST

We all pray about what we love.

We all pray about what concerns us.

So, what does my prayer life say about me?

Paul's Point:

Faith Check – This is IT, how does mine measure up

When I ask for more of God's power, is it to be more like Christ?

I want you to know what it is to BE His Children IN HIS FAMILY

True, Healthy, Family

(i.e. Being disowned because you left your former religion and accepted Christ.

Being disowned because your life has change so much that your old friends/family cannot stand being with you because of how it now makes them feel.

Never having a family of origin that embraces you (acknowledges even).



Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ [For this cause/] I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
¹⁵ Of 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 by his Spirit in the inner man;
¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,
¹⁸ May [be able] to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth,ⁿⁿ and length,^{an} and depth,^{an} and height;^{an}
¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, [which passeth] knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.
²⁰ Now unto [him that is able] to do [exceeding abundantly//.] above all that we ask or think, according to the power [that worketh] in us,
²¹ Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, [world without end./.] Amen¹

AMP

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].

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.

¹ Zodhiates, S., & Baker, W. (2000). [The complete word study Bible: King James Version](#) (electronic ed., Eph 3:1–21). AMG Publishers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

NotEs:

IVP

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)

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.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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?]

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

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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*

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 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – 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.²

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.

(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.

² 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 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

(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*.³

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 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.

³ 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 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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.

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*

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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.

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 to 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–

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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).

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.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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.

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

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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 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 (dunamenos) 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).

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

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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.

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

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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 (Kimel; 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* is 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 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.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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.⁴

God's Plan

3 [For this cause/] I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

² If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God [which is given] me to you-ward:

³ [How that] by revelation he [made known] unto me the mystery; (as I [wrote afore] in [few words,])

⁴ Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ:

⁵ Which in other ages was not [made known] unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

⁶ That the Gentiles should be [fellow heirs,^{an}] and [of the same body,^{an}] and partakers^{an} of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

⁷ Whereof I was made a minister,^{an} according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the [effectual working] of his power.

⁸ Unto me, who am [less than the least^{art}] of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;

⁹ And to [make all *men* see/] what is the fellowshipⁿⁿ of the mystery, which from the [beginning of the world] hath been hid in God, [who created] [all things] by Jesus Christ:

¹⁰ [To the intent that] now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly^{art} places might [be known] by the church the manifold wisdom of God;

¹¹ According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:

¹² In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.

¹³ Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.^{an}

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians

¹⁴ [For this cause/] I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

¹⁵ Of 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 by his Spirit in the inner man;

¹⁷ That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

¹⁸ May [be able] to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth,ⁿⁿ and length,^{an} and depth,^{an} and height,^{an}

¹⁹ And to know the love of Christ, [which passeth] knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now unto [him that is able] to do [exceeding abundantly//] above all that we ask or think, according to the power [that worketh] in us,

²¹ Unto him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, [world without end.//] Amen⁵

INTERCESSION.

Of One Person with Another: 1 Sam. 2:25 INSTANCES OF: Reuben for Joseph, Gen. 37:21, 22. Judah for Joseph, Gen. 37:26, 27. Pharaoh's chief baker for Joseph, Gen. 41:9–13, with Gen. 40:14. Jonathan for David, 1 Sam. 19:1–7. Abigail for Nabal, 1 Sam. 25:23–35. Joab for Absalom, 2 Sam. 14:1–24. Bath-sheba for Solomon, 1 Kin. 1:15–31; for Adonijah, 1 Kin. 2:13–25. Ebed-melech for Jeremiah, Jer. 38:7–13. Elisha offers to see the king for the Shunammite, 2 Kin. 4:13. The king of Syria for Naaman, 2 Kin. 5:6–8. Paul for Onesimus, Philem. 10–21.

Of Mankind with God: Gen. 20:7; Ex. 28:12, 29, 30, 38; Ex. 32:9–14; Num. 6:23–26; Num. 14:11–21; Num. 16:46–50; Deut. 5:5; Deut. 7:9; Deut. 9:18, 20, 25–29; 1 Sam. 7:5–8; 1 Sam. 12:23; 1 Sam. 15:24–26, 30; Job 1:5; Job 9:32, 33; Job 16:21; Job 42:8–10; Psa. 122:6; Isa. 62:6, 7; Isa. 65:8; Jer. 5:1; Jer. 7:16;

⁴ Neufeld, T. R. Y. (2001). *Ephesians* (pp. 138–168). Herald Press.

⁵ Zodhiates, S., & Baker, W. (2000). *The complete word study Bible: King James Version* (electronic ed., Eph 3:1–21). AMG Publishers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Jer. 11:14 Jer. 14:11. Jer. 15:1; Jer. 29:7; Ezek. 22:30; Matt. 8:5–13; Mark 6:55, 56; Eph. 6:18; 1 Tim. 2:1, 2; Heb. 13:18; Jas. 5:14–20; 1 Pet. 2:5 v. 9.; 1 John 5:16

Exemplified: Gen. 48:16 vs. 15–20.; Ex. 32:31, 32; Ex. 34:9; Num. 10:35, 36; Num. 27:16, 17; Josh. 7:8, 9 vs. 7–26.; Judg. 5:31; Ruth 2:12; 1 Sam. 1:17; 1 Sam. 12:23; 2 Sam. 24:17; 1 Kin. 8:29, 38, 39, 44, 45; 1 Chr. 29:18, 19; 2 Chr. 6:40, 41; 2 Chr. 30:18, 19; Psa. 7:9; Psa. 12:1; Psa. 20:1–4; Psa. 25:22; Psa. 28:9; Psa. 36:10; Psa. 51:18; Psa. 80:1, 2, 14, 15, 17, 19; Psa. 122:7, 8; Psa. 125:4; Psa. 132:9, 10 v. 8.; Psa. 134:3; Psa. 141:5; Isa. 62:1; Isa. 63:17–19; Isa. 64:8–12; Jer. 18:20; Ezek. 9:8 Ezek. 11:13. Dan. 9:3–19; Joel 2:17; Mic. 7:14; Matt. 5:44; Matt. 6:10; Acts 7:60; Acts 8:15; Rom. 1:9; Rom. 10:1; 1 Cor. 1:3 Gal. 1:3. 2 Cor. 9:10, 14; 2 Cor. 13:7; Gal. 6:16; Eph. 1:15–19 1 Thess. 1:2. Eph. 3:14–19; Phil. 1:3–5, 9 v. 10.; Col. 1:3, 4, 9; Col. 2:1, 2 Col. 4:12. 1 Thess. 3:10, 12, 13 2 Tim. 1:3. 1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 1:11; 2 Thess. 2:16, 17; 2 Thess. 3:5, 16; 2 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 4:16; Philem. 4, 6; Heb. 13:20, 21; 1 Pet. 5:10 See **PRAYER**, **INTERCESSORY**.

Additional Instances of: Abraham, in behalf of Sodom, Gen. 18:23–32; in behalf of Abimelech, Gen. 20:17, 18. Abraham's servant, in behalf of his master, Gen. 24:12. Jacob, in behalf of his children, Gen. 49. Moses, in behalf of Pharaoh, Ex. 8:12, 13, 30, 31; 9:33; 10:18, 19. Moses, for Israel, Num. 16:20–22; 21:7; Deut. 33:6–17; Psa. 106:23; for Miriam, Num. 12:13–15. David, for Israel, 2 Sam. 24:17. Solomon, for Israel, 1 Kin. 8:29–53. Ezra, for Israel, Ezra 9:5–15. Nehemiah, in behalf of Judah and Jerusalem, Neh. 1:4–9. Asaph, for the church, Psa. 80:13. Korah, for the church, Psa. 85:1–7. Jeremiah, for Israel, Jer. 14:7–22. Amos, for Israel, Amos 7:2–6. woman from Syrian Phoenicia, for her daughter, Matt. 15:22. Disciples, in behalf of Peter's wife's mother, Luke 4:38, 39. Parents, for son with seizures, Matt. 17:15; Mark 9:17–27. Others, who sought Jesus in behalf of the afflicted, Matt. 12:22; 15:22, 30; 17:14–18; Mark 1:32; 2:3; Luke 5:18–20; John 4:47, 49. Paul, for the church, Acts 20:32. Onesiphorus, 2 Tim. 1:16, 18. For Paul, by the churches, Acts 14:26; 15:40.

Solicited: INSTANCES OF: By Pharaoh, of Moses, Ex. 8:8, 28; 9:28; 10:17; 12:32; and by the Israelites, Num. 21:7. By Israel, of Samuel, 1 Sam. 12:19. By Jeroboam, of a prophet, 1 Kin. 13:6. By Hezekiah, of Isaiah, 2 Kin. 19:1–4. By Zedekiah, of Jeremiah, Jer. 37:3; and by Johanan, Jer. 42:1–6. By Daniel, of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, Dan. 2:17, 18. By Darius, of the Jews, Ezra 6:10. By Simon Magus, of Peter, Acts 8:24. By Paul, of the churches, Rom. 15:30–32; 2 Cor. 1:11; Eph. 6:19, 20; 1 Thess. 5:25; 2 Thess. 3:1; Heb. 13:18.

Answered: INSTANCES OF: Of Moses, in behalf of Pharaoh, for the plague of frogs to be abated, Ex. 8:12, 15; the plague of flies, Ex. 8:30–32; the plague of rain, thunder, and hail, Ex. 9:27–35; plague of locusts, Ex. 10:16–20; plague of darkness, Ex. 10:21–23. Of Moses, for the Israelites, during the battle with the Amalekites, Ex. 17:11–14; after the Israelites had made the golden calf, Ex. 32:11–14, 31–34; Deut. 9:18–29; 10:10; Psa. 106:23; after the complaining of the people, Ex. 33:15–17; when the fire of the Lord consumed the people, Num. 11:1, 2; when the people complained on account of the report of the spies, Num. 14:11–20; that the fiery serpents might be abated, Num. 21:4–9; that Miriam's leprosy might be healed, Num. 12:13; in behalf of Aaron, on account of his sin in making the golden calf, Deut. 9:20. Of Samuel, for deliverance from the oppressions of the Philistines, 1 Sam. 7:5–14. The prophet of Israel, for the restoration of Jeroboam's withered hand, 1 Kin. 13:1–6. Of Elijah, for the raising from the dead the son of the hospitable widow, 1 Kin. 17:20–23. Of Elisha, for the raising from the dead the son of the Shunammite woman, 2 Kin. 4:33–36. Of Isaiah, in behalf of Hezekiah and the people, to be delivered from Sennacherib, 2 Kin. 19.

Intercessional Influence of the Righteous: Gen. 18:26 vs. 29, 30, 32.; Gen. 19:22; Gen. 26:4, 5, 24; 1 Kin. 11:12, 13, 34; 1 Kin. 15:4; 2 Kin. 8:19 2 Chr. 21:7. Psa. 103:17, 18; Isa. 37:35; Jer. 5:1; Ezek. 14:14 vs. 18, 20.; Ezek. 14:16; Matt. 24:22; Rom. 11:27, 28; Rev. 5:8; Rev. 8:3, 4 See **CHILDREN**, **OF THE RIGHTEOUS**, **BLESSED OF GOD**; **JESUS**, **MEDIATION OF**. See **PRAYERFULNESS**.⁶

⁶ Swanson, J., & Nave, O. (1994). *New Nave's Topical Bible*. Logos Research Systems.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

VII. PRAYER FOR PERFECTION (3:14–21)

3¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father¹⁵ from whom each family in heaven and on earth receives its name: ¹⁶ Rich as he is in glory may he grant that through his Spirit you be fortified with power [to grow] toward the Inner Man¹⁷ [i.e.] that through faith the Messiah may dwell in your hearts. Stand firm on the root and foundation of love. ¹⁸ May you be strong enough to grasp together with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the height, the depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ though it surpasses knowledge. May you become so perfect as to attain to the full perfection of God.

²⁰ To him who by the power exerted in us
is able to outdo superabundantly
all that we ask or imagine—

²¹ Glory to him in the church and in the Messiah Jesus
from generation to generation,
for ever and ever! Amen.

NOTES

3:14. *For this reason.* The “reason” mentioned here and the relation of this verse to 3:1 are discussed in the first NOTE on 3:1.

I bow my knees. For the background and meaning of this extraordinary attitude of prayer see COMMENT II.

before the Father. Other NT occurrences of the attribute “Father” have been discussed in COMMENT II on 1:1–2. The reference to “the Father” lacks here and in 2:8 the frequently found specification “God our Father” or “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Although a variant reading does contain the latter formula, philological and material reasons advise against its endorsement. The next verse gives a surprising and unique explication of the term “Father.” See COMMENT III A.

15. *each family in heaven and on earth.* The Greek noun translated by “family” (*patriā*) means, just like its older and shorter form (*patrā*), “lineage,” “descent from a common father.” It may also mean “clan.” In the LXX this noun is never used to denote the abstract concept “fatherhood,” but always means a specific, concrete group of people, i.e. a family, a clan, a tribe, or a nation.² The question of which families Paul has in mind when he adds “heavenly” to “earthly” clans is discussed in COMMENT III B.

receives its name. Lit. “is named.” The same verb (*onomazō*) was used in 1:21 and translated there by “to bestow a title.” It can also mean “to utter or to use a name,” “to call after,” “to address by name,” “to invoke,” “to nominate for,” or “to install in a position,” “to make famous.” Ordinary and exceptional events in familial, professional, and institutional life, but especially in cultic and magic realms, are the *Sitz im Leben* for this verb. The various possible meanings of the term in 3:15 will be discussed in COMMENT III C.

16–19. *Rich as he is in glory ... the full perfection of God.* Paul unfolds the content of his intercession in these verses, which in the Greek text form one long and complicated sentence running from vs. 14 to vs. 19. In the translation this sentence has been broken up. Paul does not begin vs. 16 with the words “I ask,” but he treats the statement “I bow my knees ... that” as an equivalent to “I pray that” (1:16–17); cf. the combination of “bowing the knees” and “praying” in Acts 9:40, 20:36. Three petitions may be discerned in what follows.

(a) Intercession for the inner fortification of the saints; this is unfolded in the prayer that Christ reside in their hearts (vss. 16–17).

(b) Supplication for their strong perception of all the dimensions of God’s will; this supplication is interpreted by a request for knowledge of Christ’s love (vss. 18–19a).

(c) Petition for perfection with God’s perfection (vs. 19b). While the three clauses beginning in our translation with “may” (lit. three times, “that”) can be understood to set apart the three main elements of Paul’s prayer, it is also possible that the Greek conjunction “that” has different meanings in the same long sentence: perhaps only vss. 16–17 contain Paul’s prayer. In this case the apostle asks for fortification and indwelling by the Spirit, as well as for steadfast love. Verses 18–19 would then describe three consequences of the gifts granted: i.e. invigoration, knowledge, and perfection. Either way, elements typical of the language of prayer defy a strictly logical analysis. At

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

this point Paul's thinking follows the form of devotion and meditation rather than that of deduction, induction, careful subordination or coordination.

16. *Rich as he is in glory.* Lit. "according to the riches of his glory." In 3:14–15 the title of Father pointed out God's stable love, and the reference to "all families" stressed God's universal power. The inexhaustible "glory" of God is the third and final presupposition of Paul's prayer. The triad "love," "power," "glory" and the reference to "riches" were also found in 1:3–23. In remembering the "riches" and "glory" of the Father, Paul is convinced that God need not change or lose anything by granting the requests made to him. God is expected to act according to his nature, his character, i.e. his radiating love and power.

through his Spirit ... fortified with power. This pleonastic diction reflects the baroque description of God's "power" in 1:19; but only in 3:16 is the "Spirit" explicitly mentioned. In 3:18, again, a reference to reinforcement will be made: strength is necessary to comprehend the dimensions of God's wisdom. Spirit, wisdom, knowledge, and power were also linked in 1:17–19 as they are in Wisdom literature (see COMMENT X on 1:3–14). In Eph 3 these nouns are so arranged as to make it clear that man must be invigorated by God's Spirit before he is able to grasp God's manifold wisdom and hold onto it in knowledge. Paul would hardly affirm in general terms, that knowledge is power. Rather he avers that through his Spirit God empowers man to know things that are beyond the human mind, eye, ear (1 Cor 2:9–16).

[to grow] *toward the Inner Man.* The words "to grow" are not in the Greek text but are borrowed from 2:21 and 4:15–16. Because the literal version of 3:16, as "fortified toward [or into] the inner man," makes as little sense in English as, e.g. in the Vulgate and Calvin translations, a verb expressing movement is necessary for clarity. Versions and commentaries that fail to make clear the movement "toward the inner man," and instead point to the strengthening "of the inner man," or the increase of strength "in" him, are not doing justice to the Greek text. Verse 2:20 mentions a keystone toward which the building must grow if it is to grow at all "into" a holy temple. Verse 4:15 describes the growth "toward him who is the head." Verse 4:13 promises the saints that they will meet the one Perfect Man. Equally in 3:16 "the inner man" is a goal rather than a quality or possession of the saints. The saints, not the "inner man," have to grow strong. Who or what is this "inner man"? Is this term used in Ephesians as a title for Jesus Christ? Or does it denote an *alter ego* of natural man, corresponding, e.g. to the subconscious, to a higher level, or a projection of personal existence? Verse 6:10 contains the appeal, "become strong in the Lord." If this command is a parallel to the prayer contained in 3:16, then "the Lord" is the aim, focus, and source of gathering strength—he, and not some innate self that resides in the nature of man and constitutes his individual quality.

17. [*i.e.*] *that.* Since in the Greek text no conjunction whatever connects the two aorist infinitives "to be fortified" and "to dwell," it is more likely that the second verb and the clause governed by it interpret the first verb and vs. 16, than that they contain different thoughts and petitions. Thus the addition of "[i.e.]" serves to express the intimate connection between vss. 16 and 17. "Spirit" and "faith" are assigned parallel instrumental functions. The "fortification" of the saints is unthinkable without the "indwelling" of the Messiah in their hearts, and their movement "toward the inner man" depends upon the Messiah's movement "into their hearts." These parallels between vss. 16 and 17 support the conclusion tentatively reached at the end of the previous NOTE: the Messiah himself is meant by the "inner man." He is at the same time the goal (vs. 16) and the source (vs. 17) of the saints' strength. Verses 4:15–16 contain analogous statements: the church grows "toward" and (lit.) "from" Christ the head (in our translation, "He enables the body to make its own growth"). The designations of Christ as foundation and keystone contain the same dialectic.

through faith. See the NOTE on the same words in 2:8. The instrumentality ascribed to faith excludes the idea that the indwelling Christ and the person in whom he dwells might ultimately melt into one and lose all distinctive traits. Each of them has and retains his personality. Faith—whether God's, the Messiah's, or the saints'—presupposes a covenant relationship between at least two persons in which one partner trusts and is faithful to the other without trying to absorb him and remain alone on the field. The parallel words "through the Spirit" (3:16) show that faith is understood as a gift of the Spirit (cf. 2:8–9; Gal 5:22–23).

the Messiah may dwell in your hearts. The closest Pauline parallel to this amazing statement is Gal 2:20, "The life I now live is not my life but the life which Christ lives in me" (NEB). See COMMENT IV B for the mystical meaning found in analogous NT statements.⁹ The verb "to dwell" denotes permanent habitation as opposed to sojourning, pitching a tent, or an occasional visit. The "heart" is in biblical diction man's total identity and existence described under the aspect of his vitality, intelligence, will, decision.¹¹ In the OT and NT the bowels rather than the heart are the seat of emotion. When in 2 Cor 6:11–12 Paul intends to speak of the emotive capacity of the heart he adds a

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

reference to “bowels” (or “compassion”). More frequently he mentions joy or sorrow without locating them in the “heart.” The term “heart” can also denote an essential trait of human existence hidden to the eye; Paul is as much aware as OT writers that not everything human is apparent on the surface. In Eph 3:17 he may have in mind not only Christ’s rulership over man’s reason, will, and decision, but also the hidden quality of a Christian’s existence. It is far from evident to every onlooker that Christ fills and directs the saints. According to Acts 2 those inspired were considered drunk. Bultmann defines the “heart” in this special sense as “the interior in contrast to the exterior, the real self in contrast to what a man appears to be.” However, this possible connotation of the term “heart” is hardly reason enough to consider the “heart” and the “inner man” synonyms.¹⁴ If this were so, 3:16–17 would suggest that around Christ, the “indwelling” core, first the inner man, then the outer man, then perhaps the church, the earth, and the heavens form concentric circles. Nowhere in any Pauline letter is such a notion expressed, and 3:16–17 far from affirms it unambiguously. Unlike later Gnostics Paul did not forge a *Weltanschauung* and force it upon his readers. Schlier sees a parallel to 3:17 in a Mandaeen text and uses it to attribute Christ’s indwelling to baptism. But the parallel is too remote to make his suggestion persuasive.

Stand firm on the root and foundation of love. Lit. “in love being rooted and founded.” The reference to “love” may belong to the preceding statement;¹⁶ “love,” together with “faith,” would then be the manner in which, and the means by which, Christ inhabits the heart. In this case vs. 17 would say nothing at all about the soil and ground in which the saints are “rooted and founded.” In the Colossian parallels, however, there is always a reference to such a ground. Therefore, it is probable that in Eph 3:17 love is designated as the soil upon which the seedling can grow. The same love is also the ground upon which the building is to be constructed. Yet there is still another possibility: style-conscious ancient writers were less afraid than are modern authors to mix diverse metaphors,¹⁹ and Paul appears not to have felt at all restricted in this regard. Thus he may have added to the two combined images of “rooting” and “founding,” or planting and building, a third picture, i.e. a reference to the father-child, or the bridegroom-bride relationship. Most likely in 3:17 as well as in 4:16 no other “love” is in Paul’s mind than that of God and Christ which is reflected in man’s love of God and his neighbor. God’s and man’s love are not alternatives in the interpretation of these verses.

The whole clause, lit. “rooted and founded in love,” stands in relatively loose syntactical connection with the surrounding statements. So-called “absolute participles” are used in the Greek text and seem to interrupt the smooth flow of thought. The perfect participles “rooted” and “founded” fit poorly the preceding and following Greek subjunctives and infinitives that contain Paul’s several petitions. The nominative case of these participles clashes with the dative and genitive cases of the pronoun “you,” for it suits neither the indirect (dative) object “you” nor the possessive genitive (hearts) “of yours” in vss. 16–17a. In 1:18 Paul employs an accusative rather than a nominative participle for describing the subject matter of his intercession. Certainly the Greek forms “rooted” and “founded” describe the result, not the process, of rooting and founding. What is the exact meaning of these disturbing participles? It is probable that in 3:17 as much as elsewhere they possess the character and force of imperatives. Instead of a third petition, a prayer for stability, they may contain an exhortatory digression. This exhortation would concern the maintenance of an attained status, described by the perfect tenses of the Greek text. In our translation the words “stand firm on” have been added in order to convey the imperative sense related to the status, and the nouns “root” and “foundation” were chosen to express as literally as possible the meaning of the forms “rooted” and “founded” in the Greek text.

18. *May you be strong enough to grasp.* The term “grasping” belongs to the vocabulary describing a fight against a strong opponent, cf. 1:19, 6:10; strength is required to seize an opponent or to sack an acropolis. However, in 3:18 the verb “to grasp” is used in a metaphorical sense, which was at least as common as the physical: here it means to comprehend, to acknowledge a fact. Dibelius’s suggestion that this term be considered a mystical *terminus technicus* on the basis of Philip 3:12 is not convincing. Paul points out that knowledge of the full dimensions of God’s secret cannot be easily mastered; it requires a strength only God can give. According to 1 Cor 2:13–15 spiritual things are adjudicated by spiritual things only: solely “the spiritual man has a judgment on all things and is himself judged by no one.” Eph 1:18 contains a petition for the spiritual strength of insight, rather than for a mystical exclusion of reason.

the breadth, the length, the height, the depth. Lit. “what is the breadth,” etc. These terms have been understood to refer to the heavenly heritage or city, to the wisdom or love of God, to the arms of the cross and their meaning, or to other specified things. See COMMENT VI. NEB may be right to identify them with the dimensions of Christ’s love. “Love” is explicitly mentioned in the preceding and following verses.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

19. *to know the love of Christ though it surpasses knowledge.* A statement such as this is called an oxymoron by Greek philologists: Paul makes a seemingly absurd combination of opposites in order to emphasize a particular point (cf. Philip 4:7, “The peace of God surpassing all understanding”). Former statements in Ephesians on the revelation of God’s secret would exclude the affirmation, “Christ’s love surpasses God’s revelation,” for God’s revelation is complete and clear. It cannot be surpassed—its continuing spread among the Gentiles notwithstanding. God laid his heart bare when he showed that from eternity the Gentiles are included in his love and in the Messiah’s realm,²⁸ but the saints’ knowledge and understanding of the secret is still “imperfect” (1 Cor 13:12, JB). They, not revelation, still labor under imperfection.²⁹ Whatever inkling of God’s “thoughts” and “ways” men have already received, God’s counsel remains as superior to low and high theology as are the heavens above the earth (Isa 55:8–9). The Corinthians’ claim to be perfect and to possess perfect knowledge (1 Cor 1:18–2:16; 8:1–2, etc.) anticipates the claim of later Gnostic elites. But as Isa 55 and Wisdom passages such as Job 28; 38–42:6 show, long before the rise of Gnosticism there existed people and trends in need of the restriction given in I Corinthians and Eph 3:19.

May you become so perfect as to attain to the full perfection of God. Lit. “in order that you be filled into (or, toward) all the fullness of God.” Just as in 3:16, so also in 3:19 (cf. 4:12–13) the teleological and eschatological meaning of the Greek preposition “into,” or “toward” (*eis*), ought not to be allowed to disappear in the translation. While Col 1:19 and 2:9 speak of the “indwelling” of “the whole fullness of God” in Christ and the church, and describe it as an accomplished fact, it is (despite all elements of “realized eschatology”) characteristic of Ephesians to speak of “filling” as a process still going on. For people on earth, fullness is a promise and hope that has still to be realized and completed. A simple identification or conflation of God, Christ, and the church is prevented by eschatological suspension. In our translation, the verb “to attain to” was interpolated into 3:19; it may help to make the reader aware of the eschatological flavor of this verse. In order to show that God’s “fullness” and “filling” possess a qualitative and dynamic character rather than only a quantitative and spatial nature, the noun *plērōma* is in our version rendered by “perfection,” and the verb *plēroō* by “to make perfect.” Gaugler denounces versions that speak of “perfection”; he considers them “old” and “insufficient.” Yet the cultic OT meaning of this term and the function of “filling” ascribed to Christ in his relation to the church and all things (1:23; 4:10) require a translation which reveals rather than hides the mode in which God’s presence, glory, and power operate. In OT diction an ordained priest assigned to one of the cultic tasks “fills his hands” or has his hands “filled.” This “filling” signifies authority to perform a holy office. Eph 3:19 may intend to say that the saints shall be the sanctuary of God filled by his glory; cf. 2:21–22. The variant reading that the whole fullness of God be filled, suggests that some contribution to God may be made through man’s knowledge. Indeed the acquisition of a people as God’s property and his glorification by them contribute to his glory (1:6, 11, etc.); God is not an unmoved mover. But the study of the terms “fullness” and “to fill” made in the context of 1:23 has shown that in the Bible these terms do not denote the complementation or implementation of God. God’s glory is radiated when man is made his perfect “image” (cf. Gen 1:26–27; Col 3:10). This God and his glory “create” a “resplendent” (lit. “glorious”) partner of Christ (Eph 2:15; 5:27), yet God’s glory is not created by the human partner. Rather it is acknowledged and reflected.

20–21. *To him who ... is able ... for ever and ever.* The last two verses of Eph 3 make use of a liturgical pattern which is probably not Paul’s own creation. The specific wording of 3:20–21, however, may still be Paul’s.

20. *who ... is able.* The ability mentioned here is distinct from mere potential, and denotes not the possibility but the power to carry something out. Therefore the omnipotence shown in specific actions, and not the idea of an omnipotent being, is described.

by the power exerted in us. In the Greek text, the verb translated by “exerted” may be in the middle rather than the passive form. The two forms are indistinguishable in the Greek present tense. Most versions and commentaries reproduce the sense of the middle, translating “the power which is at work,” or “which operates in us,” and thus make “the power” appear to be a relatively free agent. But it is more probable that the text speaks of the Holy Spirit by which God himself works effectively and irresistibly in the saints. Because of this power exerted in man, God is praised as omnipotent. The Greek text of 3:20 contains a play on words which cannot be reproduced in English: The term “by the power” (*kata dynamin*) takes up the verb rendered by “who is able” (*tō dynamenō*). The wordplay helps justify the minority’s interpretation, “exerted.”

to outdo superabundantly all that we ask or imagine. This statement buttresses our NOTE on the oxymoron in 3:19. The limited knowledge mentioned there includes the limitation of man’s will, desire, prayer, and performance. Such double-compounds as “superabundantly” are favorites with Paul.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

21. *Glory to him in the church and in the Messiah Jesus.* This statement is puzzling and hard to explain for two reasons. Two widely different terms: “the church” and “the Messiah” are accorded parallel, if not equal, dignity. Both are mentioned in the same place as the locus or the means of God’s glorification—as if no sharp distinction were made elsewhere between the people of God and their head! The sequence of the terms “in the church” and “in the Messiah Jesus” is also startling. Why is the Messiah not mentioned before his people? Unequivocal readings of 3:21 found in third-, fourth-, and fifth-century MSS (the Ch. Beatty Papyrus and the Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Ephraemi) follow this perplexing coordination and sequence. However, the variant readings of the Koine Group, the ninth-century Codices Angelicus and Porfirianus, and other MSS as well as Oecumenius and Theophylact omit the conjunction “and” between “the church” and “the Messiah.” They suggest the version, “in the church through Christ.”⁴² The first script of the sixth-century Codex Claramontanus, the ninth-century Boernerianus, also Ambrosiaster and other fathers, reverse the order of “the church” and “Christ.” The Vulgate, by inserting a comma after “the church,” perhaps intends to indicate that temporal praise is given to God “in the church,” while eternal praise is offered “in Christ.” The reading “in the church and in the Messiah Jesus” is harder to explain than the others. Because it is the *lectio difficilior*, and because of its age and spread, it is to be preferred to the variants contained in the other groups, and to the version of the Vulgate, which look distinctly like well-meant simplifications. Indeed, even the oldest reading of 3:21 can be shown to harmonize with Pauline teaching. In 2 Thess 1:12 and Philip 1:11 (cf. Eph 1:6, 12, 14) Paul speaks of God’s glorification in the church. In Eph 4:4–6 Paul mentions the church first because he starts from the actual locus of God’s praise. Then he adds a reference to the Messiah Jesus to designate the basis of that praise. The existence and manifestation of God’s glory *in the church* is and remains dependent upon glorification of God through the Son. The secret of God is indeed now known only to the church, but it was revealed in Christ for the benefit of the whole world. In the confessional summary of Eph 4 the author follows the same procedure as in 3:21; he mentions what is most important at the end, not at the beginning.

from generation to generation, for ever and ever. Lit. “into all generations of the aeon of the aeons.” Nowhere in the LXX or the NT is exactly the same formulation found.⁴⁵ It is most unlikely that in Eph 3:21 the nouns “generation” and “aeon” possess the same angelic or demonic meaning which they may have in 2:7, 3:5, 9. Here, as in most pre-Gnostic documents, they denote time spans, eventually eternity. The liturgical formulation appears not to allude to quasi-personal “powers” but makes it possible that here and elsewhere in Ephesians the same nouns have a primarily temporal meaning. Several interpreters oppose the translation “for ever and ever,” or a similar version, and see in the formula “the aeon [singular!] of the aeons” a specific message—as though the author wanted to say: the present aeon comprehends all former generations and periods into one; or, the present is the beginning of the eternal (perpetual) aeon. Any reference to a still future aeon (cf. 1:21) or to aeons still coming (2:7) would in this case detract from the presence of the eternity that is confessed in the church’s Christological doxology. However, since in analogous doxologies (see LXX 1 Esdras 4:38; Theod. Dan 7:18) the same phrase, “the aeon of the aeons,” is found, it need not be considered a typically Christian coinage and ought not to be overloaded with secret meanings.

Amen. The addition of the “Amen” by the same person who has pronounced the prayer, doxology, or benediction is strange to synagogal practice but is found several times in Pauline writings. It cannot be stated with certainty whether this addition has to do with a practice of Jesus who, according to the canonical Gospels, was wont to open given statements with a single or double “Amen.” However, when the apostle himself says the “Amen” he apparently speaks as a spokesman of the congregation addressed—as will be explained further in COMMENT II.

COMMENTS I–VI ON 3:14–21

I. Structure and Summary

Eph 3:14–21 contains three clearly distinguishable parts. (a) Verses 14–15 begin by describing the mode of Paul’s prayer, but turn immediately to a description of the fatherly majesty of him to whom Paul lifts his voice. (b) Verses 16–19 contain the prayer itself. It is a prayer for the work of the Spirit, the presence of Christ, and manifestation of God’s glory in the saints. Above all it asks for strength and knowledge. It seems to be composed of three petitions, followed by comments on the first and the second, with a parenthetical exhortation separating the two. Or Paul may first pronounce three petitions and then enumerate three hoped-for consequences of God’s hearing the prayer. The various structural possibilities have been discussed in the NOTE on vss. 16–19. Characteristic of Paul’s prayer is the combination of trinitarian theological elements with a passionate concern for the faith, comprehension, growth of

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

each of the saints, and the intimate connection of certainty, humility, and hope. The man who was able to put himself as much into the foreground as 1:15; 3:1, 13; 4:1 indicate, was also so totally immersed in the service of God and the Spiritual welfare of the saints that he could forget himself completely: vss. 16–19 are strictly intercessory. Paul does not ask for a concession of God in favor of the saints. He petitions for the manifestation of God's very essence. If God is true to himself, to his glory, then he will hear Paul's prayer and be good to the saints. (c) Verses 20–21 utter such praise of God as befits the congregation. Just as Paul admitted the limits of human knowledge and yet asked for more, so he now acknowledges the insufficiency of human prayer and confesses the conviction that God will grant all that is necessary, for his own eternal glory's sake.

E. Haupt called this passage the highlight of Ephesians. Mitton considered it one of the gems of the epistle. The same may be said of John 17 in the context of the whole Fourth Gospel: the reader is shown that praying stands above all reasoning, even theological.

II. Kneeling

The OT as a whole and the writers and redactors of its individual parts attest to a rich variety of Israelite forms of worship. No one stance, attitude, or mode of prayer appears to have been required, recommended, or accepted at the expense of others. Amazing liberty and spontaneity prevailed in Israel's history and cult. All the more surprising is the fact that OT literature contains only a few references to prayers spoken by persons on their knees. Perhaps only in exceptional cases did individuals or the whole congregation kneel down for prayer. It may well be that for a long time genuflection was considered an act strange to the ritual of a Yahweh sanctuary, if not also to a court in Israel. Kneeling is attributed to the priests and adherents of Baal, but the remnant of Israel who refused Baal worship seemed to ignore the form of that worship together with its object. To emphasize the universal role of the Lord, the OT and Paul occasionally point out that the Lord will be revered by adoration offered by men on their knees. When Luke mentions that Jesus, Stephen, Paul, or the congregation was kneeling, and when Mark reports on the soldiers mock-worshipping Jesus, they use a Latinism.⁵² Thus kneeling looks more like a non-Israelite form of prayer than a genuinely Hebrew tradition. A story as rich in Hebrew colors as that of the Prodigal Son does not mention genuflection; both the Pharisee and the publican are *standing* in the temple while they offer their prayers (Luke 18:11, 13).

In Romans, Philippians, and Ephesians Paul uses terminology which is employed twice in the LXX for kneeling Gentiles, and once for the attitude of the congregation assembled in the temple. **Only in Eph 3:14 does he mention that he himself is kneeling in prayer.** Why should he draw attention to this in this particular letter? Perhaps because Ephesians was addressed exclusively to Gentile-born readers. Paul may have intended to show the former Gentiles how much he had "become like them" (Gal 4:12). "To those without the law [I have become] like one without the law, not as a trespasser of God's law, but bound by the law of the Messiah" (1 Cor 9:21). By assuming or endorsing an originally pagan form of worship, Paul gave vivid testimony to the unification of Jews, Gentiles, and the whole world (cf. Eph 1:10, 22–23, etc.). Indeed, according to a prophetic oracle this form of worship was expected to be universally adopted by all powers in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (Philip 2:10–11). Certainly it was adopted by some Jews several centuries before the NT was written (1 Chron 29:20; Dan 6:10).

The specific form of kneeling presupposed by Paul was most likely different from that used today in western churches. When Jesus "bent his knees" to pray in Gethsemane (Luke 22:41), he, according to Matt 26:39, "fell upon his face," and, following Mark 14:35, "fell upon the earth." 1 Chron 29:20 and Mark 15:19 identify "bending of the knees" and "approaching in dog-like fashion." In Paul's time Hellenistic rulers, creditors, masters, and on occasion the Lord Jesus, but also several gods or deities, even Satan and devilish beings, were worshiped in this manner. Bending one's knees was the initial step in approaching the person worshiped; further movements included embracing his feet and/or kissing the hem of his garment or the ground. It is rather unusual that 1 Kings 8:54 assumes Solomon was kneeling "with hands outstretched to heaven." According to 1 Kings 8:22, Solomon "stood" when he prayed this way. In Eph 3:14 Paul is most likely thinking of the crouching position, that is, of utter humiliation before God.

III. The Father and the Families

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Eph 3:14–15 makes amazing use of the term “father.” Also, a reference occurs here to “families in heaven and on earth” which is unique in the NT. Mention of the father and of families is combined with the concept of “naming.” Each of these three terms, but also the relevance of their combination, requires special discussion.

A. The Father

There are at least three ways to explain the absolute term, “The Father.”

1. The title “Father” may be derived from the address, “Abba,” “Father” (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). In this case it is equivalent to “our Father,”⁵⁶ and God is called upon as the Father of the Jews and Christians who are his beloved and faithful children and are joined together in one house, that is, the church (2:13–22). This narrow interpretation clearly contradicts the contents of Eph 3:14–15.

2. The term “Father” may possess a much wider sense. He who is called in Ephesians the “one God and Father of all, over all, through all, and in all” (4:6) or, elsewhere, the “Father of the lights” (James 1:17) and the “Father of the spirits” (Heb 12:9) is obviously the Father also of men and power who do not, or do not yet, believe in him. Thus the term “father” may possess a cosmic significance. This meaning need not imply that in a literal or metaphorical way creation is understood as an act of physical procreation by God. For in biblical books the physical aspect of fatherhood is but one of many essential elements, and perhaps not the dominant characteristic. A man becomes “father” or is called “father” when he adopts a foreign-born person, when he fills a legally superior or honorary position (e.g. as a leader), or when he is considered a prototype. When Greek thinkers designated time or war as the “father of all things” they may have extended and spiritualized a relationship which originally was understood as a physical bond only. However, in biblical language the terms “father” and “son” denote basically an economic, legal, moral, educational or religious relationship which may or may not be based on common blood. Philo and Josephus use the nouns “father” and “creator” as equivalents.⁵⁸ Not only the unity of Israel or of mankind, but also of the whole universe is guaranteed by the unwavering direction, care, and dominion exerted over all things by the one God, the Father. Classic Greek writers, Stoics, members of the Mystery Cults, and later also the Gnostics spoke of spiritual fathers or of a cosmic “Father of all.” Since in Eph 3:15 it is explicitly stated that all families “in heaven and on earth” are affected by God’s fatherhood, a cosmic understanding of the term “father” is required by the context of 3:14.

3. A widespread and fairly well-attested variant reading excludes neither of the two foregoing expositions, but adds to them a formula which belongs to indisputable Pauline tradition. The variant reads, “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The attribute “of our Lord Jesus Christ” anticipates the trinitarian tenor of 3:14–19 and brings vs. 14 into harmony with the opening formula of Paul’s epistles (1:3; 2 Cor 1:3, etc.). It also seems to solve an enigma of 3:15: not from God the Father immediately, but from or after Jesus Christ the families in heaven and upon earth take their name. However, the superior MS attestation to the shorter reading, the Greek play on the words, “Father-family,” in vss. 14–15, and the tendency of the variant to simplify, if not eliminate, a unique and disturbing element of vs. 14—these facts advise against acceptance of the variant reading. Once again the more difficult text is to be heeded in its own right.

Preference is probably to be given to the second of the three expositions sketched. If scholarly terms contribute to understanding Paul at all, it must be stated that the Cosmic Christology of 1:4–23 and the Cosmic Ecclesiology of 2:7, 10; 3:10, are crowned by a Cosmic Theology or Patrology in 3:14–15. In the following two sections evidence for or against this hypothesis will have to be weighed.

B. The Families

As a translation of several different Hebrew terms, the LXX frequently uses the word “family” (*patriā*) to denote Jewish groups “narrower than a tribe, wider than a house.” Sometimes reference is made to the “families of the earth” or the “families of the Gentiles,” or the term “the nations of the earth” substitutes as a synonym.⁶⁵ In the NT the noun “family” occurs only in Luke-Acts⁶⁶ and in Ephesians. If by the term “each family in heaven and upon earth” (Eph 3:15) the Jews and the Gentiles are meant, then neither mankind as a whole nor the church in particular is depicted as an amorphous mass. Rather both groups, separately or in combination within the church, are seen as societies with certain structures—even the structures of “families.” The created world does not only consist of men and things; to its substance belong some systems, structures, and institutions. He who names these powers intends

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

to include “all things” (*ta panta*) under their sway. In COMMENT V on 1:15–23 it was shown how (and why) the term “all things” is sometimes replaced by a reference to principalities and powers. When Paul speaks of families “in heaven and upon earth” (3:15) he is certainly not thinking only of Jewish and Gentile persons and groups. The invisible angelic or demonic powers of history, procreation or dependence, tradition and law; the influence of geographical locations, of opportunities offered in a given period, of exploits, of defeats; perhaps also the magic of nationalism and a hundred other isms, or of naked nihilistic power or tyrannical ideologies may be in the apostle’s mind. There is not one among them that has not been idolized and misused. Dibelius and Schlier especially have emphasized that the “families in heaven” mentioned in 3:15 mean angels corresponding to the principalities and powers, aeons and generations to which Ephesians referred earlier. Eph 3:15 as the analogy of Eph 4:6 may proclaim that God himself is their originator and sustainer. They are not created by, and freely at the disposition of, a deity or fate opposed to God (as assumed in later Gnosticism).

Three other interpretations are to be mentioned only in passing:

1. If it is presupposed that 3:15 contains the same grammatical mistake as 2:21, i.e. the omission of the article before the noun qualified by *pās* (“each,” “all,” or “whole”), then 3:15 can be translated with the American Version as referring to the one “whole” family that embraces heaven and earth. But the Greek text of all MSS speaks, correctly translated, of “each family,” not of “the whole family.” The emotionally appealing notion of a single family (comprehending angels, demons, all things, and all men under the fatherhood of God) is too weakly supported if it rests solely upon the assumption of a grammatical error in Eph 3:15.

2. C. L. Mitton refers to 2:21 for another purpose. Assuming that the author of Ephesians did not violate sound grammar in that verse but rather intended to speak—the idea of one church and church unity notwithstanding—of individual local congregations, he suggests that in 3:15 “family” means local congregation. The families “in heaven” are identified by Mitton either with the members of the church that have already passed out of earthly hardship—“one of the first examples of the line of thought which led to the doctrine of the Church as both triumphant and militant”—or with the guardian angels of local churches mentioned in Rev 2–3. The name given these congregations from the common Father would then be (except for the play on words mentioned earlier), “brotherhood.” Mitton is probably right in dating the formation of such ideas toward the end of the first century. He is less convincing when he finds them already in Eph 3:15 and declares this verse irreconcilable with Pauline authorship. There is no evidence that Paul was thinking here specifically either of brotherhood, or of the perpetual survival of “house” churches or rural and urban congregations, or of the “green pastures” of heaven.

3. The idea that Paul might have in mind those two families that form the church, i.e. the Jews and the Gentiles who confess Christ, seems to have some support in all Ephesian passages which stress their unification, especially in 2:11–22. But since in the church Jews and Gentiles are “members of the same household” (2:19), and since a vertical division (“in heaven and on earth”) between them would as much contradict the message of Ephesians as would a horizontal wall of separation, this interpretation is not to be recommended.

C. The Naming

In view of the wide variety of meanings inherent in the word “to name” (see the second NOTE on 3:15), at least four interpretations appear possible:

1. The heavenly and earthly families mentioned in 3:15 have been named after God—just as indeed names of men such as Isaiah or Zedekiah, and names of angels such as Michael or Gabriel in themselves contain the name of God. The phrase “to name after” (*ek*) occurs in classical Greek (but not in LXX) and may be used in Eph 3:15 in the classical sense. However, not all men and angelic or demonic powers have been given and bear such names. Therefore this understanding is contradicted by the present tense used in 3:15: each family “takes” its name.

2. A “nomenclature” and exposition conflicting with the actual names borne by heavenly and earthly tribes or powers is avoided when the translation “fatherhood” is given preference over “family.” Then 3:15 answers an ontological and an epistemological question at the same time. God is the archetype of a father, the creator of all fatherhood; and, he bears the name “Father” in an exemplary way: the earthly concept and word “father” is formed after the precedent set by God. The ontic and noetic aspects of this etiology and their combination in an indivisible unit may well correspond to an intention of the biblical creation stories and other passages that include hermeneutical information. But since, as was stated earlier, there is no linguistic evidence available from Paul’s time

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

showing that *patriā* means an abstract “fatherhood” (*paternitas*) rather than a concrete “family,” this beautiful exposition can at best be considered a homiletical corollary to 3:15.

3. The giving of a name amounts, e.g. in the case of the twelve apostles and Peter, to the exertion of power and the conveyance of an authority which is to be recognized by man. The act of “naming” or “calling” has in Semitic and other cultures more than just a nominal or descriptive meaning. It gives a person or thing identity, essence, function. He over whom God’s name is called out is put under God’s protection and judgment,⁷⁴ just as the naming of animals by man is synonymous with man’s dominion over them. Perhaps the term “instituted by God” (Rom 13:1–2) is equivalent to “named ... from God.” Eph 3:15 shows that Paul does not prostrate himself before one of the many gods and lords called upon (or, with RSV, “so-called gods ...”) “in heaven and upon earth” but before the one God who is “God of gods,” “King of kings,” “Lord of lords,” “the King, the Lord of hosts,” “the God and Father” “over, through, in all.”⁷⁶ A monotheistic creedal formulation is coined or used by Paul. The history of Israel in OT times demonstrates that even before “the Hellenistic synagogue” was founded, sufficient reasons existed to use such formulae. The doxological character of 3:15 is a warning against shifting attention away from God himself to visible and invisible powers that do not deserve adoration. Though this interpretation makes good sense, it is not beyond doubt. For it is not certain whether “named ... from God” can really be identified with “named by God,” or “instituted by God,” or, “subjugated under God”—or whether it means, as the parallel of 1 Cor 8:5 would suggest, “named by men,” i.e. falsely attributed divine honor. The Greek wording is not yet sufficiently elucidated to permit a clear decision.

4. All preceding sections of Ephesians have in one way or another pointed out that God rules not only over Israel but also over the Gentiles and all the powers that be. Specifically the term “all families” was in Gen 12 and in the Psalms understood to denote the Gentiles. In turn, these Gentiles are always described as nations who are subject to their gods. Therefore it is possible that “each family in heaven and on earth,” while not excluding Israel, denotes specifically the Gentiles, including the structures and supposed deities to whom they were subject. In this case Eph 3:15 complements 3:14. According to 3:14 Paul adopted a predominantly pagan form of prayer; he was praying with and for the Gentiles. In 3:15 he gives the reason for this liberty: by the revelation and ministry described in 3:2–13 (which includes baptism) God has put his name upon the Gentile world. His name, “Father,” was reflected already in the nomenclature “sons of God,” attributed to heavenly beings (Gen 6:2). Now it will be exalted by the “adoption” of Gentiles into God’s house (Gal 3–4; Rom 8), and by the submission of all principalities and powers (Eph 1:19–23). Paul worships God in the extraordinary form of crouching before him because he has to give thanks for the revolutionary, universal manifestation of God’s power and love (cf. Dan 6).

Each of the interpretations above can be questioned, but none can simply be ruled out. Until new materials or deeper reflection award priority to one of them or to an alternative not yet mentioned, they have to be left standing as complementary. Eph 3:15 may serve as an example that there are multiple literal senses of certain biblical passages, just as is the case, e.g. in the parables of Jesus.

IV. Spiritual Anthropology

Eph 3:16–19 deals with man’s inner life. Certainly the apostle has touched upon man’s personal hope, faith, and love earlier in the epistle. He has mentioned forgiveness, life from the dead, peace, access to God. He has spoken of knowledge and comprehension, also of works to be done and a mission to be carried out. What he wrote of himself, his history, his ministry, his prayer, his suffering, has demonstrated that the gospel does not destroy personality, the life of the soul, or one’s individual responsibility. Still, in the first two chapters of Ephesians the social character of the gospel has been emphasized more strongly than the impact of the good news upon the individual believer. In other epistles the accents appear reversed; a personal element prevails though the social one is never completely missing. The former is epitomized by Rom 7:24, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”; the latter, e.g. by Rom 12:5, “We, though many, are one body in Christ.” In Ephesians the gospel’s nucleus, its internal moving power, and its external manifestation consist of the gathering of Jews and Gentiles into one flock, of the peace made between both groups, of their common worship and its effect upon the whole world. The church rather than the individual is called a new “creation” and a “new man.”⁸⁰ Those political, ideological, or religious movements and organizations in which the individual is more or less completely lost in the community appear to have a parallel, or competition, in the message of Ephesians. The communal, i.e. ecclesiastical, character of the message of Ephesians is readily recognized by Roman, Anglican, and Presbyterian “high-church” theologians; it is

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

acknowledged for different reasons by a social (if not Marxist) interpretation of Ephesians; and it is conceded and scornfully evaluated by those who consider Ephesians a product of “early Catholicism.”⁸²

However, together with certain elements of Eph 1–3, vs. 3:16–19 provide a necessary correction. The gospel proclaimed in Ephesians is distinct from many variants of secular and religious collectivism by the vital concern shown for the enrichment, strength, stability, love, knowledge, growth, and perfection of each member of the community and, virtually, of every man. If this concern is honest and adequate, and if it does justice to the condition and disposition, the yearning and trembling, the confinement and the outreach of individual man and his “soul,” then this epistle contains a vital contribution to the problem of “community and personality.” It does not leave a complete void at the point where personal life, experience, understanding, and counseling are at stake—even in those realms focused upon by the research of anthropology, psychology, and psychiatry.

Two questions may be posed in order to study the possible relevance of Eph 3:16–19 for these fields. (a) Does the word “mysticism” aptly describe the antidote supplied by this passage (or other texts of the epistle) against sheer collectivism? (b) Do these verses propose a general anthropology as a precondition of conversion and faith, or do they contain traces of a specific anthropology and psychology on the ground of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Both questions will be treated separately.

A. Mysticism?

Among the doctrines and individual assertions that have contributed to labeling Paul’s theology “mystical,” the following are outstanding:

1. Many or all clauses containing the formulae “in Christ” and “Christ in me” or “in you.”
2. Paul’s doctrine of “dying” and “rising with Christ,” his teaching on baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and his concept of union with (or in) Christ.
3. Utterances such as, “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me ...”; “I worked harder ... though it was not I but the grace of God that is with me ...”; “God revealed it to us through the Spirit.” Cf. the various references to his knowledge, to his visions, and to revelation received.⁸⁷
4. An outright mystical statement which crowns all evidence: “In everything and all things I am initiated” (*memyēmai*, Philip 4:12).

Though a “God-mysticism” that is traceable also in Jewish writings may be discerned within the distinctly Christian (Pauline and Johannine) “Christ-mysticism” and “Spirit-mysticism,” the distinction of these several “mysticisms” contributes little to an understanding of Paul. In his theology the presence of God and the working of his grace cannot be separated from the indwelling of Christ and the work of the Spirit in man. Nor is a differentiation advisable between individual (personal) and church (collective) mysticism. Paul understands all experiences pertaining to himself as relevant to the public proclamation and spread of the gospel. Certainly he is aware of privileges granted to him by revelation and of the uniqueness of the apostolic ministry, but he treats his commission and his very existence as a servant of Christ as typical of the destiny of the whole congregation. And this is not enough: things concerning him concern the whole world; see e.g. Gal 6:14. He expects that God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit will be as near the church, and that the church in turn will be as near and dear to God, as God is to him and he to God. The church, in turn, is the showpiece of God’s will regarding the world (Eph 2:7, 3:10). Therefore, the problem of a possible church mysticism does not require separate consideration. The question is essential, however, whether “mysticism” is in any sense a fitting explanation of, and label for, Paul’s religion, and a key to his anthropology.

If the term mysticism is used to point to one of the following features, it may serve a good purpose: (1) something greater is at work than a power that can be defined by human reason and controlled by an enlightened intellect; (2) God is nearer and more mysteriously at work than cultic manipulations can achieve or express; (3) man is judged and determined by deeds of God that defy control and repetition by laboratory, psychological, or sociological methods. If one or several of these tenets is meant by “mysticism,” then this concept conveys no more than a certain negative information on Paul’s thought, experience, and teaching. But, frequently the concept “mysticism,” is meant to give a positive and substantial description of given facts and methods:

1. In popular diction mysticism is sometimes bluntly, either with appreciation or depreciation, identified with religion. Whoever relies upon the impact and success of an extraordinary experience, mood, or destiny rather than

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

upon the dictates of logic, natural science, history, ethics, etc., may be called a mystic. The experience of any and each *mysterium tremendum* may be ascribed to mysticism.

2. Or, mysticism is the reaction of certain religious people against the piety of others. It seeks to replace the rigorous demands of prophetic zeal and tradition as well as the rule of organized (priestly) religion. It upholds the right of the individual to possess an immediate relationship to the deity (viz. to the ground of being), and it refuses to submit itself to the verbalization, universalization, moralization, organization, and intolerance of formalized religion. Individualism, pantheism or panentheism (as opposed to the notion of a personal God); lack of concern for any history except the soul's; rejection of dogmatic and legalistic formulations; predilection for negative, if not paradoxical statements on the deity and on man; emphasis upon the unspeakable and unmanageable; glorification of man's passivity; concentration upon an inner circle of initiates and imitators; practice of paralogical techniques—such are the characteristics of mystic groups and individuals. Prayer, silence, intuition, ecstasy, aloofness, or asceticism are among their most sacred tenets and conspicuous marks.

3. Or, mysticism seeks to overcome tragic divisions by realizing the idea of oneness, by seeking means of unification, and by expressing the hidden unity of all things. The underlying belief in the unity of all with the deity can be based upon the conviction that the immeasurable deity is present in the confines of the finite. It may lead to the demand, "Escape from finitude!" and to the promise of a transfer into the realm of transcendence. Assured of the ascension of the soul, a mystic can stand the torments of the present world. Even when the dualistic tension between the carnal and the spiritual worlds appears to become unbearable, and when the seeming contradiction between immanentism and transcendentalism defies any explanation or mitigation, the idea of incarnation (understood as a perpetual process) offers relief and a solution to the insoluble problem. The celebration of the One who fills all by his omnipresence can be amalgamated and expressed in a confidence founded upon individual experience, self-knowledge, rebirth, transformation, and deification.

Scholarly definitions of mysticism in general and the selection of its salient points seldom agree. There is a corresponding variety of reasons why Paul was called a mystic. Jewish and Greek mysticisms were jointly or alternatively considered precedents of Paul's thought and language. Sacramental mysticism was combined with, or distinguished from, the mysticism of conversion to God and conversation with God. Active or passive, objective or subjective elements of Paul's mysticism were moved into the foreground. While it is undeniable that Paul uses formulations that resemble pagan or Jewish diction, the distinctly prophetic and doctrinal tone of most of his writings gives little encouragement to calling his total theology mystical. E.g. in Gal 2:16–20; Philip 3:6–14; Rom 8:9–18, mystical, narrative, and juridical diction are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate from Paul's prophetic and historical theology of revelation a distinct, a historical, and mystical system of thought in which the identification of God and man formed the center. Paul did not say and could never have said to God, to the Messiah, or to the Holy Spirit, "You are I and I am you."⁹³ Paul's theology is in every aspect related to Christ crucified and risen—rather than to a transhistorical deity that is either a captive of its transcendence or trapped by its immanence in the universe. Union with Christ is not taught at the expense of respect for the difference between God and man, Christ and the saints, the Spirit and the people of God. There is no trace of man's deification or of *fruitio Dei* in beatific vision. Instead of being an escape from history, salvation means to enter "an objective event that is going on" (Dibelius): it means to be sent out with a mission into the world and to hurry forward toward a goal that is not yet reached. Though Paul was given knowledge, auditions, and visions, and though he experienced ecstasy, he played down and belittled these moments (1 Cor 13:1–3; 14:18–19; 2 Cor 12:2–4, 9). All that he says about the personal God's righteous judgment, about the beginning of the new aeon in the midst of history, about mission, action, and obedience, and all his concern for the most diverse congregations, for their hope, and for their unfinished search for faith and growth in perfection, distinguish his theology from the esoteric, perfectionistic, timeless, and identification-happy traits of mysticism. In short, all the mystical elements or parallels that appear in his life and writings are under the safe control of historical and practical, if not pragmatic, arguments.

Therefore the term mysticism is either too vague or outright misleading as a description of Paul's piety and theology. It is an equally improper way to characterize the basis of his anthropology.

B. Humanity by Partnership

Just as the dwelling of God in his holy temple was the highlight of Paul's doctrine of the church (2:22), so the inhabitation of Christ in each of the saints is decisive for his anthropology (3:17). By joining Jews and Gentiles

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

together in peace and by leading them to the Father, Jesus Christ founded the church. By dwelling in the hearts of the saints he keeps the church and its members alive and makes them grow from him and toward him (cf. 4:15–16). By using the metaphors of “head,” “body,” and “filling,” Paul describes the dominion and care exerted by Christ over his body. Terms denoting inhabitation and filling are used to designate God’s presence in the church and the perfection to which he leads her members (2:22, 3:19). Eph 3:17 and the supposedly mystical passages quoted in the preceding section reveal how Jesus Christ, the head, in carrying out the ministry entrusted to him, is not only ruler of the cosmos and the church, but also a gift of God to individual man. Jesus Christ is proclaimed as being present not only for man and amongst men, but also *in* man.

Does there exist in man a place, a potential or a function that is equipped to form an entryway and a domicile for Christ? Among modern scholars R. Bultmann has shown the greatest concern for Paul’s anthropology and has come out with the most serious results elaborating upon it. His findings are: even before God reveals himself to man and before faith is born, man is so constituted that he can be reached and transformed by a power outside himself. The potential for dialogue is innate in man and demonstrates his openness to the influence of a transcendental power. Among the criticisms uttered against this picture of Pauline anthropology is the charge of individualism.⁹⁸ If Bultmann were right, Paul would consider every person perfectly constituted in himself, a particle in an amorphous collective, ultimately alone with himself and a transcendent power. Even if man’s openness and disposition for experience from beyond prevents him from being simply autonomous or self-supporting, he is yet depicted as being in himself as complete as a radio set, equipped with all necessary mechanisms for action and reaction, including a powerful antenna for receiving signals from the outer world. Revelation, the gospel, decisions of obedience and faith may activate and perfect his potentials, but they inform, form, or reform his humanity and do not exert a creative and constitutive power. Man as depicted by Bultmann possesses a humanity that is independent of God. He seems to be fully human apart from God’s revelation, the creation in Christ, the word addressed to him, and the response evoked. (Therefore the first part of Bultmann’s reconstruction of Paul’s doctrine is called “Man Prior to the Revelation of Faith.”)

Is this view supported by Eph 3:16–19? Whether or not Ephesians is accepted as authentically Pauline, this passage will either support or call into question Bultmann’s anthropology. While other Pauline texts offer their own criteria for a critical assessment of the picture just sketched, the special contribution of Eph 3 is just as important. What is meant by the “inner man,” and what does Paul expect to happen to him or through him?

The key words of 3:16 have been translated in various ways. JB has: “for your inner self to grow strong”; NEB: “strength and power ... in your inner being”; RSV: “strengthened with might in the inner man”; NTTEV: “power ... to be strong in your inner selves”; Phillips: “strength of ... inner reinforcement.”

A linguistic observation, classical Greek and Hellenistic parallels, and the logic of Paul’s argument appear to favor such versions and a corresponding exposition:

1. In Hellenistic Greek, and therefore in the NT, too, the local preposition “in” (*en* with following dative) is frequently replaced by “into” (*eis* with accusative). Therefore our translation, “fortified with power [to grow] toward the inner man” may overemphasize a literal meaning of the preposition *eis* (into, toward) which need not have been in the mind of the author of Ephesians.

2. Though the pre-history of the term “inner man” is still “not perspicuous,” some interpreters¹⁰³ believe that its origin must be traced to Platonic thought. They define the “inner man” as a thinking, morally disposed being; as the higher, moral, and rational nature of man as distinct from his baser fleshly attributes; as the reason which in essence, constitution, and function harmonizes with the divine law; or as humanity in its godward, immortal dimension. They do admit that in Pauline theology there is no human being or nature left unharmed by Adam’s fall. Therefore it is conceded that at least in 2 Cor 4:16, though perhaps not in Rom 7:22, the meaning of the term has been slightly changed by Paul: even the “inner man” must be renewed day by day. Paul cannot be credited with belief in an undefined good core in man—otherwise the devastating statements made about man’s “mind” in Rom 1:20 ff., also in Eph 4:17 (cf. 23) cannot be taken at their face value and their intent is belied. Calvin indeed identifies the inner man with man’s *anima* (“soul”)—but he does not add a statement saying that the soul is *naturaliter christiana*. Thus the interpreters who believe that Paul took over a pagan term make it clear that under Paul’s hands its pagan meaning was either lost or so altered that the original dualistic anthropological sense is no longer in the foreground.

3. It appears to make good sense that an inner self of man is strengthened in order to withstand the obstruction coming from that other self which (in the very context of two Pauline utterances on the inner man) is denoted by

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

the nouns “my members,” “this body of death,” “the outward man.” The inner man “enjoys God’s law” and is also called “my mind”; the other man follows “another law,” i.e. the “law of sin” or “flesh.” The first determines the “willing,” the second the “performing” (Rom 7:14–24). In 2 Cor 4:16 the apostle speaks correspondingly of the “inner” man who is “renewed day by day” while the “outer man is perishing.” The first may also be identified with “the light” or the “Spirit of faith” at work in those created anew by God, the second is in this case characterized by the “earthly tent” that will be destroyed, or by the “flesh and blood” that cannot inherit God’s kingdom. The former is called a “vessel” and it is “visible,” the second is a “treasure” which is “invisible” (2 Cor 4:7, 18). One is public, the other is still “hidden” (Rom 2:28–29; cf. 1 Peter 3:3–4). The idea that something inside man that may be called “inner man” should be strengthened or renewed is certainly compatible with Paul’s teaching.

But four other arguments also deserve consideration:

4. Not all NT authors exercise the prerogative of replacing *en* (in) by *eis* (into). Matthew and the author of Revelation never do so, and nowhere in the NT letters, except the ending of 1 Peter (5:12), is there a clear example of this exchange. Would Paul (or an imitator of the apostle) have yielded to sloppy (Koine) grammar just in Eph 3:16? Perhaps he did. But just the fact that here *eis* (into) with accusative may perhaps have the meaning of *en* (in) with the dative does not provide a solid enough basis for developing a doctrine of man. Actually the preposition *eis* occurs frequently in Ephesians and has a pronounced teleological and eschatological meaning. As long as an eschatological interpretation of 3:16 makes any good sense, it is preferable to the translations quoted above. The danger of substituting an immanent process of growth (e.g. psycho-dynamics) for an eschatological event is then avoided. The Greek text says nothing of a strengthening “of” the “inner man,” or of a fortification that takes place “in” the “inner man.” But it speaks of becoming strong, that is, of growth, “toward” him.

5. It is far from self-evident that in 2 Cor 4:16; Rom 7:22; Eph 3:16 the concept “inner man” has exactly the same sense. As observed earlier, Paul did not carry a wordbook around with him containing exact definitions of terms either picked up from his environment or coined personally. He—or if Ephesians should be unauthentic, someone imitating the master or developing his thought—may have used the words “inner man” with a unique connotation in this epistle, that is, as a title of Christ. Later in the exposition of 4:24 it will be shown that the term “new man” may equally be a designation of Christ himself. “Put on Christ ... put on the new man” (Gal 3:27; Col 3:10, etc.). In that case the words “inner man” must, by analogy with the titles Messiah or Son of God, be capitalized.

6. The verse which follows the reference to the “inner man,” i.e. 3:17 is an interpretive comment on the foregoing rather than a new and additional thought. Paul asks for the inhabitation of Christ in the hearts of the saints. According to this verse Christians need not grope for stars or establish, out of their own resources, contacts with transcendental spheres in order to be strengthened. The movement which really interests Paul is God’s movement toward man. When the Messiah comes and dwells in the saints, then the spiritual strengthening mentioned in vs. 16 will take place. He is their strength in person. As the “breath in their nostrils” (Lam 4:20) he alone can make them strong. Therefore, “Be strong in the Lord” (6:10). When “the head fills the body,” the body becomes “full.” What is said of the church in 1:23 is applied to each saint in 3:16–19. The “strengthening” (vs. 16) and the “indwelling” (vs. 17) are described in vs. 18 by the verb “to grasp” and in vs. 19 by the verbs “to know” and (lit.) “to be filled.” Instead of describing an element or process in natural man or in “man prior to ... faith,” the context of vs. 16 speaks about the impact and effect of the Messiah’s coming. There is not only an advent of Christ among mankind and a presence of Christ in the congregation, he also comes into individual men in order to dwell there (3:17). He proves present and effective by creating faith, love, and knowledge.

7. The diction of 1:23, 4:15–16, and the Colossian parallels include physiological metaphors; see COMMENT VI A 3 and C 3 on Eph 1:15–23. It is possible that some of the terms used in 3:16–19 are technical terms of psychology contemporary to Paul. But not only psychological diction may be present: since in 4:13 and 5:22 ff. metaphors and comparisons from erotic life are included in Paul’s argument, the same may be true of 3:16–19. A “Freudian” understanding of any one of the words “fortifying,” “inner man,” “indwelling,” “grasping,” “knowing,” “filling,” “love” cannot simply be excluded. The many metaphorical expressions may be held together by the repeated mention of “love.” It is possible that at least some of them allude to sexual union. Employment of such imagery may be obnoxious to western theologians—except for Count N. L. Zinzendorf, the eighteenth-century founder of the Unity of Brethren, and other exponents of bride mysticism—but it is not strange to a rabbi such as Paul, see e.g. Rom 4:19–21. If elements of the sexual imagery are accepted, then they certainly point to the encounter of the church with another person: Christ.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

If any of these four points, not to speak of their cumulative evidence, is stronger than the three arguments previously listed, the conclusion is inevitable: the “inner man” of Eph 3:16 is Jesus Christ himself, rather than a part or function of each man’s individual self. In this case the strengthening of man does not depend upon man’s relation to himself, upon the dialogue between a higher and a baser Ego, or upon man’s openness to the influence of certain transcendental powers. Rather the intimate meeting with a specific partner who comes from outside is decisive. The partner is according to 3:16–19 Jesus Christ who through the Spirit acts in God’s power and makes man strong. Man’s self is now determined by the encounter, the conversation, the contact with Christ—and not by a dialogue which man, potentially or actually, always carried on with himself and with some impersonal transcendental force. Instead of an *esprit vitale* innate in every man there is the Holy Spirit. Instead of a superego in man, a real *alter ego* to man—Jesus Christ—is declared the essence of man’s humanity. According to Eph 3:16–19 Christology is the nerve and criterion of man’s humanity and of anthropology. A psychology or doctrine of man that antedates or overlooks the Messiah’s coming cannot occupy the key position of Christology in Paul’s thinking.

Can the contents of this passage be applied to all men? In Eph 3 Paul speaks only of the saints. This text and other anthropological statements of this epistle (e.g. in 2:1–3, 4:17–19) do not disclose Paul’s view of humanity in general. Eph 2:11–22 suggests that even those farthest away from the holy community are already included in it by the Messiah. In Rom 3:13–16 picturesque imagery from the animal world is employed for describing the abnormal, as it were inhuman, behavior of sinners. According to Ps 73:22 (cf. Dan 4:25–34), a man estranged from God is “like a beast” (rather than still a true man). In all Pauline letters the most decisive positive statements about the function of heart and soul, tongue, feet, and hands are made in descriptions of the saints or exhortations addressed to them. However, the Pauline epistles appear not to contain material from which to reconstruct a general Pauline anthropology. What the apostle says about man is said in relation to Christ and faith.

What makes the Christian a strong and genuine man is according to Eph 3:16–19 not a noble capability implanted in him at the first creation and surviving the lapse into sin, but his ongoing visitation and strengthening by God. When God’s Spirit supplies strength—and when man grows toward the Messiah who is his very life—then he will live as a true man. A one-sided dynamic prevails. Man’s humanity depends on the partner who cares for him. In being “fortified,” “in-dwelt,” “rooted,” “founded,” “made perfect,” or “filled,” man is a recipient. But the purpose and result of the onrushing and overwhelming divine dynamics does not lie in the obliteration or extinction of man as a grappling, searching, thinking, deciding, acting, growing individual being. Paul asks God to make men strong; he encourages men to stand firm; he expects that in view of the overwhelming disclosure of God’s wisdom they will not abandon clear thought but come to know and obey the love shown in Christ. He finally expects and requests for man nothing less than perfection (3:18–19). Elsewhere he calls the perfect work done by God a new creation. Because Paul relies on God’s faithfulness, Christ’s love, and the Spirit’s power, his view of man (his so-called anthropology) possesses a bright and optimistic character. Although he certainly has not forgotten what he has said in 2:1–3 about sin, death, the devil, the flesh, and their control over every man, he demonstrates in 3:16–19 that he was serious in his earlier proclamation of man’s resurrection, salvation, enthronement, new creation, reconciliation, and access to God (2:5–18). Paul attests to an unconditional miracle.

However, do not the terms “faith,” “love,” and “knowledge” which occur at prominent places in 3:16–19 qualify this miracle? It is not likely, for they are not found in conditional clauses but describe the mode in which the saints are made perfect. Each of these nouns presupposes, as it were by definition, that two persons are joined together by a solid bond: he who is faithful and has confidence, and he who is trusted; the lover and the beloved; the knower and the one acknowledged. Man’s humanity is solidly founded when in matters of creativity, authority, and majesty an irreversible order is maintained. God does more than merely initiate or recognize the constitution of true man. He alone is and remains its giver, guarantor, judge, and perfecter.

It was said earlier that according to Ephesians human existence is a social existence. The term “social” was used to denote the character and dimension of Christ’s peace work, i.e. the resurrection and reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles, those near and those far. In 2:13–18 (cf. 1:7) it became clear that peace among men is impossible without peace with God. What might be called the “vertical-social relation” to God could not be separated from the horizontal peace with fellow man. In Eph 3:16–19 Paul has given specific attention to the partnership of God and man without which human partnership is impossible. The association of the Gentiles with Israel is according to Paul the demonstration of man’s association with God himself.

Thus Eph 3:16–19 is a beautiful illustration of the concept “enthronement in the heavens” (2:6): here is testimony to the enthronement of man, and to his highest possible elevation. Through the Father, the Messiah, and

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

the Spirit, humanity is not only created, saved, and created anew, but also glorified. This passage in fact constitutes a creed to man: Man shall be strong! More power to man—from God!

V. Ecumenical Theology

It would appear that the disclosure of a secret, the perception of another person's love, the surprise of mutual affection, and the birth of knowledge are highly private and personal events which can take place only when man is removed from the eyes of onlookers and witnesses, aloof from the madding crowd. There is no reason to doubt that Paul was aware of this fact, but in Eph 3:18 he states that the dimensions of God's attitude and work are to be "grasped together with all the saints." Thus he asserts that the "secret" fostered by God the creator and now revealed (3:9), the "manifold wisdom" of God (3:10), and the "unfathomable riches of Christ" lavished upon the Gentiles (3:6, 8) cannot be understood in separation from one's fellow man. The social orientation of Eph 2 is not forgotten during the discussion of God's relationship to every saint. He who searches for love and knowledge is warned by the words "together with all the saints" against insulating himself from those Jews and Gentiles who are engaged in the same quest. The men already filled with "hope for the Messiah" and those who "have heard the word of truth" (1:12–13) are indispensable companions for each love-and-knowledge-hungry Christian.

In 3:16–19 Paul does not explicitly say why he considers the birth or increase of knowledge a social rather than a private event. But the contents of Eph 2 and 3 supply a reason: the mode of gaining knowledge is determined by that which is to be known. The secret revealed is that the outsider has been included together with the insider in God's love and the Messiah's realm. The revelation of the secret is not just an act of intellectual information but takes place in the actual salvation and unification of Jews and Gentiles. The result and celebration of the revealed secret consists in the worship offered to God by Jews and Gentiles together, and by the evidence which their peaceful community gives the world. Therefore the very act of knowledge cannot take place except when the saving knowledge also granted to one's fellow man is gladly recognized, endorsed, and celebrated.

As was earlier shown, in Paul's thought the connection is indissoluble between the secret that is known and to be made known, on one side, and the gaining of knowledge, on the other. The reference to "all saints" in 3:18 points out a consequence: either worship, theological work, and spiritual insight are ecumenical events or they have nothing to do with the knowledge and proclamation of God. According to 3:18 all theology is communal, ecclesiastical, and ecumenical at the same time. This does not make a simple majority or the shining excellence of certain opinions the criterion of truth. The adage, *Ecclesia suadet, Spiritus sanctus persuadet* (the church—that is, the fathers, the tradition, a consensus, or spirited individuals—recommends; the Holy Spirit convinces) would have been approved by Paul. God who fills, Christ who inhabits, and the Spirit who strengthens exert an authority unequalled by that of the saints, according to 3:16–19. But "access" to God who is fully present and revealed in the man Jesus Christ (Col 1:19, 2:9) is granted solely in the company of fellow saints (Eph 2:18). If imprisonment or other events impose upon man months or years of isolated existence, the remembrance of other saints, of their faith and love, mutual intercession, and also the exchange of news and letters, will "maintain" the indispensable "unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3), as Paul's own example clearly shows.

In turn, knowledge of the revealed secret and its dimensions is not restricted to a selected number of saints or to the occupants of a specific office. Only in later times was true and full knowledge (*gnōsis*) considered the privilege of an elite, i.e. of those "perfect" among the Gnostics. According to Paul the lowliest member of the church may deserve the greatest honor (1 Cor 12:23); "he who holds the place of an uneducated man" will be able to understand the communication of spiritual men, if God's revelation and love rather than human conceit dominates the congregation (1 Cor 14:16). The "knowledge" of which Eph 3:18–19 speaks "is neither a private nor a conventicle knowledge ... it belongs to its essence that it is shared with others."

VI. The Four Dimensions

The "breadth, length, height, depth," which in 3:18 are the object of man's comprehension, have been interpreted in most diverse ways:

- a) Ambrosiaster considered the four terms a circumscription of the spheric, i.e. perfect, shape of God.
- b) Chrysostom, Theodoret, Beza, and others assumed that the mystery of God was so denoted.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

c) According to D. J. Dupont the whole universe is meant—that universe which is “one and all” (*hen kai pān*) and therefore essentially not distinct from God.

d) Reitzenstein thinks of the space or domicile created for the deity, according to magic texts, by the light of revelation.

e) Bengel, Dibelius, Schlier refer to the cubic form of the heavenly city as mentioned in Rev 21:16.

f) A seemingly unbroken line of interpretation runs from Origen, by way of Thomas Aquinas and Calvin, to T. K. Abbott and the NEB version: taking their clue from the reference to the “love of Christ” that is to be known by the saints “though it surpasses knowledge” (3:19), they see in the dimensions mentioned in 3:18 a description of the extent of Christ’s love.

g) A special form of the same exposition equates the four dimensions with the four arms of Christ’s cross.

h) Some interpreters find in Eph 3:18 a reference to the Gnostic Prime-Anthropos and his cosmic body. The body of the crucified Christ is in this case denoted as a body that fills the world in all dimensions.

i) There are innumerable interpretations that venture to equate each of the four dimensions with a specific reality or virtue. The nations, the aeons, sin, and glory; good angels, bad angels, men on the steep way upward, and humanity on the broad way; the divinity and the humanity of Christ, the length and breadth of apostolic preaching; the virtues of love, hope, patience, and humility—quartets such as these have been formed to explain the hidden meaning of the four dimensions in Eph 3:18. The pungent statement made by Calvin (in his interpretation of this verse) about Augustine’s exegesis of this text is appropriate to many, if not all, of these interpretations: they come to a result “that is pleasant because of its subtlety. But what has it to do with Paul’s intention?”

Feuillet is aware of the difficulties inherent in these attempts to elucidate Eph 3:18. The expositors who refer to the cubic form of the heavenly city or tower (as taught by some apocalypticists and rabbis) presuppose that Eph 3:18 speaks of three dimensions—those of height, depth, breadth—as they are usually distinguished in geometry. But while “the Greeks distinguished three dimensions only, not four,” Ephesians mentions four. Where, Feuillet asks, are four dimensions ever enumerated in Paul’s environment or in literature known to him? He answers, in OT Wisdom books and related sources! According to Wisdom thought, the search for wisdom goes on in the four dimensions of heaven, earth, water, and a depth “deeper than Sheol.” These four dimensions are usually mentioned when an author wants to point out that God and his wisdom cannot be traced but remain inscrutable—“a perfect antithesis to the Gnostic theme which treats knowledge of the cosmos as equivalent to the knowledge of God.”¹²⁷ Since Ephesians is replete with borrowings from Wisdom tradition, Eph 3:18 may reflect the same influence. In this case Paul wants to show in 3:18 how impossible it is ever to grasp fully the manifold wisdom of God. Compare variant (b) in the expositions given above. Abbott has come to an analogous result: in the apostle’s mind is “not so much the thoroughness of comprehension as the vastness of the thing to be comprehended.” This interpretation is buttressed by the verse that follows 3:18: the object of knowledge, Christ’s love, is called “surpassing knowledge.” Feuillet’s interpretation recommends itself as the least fantastic and the one best supported by the context. Even when Paul asks God for more knowledge, he remembers the “depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God” and the impossibility of exploring and tracing “his judgments and ways” (Rom 11:33).⁷

Prayer. An examination of the Old and New Testaments and of the early Church Fathers reveals certain “minimal” beliefs or assumptions that underlie the practice of Christian praying. This is not to deny that there was a development in the conception of prayer, though this development is more pronounced in the Old Testament than it is in the New Testament and early church. The consistency in the latter case is seen in the close correspondence between Jesus’ prayer life and the prayer life of the New Testament church. This consistency extended into the patristic period, for the early Father’s understanding of prayer was thoroughly shaped and limited by the Lord’s Prayer, particularly through mutually influencing exegetical literature on it, devotional and liturgical use of it, and the catechetical tradition that employed it.

Petition. Though prayer also includes adoration (e.g., Pss. 144–150; Luke 1:46–55), confession (e.g., Ps. 51; Luke 18:13), and thanksgiving (e.g., Ps. 75; 1 Thess. 1:2), Christian prayer has always been essentially petitionary. Indeed, the simple and almost naive petitioning that marks New Testament prayer is reflected in all its humanness in the psalms—the liturgical inheritance of the early Christians—as well as in the rest of the early church’s Scriptures. Petitions are made for rain and fire, relief from famine and plague, resurrections from the dead, and so forth (e.g.,

⁷ Barth, M. (2008). [Ephesians: Introduction, translation, and commentary on chapters 1–3](#) (Vol. 34, pp. 348–397). Yale University Press.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

see 1 Kings 8:35–40; 17:20–22; 18:26–39). In fact, most Hebrew terms used in the Old Testament for prayer refer in some sense to petition; prayer in the Old Testament more frequently expressed supplication than anything else.

Christian prayer, then, shared a simple belief that God could be petitioned to intervene and effect changes in nature and in the course of world events. The immediate source of this confidence came from the teachings and examples of Jesus himself, such as the model prayer he offered (Matt. 6:9–13; Luke 11:2–4) and his assurance that one had only to ask the Father in order to receive what was needed (Matt. 7:7; Luke 11:9). We can readily document that Jesus' instructions were taken to heart by his early followers: there were prayers for the selection of leaders, for deliverances from prisons, for the spread of the gospel, for healings, and so on (e.g., see Acts 1:24; 12:5; 13:3). Indeed, Paul's teaching in Philippians 4:6 echoes Jesus' own. Thus, prayer was unquestioningly believed to be an effective cause of God's actions such that a difference resulted in human events.

Such petitions were, in part, motivated by the need of the moment. In fact, a notable characteristic of New Testament prayer (and its predecessor) was its spontaneity. Prayer was to be placed in the midst of everyday life, not just reserved for liturgical contexts. Accordingly, petitions were to cover the entire gamut of one's life, including material and spiritual needs, though by the time we reach the New Testament period the former has been subordinated to the latter, as the pattern of the Lord's Prayer suggested. The pray-er should feel free to make requests of God, which, according to biblical material is equivalent to letting God know the desires of one's heart (see Job 6:8; Ps. 21:2; Phil. 4:6).

At this point we must guard against equating Christian belief in the efficacy of prayer and magic. Magic attempts to *control* or *manipulate* the divine will in order to induce it to grant one's wishes, especially through the use of techniques such as charms, spells, rituals, or ceremonies. Christian prayer involves a struggle of wills in which the pray-er attempts to *persuade* God, all the time seeing prayer as a divinely given means whereby the pray-er can participate in *God's* agenda.

God. One's understanding of prayer varies in accordance with one's conception of the two parties involved—namely, the divine and the human—and their relation to each other. We turn then to the biblical conception of the first party—God. The view of prayer found in the Old Testament, the soil for that in the New Testament, was founded on the Hebraic conception of God as both immanent and transcendent.

The prayers of Israel reveal their fundamental belief that they were talking to a God who, though mysterious, was immediately and actively present.

This immanent God of Israel was addressed as “you who hear prayer” (Ps. 65:2). That is to say, from the beginning of the Old Testament traditions, God and humans engaged in dialogue—in conversation made possible by the ascription of personhood to God. Thus, Elohim was a God who listened and answered (Gen. 21:16–18; 22:11–12). The Divine shares his intentions (Gen. 18:17; Exod. 3). The human questions (Gen. 15:2, 8), requests guidance (Exod. 5:22–23; 32:11–13), complains (Num. 11:1–15), reasons (Gen. 18:23), and bargains (Gen. 28:20–22). This personal relationship established in prayer recurs in almost every book of the Old Testament (especially in Jeremiah). This understanding of prayer as personal confrontation with a responsive objective referent continues into the New Testament and makes Christian prayer distinctive from merely reverencing an impersonal sacred object that can never be prayed to, petitioned, or thanked. Personhood includes mutuality, rapprochement, and reciprocity—addressing and being addressed. Christian prayer is possible only if it is an event between two persons in an essential reciprocal relationship. This sense of reciprocity, which is found in the Judeo-Christian concept but is lost in a monistic understanding of prayer, allows us to speak of prayer as talking to God.

The essence of Judeo-Christian prayer conceives of this fellowship between God and humans as a communion reflecting the forms of the social relations of humanity (friendship, master–servant, groom–bride, father–child). (One implication is that anyone capable of conventional interhuman discourse is capable of praying.) It is the last relationship that is most important as we move from the Old Testament's conception of God to the New Testament's. In fact, it has been suggested that the outstanding idea of Christ's teaching was the fatherhood of God.

The notion of God as father is not absent from the Old Testament, though it appears only fifteen times. Still, nothing in all the extant literature of ancient Palestinian Judaism indicates that “my Father” was used as a personal address to God. The *community* did pray to God as Father, and the individual occasionally spoke *of* God as his heavenly Father; but this was rare before the diaspora, and other titles for God were far more frequent in Jewish prayers. Instead, “my Father” is characteristic of the *ipsissima vox Jesu*. (Jesus *always* addresses God in prayer as “Father” except for the “cry of dereliction” on the cross.) With the word “abba” Jesus introduced a new way of praying—talking to God as naturally, intimately, and sincerely as a child talks to his or her father. “Abba” reveals the

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

heart of Jesus' relationship with God, marking his complete obedient surrender to the Father (Mark 14:36) and his authority as the one to whom God reveals his thoughts (Matt. 11:27). The early church used this same address and thereby appropriated the central element of Jesus' understanding of God (see Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6). Indeed, by giving the disciples the paradigm prayer with the address "Our Father," Jesus invited his followers to share in the same relationship with God he had, for it was customary in the Judaism of that time for individual religious groups to be united and characterized by a particular prayer (hence the disciples' request in Luke 11:1).

The Christian tradition also conceives of God as susceptible to human influence by means of prayer. The conception of a real influence of humans on God lies at the root of the prophetic belief that God hears or answers prayer. God can let himself be determined by the pray-er and grant what is asked for or, because God is Person, he can refuse the petitioner and deny the request. (The very notion of "petition" or "request" implies this.) Certainly this is true of the Old Testament. For example, one thinks of Abraham's intercession for Sodom (Gen. 18:22–23), Moses' intercession for his people (Num. 14:12–20), or Israel's desire to have a king against God's wishes (1 Sam. 8:19–22). But while this belief is presupposed by those who pray and teach about prayer in the Gospels and the New Testament church, in two prominent cases God's will is precisely *not* changed by human petitioning: in Jesus' Gethsemane prayer and in Paul's thrice-prayed request to have his "thorn in the flesh" removed. (Again, though, even in these cases pray-ers must have presupposed that God's will *could* be influenced in order to pray such prayers.) In fact, the New Testament emphasis seems not to be on changing *God's* will through prayer, but on changing the *human's* will. Nonetheless, in Christian prayer the human response to the Word of God has an effect on God. These words constitute part of the history between God and humans, and thus become part of God's history as well.

While the immanence of God formed much of the basis for prayer in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God's transcendence is important as well. We have already implied it by noting that God maintains the prerogative of denying the pray-er's request. God's hand cannot be forced. In fact, even the intimacy of the "abba" in the Lord's Prayer is mitigated by the following phrase, "who are in heaven," to insure that petitioners remember that they and the addressee are not on a par with each other. God is the Supreme Being or reality, both omnipresent and omnipotent. He *can* perform what is asked, but he stands over against the prayer and, as such, he is sovereign over the petitioner, in providential control of the universe, and the source and bestower of all that we receive.

Humans. If God is the sovereign Lord of the universe from whom we should seek and receive the provision of spiritual and physical necessities, then we are reminded of our utter creaturely dependence on God. The divine-human relationship is understood to have its origin and the determination of its character entirely from the divine side, so that prayer is but a trusting response in a relationship that has been initiated by God. Prayer's form, content, and efficacy belong to the divine economy of human salvation.

Christian prayer has traditionally also expressed the human's freedom to play its essential role in prayer. Prayer in the Old Testament often pictures the pray-er as an active cooperator. Such prayer is a dynamic dialogue that expresses the history Immanuel wills to have *with* humans. Prayer thus becomes one of the ways in which the creature cooperates with God in order to bring about God's plan. This is evident in God's history of salvation when many significant events include the prayers of mediators such as Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, and others. In fact, it sometimes even seems in the Old Testament that God so desires obedience and cooperation that he is unwilling to carry out his purposes until men and women have recognized the divine summons and answered it (e.g., see Exod. 4:10–17).

This Old Testament emphasis is not as clearly set forth in the New Testament, which may account, for example, for some disagreements about the intention of the first three petitions in the Lord's Prayer—whether they are a call for God to act alone (Lohmeyer, for example) or a call to God for help (Augustine, Luther). If the latter is the case (as the majority think), then why ask God to do for us what should be our duty? It is certainly not to escape our responsibility for action, but to enter into this human-divine partnership in which we offer ourselves at God's disposal, expecting and seeking him to be at work to make our efforts effective. This raises two important Judeo-Christian themes regarding prayer.

First, while prayer is a kind of work, the corollary is not necessarily (nor even usually) true. We must guard against the reductionistic motto "To work is to pray." It should be obvious that work cannot be a substitute for prayer, for no matter how faithful one has been in planning and toil, the harvest ultimately depends on factors outside of human control. The reduction of work to prayer may even be a manifestation of the human proclivity toward self-justification.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Second, both Testaments insist that while prayer and service are not to be equated with each other, they are also not to be separated from each other. With this insistence goes the belief that only the prayer of the righteous is efficacious (Prov. 15:29). This set of convictions is particularly a prophetic emphasis in the Old Testament, beginning as early as Samuel's intercession for Saul, which leads to the conclusion that prayer must result in obedience (1 Sam. 7:12, 15; 15:22–23). It was especially the eighth-century prophets who emphasized the necessity for moral goodness of the one who prayed. Prayer was not to be substituted for righteousness. Jahweh wanted more than mere ritual and ceremony, notwithstanding Israel's elected status. There can only be true prayer if one is simultaneously actively seeking good; insincere prayer cannot be a substitute for justice and responsible action.

These twin virtues of service and prayer were also inseparably linked in the New Testament. Prayer in the early church is depicted as producing encouragement (Acts 18:9–10; 23:11), guidance (Acts 8:26–40; 10–11; 13:1–3), and power (Acts 16:25–26) in one's work. And again, effective prayer in such cases is not to be disassociated from righteousness (e.g., see James 5:15–16).

The Basis of Prayer. The true basis of prayer in the Judeo-Christian tradition is the recollection of God's acts in history. Such remembrances establish the ground on which a request can be made and guide the petitioner to make appropriate requests. This is especially seen in Deuteronomy where appropriate prayer is prompted by the recollection of God's mighty deeds (4:9, 32–39; 9:25–29; 32:1–43). The memory of God's lovingkindness often becomes the preamble and ground for the petition (Gen. 32:10–13; 1 Kings 3:3–14). In fact, failure to recall God's past acts might prevent a favorable response to prayer (Jer. 2:5–13). Thus, prayer in the Old Testament must be discussed in the light of God's covenantal relationship with Israel. This is quite noticeable in the psalms, which recapitulate the great events of salvation history. The grounding of prayer in the recollection of God's nature and deeds contains the seeds of New Testament liturgical practice and teaching (e.g., see 2 Kings 19:14–19; Matt. 6:5–8).

“Christian” Prayer. If prayer is based on God's acts, then prayer is ultimately a response to the prior activity of God. In *Christian* prayer, the primary divine act is God's new revelation in Jesus Christ, in whom all the promises of God find their “yes.” Christian prayer is, thus, a sequel in a relationship that begins before the idea of praying even occurs to us. One is summoned to continue the dialogue by the God who offers the *gift* of prayer, who guarantees its reality, and who calls on men and women to pray through the instrumentality of human speech. Thus, Christian prayer is not conceived of as the natural human's own achievement. Though our own endeavors are not precluded, ultimately the believer is impelled to pray by the indwelling God at work in the deepest places of his or her soul. In the New Testament, this understanding of prayer as God's work focuses on the roles of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

First, Christian prayer is to be prayed “in the name of Christ” (John 14:13–14; 16:23–28). This is not some magical formula. It signifies that the suppliant takes the posture and attitude of Christ toward God and toward the world. To pray “in his name” is therefore to pray in a manner consistent with our new identity effected by the reconciliation of God and humans in Jesus Christ. That is to say, the use of Jesus' name in prayer is effective not as some sort of password that can be used indiscriminately by every petitioner. It is only effective to pray “in Jesus' name” if we are truly *living* in the name of Jesus. This phrase, then, has more to do with the identification of the person who prays than it does with right methods or conditions of prayer (e.g., see Acts 19:13–16). Such prayer guards against a misreading of God's nature and will, and saves prayer from human selfishness and presumption.

Prayer “in Christ's name” is usually associated with prayer that is in keeping with God's will. Indeed, the patristic exegesis of the third petition of the Lord's Prayer insisted that God's will is expressed by the divine economy in Christ. In the third petition we ask not only for *God's* will to be done; we pray that it may be done among and through us—that we may become obedient participants in its accomplishments. By so praying, we also guard against the self-centered request for personal gain, away from which biblical prayer seems to move, at least in the New Testament.

Second, Christian prayer is mediated by Christ, a theme that is particularly found in John's Gospel and the letter to the Hebrews. This role of Christ began with his ascension to the Father and is made possible, in part, by his experiences whereby he empathizes with our condition (Heb. 4:14–16). The role of mediator in prayer was prevalent in the Old Testament (as in Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Amos, Solomon, Hezekiah, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Israel). But Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the ultimate intercessor, and, because of this, *all* Christian prayer becomes intercession since it is presented through and by Christ to God. In fact, Calvin insisted that without Christ's intercession we are cut off from the benefits of prayer, for the only hope that our prayers are heard lies in the fact that Christ causes them to be heard in his mediatorial role.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Third, Christian prayer is prompted and guided by the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament the Spirit is that which makes possible even the address of God as “abba” (Rom. 8:15–16; Gal. 4:6). The precise meaning of the Spirit’s role in Romans 8:26–27 is variously interpreted, though it is usually associated with the regulation and purification of our requests as the interpreter of the mind of God. Thus, the Holy Spirit is the arbiter, director, and interpreter of all our wishes. Accordingly, God may answer our petitions in his own way (see 2 Cor. 12:7–9).

Wrestling in Prayer. We have established that prayer is a dialogue between two distinct partners. In fact, prayer in the Judeo-Christian tradition is often a *struggle* between two wills—between two covenant partners. And though the two partners are not equal, the human agent is not precluded from the complaining, questioning, and passionate vehemence that characterize true dialogues.

The psalms offer some of the best examples of this. We must not overlook or censor the humanness of the psalmist just so that our modern “piety” will not be disturbed.

The prototype of this wrestling or conflict with God is the story of Jacob in Genesis 32:22–32. Jacob engages God with a perseverance that refuses to let go until Jacob’s desire is met. In this case, the struggle results in a character change and marks the petitioner for life. Other outstanding Old Testament examples of contention with God in prayer include the prophets Jeremiah (see Jer. 12:1) and Habakkuk (see Hab. 1:2–4). In these cases, the arguments result in assurances that all is in God’s control and a deepened understanding of God’s purposes; however, while Habakkuk finally takes delight in God’s providence, Jeremiah never seems to be sure whether he should delight in or despair over such divine government (compare Hab. 3:17–19 with Jer. 20:7–18). Somewhat paralleling these prophets, especially with regard to the subsequent submission of the suppliant, the exemplary New Testament models of the engagement of two wills in prayer are Jesus’ Gethsemane prayer (Matt. 26:36–46, par.) and Paul’s “thorn-in-the-flesh” prayer (2 Cor. 12:7–10).

The New Testament passages that are more difficult to explain include those that seem to teach importunity in prayer (e.g., Luke 11:5–13; 18:1–8). Some argue that these parables teach perseverance in a request until either our wills or the circumstances of our lives are altered. Others argue that the original design of these stories may not have been to teach importunity. In Luke 11 and 18, for instance, Jesus is telling his hearers that if humans are like this, how much more readily will God respond to petitions. In Luke 11, then, Jesus was concerned to teach that the needy may always resort to God without hesitation. Luke added his application in verse 8 (“I tell you ...”). In Luke 18 the parable is placed in an eschatological setting regarding the vindication of sufferers, and verse 1 does not specify persistence with respect to the *same* request. Even if this latter interpretation is correct regarding the *original* intention of these parables, one must still deal with the way they were understood and applied by the early church. And we are still left with the examples of persistent storming of heaven in the Old Testament—examples in which the petitioners sometimes get their way (e.g., refer to Israel’s request for a king in 1 Sam. 8).

In the Bible there seem to be what C. S. Lewis calls two “patterns” of petitionary prayer. On the one hand, there is the wrestling that strives with God to change God’s will and/or the circumstances. On the other hand, there is the resignation to God’s will and to the circumstances.

God’s Response. If God is to be thought of in the Judeo-Christian tradition as a personal being with whom one wrestles in prayer, it is not surprising to find that within this tradition God is sometimes conceived of as *not* “hearing” or “answering” prayer. In fact, if petitionary prayer is request, it follows that it may or may not be granted, since that is the nature of requests over against compulsion. Just as God cannot be bound by human wishes nor induced to carry out the petitioner’s will just because the prayer is long or eloquent or the pray-er is pious, so there are no automatic guarantees that God will hear our prayers.

There is certainly an expressed confidence that God will answer prayer (Pss. 3:4; 6:9; 17:6; 138:3; Matt. 7:7–11). But God sometimes seems far off or silent (see Pss. 10:1; 13:1–2; 77:5–9; 89:46). In fact, there are times when God does *not* answer or hear prayer. There is no formal treatment of this phenomenon in the Bible, though recurrent episodes suggest reasons why God does not hear some prayers. Such reasons include broken taboos (1 Sam. 14:36–42), divine displeasure with a people’s behavior (Deut. 3:23–27), sins of various sorts (Ps. 66:18; Isa. 1:15; 59:1–3), selfish ends (James 4:3), and so forth. At times, the silence of God is simply inexplicable (as in Job).

But to be fair to the Judeo-Christian tradition more needs to be said. First, it is assumed that prayers that will be answered in due time (that is, in God’s time) are prayers prayed in accord with God’s will, particularly as that is expressed in Christ. This is especially the New Testament answer to the “problem of unanswered prayer.” Thus, such silences are only temporary; for example, the silence of God experienced and expressed by the psalmist is not typically isolated in the biblical accounts but is set in the context of God’s answering (e.g., see Pss. 22 and 28). Second,

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

prayers that are answered in a way that we do not expect give us the *appearance* of God's silence only because we do not hear the response we want to hear; such "unanswered" prayer may really uncover a moral problem on the petitioner's part. Third, in refusing the specific answer requested, God may truly be hearing and answering our prayers if our intention is to seek God's will, because God sometimes wrathfully gives exactly what the wicked seek to their own damnation (see Rom. 1).

A caution is in order here. The suggestion is often made that prayer is "unanswered" because one does not pray "in Christ's name" nor "according to God's will." Not only does such a way out of the problem raise some interesting questions regarding Jesus' Gethsemane prayer, but it ignores the times when one *seems* to pray in Christ's name or according to God's will and does not receive an answer. Any solution must begin with the reminder that answers to prayer are grounded in God's graciousness and faithfulness to his promises, not in the petitioner's rights.

DENNIS L. OKHOLM

Bibliography. K. Barth, *The Christian Life*; D. G. Bloesch, *The Struggle of Prayer*; G. A. Buttrick, *Prayer*; J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*; A. Cunningham, *Prayer: Personal and Liturgical*; G. Ebeling, *On Prayer: Nine Sermons*; J. Ellul, *Prayer and Modern Man*; F. L. Fischer, *Prayer in the New Testament*; R. J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*; M. Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer: A Window to the Popular Religion of Ancient Israel*; F. Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*; H. T. Hughes, *Prophetic Prayer: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Prayer to the Reformation*; J. Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus*; P. LeFevre, *Understandings of Prayer*; C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*; R. L. Simpson, *The Interpretation of Prayer in the Early Church*; Tertullian's Tract on the Prayer; H. Thielicke, *Our Heavenly Father: Sermons on the Lord's Prayer*; E. D. Willis, *Daring Prayer*.⁸

INTERCESSION—the act of petitioning God or praying on behalf of another person or group. The sinful nature of this world separates human beings from God. It has always been necessary, therefore, for righteous individuals to go before God to seek reconciliation between Him and His fallen creation.

Examples of intercession occur in classic instances. In Genesis 18, where Abraham speaks to God on behalf of Sodom, his plea is compassionate; it is concerned with the well-being of others rather than with his own needs. Such selfless concern is the mark of all true intercession.

Moses was also effective in petitioning God on behalf of the Hebrew people (Ex. 15:25). Even the pharaoh asked Moses to intercede for him (Ex. 8:28). But just as righteous men often succeeded in reconciling Creator and creation, the Bible also reminds us that the ongoing sinfulness of a people can hinder the effects of intercession (1 Sam. 2:25; Jer. 7:16).

The sacrifices and prayers of Old Testament priests (Ex. 29:42; 30:7) were acts of intercession which point forward to the work of Christ. Christ is, of course, the greatest intercessor. He prayed on behalf of Peter (Luke 22:32) and His disciples (John 17). Then in the most selfless intercession of all, He petitioned God on behalf of those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). His work on the Cross is His ultimate expression of intercession (Is. 53:12).

Christ's intercessory work did not cease when He returned to heaven. He still intercedes for His church (Heb. 7:25), and the Holy Spirit pleads on behalf of the individual Christian (Rom. 8:26-27). Finally, because of their unique relationship to God through Christ, Christians are urged to intercede for all people (1 Tim. 2:1). The latter text shows intercessory prayer is a primary ministry of the church.

INTERCESSION. (Heb. 7:25) *entunchano* (en-toong-khan-oh); *Strong's #1793*: To fall in with, meet with in order to converse. From this description of a casual encounter, the word progresses to the idea of pleading with a person on behalf of another, although at times the petition may be against another (Acts 25:24; Rom. 11:2).

INTERCESSION (MAKE). (Jer. 27:18) *paga'* (pah-gah); *Strong's #6293*: To reach; to meet someone; to pressure or urge someone strongly; to meet up with a person; encounter, entreat; to assail with urgent petitions. This verb occurs forty-six times. In some passages it is translated "meet," as in Joshua 2:16. In Joshua 19:27, *paga'* refers to the extent to which a tribal boundary is reached. Sometimes the verb refers to "falling upon" someone in battle, that is, to meet up with the enemy with hostile intent (1 Kin. 2:29). *Paga'* is also translated "make intercession," the idea being that a supplicant catches up with a superior, and reaches him with an urgent request. Thus, intercession involves reaching God, meeting God, and entreating Him for His favor⁹

INTERCEDE, INTERCESSION* See Prayer.

⁸ Okholm, D. L. (1996). [Prayer](#). In *Evangelical dictionary of biblical theology* (electronic ed., pp. 621–626). Baker Book House.

⁹ Hayford, J. W., Thomas Nelson Publishers. (1995). [Hayford's Bible handbook](#). Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

INTERCESSION OF CHRIST* Theological term for Christ's activity of petitioning God the Father to save, help, and sustain people on earth.

The Hebrew word meaning "to make intercession" is from a root meaning "to strike"; hence it means "to assail or encounter with a request." That word is used prophetically of the ministry of the "servant of the Lord": "He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Is 53:12, RSV). The principal Greek verb meant in secular usage to "meet," "approach," or "make an appeal." In intertestamental literature that word was employed in the sense of personally petitioning an official to gain a favor (e.g., 2 Macc 4:8). The noun form of the word is translated in the NT both as "intercession" (1 Tm 2:1) and as "prayer" (4:5).

Theologians generally see intercession as the second phase of Christ's "high priestly work," after he first made satisfaction for sin through his suffering and death on the cross (1 Tm 2:5-6). In the OT one of the priest's functions was to petition God on the people's behalf. In particular, on the annual Day of Atonement the high priest carried the blood of the sin offering into the Holy of Holies, sanctified the sacred place by means of incense, and sprinkled the sacrificial blood on and about the "mercy seat" (Lv 16:11-19). Correspondingly, after Christ offered himself on the cross as the sacrifice for sins, he ascended to the Father and entered the heavenly sanctuary where he now represents his people (Heb 7:25).

Christ's Intercession on Earth Before his life of intercession in heaven, Jesus Christ exercised such a ministry on earth, consistent with his own teaching that the disciples should always pray and not get discouraged (Lk 18:1). Scripture often points to Jesus in prayer. For example, Jesus interceded at the grave of his friend Lazarus (Jn 11:41-42). Jesus prayed all night on a mountain before selecting the 12 apostles (Lk 6:12-13). After warning his disciple Peter that Satan had designs on him, Jesus said to Peter, "I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail" (Lk 22:32, RSV). Jesus' first words on the cross were a prayer for those who had persecuted him (23:34).

The "high priestly prayer" recorded in John 17 provides the most complete account in Scripture of an intercessory prayer by Jesus. The ground, or basis, of his impassioned petition was his intimate relationship with his heavenly Father (Jn 17:5, 8). The objects of his prayer were (1) himself, that he might glorify the Father and complete the work he had been sent to accomplish (Jn 17:1-5); (2) his disciples, who were chosen to spread the gospel after his departure (vv 8-9); and (3) the entire family of believers (v 20). The goals of his intercession included (1) the unity of God's people (vv 11, 21), (2) their joy in spite of hardships and discouragement (v 13), (3) their preservation from evil (v 15), (4) their sanctification by the Word of God (v 17), and (5) their eternal fellowship with Christ (v 24).

Christ's Intercession in Heaven Christ's intercession for his people, begun on earth, is continued in heaven. The Epistle to the Hebrews depicts Christ as a priest, placing considerable emphasis on his continuing ministry of intercession. Christ's heavenly intercession is a sequel to his earthly sacrifice accomplished "once for all" (Heb 10:10-18). Jesus himself said, "Every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32, RSV). His continuing intercession is recognized in such NT phrases as "through Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:8; 16:27; 1 Pt 2:5), "through him" (Col 3:17; Heb 13:15), and "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:20).

The doctrine of Christ's heavenly intercession is explicitly affirmed in four NT texts. The apostle Paul spoke of Christ "at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us" (Rom 8:34, RSV). The writer of Hebrews affirmed that Christ "is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25, RSV). Further, Christ has entered "into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf" (9:24). The apostle John also described that ministry: "If any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn 2:1). The Greek word for "advocate" meant a legal counselor who appeared before a magistrate to plead a client's cause. John thus pictured the ascended Lord as appearing before God on behalf of his people, presenting his own obedience and suffering as the ground for the believer's acquittal.

The Way Intercession Works Christ's heavenly intercession has both a static aspect (his redemptive work has been completed) and a dynamic aspect (he continues to care for God's people). Thus Christ's intercession is seen as including (1) his presence with the Father as the ground of each believer's justification (Heb 9:24); (2) his thwarting of Satan's accusations against each believer (Rom 8:33; Rv 12:10); (3) his claim for each believer's right of access to the divine presence (Heb 4:14-16); and (4) his mediation of the prayers of each believer. The heavenly Father's

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

response is to impart the full range of spiritual blessings on believers. In the words of the Puritan John Owen (1616–83), “The intercession of Christ ... is his continual appearance for us in the presence of God, representing the efficacy of his oblation, accompanied with tender care, love and desires for the welfare, supply, deliverance and salvation of the church.”

Those for whom Christ intercedes in heaven are described in Scripture both broadly and narrowly. Christ is said to pray for all people everywhere (Is 53:12; cf. Mt 26:28). More specifically, and perhaps more profoundly, he prays for his own redeemed community, the church (Jn 14:16; 17:9, 20; Heb 4:15–16). Nevertheless, Christ’s prayers are also centered on the specific needs of individual believers (Lk 22:31–32; 1 Jn 2:1).¹⁰

Intercession, intercede

Greek expression: *enteuxis, entugchanō*

Pronunciation: *EHN tew kseess; ehn toong KAH noh*

Strong’s Numbers: 1783, 1793

KEY VERSES

Romans 8:34; 1 Timothy 2:1; Hebrews 7:25

In our day, we often hear of mediators, or intermediaries, working to establish peace in the Middle East or in a terrorist crisis. These intermediaries engage in the work of intercession—that is, they represent one person trying to establish peace with another party. The New Testament concept of “intercession” is not far from this concept. The Greeks used the verb *entugchanō* to express “meeting,” “approaching,” or “making an appeal.” In the Jewish literature written between the Old and New Testaments, the word was employed in the sense of personally petitioning an official to gain a favor (2 Maccabees 4:8).

The New Testament writers borrowed the Greek term *enteuxis* to describe Christ’s heavenly ministry of “intercession.” After Christ offered Himself on the cross as the sacrifice for sins, He ascended to the Father and entered the heavenly sanctuary where He now represents His people (Heb. 7:25). The letter to the Hebrews depicts Christ as a Priest engaged in His continuing ministry of intercession. Christ’s heavenly intercession is a sequel to His earthly sacrifice accomplished once for all (Heb. 10:10–18). Jesus said, “Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 10:32, NASB). His continuing intercession is recognized in such New Testament phrases as “through Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:8; 16:27; 1 Pet. 2:5) and “through Him” (Col. 3:17; Heb. 13:15).

The doctrine of Christ’s heavenly “intercession” is explicitly affirmed in four New Testament texts. The apostle Paul spoke of Christ, “at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us” (Rom. 8:34, NASB). The writer of Hebrews affirmed that Christ “is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25, NASB). Further, Christ has entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb. 9:24, NASB). The apostle John also described that ministry: “If anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1, NASB). The Greek word for “advocate” meant a legal counselor who appeared before a magistrate to plead a client’s cause. John thus pictured the ascended Lord as appearing before God on behalf of His people.

The noun form of the Greek word for “intercede” is translated in the New Testament both as “intercession” (1 Tim. 2:1) and as “prayer” (1 Tim. 4:5). Paul exhorts believers to intercede on behalf of all people, so that all might come to know Jesus Christ as their Savior (1 Tim. 2:4). We should pray—and pray often about all things for God is the source of our effectiveness in this life.¹¹

CHAPTER 14

WHAT WE SHOULD PRAY FOR

¹⁰ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (pp. 638–639). Tyndale House Publishers.

¹¹ Carpenter, E. E., & Comfort, P. W. (2000). In *Holman treasury of key Bible words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew words defined and explained* (p. 312). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Now that we have gone through the benefits which have come to the saints through prayer, let us meditate on the words: "Ask for what is great, and what is small shall be added unto you," and "ask the things of heaven, and the things of earth shall be added unto you." Every symbolical and figurative good is small and of earth when compared with true and spiritual good. And thus the Word of God in inviting us to imitate the prayers of the saints in order that we may ask for the real favours which they obtained in a figurative manner, aptly tells us that the things of heaven and what is great are signified by the things of earth and what is small. This is said: "You who wish to be spiritual, ask in your prayers for <the things of heaven and what is great.> Thus, having received them as being of heaven, you will inherit the kingdom of heaven, and as being great, you will enjoy the greatest blessings. And the Father will supply you in due measure with what is required of the things of earth and what is small, because your bodies need them."²²⁴

THE FOUR KINDS OF PRAYER

2. And since the Apostle in the First Epistle to Timothy uses four words for four things that have close relevance to the question of prayer, it will be useful to take his text and see if we properly understand, in its precise meaning, each of the four. This is what he says: *I desire, therefore, first of all, that SUPPLICATIONS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSIONS, and THANKSGIVINGS be made for all men*, and so on. I believe, then, that SUPPLICATION is offered by one who needs something, beseeching that he receive that thing; PRAYER is offered in conjunction with praise of God by one who asks in a more solemn manner for greater things; INTERCESSION is the request to God for certain things made by one who has greater confidence; and THANKSGIVING is the prayer with acknowledgment to God for the favours received from God: either the one who acknowledges, understands the greatness of the favour done him, or he who has received it attaches such greatness to it.

SUPPLICATION

3. Examples of the first kind are: Gabriel, speaking to Zachary, who doubtless was praying for the birth of John, says the following: *Fear not, Zachary, for thy SUPPLICATION is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John*. And there is written in Exodus regarding the golden calf: *But Moses BESOUGHT the Lord his God, saying: Why, O Lord, is Thy indignation enkindled against Thy people whom Thou hast brought out of the land of Egypt, with great power? And in Deuteronomy: And I made SUPPLICATION before the Lord as before, forty days and forty nights (I neither ate bread, nor drank water), for all the sins you committed*. And in Esther: *Mardochai BESOUGHT God, remembering all the works of the Lord and said: O Lord, Lord, Almighty King.... And Esther herself BESOUGHT the Lord the God of Israel, and said: O my Lord, who art our king....*

PRAYER

4. Regarding the second kind, see Daniel: *And Azarias standing up PRAYED in this manner, and opening his mouth in the midst of the fire he said.... And Tobias: And I began to PRAY with tears, saying: Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy works are just, and all Thy ways mercy and truth. And Thy judgments are true and just forever*. And since the passage in Daniel has been obelized on the ground that it is not found in the Hebrew text, and those of the circumcision reject the Book of Tobias as not being canonical, I shall quote the words of Anna from the First Book of Kings: *And she PRAYED to the Lord, shedding many tears. And she made a vow, saying: O Lord of Hosts, if Thou wilt look down on the affliction of Thy servant, and so on*. And in Habacuc: *A PRAYER of Habacuc the prophet with song. O Lord, I have heard Thy voice and was afraid. O Lord, I reflected on Thy works and I was astonished. In the midst of two animals Thou wilt be known; in the approach of the years Thou wilt be recognized*. The example just given illustrates very well the definition of *prayer* inasmuch as he who offers it unites it with praise of God. And again, in the book of Jonas: *Jonas PRAYED to the Lord his God out of the belly of the fish. And he said: I cried out of my affliction to the Lord my God, and He heard me. Out of the belly of hell Thou didst hear the screams of my voice. And Thou hast cast me forth into the deep in the heart of the sea, and a flood hath compassed me*.

INTERCESSION

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

5. Concerning the third kind: the Apostle rightly assigns *prayer* to us, but *intercession* to the Spirit as being superior and having confidence in Him to whom He addresses Himself. *For, he says, we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit Himself INTERCEDETH MIGHTILY for us with unspeakable groanings. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what the Spirit desireth: because he INTERCEDETH for the saints according to God.* The Spirit, therefore, *asks and intercedes*, but we *pray*. And Josue's words commanding the sun to stand over Gabaath seem to me to be an intercession also: *Then Josue spoke to the Lord in the day that God delivered the Amorrhite into the hands of Israel, when He broke them at Gabaath, and they were broken in the sight of the children of Israel. And Josue said: Let the sun stand over Gabaath and the moon over the valley of Elom.* And in Judges, Samson in my opinion said in intercession: *Let me die with the foreigners—when he bent in his strength and the house fell upon the princes and all the people that were there.* Even though it is not written that Josue and Samson *interceded* but that they *said*, nevertheless their words seem to be an *intercession*, which we must judge to be different from a *prayer*, if we are to give words their proper meaning.

THANKSGIVING

An example of *thanksgiving* is the utterance of Our Lord, saying: *I confess to Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them to little ones.* For the term *confess* comes to the same as *give thanks*.

6. Now, it is not out of place to address supplication, intercession, and thanksgiving to < saintly > men also. The two latter (intercession and thanksgiving) may be addressed not only to saintly men but even to < other men >. But supplication may be addressed only to saints, should another Paul or Peter be found, in order that they may help us to become worthy of receiving the power, granted to them, of removing sin. But, perhaps, if we have done injustice to any man—even if he be not a saint—and we become aware of the injury done to him, we may supplicate even him so that he may pardon us our injustice. And if we address ourselves thus to saintly men, how much more should we thank Christ²⁴¹ who has conferred so many benefits on us through the will of the Father! We should also intercede with Him as Stephen did, saying: *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;* and, following the example of the father of the lunatic, we shall say: *Lord, I supplicate Thee, have pity on my son²⁴³—or on myself or on anyone else.*¹²

INTERCESSION OF CHRIST—Christ's priestly office consists of these two parts, (1) the offering up of himself as a sacrifice, and (2) making continual intercession for us.

When on earth he made intercession for his people (Luke 23:34; John 17:20; Heb. 5:7); but now he exercises this function of his priesthood in heaven, where he is said to appear in the presence of God for us (Heb. 9:12, 24).

His advocacy with the Father for his people rests on the basis of his own all-perfect sacrifice. Thus he pleads for and obtains the fulfilment of all the promises of the everlasting covenant (1 John 2:1; John 17:24; Heb. 7:25). He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities," and is both a merciful and a faithful high priest (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15, 16). This intercession is an essential part of his mediatorial work. Through him we have "access" to the Father (John 14:6; Eph. 2:18; 3:12). "The communion of his people with the Father will ever be sustained through him as mediatorial Priest" (Ps. 110:4; Rev. 7:17).

INTERCESSION OF THE SPIRIT—(Rom. 8:26, 27; John 14:26). "Christ is a royal Priest (Zech. 6:13). From the same throne, as King, he dispenses his Spirit to all the objects of his care, while as Priest he intercedes for them. The Spirit acts for him, taking only of his things. They both act with one consent, Christ as principal, the Spirit as his agent. Christ intercedes for us, without us, as our advocate in heaven, according to the provisions of the everlasting covenant. The Holy Spirit works upon our minds and hearts, enlightening and quickening, and thus determining our desires 'according to the will of God,' as our advocate within us. The work of the one is complementary to that of the other, and together they form a complete whole." , Hodge's Outlines of Theology.¹³

¹² Origen. (1954). *Origen: Prayer, Exhortation to Martyrdom* (J. Quasten & J. C. Plumpe, Eds.; J. J. O'Meara, Trans.; Vol. 19, pp. 53–57). Newman Press.

¹³ Easton, M. G. (1893). In *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (p. 346). Harper & Brothers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

INTERCESSION Act of intervening or mediating between differing parties, particularly the act of praying to God on behalf of another person. In the OT the Hebrew verb *paga'* is used of such pleading or interceding (Gen. 23:8; Isa. 53:12; 59:16; Jer. 7:16; 15:11; 27:18; 36:25). More general terms such as *palal*, "pray," or *chalah*, "appease," are also sometimes translated "intercede" (1 Sam. 7:5; 1 Kings 13:6). In the NT the Greek term is *entungkano* and its derivatives (Rom. 8:26–27, 34; 1 Tim. 2:1; Heb. 7:25).

Old Testament Many OT characters noted for their faith are also noted for their intercessory prayer. Abraham asked God not to destroy Sodom in order to save his nephew Lot. He called on the righteous character of God, asking if God would "kill the righteous with the wicked" (Gen. 18:25). In so doing, Abraham acknowledged that he was not worthy to lay such claims before the holy God (v. 27). Abraham also interceded for Abimelech, fulfilling a prophetic function and bringing healing (Gen. 20:7, 17).

Moses intervened between God and Pharaoh as he tried to get permission for the people to leave Egypt (for example, Exod. 8:8). At Sinai the people asked Moses to represent them before God since they feared to approach the awesome God (Exod. 20:19). After the people built the golden calf, Moses prayed for God's mercy, calling on God to remember His reputation among the nations and His promises to the patriarchs. As a result, God relented (Exod. 32:11–14). Through intercessory prayer Moses sought to make an atonement for sin, identifying himself so completely with the people that he asked to be blotted out of God's book if God would not forgive the people's sin (Exod. 32:30–34; cp. Deut. 9:25).

The priests had intercession as part of their job description (Joel 2:17; cp. 1 Sam. 2:25). The high priest's task was to make atonement for the people (Lev. 16). In face of the people's idolatry, Samuel asked God to forgive them (1 Sam. 7:5). Even when he did not agree with the people, Samuel took their plea for a king to God (1 Sam. 8; cp. chap. 12). When God rejected Saul, Samuel prayed in grief (1 Sam. 15:11). David interceded all night on behalf of his newborn baby, even knowing God had decreed the child's death because of David's sin (2 Sam. 12:14–18). After taking a census without God's direction, David asked God to punish him and not the innocent people (2 Sam. 24:17).

In dedicating the temple, Solomon asked God to hear the prayers of the sinful people and forgive them (1 Kings 8; cp. 3:3–14). Elijah accused God of bringing "tragedy upon the widow with whom I am staying by killing her son" (1 Kings 17:20) and prayed successfully that the child would live again (cp. 2 Kings 4:32–34). Hezekiah took Sennacherib's letter to the temple and opened it before God, praying for deliverance from the Assyrians (Isa. 37:14–20).

Intercession formed an important part of the prophet's task. Amos prayed that God's Word would not come to pass (Amos 7:5–6). Jeremiah responded to God's Word of judgment on the nation with a plea for God not to be a stranger among those who could not save themselves (Jer. 14:7–9). Lamentations is filled with prayers for the nation.

The Prophet Isaiah looked to a day when people from all nations could come to the temple and make intercession (Isa. 56:7). The prophetic hope centered in the Suffering Servant who would bear the sin of all people, making intercession for transgressors (Isa. 53:6, 12).

Intercession was not always effective. God told Jeremiah to forsake the prophetic duty of intercession: "Do not pray for these people. Do not lift up a cry or a prayer on their behalf, and do not beg Me, for I will not listen to you" (Jer. 7:16). Even the great heroes of intercession would not succeed in such situations (Jer. 15:1; cp. Ezek. 14:14). In the final analysis, even the most righteous of people need an intercessor with God (Job 9:32–35; 19:25; 23:1–17).

New Testament The NT teaches that intercession is expected of all believers (1 Tim. 2:1–3). Intercession for the sick is particularly important (James 5:14). Paul in his letters constantly referred to his prayers for the readers, and Jesus set forth the supreme example of intercession (Luke 22:32; 23:34; John 17).

The Bible reveals that the Holy Spirit, Christ, and Christians intercede for mankind. Romans 8:26–27 shows that the Holy Spirit works to sustain the burdened believer, to intercede, to carry even inexpressible prayers to God. Romans 8:34 offers the truth that the risen Christ will maintain His intercession for the believer, being the Mediator between God and man. God accepts a believer's prayers and prays through Christ's intercession. His death secured removal of sin; His resurrection bestowed life on those who believe in Him; His ascension brought exaltation to power in heaven and on earth. Now He intercedes for us at God's throne of grace. Hebrews 7:25 proclaims the complete deliverance that comes through salvation accomplished through Christ and notes that He is ever present in heaven to intercede for those who come to Him. See *Prayer*.

J. William Thompson and Trent C. Butler¹⁴

¹⁴ Thompson, J. W., & Butler, T. C. (2003). [Intercession](#). In C. Brand, C. Draper, A. England, S. Bond, & E. R. Clendenen (Eds.), *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (pp. 828–829). Holman Bible Publishers.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

WORD WEALTH

Jeremiah 27:18 **make intercession**, *paga*: (pah-gah); Strong's #6293: To reach; to meet someone; to pressure or urge someone strongly; to meet up with a person; encounter, entreat; to assail with urgent petitions. This verb occurs 46 times. In some passages it is translated "meet," as in Josh. 2:16. In Josh. 19:27, *paga* refers to the extent to which a tribal boundary is reached. Sometimes the verb refers to "falling upon" someone in battle, that is, to meet up with the enemy with hostile intent (1 Kin. 2:29). *Paga* is also translated "make intercession," the idea being that a supplicant catches up with a superior, and reaches him with an urgent request. Thus, intercession involves reaching God, meeting God, and entreating Him for His favor.¹⁵

The Sagacity and Submissiveness of Intercession

Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him. (Matthew 6:8[†])

Our understanding of God is the answer to prayer; getting things from God is God's indulgence of us. When God stops giving us things, He brings us into the place where we can begin to understand Him. As long as we get from God everything we ask for, we never get to know Him, we look upon Him as a blessing-machine, that has nothing to do with God's character or with our characters. "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."[†] Then why pray? To get to know your Father. It is not sufficient for us to say, "Oh yes, God is love," we have to know He is love, we have to struggle through until we do see He is love and justice, then our prayer is answered.

The nearer Abraham comes to God in his intercession, the more he recognises his entire unworthiness. There is a subtle thing that goes by the name of unworthiness which is petulant pride with God. When we are shy with other people it is because we believe we are superior to the average person and we won't talk until they realise our importance. Prayerlessness with God is the same thing, we are shy with God not because we are unworthy, but because we think God has not given enough consideration to our case, we have some peculiar elements He must be pleased to consider. We have to go to school in order to learn not to take ourselves seriously and to get the genuine unworthiness which no longer is shy before God. A child is never shy before its mother, and a child of God is not, it is conscious of its worthiness, i.e., its entire dependence.

"And he said, Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake" (Genesis 18:32). Abraham does the interceding while the angels go for the final test, after the final test, prayer is impossible. The way Abraham reached the stopping-point is indicated by the fact that he was in complete and entire communion with God through the progress of his intercession. When we come up against things in life, are we going to cave in and say we cannot understand them? We understand them by intercession, and by our intercession God does things He does not show us just now, although He reveals more and more of His character to us. He is working out His new creations (rv) in the world through His wonderful Redemption and our intercession all the time, and we have to be sagacious, not impudent.

The Shamelessness and Strenuousness of Intercession

I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. (Luke 11:8)

Strenuousness means whipping ourselves up, and jeering at ourselves till we sit down no more. Never give yourself any encouragement, only encourage yourself in God. "And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). It is a pleasant business to faint, everyone else has all the bother. "God will give it to me in His good time." He cannot until we intercede. Be at the business, use some perspiration of soul, get at the thing, and all of a sudden you will come to the place where you will say, "Now I see," but I defy you to tell anyone what you saw until they come to where you are—

¹⁵ Hayford, J. W., ed. (1997). *Spirit filled life study Bible* (electronic ed., Je 27:16). Thomas Nelson.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

*Oh could I tell, ye surely would believe it!
Oh could I only say what I have seen!
How should I tell or how can ye receive it,
How, till He bringeth you where I have been?*

The point is that we have come to understand God. It is never God's will for us to be dummies or babies spiritually, it is God's will for us to be sons and daughters of God, but He does not prevent us paying the price of being sons and daughters. He makes us sons and daughters potentially, and then sends us out to be sons and daughters actually. Are we prepared to go into the shameless business of prayer? that is, are we prepared to get to the right understanding of God in this matter? We can only get it by one way, not by disputing or controversy, but by prayer. Keep at it. We have no business to remain in the dark about the character of our Father when He has made His character very clear to us. The Sermon on the Mount has more to do with prayer than anything else. It means an end of self-indulgence in the body, in the mind, in the spirit, self-indulgence in anything and everything and a strenuous determination to get to understand God in this matter.

The Sacrament and Substitution of Intercession

And He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with Me one hour? (Matthew 26:40')

It is a great thing to watch with God rather than put God to the trouble of watching me in case I burn myself. We tax the whole arrangement of heaven to watch us, while God wants us to come and watch with Him, to be so identified with Him that we are not causing Him any trouble, but giving Him perfect delight because He can use us now instead of taxing some other servants of heaven to look after us.

O Lord, my Lord, I come to Thee this morning with a sense of spiritual failure. Cleanse me by Thy grace and restore me to the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. O that the sweet kindness of Jesus were more and more manifest in me.



O Lord, Thou knowest, in eager helpless trust I look up. O that in power and peace and purity and grace Thou wouldst shine forth in power, in grace and glory this day.



O Lord, the range of Thy power, the touch of Thy grace, the breathing of Thy Spirit, how I long for these to bring me face to face with Thee; Lord, by Thy grace cause me to appear before Thee.

Afternoon address at Founder's Day, the annual meetings of the Pentecostal League of Prayer, London, May 5, 1915.

Chapter XI

The Key to Service

*Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.
Matthew 9:38*

This is the key to the whole problem of Christian work. It is simple in words, but amazingly profound, because our Lord Jesus Christ said it.

Our Master's Orders

Pray ye therefore . . .

Prayer is usually considered to be devotional and more or less unpractical in ordinary life. Our Lord in His teaching always made prayer, not preparation for work, but *the* work. Thank God for all the marvellous organisation there is in Christian work, for medical missions and finely educated missionaries, for aggressive work in every shape and form; but these are, so to speak, but wards to the lock, the key is not in any of our organisations, the key lies exactly to our hand by our Lord's instruction, "Pray ye therefore."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:12-13). Have the "greater works" been done? They certainly have. The

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

men our Lord said these words to write the New Testament, and the reason they wrote it is that our Lord when He was glorified sent forth the personal Paraclete, the Holy Ghost not only in His power—His power and influence were at work before Pentecost—but He sent Him forth on to this earth personally where He is to this hour, and through His might and inspiration were produced the “greater works,” i.e., the New Testament.

But what does it mean for us? Have we also to do greater works than Jesus did? Certainly we have, if our Lord’s words mean anything, they mean that; and the great basis of prayer is to realise that we must take our orders from our Master. He put all the emphasis on prayer, and He made prayer not preparation for the work, not a sentiment nor a devotion, but *the* work. There is a real danger of worshipping prayer instead of praying because we worship. It is easy to do it if once we lose sight of our Lord and the emphasis is put not on His command, but on the thing which He commands.

We pray on the great fundamental basis of Redemption, and our prayers are made efficacious by the wonderful presence of the personal Holy Ghost in the world. Prayer is simple, prayer is supernatural, and to anyone not related to our Lord Jesus Christ, prayer is apt to look stupid. It does sound unreasonable to say that God will do things in answer to prayer, yet our Lord said that He would. Our Lord bases everything on prayer, then the key to all our work as Christians is, “Pray ye therefore.”

When we pray for others the Spirit of God works in the unconscious domain of their being that we know nothing about, and the one we are praying for knows nothing about, but after the passing of time the conscious life of the one prayed for begins to show signs of unrest and disquiet. We may have spoken until we are worn out, but have never come anywhere near, and we have given up in despair. But if we have been praying, we find on meeting them one day that there is the beginning of a softening in an enquiry and a desire to know something. It is that kind of intercession that does most damage to Satan’s kingdom. It is so slight, so feeble in its initial stages that if reason is not wedded to the light of the Holy Spirit, we will never obey it, and yet it is that kind of intercession that the New Testament places most emphasis on, though it has so little to show for it. It seems stupid to think that we can pray and all that will happen, but remember to Whom we pray, we pray to a God Who understands the unconscious depths of personality about which we know nothing, and He has told us to pray. The great Master of the human heart said, “Greater works than these shall he do. . . . And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do.”

Not only is prayer the work, but prayer is the way whereby fruit abides. Our Lord puts prayer as the means to fruit-producing and fruit-abiding work; but remember, it is prayer based on His agony, not on our agony. “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:16).

Prayer is not only the work and the way fruit abides, but prayer is the battle. “Put on the whole armour of God, . . . Stand therefore, . . .” and then pray. Paul says, “Praying always . . . for all saints, and for me” (see Ephesians 6:11-19). Do we remember to pray on the ground of our Lord’s orders for all who minister in His Name? If the Apostle Paul earnestly solicited prayer on his behalf that he might “make known with boldness the mystery of the Gospel,” (rv) surely it behoves us to remember that this is the key our Lord puts into our hands for all Christian work; not prayer because we are helpless, but prayer because God is Almighty.

Our Master’s Ownership

the Lord of the harvest . . .

Jesus did not say, “Go into the field,” He said, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest. . . .” That does not so much mean that the harvest is the world, it means that there are innumerable people who have reached a crisis in their life, they are “white already to harvest.” We find them everywhere, not only in the foreign field, but in the people living beside us, and the way we discern it is not by intellect, not by suggestions, but by prayer. Think of the countless crises in people’s lives at this time; they are at the parting of the ways, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.”

When we read the concluding verses in St. Matthew’s Gospel, we are apt to put the emphasis on the fact that Jesus said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations,” whereas the emphasis should be on “Go” because “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth.” Then the “going” is in perfect order, putting the emphasis where our Lord puts it. “Go ye therefore, . . . and, lo, I am with you alway,” that He may work His mighty works through us.

Our Master’s Option

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

. . . *that He will send forth labourers into His harvest.*

There is only one field of service that has no snares, and that is the field of intercession. All other fields have the glorious but risky snare of publicity; prayer has not. The key to all our work for God is in that one word we are apt to despise—"Pray." And prayer is "labourer" work.

The reason prayer is so important is, first because our Lord told us that prayer on the ground of His Redemption is the most mighty factor He has put into our hands, and second, because of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost in the day in which we live. We receive our knowledge of the Holy Ghost not by experience first, but by the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. The testimony of Jesus Christ regarding the Holy Ghost is that He is here, and the real living experience the Holy Spirit works in us is that all His emphasis is laid on glorifying our Lord Jesus Christ. We know the Holy Spirit first by the testimony of Jesus, and then by the conscious enjoyment of His presence.

"Pray ye therefore." Prayer is labour, not agony, but labour on the ground of our Lord's Redemption in simple confidence in Him. Prayer is simple to us because it cost Him so much to make it possible to us. God grant that we may work His victories for Him by taking His way about it.

O Lord, this morning disperse every mist, and shine clear and strong and invigoratingly. Forgive my tardiness, it takes me so long to awaken to some things.

◆ ◆ ◆

Lord God Omniscient, give me wisdom this day to worship and work aright and be wellpleasing to Thee. Lord, interpret Thyself to me more and more in fulness and beauty.

◆ ◆ ◆

Dark and appalling are the clouds of war and wickedness and we know not where to turn, but, Lord God, Thou reignest.¹⁶

Chapter XII

The Unrealised Logic of Prayer

Romans 8:26-28

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. Ephesians 6:18

Praying in the Holy Ghost. Jude 20

Ephesians 6:18 and Jude 20 are not quite identical with Romans 8:26. In the former it is man praying in the atmosphere produced by the Holy Spirit indwelling and surrounding him; in the latter the Holy Spirit Himself is praying in man. The similarity is obvious, but the point of difference is often missed in thinking about prayer. We realise that we are energised by the Holy Spirit for prayer, we know what it is to pray in the atmosphere and the presence of the Holy Spirit; but we do not so often realise that the Holy Spirit Himself prays in us with prayers that we cannot utter.

The Unrealised Philosophy of Prayer (Romans 8:26)

The great thought which we do not realise sufficiently is the interchanging action of the Divine Spirit and the human spirit. This interchanging action of the Divine and human at every stage of our religious life is vividly expressed here. The best example of the Divine Spirit working in a human spirit is seen in our Lord Jesus Christ in the days of His flesh. According to some expositors, we are so infirm that the Spirit of God brushes aside all our infirmities and prays irrespectively of us, but we find that our Lord recognised the difference between His own Spirit and the Spirit of God, and that His mind was always in subordination to the mind of God. "I can of Mine own self do nothing."

(a) The Uncovered Truth of Our Infirmities

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities . . .

To ask how we are to get our prayers answered is a different point of view from the New Testament. According to the New Testament, prayer is God's answer to our poverty, not a power we exercise to obtain an answer. We have the idea that prayer is only an exercise of our spiritual life. "Pray without ceasing." We read that the disciples said to our Lord, "Lord, teach us to pray." The disciples were good men and well-versed in Jewish praying, yet when they came in contact with Jesus Christ, instead of realising they could pray well, they came to the conclusion they

¹⁶ Chambers, O. (1996). *If ye shall ask*. Marshall, Morgan & Scott.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

did not know how to pray at all, and our Lord instructed them in the initial stages of prayer. Most of us can probably remember a time when we were religious, before we were born again of the Spirit of God, when we could pray fairly well; but after we were born again we became conscious of what Paul mentions here, our utter infirmity—“I do not know how to pray.” We become conscious not only of the power God has given us by His Spirit, but of our own utter infirmity. We hinder our life of devotion when we lose the distinction in thinking between these two. Reliance on the Holy Spirit for prayer is what Paul is bringing out in this verse. It is an unrealised point, we state it glibly enough, but Paul touches the thing we need to remember, he uncovers the truth of our infirmity, The whole source of our strength is receiving, recognising and relying on the Holy Spirit.

(b) The Unsyllabled Torment of Our Inability

for we know not what we should pray for as we ought . . .

The only platform from which the holiest saint on earth is ever heard is the platform mentioned in Hebrews 10:19, viz., we have “boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.” There is no other way. When we come into the presence of God, the human side of our praying makes us realise what Paul is trying to teach, that if we are ever going to approach God and pray acceptably, it must be by the “piece of God” in us which He has given us. Some of the qualities of God must be merged into us before our prayers can be fit for His acceptance. We are all familiar with Luke 11:13, but we do not always remember that our Lord spoke the words in connection with receiving the Holy Spirit for prayer. Paul in Romans 8:26 beats out into gold leaf the nugget that our Lord gives in Luke 11:13. When I realise that I cannot approach God, that I cannot see as God sees, that I am choked up with things my eyes see and my flesh wants, and the empty spaces round my heart want, then Jesus says, “If you, being evil,”—you know that is your infirmity—“if you ask God for the Holy Spirit, He will give Him to you.” That is, God will be merged into me, and I can begin to think about real prayer, relying on what God has planted in me for prayer. Otherwise we could never get near Him, the crush of our infirmities would paralyse the words on our lips. We can only pray acceptably in the Spirit, that is, by the Holy Spirit in us, all the rest is being “cumbered about.” The disposition of sin is removed in sanctification, there is no doubt about that; but Paul insists that the body is not changed, the body we had and which was ruled by the wrong disposition of sin still remains (see Romans 6:12-19). We have to use that body now and make it a slave to the new disposition, and we have to realise the need to do it more in prayer than in anything else.

(c) The Unutterable Tenderness of the Intercession

. . . but the Spirit Itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

The spirit of a man, whether it be energised by the Spirit of God or not, is bound to try and express itself in the body, which becomes its soul manifest; if it refuses to express itself in a rational way, it will express itself in an irrational, stupid way. When the Spirit of God comes in and energises the spirit of a man, what happens is that he is taken up into the great mystery of the Holy Ghost interceding in him along a particular line. If the Holy Spirit is allowed to dwell in the human spirit He has energised, He will express the unutterable. Think what that means. It means being quickened by the incoming of the Holy Spirit Who comes in to dwell supremely, and the amazing revelation is that He intercedes in us, for us, with a tenderness exactly in accordance with the Mind of God.

Have we ever allowed our minds to dwell on this element of prayer? “The sinner out of heart with self is nearest God in prayer.” It is a mistake to interpret prayer on the natural instead of on the spiritual line, to say that because prayer brings us peace and joy and makes us feel better, therefore it is a Divine thing. This is the mere accident or effect of prayer, there is no real God-given revelation in it. This is the God-given revelation: that when we are born again of the Spirit of God and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, He intercedes for us with a tenderness and an understanding akin to the Lord Jesus Christ and akin to God, that is, He expresses the unutterable for us.

The Unrivalled Power of Prayer (Romans 8:27)

(a) The Unimagined Interest of God

And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit . . .

The Holy Spirit when He comes in to the hidden sphere of our life applies the Atonement to us in the unconscious realm as well as in the realm of which we are conscious, that is, He works out in us the understanding of sin that God has; and it is only when we get a grasp of the unrivalled power of the Spirit in us that we understand the meaning of 1 John 1:7, “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” This does not refer to conscious sin only, but

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

to the tremendously profound understanding of sin which only the Holy Ghost in us realises, and God searches our hearts to find out what the intercession of His Spirit is.

There are tremendous thoughts expressed in God's Book, and unless we have learned to rely on the Holy Spirit we shall say, "Oh, I shall never understand that," but the Holy Spirit in us understands it, and as we recognise and rely on Him, He will work it out, whether we consciously understand or not. The point for us to remember is that we must get to the right basis of thinking spiritually as well as of living. Never close down on your personal experience, never rivet your attention on the fact that you have had the experience of salvation or sanctification, or the baptism of the Holy Ghost; these experiences are simply doorways into a life. We have to make our minds realise this great revealed thought underneath, that the Holy Spirit is working out in us the Mind of God even as He worked out the Mind of God in Christ Jesus.

(b) The Undiscovered Intercession before God

because He maketh intercession for the saints . . .

Who does? The Holy Spirit in us, and God searches our hearts, not to know what our conscious prayers are, but to find out what the prayer of the Holy Spirit is in and behind all our conscious praying. In the vision of Ezekiel wings are used as the symbol of aspiration in praying, "And the sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaketh" (Ezekiel 10:5 rv). The voice of praying in the saints is exactly identical with the voice of Almighty God, and slowly and surely God discerns in the life of the individual saint what He discerned always in His Son, Who said, "I came down from heaven not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me."^{†††} As we rely on the Holy Spirit we learn to brood along the line of His expression of the unutterable in us.

(c) The Unsurpassed Identification with God

. . . according to the will of God.

Look back over your own history with God in prayer, and you will find that the glib days of prayer are done. When we draw on the human side of our experience only, our prayers become amazingly flippant and familiar, and we ourselves become amazingly hard and metallic; but if along with the human element we rely on the Holy Spirit, we shall find that our prayers become more and more inarticulate; and when they are inarticulate, reverence grows deeper and deeper, and undue familiarity has the effect of a sudden blow on the face. There is something hopelessly incongruous in a flippant statement before God. We can always measure our growth in grace by what Paul is stating here. Am I growing slowly to lisp the very prayers of God? Is God gratified (if I may use the phrase) in seeing that His Spirit is having His way at last in a life, and turning that life into what will glorify His Son?

The Unrecognised Providence of Prayer (Romans 8:28)

At the first glance this verse seems to have nothing to do with the previous verses, but it has an amazingly close connection with them.

(a) The Undeified Shrine of Consciousness

And we know that to them that love God . . . (rv)

Do you remember how Paul never wearied of saying, "Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost"^{†††}? Recall what Jesus Christ said about the historic temple which is the symbol of the body; He ruthlessly turned out those that sold and bought in the temple, and said, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer^{†††}; but ye have made it a den of thieves." Let us apply that to ourselves. We have to remember that our conscious life, though only a tiny bit of our personality, is to be regarded by us as a shrine of the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost will look after the unconscious part we do not know, we must see we guard the conscious part, for which we are responsible, as a shrine of the Holy Ghost. If we recognise this as we should, we shall be careful to keep our body undefiled for Him.

(b) The Undetected Sacredness of Circumstances

all things work together for good . . .

The circumstances of a saint's life are ordained by God, and not by happy-go-lucky chance. There is no such thing as chance in the life of a saint, and we shall find that God by His providence brings our bodies into circumstances that we cannot understand a bit, but the Spirit of God understands; He is bringing us into places and among people

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

and under conditions in order that the intercession of the Holy Spirit in us may take a particular line. Do not, therefore, suddenly put your hand in front of the circumstances and say, “No, I am going to be my own amateur providence, I am going to watch this and guard that.” “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” The point to remember is that all our circumstances are in the hand of God. The Spirit imparts a solemnity to our circumstances and makes us understand something of the travail of Jesus Christ. It is not that we enter into the agony of intercession, it is that we utilise the common-sense circumstances into which God has put us, and the common-sense people He has put us among by His providence, to present their cases before Him and give the Holy Spirit a chance to intercede for them. We bring the particular people and circumstances before God’s throne, and the Holy Spirit in us has a chance to intercede for them. That is how God is going to sweep the whole world by His saints. Are we making the Holy Spirit’s work difficult by being indefinite, or by trying to do His work for Him? We must do the human side of the intercession, and the human side is the circumstances we are in, the people we are in contact with. We have to use our common sense in keeping our conscious life and our circumstances as a shrine of the Holy Ghost, and as we bring the different ones before God, the Holy Spirit presents them before the Throne all the time. The Holy Spirit does the interceding, but we must do our part; we must do the human side while He does the Divine. So never think it strange concerning the circumstances you are in.

(c) The Undeviating Security of His Calling

... even to them that are called according to His purpose.(rv)

To talk about our intercession for another soul being the means of doing what the Bible says, “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,” sounds utterly ridiculous until we get the basal thinking revealed through the Atonement and the indwelling Holy Ghost, then it is an amazing revelation of the marvellous love and condescension of God—that in Christ Jesus and by the reception of the Holy Spirit, He can take us, sin-broken, sin-diseased, wrong creatures, and re-make us entirely until we are really the ones in whom the Holy Spirit intercedes as we do our part. Are we making it easy for the Holy Spirit to work out God’s will in us, or are we continually putting Him on one side by the empty requests of our natural hearts, Christians though we be? Are we learning to bring ourselves into such obedience that our every thought and imagination is brought into captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ, and is the Holy Spirit having an easy way through us more and more? Remember, your intercessions can never be mine, and my intercessions can never be yours, but the Holy Ghost makes intercession in our particular editions, without which intercession someone will be impoverished. Let us remember the depth and height and solemnity of our calling as saints.¹⁷

Step 9

Prayer That Intervenes and Reverses

He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them.

Hebrews 7:25

The disciples’ call to prayer is the call to a life of expanding dimensions—from worship to petition, from thanksgiving to warfare. As noted before, Ephesians 6:18 points the way to

- “praying always with all prayer” (that is, by every means of prayer)
- “and supplication” (literally, persevering for the promises, as contained in the text)
- “in the Spirit” (with supernatural assistance from Him).

Let me invite you—no, let me *urge* you—toward what lies at hand. I want to discuss three grand words that describe different ways in which we can pray: supplication, intercession and thanksgiving. But I especially want us to see them in their relationship to that order of prayer I call *the prayer that intervenes and reverses*.

Supplication

In writing to the Philippians, the apostle Paul registered one of the broadest, most inclusive and most practical calls to prayer in the Bible: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7). Philippi was a Roman colony, an outpost of Rome’s authority, and therefore secured with a special contingent of imperial troops.

¹⁷ Chambers, O. (1996). *If ye shall ask*. Marshall, Morgan & Scott.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Paul's choice of terms, noting the *promise* of prayer, takes on special meaning in this light. When he says, "The peace of God . . . will guard your hearts and minds," he uses the Greek word for "guard"—the garrisoning of Roman troops to secure a colony. In other words, he was saying, *If you will take a specific stance in prayer, God will establish a stronghold in your mind, bracing you against the adversary so that you will never be cast into tumult or confusion, whatever your trial or need.*

This text points the way for our entry into this place of secured confidence following prayer. But it involves more than simple petition—ordinary, give-us-this-day-our-daily-bread asking. Paul calls us to "supplication," an interesting word in the Greek language (*deomai*) that essentially has to do with "asking" but extends the idea further.

Strong's Concordance has linked in alphabetical sequence the words *dei*, *deomai* and *deō*. When I looked up the first, my discovery of these words in their natural *lexical* order helped me to see them in their *logical* order. First, their definitions:

- *Deomai*: "to supplicate or to make supplication," "to beg" or "to pray earnestly"
- *Deō*: "to bind something up" or "to tie something up"
- *Dei*: "ought" or "it is necessary" (a Greek particle used to express the moral imperative)

The "moral imperative" refers to that which in the order of things "ought" to be. For example, if there is a need, we *ought* to help. If there is a fire, we *ought* to do something—help, warn someone, get water or even put it out. "Ought" means, in the order of things, to do what is necessary and right.

Now, it was seemingly by accident that in discovering the linguistic relationship of these words, I began to grasp the concept of supplication (that is, the pivotal difference between simply asking and supplicating): To ask is to simply make our request known, and we have dealt with that already. But supplication answers to those times when a focused point of *passion* in prayer is needed. And when this need is joined to our recognition of the privileges we have been given in prayer, a distinct dimension of prayer emerges.

I had always been puzzled by *deomai* being translated "to beg" where prayer was involved, since Jesus does not *ever* teach prayer as begging. It does not reflect our relationship with God. But when we look at the cognate, *deō* ("to bind"), the dynamic between prayer and spiritual authority comes clearly into view.

Consider Jesus' teaching regarding the authority His Church shall be given over the dark powers of hell: "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Based on that quote, it appears that *deomai*, as a prayer exercise called supplication, implies more than earnest begging. The evidence is that we are to see supplication as involving the Christ-authorized action of binding up certain things.

Understandably then, we ask, What things do I have the *right* to bind up? The answer, I believe, is in our seeing the cognate relationship of *dei* to *deomai*. It would seem we are assigned to bind up things that are *not* what they ought to be and see them through in prayer until they *are* what they ought to be. Supplication, thus seen, is prayer that can return things to their intended order—to what is proper or ought to be.

Look at our world, created under a divine order now long since violated. We understand that so much of our world is as it is because the order God intended has fallen into confusion, chaos and disarray due to the Fall, human sin, and satanic activity. Now, seeing things "out of order," God has ordained a *Mission: Possible* for we who have come under *His* order. We not only have the privilege of *fellowship* in prayer but also an invitation to *partnership* in prayer—to learn a dimension of binding by prayer unto the reconstitution of His original order and intent for peoples' lives and circumstances.

Supplication moves into the confusion of the fallen order of things (for example, a broken heart, a broken home, someone's broken health) and begins through supplication to bind up broken things, drawing the strands of such binding back to what ought to be according to God's intent and God's will.

In short, the praying Church has been empowered by Christ's promise to pray in ways that stop the plans that hell's councils are trying to advance. This is what is meant by prayers that bind and loose. Binding is not limited to how we may conceive of something being tied up; it is also based on the concept of binding as it is used when a contract has been made.

For example, when a property is being developed, an architect will regularly visit the site, meeting with the contractor to assure the details of the contract are fulfilled. Holding the contractor to the contract is legally possible because the terms of a contract are binding—but possible only as the architect or his representative insists on the "binding" clauses of the contract, ensuring that contested or neglected features of the project will be finished as they ought to be and as the owner wills.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

The analogy is obvious. In this world, Satan is trying to construct things that are totally out of line from God's blueprint. You and I are on-site observers of what is taking place in human lives and earthly circumstances that come to our awareness. When what ought to be is not, our role in supplication is to say:

Lord, what You contracted for at the cross, for Your purpose and power to save [name] or deliver [name], isn't being done on earth. Let Your ruling power, Your kingdom, come! Let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Lord, as Your agent assigned to this case in prayer, I say stop the adversary's advance. According to Calvary's terms, I "bind" the enemy from success. According to Your will through the power of Jesus' blood, I loose on earth what You have already willed in heaven.

Please notice that the grammar of the Greek phrase, translated in essence "whatever you bind will be bound, whatever you loose will be loosed," makes one thing clear that sometimes goes unnoted. It is important that we understand this fact: Our binding only accomplishes on earth what has *already been* accomplished in heaven.

In other words, we do not *make* things happen; prayer *releases* their happening. God has ordained the intended order, so we are not creators of what occurs but rather *releasers* of what He has desired to be, but which our flesh or the devil oppose. So when we bind or loose, remember, His is the power and the provision; ours is the privilege of participation. Further, may we always be wise and praiseful, knowing the source of the power we exercise. Where does it flow from?

The cross!

Never forget it, loved one. Jesus' death on the cross broke the adversary's rule over us once and forever. Apart from Calvary's power, we are no different. You and I have no defense in our own power. We are all helpless against Satan's strategies or contrivances, *except* that when we have the resources of Calvary, we not only have a sure defense for our own soul but also a point of appeal in calling for heaven's best in the face of hell's worst.

Because of Jesus' victory through the blood of His cross, prayers of supplication can bind—we can contract for heaven's ought-to-be deliverance and rejoice in seeing God's will done.

In this light, then, it is not surprising that Paul said when we pray that way, the peace of God will guard our hearts. Prayer (asking) and supplication (binding and loosing) lay the groundwork for a deep peace to possess the soul if, as Philippians 4:6 says, praises of thanksgiving are offered with them. Faith brings peace, and anxiety will cease.

Prayer has found a place of confidence by calling on heaven's resource and victory and by applying them in simple faith. Then with thanksgiving, we rest in praise as heaven's power moves to actuate the holy will and purpose of God's intended order on earth as in heaven. Our prayers are set forward in Calvary's power of release, for God's glory and in Jesus' name. Amen.

Intercession

Continuing with "all prayer" as our goal, let's look at the idea of intercession. Considering the apostle Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:1–3, it is important and impressive to see the priority this order of prayer is given along with supplication:

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior.

Of particular significance are the *place* and the *scope* indicated—the priority ("first of all") and the aegis of influence ("for kings and all who are in authority").

In this foundational New Testament call to intercession, we have what I believe is the Bible's fundamental realm of assignment with regard to civic and political affairs. The directive is to pray for civic issues that are grander and broader than our own immediate points of personal concern or involvement. Obedience to this call will disallow any notion or practice of prayer as a preoccupying, self-centered concern. We are promised influence that can affect the climate of a culture ("that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life").

Understandably, it would be tempting to say, *Who am I to suppose that when I kneel, I can decide the moral, spiritual, political, military or economic circumstances in my country? In my world?* But the Word of God not only says intercession has that capacity; it also specifically says intercession is one of our *first* assignments—a priority which, if observed, can reveal the living Church's real role in determining government. (While I believe Christians in a free society should vote and be as politically active or involved as they feel called, the Bible says little about direct political control. Yet it has *much* to say about the intercessor's role in praying for governments.)

"Effective" and "Fervent" Prayer in James

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

In James 5:16, the Bible notes, “The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.” The text, freely translated, reads, “The spiritually energized prayer of an impassioned person seeking God will count for more than he or she can imagine. Look how!” Then the prophet Elijah is mentioned as an illustration of such prayer:

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

vv. 17–18

A study of the Old Testament text being referenced here (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1–46) reveals a dramatic story of social, spiritual, economic and, yes, meteorological impact through one man’s intercession. The climate of the culture was *literally* changed, as drought conditions gave way to life-giving rain. The same passage shows Elijah’s victory over the prophets of Baal—a spiritual triumph—and the breaking of a drought, which would have had obvious economic and social impact. God’s judgment on the people was reversed, and this magnificent passage in James says that same potential is available today.

The broad, sweeping possibilities of intercession are unfolded in an examination of the Greek and Hebrew words used to indicate this type of prayer. *Entynchanō* (Greek) and *paga* (Hebrew) have essentially the same meaning—a definition that seems peculiar to most when first heard. Both mean to “light upon,” “come upon by accident” or “strike” (as lightning, unpredictably).

The Word Paga in the Old Testament

Maybe you are like me, and your first exposure to those definitions evoked a bit of bewilderment. *Prayer by accident?* Let me give some examples of the use of *paga* in the Old Testament to demonstrate the awesome truth in this word.

In Genesis 28, Jacob is seen in flight, running from his brother, Esau. He comes to a place that will eventually be named Bethel. As he arrives there, he looks for a place to rest. During the night of sleep, he had the vision known as Jacob’s ladder. When he awakened the next morning—after God met him in a dynamically powerful way, giving him a promise for his whole future—Jacob says, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it” (v. 16). The day before, however, when he stopped at that site, Scripture says, “He lighted upon a certain place” (v. 11 KJV).

In other words, to Jacob’s eye this was a random place of stopping; but in God’s plan, it would become the milestone of his life. Therein lies the idea of intercession. What seems random—catching us unexpectedly in time and circumstance and commanding our attention—is not accidental but *providential*.

Dear one, almost every day of our lives, you and I step into apparently random situations. If we perceive they are ordained of the Spirit, we will learn to respond to them, knowing God has brought us to them. There will be occasions when we will have a seemingly random thought, or a “signaling,” which might seem accidental; but wisdom will teach us to seize these moments as intended by God to cause us to intercede for someone or some situation.

The issue of intercession does not have to do only with grand national and international issues, as we have already reflected upon, but also with anything that the Lord places before us as a point intersecting our daily lives. Perhaps you are driving along and see an accident in the roadway. Recognize that in God’s providence, He has you present to intercede.

Please capture the divine significance of this for a moment. In many cases, you and I are the only people He has on the scene who have sufficient spiritual sensitivity to know that we can make a difference. The Lord wants to salt all of society with people who have this understanding—people who recognize that, as intercessors, they are present for the purpose of travailing in prayer for a world that otherwise would experience only the tragic consequences of life’s problems, without the hope of divine entry to their circumstance through intercession.

Intercession occurs when people realize God has ordained boundaries of blessing for human experiences, and unless someone prays, Satan will try to violate the boundary line. He will try to make the experience less than it would have been in God’s counsel and covenant. Intercession sees that God’s purposes reach all the way unto what He wills.

Unfortunately, many of God’s people have adopted a mind-set of passivity, a kind of spiritual sloth that causes us to think, *Well, God is all-powerful. He can do whatever He wants, and I’ll sort of agree to it. Isn’t that what “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” means?* (Matthew 6:10 KJV).

No, dear one.

Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done” on this earthly side of things. We, the redeemed troops, therefore, must fight the good fight and see heaven’s covenant established and extended in the name of the King. We are not praying, *Oh well, I guess, “Thy kingdom come, and Thy will be done.”* Instead, we are praying, *I*

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

stand as heaven's ambassador on this planet. And I say, "God's kingdom come here, in this setting, and God's will be done."

Intercession is insisting on the extension of heaven's covenanted boundaries, which hell will encroach upon and try to push back to less than what God has intended. We are the ones appointed to monitor the situation. In prayer we represent heaven's *purposes*, by heaven's *power*, speaking heaven's *covenant* into the situation; and we watch God actuate it according to our calling upon Him.

The word *paga* is also found in 1 Samuel 22. During the time of his backsliding as king of Israel, Saul was offended by some of the priests. He ordered his own troops to fall on them and kill them, but his troops respected God's priests too much to obey their own king. It was an embarrassment to him, so Saul turned to a pagan man, Doeg the Edomite, who had joined his entourage, and said, "Turn thou, and fall upon the priests" (v. 18 KJV). The hateful Edomite seized the moment, grabbed a sword and began to lop off the heads of God's priests. The Bible says that Doeg turned and "fell upon [*paga*] the priests" (v. 18 KJV).

Now, I admit that the scene, the slaying of God's priests, is tragic. But the verb, objectively used in this setting, represents a person who goes on the attack, falling upon the perceived adversary of his king. It is a lesson in intercession, except in our case, our adversary is the devil, who "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). In intercessory prayer, you and I are taking the sword of the Spirit and, at the direction of our King, falling upon the adversary, cutting off his efforts to attack and stopping his advance.

Intercession is such a dynamic form of prayer. It involves our ensuring on earth the boundaries of God's heavenly purposes, defending against the enemy's encroachment, recognizing our privilege to take action at apparently random encounters and *controlling the climate* of societies and nations.

The Role of Intercessor in Romans

So how do we exercise the role of intercessor? In Romans 8:26–27, we read how the Holy Spirit is available to help us in this prayer dimension:

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God. Note the proximity of these two verses to the oft quoted verse that follows: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (v. 28).

This much-loved verse must never be removed from its context. Romans 8:26–28 needs to be considered as a whole, for it shows how when intercession is energized by the Holy Spirit are brought to bear upon situations we do not understand, *then* there comes the entry of God's purpose—at which point "all things work together for good."

Listen to me, dear one: All things *do not* work together for good in this world—not automatically. *Nothing* works together for good in this world on its own. But intercession is the pivot point determining *if* God's good will penetrate all things. As that occurs, and we partner with Him in understanding and undertaking our prayer role, we allow the likeness of His Son to be developed in us.

Jesus' likeness is not only one of character; it is also one of spiritual authority. Jesus not only walked in purity of conduct, but He also walked about setting straight things that had been corrupted by the works of darkness. Remember Acts 10:38: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth . . . who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil." Jesus was not just a good man. He was *God's* man.

So as the Lord calls us to be conformed to the image of Christ (see Romans 8:29), learning Holy Spirit–assisted intercession is a part of our character growth in Christ—a part of being conformed to His image as disciples.

Thanksgiving

Finally, learn the power of thanksgiving, which Paul describes in one of his letters to the believers in Thessalonica: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thessalonians 5:16–18).

The Bible does not say everything is a thankworthy thing. It says, in everything you *see*, be thankful. For example, if you saw the flames of a small brush fire threatening your home, you would not stand there and say, *Thank God!* Instead, you would grab a rug to beat the fire out or spray water to drench it. But when hell's fire begins to draw near through tough or painful circumstance, the Bible says to use praise and thanksgiving—to God for His almightiness—to strike down the blaze.

We are not told to give thanks *for* everything but rather *in* everything. That is, in the middle of everything, however desperate, *give thanks*.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

How? Go out and begin slapping down hell's flames with praise to God. Shout to the high heavens that God is able to master this situation by His dominion, which you welcome with your worship. Say:

- *I thank God this situation can't master us.*
- *I thank God He is bigger than what is happening right now.*
- *I thank God that though I had this accident, He is going to move into this scene and assist me.*
- *I thank God that though my sister has been diagnosed with cancer, we have a living Lord who is going to sustain us.*
- *I thank God that though I seem to be weak in my body today, He has promised me His strength and resources.*

In everything, give thanks!

This is what Paul is saying when he writes, "For this is the will of God" (v. 18). Are cancer, difficulties and accidents the will of God? No. But the *spirit of thanksgiving* is the will of God concerning you.

As we look at worship, petition, supplication, intercession and thanksgiving, we are seeing some of the exceeding wonders of prayer for application in our personal lives, as we live in the power of the Spirit as growing disciples of Christ.

But lo' the snare is broke, the captive's freed,
By faith on all the hostile powers we tread,
And crush through Jesus' strength the Serpent's head.
Jesus hath cast the cursed Accuser down,
Hath rooted up the tares by Satan sown:
All nature bows to His benign command,
And two are one in His almighty hand.

Charles Wesley, 1707–1788¹⁸

What is intercessory prayer?

Quite simply, intercessory prayer is the act of praying on behalf of others. The role of mediator in prayer was prevalent in the Old Testament, in the cases of Abraham, Moses, David, Samuel, Hezekiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Christ is pictured in the New Testament as the ultimate intercessor, and because of this, all Christian prayer becomes intercession since it is offered to God through and by Christ. Jesus closed the gap between us and God when He died on the cross. Because of Jesus' mediation, we can now intercede in prayer on behalf of other Christians or for the lost, asking God to grant their requests according to His will. ~~"For there is one God and one mediator between~~ God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

A wonderful model of intercessory prayer is found in Daniel 9. It has all the elements of true intercessory prayer. It is in response to the Word (v. 2); characterized by fervency (v. 3) and self-denial (v. 4); identified unselfishly with God's people (v. 5); strengthened by confession (v. 5–15); dependent on God's character (vv. 4, 7, 9, 15); and has as its goal God's glory (vv. 16–19). Like Daniel, Christians are to come to God on behalf of others in a heartbroken and repentant attitude, recognizing their own unworthiness and with a sense of self-denial. Daniel does not say, "I have a right to demand this out of You, God, because I am one of your special, chosen intercessors." He says, "I'm a sinner," and, in effect, "I do not have a right to demand anything." True intercessory prayer seeks not only to know God's will and see it fulfilled, but to see it fulfilled whether or not it benefits us and regardless of what it costs us. True intercessory prayer seeks God's glory, not our own.

The following is only a partial list of those for whom we are to offer intercessory prayers: all in authority (1 Timothy 2:2); ministers (Philippians 1:19); the church (Psalm 122:6); friends (Job 42:8); fellow countrymen (Romans 10:1); the sick (James 5:14); enemies (Jeremiah 29:7); those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44); those who forsake us (2 Timothy 4:16); and all men (1 Timothy 2:1).

There is an erroneous idea in contemporary Christianity that those who offer up intercessory prayers are a special class of "super-Christians," called by God to a specific ministry of intercession. The Bible is clear that *all* Christians are called to be intercessors. All Christians have the Holy Spirit in their hearts and, just as He intercedes for us in

¹⁸ Hayford, J. (2018). [Walking the path of prayer: 10 steps to reaching the heart of god](#). Chosen.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

accordance with God's will (Romans 8:26–27), we are to intercede for one another. This is not a privilege limited to an exclusive Christian elite; this is the command to all. In fact, not to intercede for others is sin. ~~“As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you” (1 Samuel 12:23).~~

Certainly Peter and Paul, when asking others to intercede for them, did not limit their request to those with a special calling to intercession. “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him” (Acts 12:5). Notice it was the whole church that prayed for him, not just those with a gift of intercession. In Ephesians 6:16–18, Paul exhorts the Ephesian believers—all of them—on the fundamentals of the Christian life, which includes intercession “on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.” Clearly, intercessory prayer is part of the Christian life for all believers.

Further, Paul sought prayer on his behalf from all the Roman believers in Romans 15:30. He also urged the Colossians to intercede for him in Colossians 4:2–3. Nowhere in any biblical request for intercession is there any indication that only a certain group of people could intercede. On the contrary, those who seek others to intercede for them can use all the help they can get! The idea that intercession is the privilege and calling of only some Christians is without biblical basis. Worse, it is a destructive idea that often leads to pride and a sense of superiority.

God calls all Christians to be intercessors. It is God's desire that every believer be active in intercessory prayer. What a wonderful and exalted privilege we have in being able to come boldly before the throne of Almighty God with our prayers and requests!¹⁹

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 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]

3:1 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.

¹⁹ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered](#). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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.

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.

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)

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.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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. 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.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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*

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.

ROLE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

Original Relationship: Creation	Distortion of the Relationship: The Fall	Restoration of the Relationship: Redemption
Man and woman are perfectly related to one another and to God (Gen. 2:25).	The relationship between the man and the woman and their relationship to God are distorted by the presence of sin (Gen. 3:7, 8).	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.

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.

Walking Together in His Amazing Grace: A Study of Ephesians

Week 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

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); both²⁰

Ephesians 5:18

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.²¹

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*

Cross references

- A. [Ephesians 3:2](#) : [Acts 9:15](#)
- B. [Ephesians 3:3](#) : [Acts 22:17, 21](#); [26:16](#)
- C. [Ephesians 3:3](#) : [[Rom. 11:25](#); [16:25](#); [Eph. 3:4, 9](#); [6:19](#)]; [Col. 1:26](#); [4:3](#)
- D. [Ephesians 3:6](#) : [Gal. 3:28, 29](#)
- E. [Ephesians 3:7](#) : [Rom. 15:16](#)
- F. [Ephesians 3:7](#) : [Rom. 1:5](#)
- G. [Ephesians 3:7](#) : [Rom. 15:18](#)
- H. [Ephesians 3:8](#) : [[1 Cor. 15:9](#)]
- I. [Ephesians 3:8](#) : [[Col. 1:27](#); [2:2, 3](#)]
- J. [Ephesians 3:9](#) : [John 1:3](#); [Col. 1:16](#); [Heb. 1:2](#)
- K. [Ephesians 3:10](#) : [1 Pet. 1:12](#)
- L. [Ephesians 3:10](#) : [[1 Tim. 3:16](#)]
- M. [Ephesians 3:10](#) : [Eph. 1:21](#); [6:12](#); [Col. 1:16](#); [2:10, 15](#)
- N. [Ephesians 3:11](#) : [[Eph. 1:4, 11](#)]
- O. [Ephesians 3:12](#) : [2 Cor. 3:4](#); [Heb. 4:16](#); [10:19, 35](#); [[1 John 2:28](#); [3:21](#)]
- P. [Ephesians 3:13](#) : [Phil. 1:14](#)
- Q. [Ephesians 3:13](#) : [2 Cor. 1:6](#)
- R. [Ephesians 3:14](#) : [Eph. 1:3](#)

Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

²⁰ Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Eph 3:1–5:33). Thomas Nelson.

²¹ 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 9: Ephesians 3:14-21 – INTERCESSION

S. [Ephesians 3:16](#) : [[Eph. 1:7](#); [2:4](#); [Phil. 4:19](#)]

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins,
according to the riches of His grace

⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

¹⁹ And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

T. [Ephesians 3:16](#) : [1 Cor. 16:13](#); [Phil. 4:13](#); [Col. 1:11](#)

¹³ Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong.

U. [Ephesians 3:16](#) : [Rom. 7:22](#)

V. [Ephesians 3:17](#) : [John 14:23](#); [Rom. 8:9](#); [2 Cor. 13:5](#); [[Eph. 2:22](#)]

W. [Ephesians 3:17](#) : [Col. 1:23](#)

X. [Ephesians 3:18](#) : [Eph. 1:18](#)

Y. [Ephesians 3:18](#) : [Rom. 8:39](#)

Z. [Ephesians 3:19](#) : [Eph. 1:23](#)

AA. [Ephesians 3:20](#) : [Rom. 16:25](#)

BB. [Ephesians 3:20](#) : [1 Cor. 2:9](#)

CC. [Ephesians 3:20](#) : [Col. 1:29](#)

DD. [Ephesians 3:21](#) : [Rom. 11:36](#)