

Ephesians

Chapter 3

The Mystery of the Church - Ephesians 3:1-13

After presenting the great truths of the Church, Paul now turns to God in prayer and asks that his readers understand the great truths that have just been revealed. No sooner does he break out in prayer, than he stops and parenthetically explains his role in this mystery. His prayer, which actually starts in verse one, is interrupted until verse 14. In the intervening verses we find out some great truths about the Church, the mystery of Christ that was hidden and now revealed.

The Messenger - Ephesians 3:1

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

We find the messenger of the mystery in verse one, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ. Paul never considered himself to be the prisoner of Rome, although it was Rome that had arrested him. He did not consider himself a prisoner of the Jews, although it was they that trumped up the charges against him. Nor was he the prisoner of Satan. No, Paul was the prisoner of Jesus Christ. He saw his imprisonment first, and foremost, as the platform from which God would have him minister. He knew that his life was in God's hands, and when God would have him free, he would go free. Until then, he was Christ's prisoner.

The Mission - Ephesians 3:2

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

What was Paul's mission? It was to spread the news of the mystery that was given to him by God on the Damascus road. The word for dispensation, *oikonomia*, refers to a stewardship. Paul was a steward of the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which made both Jew and Gentile part of one new body. A steward was responsible for someone else's property or affairs when that person was not around. As a result, a steward had a great deal of responsibility to carry out the wishes of the owner.

Implications of Paul's Stewardship

- 1. The message was not his, it was God's.**
- 2. Paul was responsible to proclaim the mystery faithfully - 1 Corinthians 9:16.**
- 3. The Gospel was a divine trust given to Paul and for which Paul was accountable - 1 Timothy 1:12-14.**
- 4. Paul was responsible to pass the truth of the Gospel on to the next generation - 2 Timothy 2:1-5.**

What was this stewardship? It was the grace of God, which is a reference to the gospel message as proclaimed to the Gentiles. Prior to the calling of Paul, the gospel was basically a Jewish thing. The early church consisted of Jews, and all of the Apostles were Jews. It was not until the calling of Paul later on in Acts that the Gentiles were included in the church. In fact,

it was not until after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 that the Gentiles were seen as fellow members of the church. Paul's special role was to be the bridge between the Jew and Gentile, proclaiming the message of God's grace that made both Jew and Gentile equal sharers in the church.

The Mystery - Ephesians 3:3-6

How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) 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; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

Paul now defines the mystery. The word for mystery, *musterion*, refers to something that was hidden but is now revealed. It does not carry the connotations of a who-dun-it, but is merely a secret that has been disclosed.¹ In these three verses we see the revelation of the mystery, the revealers of the mystery, and the recipients of the mystery.

The Revelation of the Mystery - Ephesians 3:3-4

By definition, a mystery is something that is unknowable unless revealed. Thus, spiritual mysteries are unknowable unless they are revealed by God. The source of Paul's understanding regarding the mystery of the Church was divine revelation, given to him by God, in which God revealed the truth about the Church.

The concept of the Church was not something dreamed up in the mind of Paul, or one of the other Apostles. We will see later that it was in God's plan from before the foundations of the earth. God did not come up with a new plan after Christ was rejected by Israel, and hence the Church was born. This is most clearly seen in Romans 9-11, in which we find that the Rejection of the Messiah by Israel foreordained by God (Romans 9), the fault of Israel (chapter 10), and temporary (Chapter 11).

Paul notes that he had written about this mystery "*before in a few words.*" Some think that this is a reference to a document which Paul had written previously to the recipients of the letter, other think that it is just a reference to the preceding chapter.² I think it is probably best to see this as a reference to what he has just said in chapter 2 in which he introduced the mystery of the "third race",³ and which he explains more fully in the following verses.

The Revealers of the Mystery - Ephesians 3:5

In verse five we find the revealers of the mystery of the Church, namely the Apostles and Prophets through the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, all spiritual truth has as its source the divine revelation of God as given by the Holy Spirit. However, the Holy Spirit uses men as channels of that divine truth. In the early church, those channels were the Apostles (the eleven plus Matthaïas plus Paul), and the prophets (the early "preachers").⁴

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 105.

² William Hendricksen, *Ephesians, NTC*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 153.

³ See Hughes, *Ephesians*, chapter 11.

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *Epistles to Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians, NICNT*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), pp. 314-15.

The Recipients of the Mystery - Ephesians 3:6

Finally, in verse six we find the recipients of the mystery, namely the Gentiles. Prior to the Church, the only way for a Gentile to become part of God's family was for them to become a Jew. They had to submit to the rite of circumcision, where applicable, and in essence become a citizen of Israel. In the New Covenant, however, the Gentile and Jew both come to God on the basis of faith in the gospel. No longer is salvation tied up with a national identity, but with a personal identity, that of identification with Christ.

Paul uses three words to describe this new relationship.⁵ He says that the Gentiles are fellowheirs (*sunkleronoma*), which indicates that they share the same inheritance as the Jew. This is great in and of itself, but even further the Gentiles are of the same body (*sussoma*). This is not an amalgamation, but a fusion. By the way, this word is only used by Paul and other early Christian writers. Thirdly, the Gentiles are partakers (*summetocha*) of the divine promise. This gives them all the rights and privileges of the Jew. In fact, as far as God is concerned, the distinction between Jew and Gentile have been abolished.

Thus, we see that Paul stresses again and again that in Christ the national barrier between Jew and Gentile has been completely abolished. God no longer deals exclusively with the Jew, but is calling for himself a people from all nations and tribes and languages. This does not mean that God is forever through with the Jew (see Romans 11), but it does mean that in the present age of the Church, all racial distinctions are gone.

| Mystery in the New Testament | |
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| 1. | The Interim Kingdom of God is called a Mystery - Mark 4:11. |
| 2. | Israel's Temporary Blindness is a Mystery - Romans 11:25. |
| 3. | The Church is a Mystery - Romans 16:25; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3-4; 3:9; Colossians 1:26-27; 2:2; 4:3. |
| 4. | The Relationship Between Christ and the Church is a Mystery - Ephesians 5:32. |
| 5. | The Transformation at the Rapture is a Mystery - 1 Corinthians 15:51-52. |
| 6. | The Man of Sin is a Mystery - 2 Thessalonians 2:7. |
| 7. | The Gospel Itself is a Mystery - 1 Timothy 3:9; 3:16. |
| 8. | The Apostate Church is Known as a Mystery - Revelation 17:5-7. |

The Minister of the Mystery- Ephesians 3:7-8a

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints...

Paul now present himself as the minister of this mystery. The word for minister, *doulos*, was first used to refer to a servant who waited on tables. It later became used to refer to slaves in

⁵ A. Skevington Wood, *Ephesians*, EBC Vol. 11, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1978), p. 46.

general.⁶ Paul saw himself as the slave of Christ, whose task it was to take the good news of the gospel to the Gentiles. It was not his task to cook the meal, or to determine the menu, or to insure that what was served was acceptable to the patron, it was his job to get the meal to the table without dropping it on the floor along the way.

Paul's description of himself in these three verses is very insightful. Far from thinking of himself in exalted terms, he saw himself as the lowest of the low. Unlike many today, Paul did not suffer from an exalted view of self. He always saw himself as an object of God's overwhelming grace. He was always in awe that God would ever consider making him part of his family and giving him the task of representing the gospel to the lost world.

First of all, he saw his ministry as being itself a gift of God's grace. The very fact that he was called by God to be a slave in God's service was something Paul never got over (1 Timothy 1:12-17). To be called into service for the creator of the universe is indeed a high privilege. In the Old Testament Moses is called the servant of God (Numbers 12:7-8). Far from being a demeaning title, it was one of honor. To be pressed into service for the God of the universe is a job that surpasses anything this world has to offer.

Someone once asked a great preacher why he did not run for political office as he was a great orator and popular with many people. His response was that if he left the ministry even to be the President of the United States, it would be a demotion.

Secondly, Paul saw himself as the least of all saints. His very name, *paulos*, means "small." Although Paul did exercise his apostolic authority on more than one occasion (see 2 Corinthians), he nevertheless did not make it a habit of comparing himself to the other apostles. The word he used for least, *elachistatero*, is a comparative on top of a superlative.⁷ He is in essence saying "the lesser of the leastest." In 1 Timothy 1:15 Paul calls himself "the worst of sinners." Paul did not have a very exalted view of self, but in his service to Christ he was unstoppable. When a man loses his sense of humility about being part of God's program in reaching the lost, he becomes ineffective.⁸ *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.*

The Message of the Mystery - Ephesians 3:8b-9

...is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:

The message of the mystery is to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ and to make known the fellowship of that mystery to all men. The first part of this message, the "unsearchable riches of Christ" refers to all of the truths and blessings in Christ.⁹ This include our fellowship with him, heirship with him, and all of the blessings mentioned in Ephesians 1:3-14. We are reminded that Paul tells us in Colossians 2:2-3, "That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The treasures of wisdom and knowledge refer to divine truths which are known only to those who are in Christ.

⁶ John F. MacArthur, *Ephesians*, (Chicago, Moody Press, 1984), p. 93.

⁷ Hendricksen, p. 156.

⁸ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, p. 94.

⁹ MacArthur, p. 95.

The second part of this message is to teach the fellowship of the mystery. The word for fellowship, *oikonomia*, is the same word used for dispensation in verse 2. Paul is here describing the stewardship, or administration, of the Church age. As we have noted time and time again, the Church was a mystery. It is not found in the Old Testament except in allusions where promises of Gentile blessings are given. It was not until after the death and resurrection of Christ that the Church was unveiled in Acts 2. Even in Acts 1:6 we read that the disciples asked Christ, “wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Paul was specifically chosen by Christ to be the messenger of this new message, that of a “third race” in which Jew and Gentile would be made one body.

Both of the parts of this message were hidden from the beginning of the world. Again we see that the Church was not “Plan B” in God’s eyes. It was not something done on the spur of the moment, and in the crisis of the Messiah’s rejection by Israel. No. It was part of the determinate plan of God which was hidden in the Old Testament and revealed in the New. That which was a mystery to men was fully known by God.

The Magnificence of the Mystery - Ephesians 3:10-13

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord: In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.

Finally, in verses ten through thirteen we see the magnificence of the mystery of the Church. Since everything that God does is designed to bring glory and honor to his name, the Church is no exception. Note the following points about this magnificence.

It Is Displayed To The Angelic Hosts

First, the magnificence of the mystery of the Church is displayed to angels. The terms, principalities and powers are used elsewhere to refer to the angelic hosts (Ephesians 1:21; Colossians 2:16; and Ephesians 6:12). What is displayed to them? The manifold, literally multicolored, wisdom of God.¹⁰

Unlike men, there is no redemption plan for angels. Those angels that sinned with Satan forever sealed their doom as part of his kingdom. Those angels that did not follow Satan in his rebellion were confirmed in their holiness. Therefore, when angels look at the plan of salvation whereby God takes a rebellious and hell-bound sinner and makes him part of his own family and grants him an inheritance in heaven, it is a cause for wonder. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:10-11, “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into.” The angels literally “stoop over” to look into the salvation that is available to us. They look on in wonder, awe, and praise to the God who transforms sinners into saints.

It Is For His Own Purpose

Secondly, the magnificence of the mystery exists to fulfill God’s own purpose. Why did God create the universe, for his own purpose. Why did God save man? For his own purpose. Why

¹⁰ Hughes, p. 109.

did God reveal the mystery of the Church, for his own purpose. Ultimately, everything is done for God's own purpose. That is where the answer ends.

Ultimately, there comes a point when one has reached the end of inquiry and is left with a mystery known only to God. What existed before the world? God! What existed before God? Nothing. God always was. At that point our questions have to stop and we need to accept by faith the answer given to us by God. In the same manner the question, “Why did God create the universe?” stops with the answer, “because he wanted to.” Further questioning is meaningless.

It Gives Us Boldness and Access

Thirdly, magnificence of the mystery is also revealed in that we now have access and boldness. The word for boldness, *parhessia*, refers to “freedom of speech.” It is the ability to openly and honestly share what is on one’s heart.¹¹ Access, *prosagoga*, refers to the access granted a lowly subject in a kingdom to the King. Because of God’s grace as evidenced in the Church, both Jew and Gentile have access to God, and boldness to enter his presence. We are told in Hebrews 4:15-16, “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*” Our access and boldness is not because of us, but because of Christ. He is the one that has granted us access to the throne room of God, and it is through Christ that we have the freedom to cry, “Abba, Father.”

It Is A Source Of Glory

Finally, the magnificent mystery of the Church is evidenced in our trials. Paul never sought escape from his trials, but was always thankful that he was counted worthy to suffer for Christ. Paul’s proclamation of the mystery caused him trouble on all sides. The Jews considered him a traitor to Judaism and their nation. The Gentiles considered him a buffoon and a fool. The Romans looked upon him as a troublemaker. In spite of all of this, Paul rejoiced in his tribulation knowing that they would produce a better reward in the future.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Romans 8:18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

A Prayer For Power - Ephesians 3:14-21

In verses fourteen through twenty-one Paul finally gets to the prayer he started in verse one. This prayer, prompted by the revelation of the mystery of the Body of Christ, the Church, is directed to God on the behalf of Paul’s recipients so that they may be able to understand fully the mystery of the Church.

This prayer is the second in the book of Ephesians. Paul’s first prayer was that the recipients of Ephesians may understand the riches of their blessings in Christ. This prayer is that they may appropriate and use the power that is theirs in Christ.¹² This is necessary because it is possible to have a head knowledge of all the blessings and resources we have in Christ, and yet

¹¹ Bruce, p. 322.

¹² MacArthur, *Ephesians*, p. 100.

not once appropriate that power. It is like a man who sits around in the dark because he does not flip the switch that sends electric current to the light by his chair. There is nothing wrong with the availability of the power, or with the lamp and wires, but unless that power is appropriated and put to use it does not accomplish a thing.

The Posture of Paul's Prayer - Ephesians 3:14a

For this cause I bow my knees...

The first thing to note about this prayer of Paul's is that it is uttered on his knees. Paul is not prescribing a posture for prayer here, as the common posture for prayer for the Jew was to stand with hands lifted up to heaven. What is in view here is most likely an attitude of submission by Paul towards God, the response of an intensely passionate and emotional request, and an attitude of reverence towards God.¹³ Paul had an intense burden for the Ephesians, and he wanted them to really grasp the reality of the power that was theirs in Christ and the ability to use that power.

| Positions For Prayer In The Bible | |
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| 1. | Standing - Mark 11:25 |
| 2. | Sitting - 1 Chronicles 17:16 |
| 3. | Bowing - Exodus 34:8 |
| 4. | Lying - Psalm 6:6 |
| 5. | Prostrated - Psalm 28:2 |
| 6. | On one's face - Matthew 26:39 |
| 7. | On one's knees - 1 Kings 8:54, Daniel 6:10 |
| 8. | With the face between the knees - 1 Kings 18:42 |

The Person of Paul's Prayer - Ephesians 3:14b-15

...unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

Secondly, we note the person of Paul's prayer, namely the Father. Throughout the New Testament we are told that it is to the Father we are to direct our prayers. Why? It is because the role of the Holy Spirit is to direct men to Christ (John 16:13-14), and the role of Christ to direct men to the Father (John 17; John 6:46; John 14:6).

¹³ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, pp. 101-2.

The Trinity in Prayer

The Father Receives Our Prayer

Scripture teaches very clearly that it is the Father who is to be the ultimate focus of our prayers. Although in a sense all members of the Godhead, being God, are address in prayer, the Father is the one to whom our requests are to be directed - Matthew 6:9; John 16:23-24.

The Son Gives Us The Right to Pray and Access to God

Prayer is directed to the Father in the name of Jesus Christ. It is Christ that gives us access to God. Without Him, our prayers would fall on deaf ears - Romans 1:8; Ephesians 2:18; Romans 5:1-2.

Scripture does indicate that at times men have prayed to Jesus Christ, but this is the rare exception - Acts 7:59-60; 2 Corinthians 12:8.

The Holy Spirit Reveals God's Will To Us and Our Hearts to God

Finally, it is the Holy Spirit that makes us conscious of spiritual things and of the will of God. He not only intercedes for us, but he reveals God's will to us so that we may pray according to God's will - Romans 8:26; 1 John 5:14-15; 1 Corinthians 2:12-14.

Paul not only speaks of the Father as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but he is also the Father of the whole family in heaven and earth. Some translations render this "every family," and others render it "all fatherhood."¹⁴ In spite of the appeal of some of these other translations, the best is "family in heaven and earth." What family is this? It is the redeemed family of all the ages, consisting of both living believers on earth and dead believers in heaven. This is not saying that God is the Father of all men, but that he is the Father of the "heavenly household," of which all the redeemed are a part.

Who Comprises God's Household?

- 1. Elect Angels**
- 2. Old Testament Saints**
- 3. Church Age Members that have died - the Church Triumphant**
- 4. Church Age Members that are still alive - the Church Militant**
- 5. Future Tribulation Saints**
- 6. Future Millennial Saints**

The Petition of Paul's Prayer - Ephesians 3:16-19

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that

¹⁴ For an extended discussion see Hendricksen, pp. 167-68.

ye, being rooted and grounded in love May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

We now get to the actual petitions of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians. Note that all of these petitions have to do with spiritual realities, not physical necessities. That is not to say it is never right to pray for physical needs, but physical needs should take a distant second place to spiritual needs.

What is the source of the answer to this prayer? It is the riches of God's glory. It is a sobering and awesome thought to see that when God has super-abundantly answered our prayers and given us over and above everything that we need, that he has not diminished his supply one bit. Some times we pray as though God's answers are on the ration-plan, we get just enough to make ends meet but no more. Not so! God can answer our prayer and never miss the resources that he used because those resources are inexhaustible.

Someone has likened our response to God's resources to that of a fish, swimming in a vast lake, who is fearful of taking a drink of water lest he empty the lake. God's provision so far exceeds our need that there is never a danger of it running out.

Spiritual Strength - Ephesians 3:16

Paul's first request is that the Ephesians be strengthened with might in the inner man. The word for strength, *kratiao*, is the opposite of discouragement. It is all too easy to become discouraged in our Christian life as we see our many failures. Paul's prayer is that the Ephesian believers be encouraged by the Holy Spirit on the inner man. The outer man, or physical body, may be wearing away but the inner man for the believer should grow stronger and stronger with years. Those that are the oldest in the Christian faith should be the ones who exude the character of Christ in their inner man.

In 2 Corinthians 4 we find Paul's own testimony regarding this subject of spiritual strength. In verses eight to nine he writes, "*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*" Paul defines his struggle using four paradoxical statements. He first states that he is troubled on every side, but not distressed. The word for "trouble," *thlipsis*, refers to the process of "squeezing grapes in order to release the juice." The word for "distressed," *stenochoria*, refers to being "between two immovable objects with nowhere to turn." Although Paul was being constantly squeezed by the pressures of life, nevertheless he was not so entrapped that he had no where to turn.

Secondly, he says that he is perplexed, but not in despair. The word for "perplexed," *aporoumenoi*, refers to "being without means, to be at a standstill, or perplexed." "Despair" is *exaporoumenoi*, which is an intensified form of *aporoumenoi*. Paul is saying that although he is at his wits end, he is not totally at his wits end. He may be in a state of perplexion, but that perplexion has not resulted in a total inability to think or act.

Thirdly, he says that he is persecuted but not forsaken. The word for "persecuted," *dioko*, refers to "being hunted or to be pursued with the intent of inflicting harm." "Forsaken" is *egkatalaipo*, which means "abandoned or left to ones own means." Although Paul was hounded by the Judaizers and those who would have loved to have seen him killed, he never saw himself as being forsaken by God. He believed the promise of God as quoted in Hebrews 13:5, "*I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*"

Fourthly, Paul says he is cast down, but not destroyed. The word for “cast down” is *kataballo*, and refers to “being thrown down on the ground.” “Destroyed” is *apollumeno* and means “to be completely demolished or ruined beyond recovery.” To use boxing terms, Paul is saying that he has gotten knocked down to the canvas, but he is not out for the count.

Why was this possible? Why did Paul have such a positive attitude even though he was at the point of spiritual and emotional exhaustion? It is because “*the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh*” (2 Corinthians 4:11). Paul knew that when he was at his end, Christ was only at the beginning. In fact, Christ was most evident when Paul was the weakest. In spite of the fact that the outward man was perishing, the inward man was being renewed day by day with the power of the indwelling Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:16). One’s spiritual strength has little to do with one’s physical strength, and everything to do with the power of the Holy Spirit in the inner man. In our weakest moments the power of Christ shines through us to a watching world.

Christ’s Indwelling Presence - Ephesians 3:17a

Secondly, Paul prays that the Ephesians may have Christ dwell in their hearts by faith. How is this possible, since we are told that believers already possess the indwelling Christ? Is Paul praying that the Ephesians would have something they already have? Not if one looks at the word “dwell.” The word used is *katoikasai*, which is a compound word make up of *kata*, down, and *oikos*, house. Paul is not asking that Christ would dwell in the heart of the Ephesians, but that Christ would *be at home* in the heart of the Ephesians.

There is a vast difference between being in someone’s home, and feeling as though you are wanted in someone’s home. It is easy to tour the White House, but quite another thing to feel at home there. Paul’s request is that Christ would be at home in the hearts of the Ephesians, in other words, that he would be comfortable there. We need to ask ourselves, “how comfortable is Christ in me?” Sometimes we go places and do things that Christ would not be comfortable with at all, yet we scarcely give him a passing notice. In 1 Corinthians 6:15 Paul tells the Corinthian believers, “*Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.*” Paul’s point in that we as believers carry around within us the indwelling Christ. Everywhere we go, and everything we do, Christ participates in. We should not want to do anything that he would not approve of. We need to strive to make our lives a place where Christ is comfortable.

Comprehension of Christ’s Love - Ephesians 3:17b-19a

Thirdly, Paul prays that the Ephesian believers comprehend Christ’s love. Even though Paul prays this, there is a sense in which this is an unanswerable request. Christ’s love for us is infinite in extent, and there is no way we as fallen human beings will ever be able to fully comprehend the great love that God has for us. But we can try. Note the following elements of Christ’s love that Paul brings out.

1. We should be rooted and grounded in Christ’s love

The idea here is that the love of Christ is something that lends stability to our lives. The words for rooted and grounded are pictures for a tree and a building.¹⁵ Just as a good root system gives stability to a tree and a good foundation gives support and stability to a building, so a comprehension of the love of Christ’s gives stability to the believer. This is what Paul means when he says in Romans 8:38-39, “*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels,*

¹⁵ Hendricksen, p. 172.

nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." What gives stability to the heart of the believer in the storms and tribulations of life? It is a knowledge that they are safe in the love of Christ which will never fail them.

2. We should comprehend the extent of Christ's love

Although we will never perfectly understand the love Christ has for us, we can grow in our knowledge of that love throughout our life. Paul asks that the Ephesian believers know the breadth (*platos*), width (*makos*), height (*hopsos*) and depth (*bathos*) of Christ's love. In other words, that the Ephesian believers have a full comprehension of the extent of Christ's love for them, one that knows no boundaries.¹⁶ No matter where we go, or what we do, Christ's love for us remains.

The Four Magnitudes of Christ's Love¹⁷

A love which is *wide* enough to embrace the world - John 3:16.

A love which is *long* enough to last forever - 1 Corinthians 13:8.

A love which is *high* enough to take sinners to heaven - 1 John 3:1-2.

A love which is *deep* enough to take Christ to the very depths to reach the lowest sinner - Philippians 2:9.

3. We should know Christ's love which passes knowledge

The idea here is that we would experientially know (*ginosko*) the love of Christ which passes knowing (*gnoseos*). How is it possible to know something that is beyond knowing? It is only the power of the Holy Spirit that enables us to know this kind of divine truth. When our human faculties of reasoning end, the Holy Spirit picks up and takes us deeper into God's truth. Put another way, the only way a person can know of the love of Christ and comprehend it is by the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. Apart from his help, Christ's love will remain a mystery.

The Fulness of God - Ephesians 3:19b

Fourthly, Paul prays that the Ephesian believers would be filled with all the fullness of God. Again, a complete and total understanding of this is not possible this side of heaven, and even in heaven there are some elements of this that we may never know. The idea here is that Paul prays that the Ephesians would become totally *dominated* by God in their lives. A person who is filled with anger is dominated by anger. A person who is filled with alcohol is dominated by it. Similarly, a person who is filled with God is dominated by God in every aspect of their life.¹⁸ The key is control. Who should control the life of the believer? It is God. When we become dominated by God we fulfill the spirit of this request.

The Praise of Paul's Prayer - Ephesians 3:20-21

¹⁶ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, p. 110.

¹⁷ Hughes, p. 117.

¹⁸ MacArthur, *Ephesians*, p. 111-12.

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, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

Finally, we hit the praise of Paul's prayer. There is probably no greater statement regarding the power of God as it relates to the believer than these two verses. Paul uses one superlative after another, layer upon layer, to show the surpassing ability of God to abundantly answer the prayer Paul had for the Ephesian believers. Note the following points about this statement of praise.

God is Able

This is the foundation of Paul's praise. We do not serve an impotent God who cannot do what we ask. Rabbi Keushner, in his book *Why Bad Things Happen To Good People*, comes to the conclusion that God is good, and that he would like to do good things, but that he is not able. God would like to save your marriage, but he can't. God would like to help you through the trials of life, but he can't. God would like to cure a person with cancer, but he can't. That is not the God of the Bible. Anything God desires to do, he can do, and he can do it effortlessly. There is no problem too big for God to handle.

God is Able to Do Exceedingly

God can not only do those things he wants to do, but he can do them exceedingly beyond our expectations. It is sort of like asking a world heavyweight champion if it would be possible for him to lift a postage stamp. Of course he can! He can lift a lot of postage stamps. Sometimes we come to God and are almost afraid to ask him for help since we think he cannot do those things we ask, or that it will take too much effort on his part to answer our requests. Not so!

God is Able to Do Exceedingly Abundantly

God can not only exceed our needs, but he can do that abundantly. This is a superlative upon a superlative. When God has exceedingly met our needs out of his abundant storehouse, nothing has diminished. He is not tired, nor does he need a little time to replenish the supply. God's power is limitless, and his supply inexhaustible.

God is Able to Do Exceedingly Abundantly Above All That We Ask or Think

Finally, God is able to exceedingly and abundantly meet our needs over and above anything that we can ask or think. Put another way, whatever we can imagine God doing he can do over and above. The problem that God sometimes does so little for us is not that he cannot, but that we do not ask or even consider the possibility that he can do those things we ask. The problem is ours, not God's. We are reminded of Christ's words to the disciples in John 14:14, "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it." James tells us in James 4:1-4, we have not because we ask not. God would do so many things for us if we would only ask.

According to the Power That Worketh In Us

God's ability to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think is according to the power in us. What is that power? It is God himself. Note also that it is according to, not out of. God's ability to do those things in us comes from his infinite power, power that is not diminished even when exercised mightily in our behalf.

Glory to God!

Paul's "amen" is a statement to God's glory. Why would God answer this prayer of Paul's? Because it would glorify him. A believer who is strong in the inner man, growing in a comprehension of the love of Christ, and full of the fulness of God will bring glory to God's name. Paul glorifies the God who can do these things, not only in this present age, but in every age to come.