

# Ephesians 3:14-21

- Prayer for the church: be filled with the Spirit to the glory of God -

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## Introduction

- ❖ The letter to the Ephesians might be compared to a gothic cathedral, a cathedral of faith. The outside of the church is beautiful, looking at the pinnacles, the majestic entrances, one gets overwhelmed by the artistry. Once inside, the visitor is silenced and gently forced to sit down and to look, to look at the ceilings, the walls, the pillars, the glass-stained windows. These cathedrals have been built by architects and artisans. These cathedrals were not only built to the glory of God, honestly speaking, but also to the glory of the city and men.
- ❖ The letter to the Ephesians can also be compared with a tapestry. All the threads are woven and knitted together to show one great picture of the grace and glory of God in Christ.
- ❖ There is a lot of attention to the special manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The focus of the writer (Paul) in this letter is different.
  - He is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to God the Father and the love of our Lord Jesus Christ better (Eph 1:17; 3:5; 3:16-19; 5:15-18).
  - The Spirit enables access to the Father, through Christ (Eph 2:18; 6:18). By the Spirit, the church is dwelling for God, a temple (Eph 2:22; 5:18-20; 1 Pet 2:5, 9; Rev 1:5, 6).
  - The unity of the Spirit is stressed (Eph 4:3-6).
  - The Spirit has been given as a seal (Eph 1:13; 4:30).

- ❖ This study concentrates on Ephesians 3:14-21. It will be made clear that the prayer for the Spirit of wisdom and revelation is of the utmost importance for the church in Ephesus and today's church.
- ❖ The context, form and structure, theological notes, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline below show some overlap with other sermon outlines taken from Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. This makes it possible to use this sermon outline as a "stand-alone" and as part of a series.

## Literary and historical context

- ❖ The City of Ephesus:<sup>1</sup>
  - The city was an important administrative and commercial hub of the Roman province of Asia. Nowadays the remnants of the magnificent city theatre can still be viewed. It had a seating capacity of 24,000 people (Acts 19:30-41). The temple of Artemis was famous and already classified in the ancient world as one of the seven wonders of the world. Numerous other gods and goddesses were worshipped.
- ❖ The City of Ephesus in the New Testament:
  - Paul visited Ephesus for the first time only briefly on his way to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18-22). After he had left the city, Priscilla and Aquila continued to preach the gospel (Acts 18:24-28).
  - Paul visited the city for a second time and stayed there for more than two years (Acts 19): **"This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."** More churches were probably established during these years (Rev 2-3) in the Roman province of Asia.
    - Paul must have encountered severe conditions while he was in Ephesus. In his letter to the Corinthians, he wrote: **"If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus** for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor 15:32). The majority of recent scholars postulate that Paul was in prison one or more times while he was in Ephesus.
  - Paul met the Elders of the church on the beach of the city of Miletus (Acts 20:13-38) when he travelled to Jerusalem.
  - Jews from Asia recognized Paul when he entered the temple in Jerusalem: **"Some Jews from the province of Asia saw Paul at the temple.** They stirred up the whole crowd and seized him" (Acts 21:27; 24:19).

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold, C. (1993, pp. 249-253). *Ephesus*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

- Later, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus (1 Tim 1:3) to support this church through teaching and instructions.
- ❖ Finally, the apostle John received his Revelation of Jesus Christ and sent it to the seven churches in Asia, the first being Ephesus (Rev 1:11; 2:1-7). According to old church traditions, John probably stayed in Ephesus.
- ❖ An overview of the letter to the Ephesians and the context of 3:14-21:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1:1-2   | Salutation   |
| 1:3-14  | Blessing or glorification of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  |
| 1:15-23   | First prayer and thanksgiving to God   |
| 2:1-22  | Gentiles and Jews are both made alive in Christ – a new creation, a holy temple in the Lord  |
| 3:1-13  | Admonition: don't be discouraged because of my sufferings (Paul)   |
| 3:14-21   | Second prayer and glorification of the Father  |
| 4:1-6:9   | Admonition: live a life worthy of the calling you have received:   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4:1-16</li> <li>•</li> <li>• 4:17-5:20</li> <li>•</li> <li>• 5:21-6:9</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Live a life of love within the community of the church, which is the body of Christ</li> <li>• Live a life of love as a new creation in Christ, as children of God, filled with the Holy Spirit</li> <li>• Live a life of love, especially within the family-household</li> </ul> |
| 6:10-20   | The spiritual warfare  |
| 6:21-24   | Greetings  |

## Form and structure

- ❖ Ephesians 3:14-21 consists of three parts:

### Paul is praying for the church (verse 14-21)

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| <i>Reason:</i><br>(verse 14, 15) | For this reason I kneel before the Father,<br><br>from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.   |
| <i>Prayer:</i><br>(verse 16-19)  | I pray<br><br>that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,<br><br>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;<br><br>in being rooted and established in love,<br><br>that you may have power, together with all the saints,<br><br>to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,<br><br>and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—<br><br>that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. |
| <i>Praise:</i><br>(verse 20, 21) | Now to him<br><br>who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us,<br><br>to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!<br><br>Amen.  |

- ❖ A detailed analysis of the prayer shows the following:
  - God, the Father, is acting through his Spirit (step 1) so that Christ may dwell in the believers (step 2) to effect that they will be filled to the measure of the fullness of God (step 3). **Note the Trinitarian order: Father > Spirit > Christ (Son) > GOD.** See below the Trinitarian character of this letter.
    - The left column summarizes the prayers. The right column shows the three different steps.

### Prayer request (verse 16-19)

|                              |   |               |
|------------------------------|---|---------------|
|                              | I pray  |               |
| <i>Source</i>                | that out of his glorious riches   |               |
| <i>Action by God</i>         | he ( <b>Father</b> ) may strengthen you with power                                | <i>Step 1</i> |
| <i>through</i>               | through his <b>Spirit</b> in your inner being,                                    |               |
| <i>to the effect of</i>      | so that <b>Christ</b> may dwell in your hearts through faith;                     | <i>Step 2</i> |
| <i>which results in</i>      | in being rooted and established in love,  |               |
| <i>in order to</i>           | that you may have power (have strength to;<br>ESV), together with all the saints, |               |
| <i>comprehend</i>            | to grasp how wide and long and high   |               |
| <i>know/experience</i>       | and deep is the love of Christ,   |               |
|                              | and to know this love that surpasses<br>knowledge—                                |               |
| <i>and the final purpose</i> | that you may be filled to the measure of all the full-<br>ness of <b>God</b> .    | <i>step 3</i> |

## Technical, theological and hermeneutical notes

### Literary notes:

- ❖ The authorship and addressees of this letter have much been debated.<sup>2</sup> Pauline authorship is affirmed by tradition and autobiographical information.

### General theological notes:

- ❖ The letter to the Ephesians is essentially Trinitarian:
  - Ephesians 1:3-14. “Praise be **to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**.... Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised **Holy Spirit**, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”
  - Ephesians 1:17: “I keep asking that **the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father**, may give you the **Spirit** of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”
  - Ephesians 2:18: “For through **him** (Jesus Christ) we both have access to the **Father** by **one Spirit**.” (See also Eph 2:22; 3:5.)

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold, C. (1993, pp. 240-242). Ephesians, Letter to. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

- Ephesians 3:14-19: “For this reason I kneel before the **Father**,... I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his **Spirit** in your inner being, so that **Christ** may dwell in your hearts through faith...”
- Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body and one **Spirit**— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— <sup>5</sup> one **Lord**, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one **God and Father** of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”
  - Paul begins his letter with an exclamation of praise to God (Eph 1:3) and the mercies of God, especially his love: “But because of his great love for us, **God**, who is rich in mercy” (Eph 2:4).
  - Christ is the exalted one (Eph 1:21-22). He is the head of all creation (Eph 1:10) and especially of his body the church (Eph 4:15).
- ❖ Unity of the believers with Christ, the “saints in Ephesus, **the faithful in Christ Jesus**”:
  - The expression “in Christ” or “in him” occurs thirty-four times! There is a mystic corporate unity and solidarity of all believers in Christ, which is practised in the local congregation.
    - In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7). “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan” of God (Eph 1:11).
    - God “made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions— it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:5-6).

#### The new man(kind)

- ❖ The new man(kind) as a creation by Christ is an important theme in this letter:
  - “His purpose was to create in himself one new man(kind) out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility” (Eph 2:15, 16).
  - “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:22-24).
  - “It is the gracious action of God’s Spirit moving believers into a different sphere where the new rule of life obtains.”<sup>3</sup>
- ❖ His mind and heart of the new man have been changed. *Heart* “stands not for the literal heart but for “the whole of the inner being of man in contrast to his external

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<sup>3</sup> Dockery, D. S. (1993, p. 629). *New Nature and Old Nature*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

side”.<sup>4</sup> The heart is also “the integrating center of man as a rational, emotional, volitional being.”<sup>5</sup>

#### Hermeneutical notes:

- ❖ Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, although both assertions have been contested by scholars (see above).
  - For the exposition, it is fruitful to refer to the implied author and the implied addressee. We can’t meet Paul nor the Ephesians personally. There is a distance of place and time between the first readers, Paul, and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century reader. But we can get to know them both through the contents of this letter. The author (Paul) tells some things about himself, personal information, style of writing, his concerns. The same is true for the Ephesians, but the information we receive is given by the implied author.
- ❖ The implied author makes himself known by:
  - Personal remarks, such as “**As a prisoner for the Lord,**” tell something about his situation.
  - The use of personal pronouns, such as “I”, “my” and to a lesser extent “we”, because in this case he includes others as well.
  - His theological statements, acclamations and prayers, are embedded in and function in the larger Christian community.
- ❖ The implied audience is made known by the author of the letter:
  - When he writes about their local and sometimes personal circumstances.
  - When he uses specific personal pronouns, such as “you”, “we” – including himself, “they”, when he is writing about others.
  - When he uses imperatives and specific figures or style, such as hyperboles, understatements, irony. Take, for example, Ephesians 4:2-4:
    - “**I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received**” (Eph 4:2) tells us something about Paul and the Ephesians:
    - To Paul, it is important (“**I urge**”) to live a life worthy before God.
      - Paul is concerned about the conduct of the Ephesians (“**I urge you**”). These concerns are exemplified by verse 3: “**Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**”

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4 Baumgärtel and Behm (612) quoted by Chamblin, J. K. (1993, p. 769). *Psychology*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

5 Dunn (1988, 100) quoted by Chamblin, J. K. (1993, p. 769). *Psychology*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

- Because, by implication, (some) were not humble and gentle; (some) were not patient, not bearing with one another in love. And by doing so, breaking up the bond of peace (verse 4).

### Power and Glory

- ❖ Power and glory are important themes which the Spirit will show the believers.
  - There are three passages in which Paul addresses the power of God, the power of the enemy, and the spiritual war in which the believers are engaged: Ephesians 1:18-23; 2:19-23; 6:10-12(-18).

## Exposition

### Introduction

- ❖ Before looking into detail at Ephesians 3:14-21, it is helpful to have a look at Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2:1-10 first.
  - The first passage gives an introduction to the letter as a whole and its major themes.
  - The second passage gives a summary of the work of God done in the lives of sinners.

### Overview Ephesians 1:3-14

- ❖ This passage consists of three sections, each ending with “to the praise of glorious grace.” The author is glorifying the Triune God. Everything is done “in Christ.”
  - Compare Ephesians 3:21: “to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”
  - (verse 3-6) – *election*
    - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
    - For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.
    - In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ,
    - in accordance with his pleasure and will—
    - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.
  - (verse 7-12) – *redemption*
    - In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,

- in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.
- And he made known to us the mystery of his will
- according to his good pleasure, which he purposed **in Christ**, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.
- **In him** we were also chosen, having been predestined
- according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope **in Christ**, might be for **the praise of his glory**.
- (verse 13-14) – *inheritance*
  - And you also were included **in Christ**
  - when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation.
  - Having believed, you were marked **in him** with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—**to the praise of his glory**.
- ❖ Some remarks:
  - We – You: In verse 3-12 Paul uses “we”. In verse 13 and 14 he is addressing the congregation “you.” Both “we” and “you” receive the inheritance “our.” This means that everything he has written in verse 3-12 is also applied to the church in Ephesus.
  - “Every spiritual blessing” “in Christ” (verse 3):
    - Election to be holy and blameless (verse 4);
    - Predestined to be adopted as his sons (verse 5); Also (verse 11);
    - Redemption through his blood (verse 7);
    - Made known the mystery of his will for the future (verse 9) inheritance (14).
    - It is helpful to relate these verses to Ephesians 3:18.
  - Everything is done according to his will, love, grace and plan (verse 5, 7, 9 and 11).
  - The purpose: **“to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ”** (verse 9).
    - Already before the creation, the believers were chosen in Christ, the Lord Jesus. Everything we receive, we receive in Christ! He is from eternity. Christ will receive all power, cosmic power (verse 9). He is Lord of all.

❖ Additional note. Both Ephesians 1:3-14 and Ephesians 3:14-21 reveal the Trinitarian character of God but in reverse order of the three persons:

- Ephesians 1:3-14: God > in Christ > Holy Spirit > to glorify God.
- (Revelation of God's plan to man)
- Ephesians 3:16-21: God > Holy Spirit > in Christ > to glorify God.
- (Prayer of man to God)

#### Overview Ephesians 2:1-10

❖ This paragraph describes the great saving acts of God in his love. Christians are rooted and established in this love (Eph 3:17).

- The human condition (Eph 2:1-3) – **we were dead:**
- "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked,
- following the course of this world,
- following the prince of the power of the air,
- the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—
- among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh,
- carrying out the desires of the body and the mind,
- and were by nature children of wrath,
- like the rest of mankind.
- God's loved us in Christ (Eph 2:4-7) – **we are made alive:**
- But God, being rich in mercy,
- because of the great love with which he loved us,
- even when we were dead in our trespasses,
- **made us alive together with Christ**
- —by grace you have been saved—
- **and raised us up with him**
- **and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**
- so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
- Saved by grace, **created in Christ for good works** (Eph 2:8-10):
- For by grace you have been saved through faith.

- And this is not your own doing;
- **it is the gift of God,**
- not a result of works,
- so that no one may boast.
- For we are his workmanship,
- created in Christ Jesus for good works,
- which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

#### Verse 14-15

- ❖ **“For this reason”** summarizes the preceding chapter:
- ❖ "In him (Christ) and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence. **I ask you, therefore, not to be discouraged because of my sufferings for you,** which are your glory." See also Ephesians 3:1 and 4:1.
  - Paul is worried that the Ephesians are discouraged because of his circumstances (3:13; 3:1; 4:1). They need to be strengthened in their faith. Paul is in prison. Fortunately, he has still the liberty to receive personal information from the Ephesians and to send letters to the congregations.
- ❖ **“I kneel before the Father.”**
  - See for the Trinitarian character of this letter above.
  - **“kneel”** This signifies great reverence and submission. This posture especially marks the humble approach of the worshipper before God.<sup>6</sup>
  - **“Father”** reminds the believers of verse 5: “In love he predestined **us to be adopted as his sons** through Jesus Christ.” As Father, he has prepared the inheritance (Eph 1:14, 18). The adopted sons are heirs (Eph 3:6) in Christ. As Father, he is the creator of all things. This address implies a personal (son – father) and also a shared personal relationship with the believers of the church in Ephesus.
- ❖ **“From whom **his whole family** in heaven and on earth derives its name”** (NIV). Compare ESV: **“from whom **every family** in heaven and on earth is named.”** The ESV is preferred.<sup>7</sup>
  - **“From whom”** refers implicitly to his authority.
  - Following the NIV, there is only one family. This raises the question of who belongs to this family in heaven. Following the ESV there are more families. What is meant by **“family”**?

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6 O'Brien, P. T. (1999, p. 255).

7 Robertson, A. T. (2006, p. 772).

- **“family” = “πατριά”**: 2. a relatively large body of people existing as a totality at a given moment **and linked through ancestry** and sociopolitical interests, *people, nation* (see also Ps 21:28; 1 Ch 16:28; Acts 3:25).<sup>8</sup>
- What is meant by family in heaven? There are two possible answers:
  - 1. The families of angels, and spiritual beings;
  - 2. The fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jakob and others) and their generations (Acts 3:25) who already belong to Christ in heaven.
- The use of **“generations”** in **“throughout all generations”** (Eph 3:21) supports this view, where Paul is writing about the future. In Ephesians 3:5 he was looking at the past: **“the mystery of Christ, which 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.”** These sons of men belonged to the gentiles being distinguished from the people of Israel. Now they have become one people, one family (Eph 3:6; Eph 2:11-22).
- **“Is named.”** “This is solely a divine prerogative and an expression of God’s sovereignty over every power in the cosmos.”<sup>9</sup>
  - Abram received a new name by God (Gn 17:5). Jacob was called Israel (Gn 32:28). Simon was called Peter by Jesus (Mt 16:18). The believers will receive a new name:
  - “And I will give him a white stone, **with a new name** written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it” (Rev 2:17).

#### Verse 16-19

- ❖ For a detailed outline of this prayer see above.
- ❖ **“I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”**
  - Alternative translation: **“be mightily strengthened through the Spirit.”**<sup>10</sup>
  - **“glorious riches”** See also Ephesians 1:18 and for the richness of his grace (Eph 2:7) of Christ (Eph 3:8).
    - **“Glorious” = “δόξα”**: 1. **the condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendor, radiance.**<sup>11</sup> **“Majesty”** as an old term for royal beings who have, or had, both power and splendor, has been suggested.<sup>12</sup>

8 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 788).

9 Luter, A. B., Jr. (1993, p. 626). *Name*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

10 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 564).

11 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 257).

12 Best, E. (1998, p. 162).

- This glory features prominently in the first three chapters of this letter and especially in the two prayers (first prayer: Eph 1:6, 12, 14, 17, 18; second prayer: Eph 3:16, 21).
- **“to strengthen” = “κραταιόω”**: In the psychological sense of encouragement to remain firm.<sup>13</sup> This strengthening will result in a strong faith being rooted and established in love.
- **“with power by”** This power is necessary because of the discouragement (Eph 3:13) and the spiritual warfare of the Christian, which is described in Ephesians 6:1-17.
  - “Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”
- **“Spirit”**
  - The believers have been marked by the Spirit (Eph 1:13).
  - He is the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Father (Eph 1:17; 3:5).
  - Through the Spirit, the believer has access to the Father (Eph 2:18).
  - In Christ “you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).
  - The one Spirit creates unity through the bond of peace in Christ (Eph 4:3, 4).
  - He is the spirit of the sonship (Eph 1:13, 14). Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans: “You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom 8:15).
- **“in your inner being”** this phrase identifies the person in Christ, in contrast to ‘the outer nature,’ the person in Adam and destined to perish. ‘Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day,’ anticipating the full realization of the new humanity in the heavenly glory.”<sup>14</sup>
- ❖ **“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.”**
  - **“dwell” = “κατοικέω”**: 1. **to live in a locality for any length of time, live, dwell, reside, settle (down).**<sup>15</sup> “The verb used in this prayer is a strong one, signifying a permanent indwelling rather than some temporary abode.”<sup>16</sup>
  - **“your hearts.”** O’Brien remarks: “The ‘heart’ here, as elsewhere in Ephesians (1:18; 5:19; 6:5), is employed in its customary Old Testament sense of the centre

13 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 564).

14 Chamblin, J. K. (1993, pp. 772–773). *Psychology*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

15 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 534).

16 O’Brien, P. T. (1999, p. 259).

of one's personality, the thoughts, will, emotions, and whatever else lies at the centre of our being."<sup>17</sup>

- This is elaborated in Ephesians 4:13: to “attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (See also below).
- **“Faith is essential**; Christ’s indwelling presence, through the power of the Spirit, is ‘through faith,’ ‘according to the riches of [God’s] glory’”<sup>18</sup>
- John Stott refers to Charles Hodge who wrote, “The indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees” Stott continues: “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’, and may lay hold ever more firmly ‘by faith’ of this divine strength, this divine indwelling.”<sup>19</sup>

❖ **“being rooted and established in love,”**

- **“rooted.”** See also John 15:1-8.
- **“established” = “θεμελιόω”**: 2. **to provide a secure basis for the inner life and its resources, establish, strengthen.**<sup>20</sup>
  - “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.”<sup>21</sup>
- Love (see also 1 Corinthians 13):
- Ephesians 1:4, 5: "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. **In love he predestined** us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—“
- Being rooted and established in love refers to the love of God, Ephesians 2:4-7:
  - **“But because of his great love for us, God**, who is rich in mercy, **made us alive with Christ** even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-7).

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17 O'Brien, P. T. (1999, p. 259).

18 Gaffin, R. B., Jr. (1993, p. 349). *Glory, Glorification*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

19 Stott, J. R. W. (1979, p. 135).

20 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 449).

21 Stott, J. R. W. (1979, p. 136).

- Being rooted in the love of God through the Holy Spirit implies that a believer is made alive with Christ and shares already a seat with him in the heavenly realms.
- “**may have power, together with all the saints**” Bratcher and Nida remark: “**The whole fellowship of the church, all God’s people, is the place where this knowledge is attained; it is not an individual achievement but a corporate experience.**”<sup>22</sup> We need this power because the love of Christ is often contrary to our love for other people.
- ❖ **“to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—”**
  - **“to grasp” = “καταλαμβάνω”**: 4. **to process information, understand, grasp**<sup>23</sup> not only in an intellectual fashion because it surpasses knowledge. It is personal and experienced knowledge.
  - **“how wide... and deep”**
    - Bratcher and Nida suggest the following circumscription: “If ‘your salvation’ is taken to be subject, then the translation can read ‘... **to understand your salvation in its full dimension**’ or ‘... to understand the complete scope (or, meaning) of your salvation’”<sup>24</sup>
  - This love of Christ and the Father is all-encompassing. The great command teaches the same: “Love the Lord your God with **all your heart** and with **all your soul** and with **all your mind** and with **all your strength**” (Mk 12:32).
    - The love of Christ touches and transforms the heart, the soul, the mind and the strength.
  - Paul already mentioned the love of the Ephesians: “since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and **your love for all the saints**” (Eph 1:15). Faith and love are two sides of the same coin.
    - “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love” (Eph 4:2).
  - This love of Christ is the mysterious power of the church: “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. **From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love,** as each part does its work.
    - Ephesians 6:24: “**Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.**”

22 Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993, p. 86, 87).

23 Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000, p. 520).

24 Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993, p. 87).

- See also love as fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23).
- **“to know”**: “The human mind unaided is not sufficient to grasp the mind and knowledge of God.”<sup>25</sup> Bratcher and Nida suggest: “In this context *know* is often best translated as **‘to experience’**. Therefore, ‘may you come to experience how he loves you.’”<sup>26</sup>
  - **“surpasses knowledge.”** This refers to intimate knowledge of the reality (the love of Christ is experienced in the heart).<sup>27</sup> Alternative translation: **“although it can never be fully known.”**<sup>28</sup>
    - Compare other expressions: “the overwhelming greatness of his power” (Eph 1:19), and “the great love with which he loved us” (Eph 2:4) as well as “the overwhelming wealth of his grace” (Eph 2:7), and “the infinite riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8), and also “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10). Paul likes superlatives.<sup>29</sup>

❖ **“That you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”**

- See for the Trinitarian character of this letter above.
- **“be filled.”** God will fill the saints with his fullness, through the inner work of the Spirit by which Christ will dwell in them.
- A similar expression is found in Ephesians 4:13. (The different colours show the parallels.) The Greek text is added for comparison:
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| Ephesians 3:19  | Ephesians 4:13   |
|---|--|
| <p>“and to know <b>the love of Christ</b> that surpasses <b>knowledge</b>, that you may be filled with all the <b>fullness of God.</b>” (ESV)</p> | <p>“until we all reach unity in the faith and in the <b>knowledge of the Son of God</b> and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the <b>fullness of Christ.</b>”</p> |
| <p>“γνῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν <b>τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ,</b> ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν <b>τὸ</b></p>  | <p>“μέχρι καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ <b>τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ</b></p>  |

25 Robeck, C. M., Jr. (1993, p. 527). *Knowledge, Gift of Knowledge*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

26 Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993, p. 88).

27 Chamblin, J. K. (1993, p. 771). *Psychology*. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

28 Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993, p. 88).

29 Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993, 87).

πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ.

θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ.”

- Ephesians 3:19 is part of a prayer, a request from God. Ephesians 4:13 is part of the purpose of the instruction by the elders (Eph 4:11, 12).
- **“the fullness of God”** Paul uses different words to express the same thought to shed light on this mystery. See Ephesians 2:21, 22; 3:17-19; 4:15, 16; 5:18-20; 5:29, 30. (Also: Col 1:19, 20; 2:9). Here, the first part of the sentence “knowledge of the love of Christ” explains “the fullness of God.”
  - O'Brien: "If 'fullness' denotes something like the divine power, essence, and glory, then the references to 'the fulness of God' (Eph 3:19) and 'the fulness of Christ' (Eph 4:13; Col 1:19; 2:9) are appropriately explained. According to Colossians 1:19, Christ is the person in whom God in all His fulness was pleased to take up his residence. All the attributes and activities of God—his spirit, word, wisdom, and glory—are perfectly displayed in Christ. In him all the fulness of deity dwells bodily (Col 2:9).<sup>30</sup>

#### Verse 20-21

- ❖ **“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”**
  - Bratcher and Nida suggest restructuring this sentence for example: “he is able to do so much more than we can ever think of asking for or even imagine, and he does this because of the way his power works in us” or “... what his power causes us to do” or “... what his power is able to help us to do”<sup>31</sup> This might be helpful to understand these words better.
  - John Stott points to seven stages in sentences:
  - (1) He **is able to do**.
  - (2) He is able to do **what we ask**.
  - (3) He is able to do what we ask **or imagine**.
  - (4) He is able to do **all** we ask or imagine.
  - (5) He is able to do **more**.
  - (6) He is able to do **immeasurably** more.

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30 O'Brien, P. T. (1999, p. 149).

31 Bratcher, R. G., & Nida, E. A. (1993, p. 89).

- (7) He is able to do **immeasurably more than all** we ask or imagine.<sup>32</sup>
- ❖ **“To his power that at work within us.”** This power was already mentioned in:
  - “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him **who works all things according to the counsel of his will**” (Eph 1:11).
  - “What is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he **worked in Christ** when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places” (1:19, 20; also Eph 2:4-6).
    - This power became visible:
    - “when he raised him from the dead” (resurrection) and
    - “seated him at his right hand” (ascension).
- ❖ **“to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus”**
  - **“Church”** refers both to the local assembly and congregation and the universal church. It is the gathering of those who have been called. **The church is the visible presence of Christ in this world and will reveal the glory of God.** Therefore: “the glory that is seen in the Church is not its own glory but derives from Christ.”<sup>33</sup>
  - This church is a temple in Christ (Eph 2:21, 22):
  - “in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into **a holy temple in the Lord.** In him you also are being built together **into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.**” Best refers to the Old Testament, the glory of God filling the temple: “God’s glory is both to be praised in the church and can be seen in the church, for the church is related to the fullness of Christ (1:23), and is his body and bride. In so far as the church is worthy, pure and immaculate, and this she is (5:27), she exhibits God’s glory, and the powers learn from her. She is his dwelling-place in the Spirit (2:22; 1 Cor 3:16) **and where he dwells, his glory dwells, as it did in the temple in Jerusalem.**”<sup>34</sup>
- ❖ **“throughout all generations, for ever and ever!”**
  - Compare: “not only in this age but also in the one to come.”
- ❖ **“Amen.”**

## Application

### Be prepared

<sup>32</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979, p. 139, 140).

<sup>33</sup> Best, E. (1998, p. 351).

<sup>34</sup> Best, E. (1998, p. 350–351).

- ❖ Pray this prayer of Paul for the church and your congregation.
  - As John Stott puts it: “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, and are evidently not concerned about matters we do not include in our prayers. Prayer expresses desire. (...) 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.<sup>35</sup>
- ❖ It is possible to select certain topics from this text to preach upon:
  - The prayer for the church (Eph 3:14, 15)
    - The reason – the contents – the result.
    - Addressed to the Father – the gift of the Holy Spirit – to understand the love of Christ.
  - The inner working of the Holy Spirit (Eph 3:16, 17)
    - As a gift from the Father – being strengthened by his power, which surpasses all expectations –
  - Being rooted and established in the love of Christ together with all the saints (Eph 3:18, 19).
    - To know the love of Christ. See below.
  - The purpose, the power of God and his fullness (Eph 3:20, 21)
    - The glory of God.
- ❖ Before preaching this text, pray this text for your congregation and the church worldwide.

Be amazed

- ❖ ““That God should set such a high value on a community of sinners, rescued from perdition and still bearing too many traces of their former state, might well seem incredible were it not made clear that he sees them in Christ, as from the beginning he chose them in Christ’.
- As a consequence, then, Paul prays that his readers might ap-

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<sup>35</sup> Stott, J. R. W. (1979, p. 131, 132).

preciate the extraordinary value which God places on them. He views them as in his beloved Son and estimates them accordingly. And this is true of all who are 'in Christ'. Let us, therefore, as Christians realize that God purposes 'to accomplish his gracious plan through [us] ... as the first fruits of the reconciled universe of the future'. May we live consistently with this high calling (cf. Eph. 4:1) **and accept with gratitude and true humility the grace and glory that he has lavished on us.**<sup>36</sup>

- ❖ "The first half of the letter is far from a dispassionate theological treatise. It exudes emotion in the praise and worship of the almighty God who loves and responds to his people. The author writes with intense feeling and wants to elicit the same response—praise, worship and prayer—in the lives of his readers."<sup>37</sup>

### Praise

- ❖ Praise God the Father.
  - For his love and grace.
  - For his power, glory and fullness.
- ❖ Praise Christ for his all-encompassing love.
  - For the church, his body.

### The Holy Spirit

- ❖ The Holy Spirit is completely different:
  - "The Holy Spirit is very different from the spirits that are worshipped in traditional religion. He is a person, not just an influence or a force. He cannot be manipulated or placated as spirits are in traditional religions. He is also holy and so cannot be associated with anything unholy or demonic. He helps us know God much more deeply. Without his revelation and wisdom, our knowledge of who God is and what he does for us will be shallow and weak."<sup>38</sup>
  - The wisdom of the Holy Spirit is the wisdom of the Father and the Son.
    - "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Rom 11:33-36)).
    - He will enlighten the eyes of the believer's heart to know the love of God and Christ more fully, especially the glory and power of God, and his grace and love (Eph 2:1-10).

### The love of Christ

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36 O'Brien, P. T. (1999, p. 136), quoting F.F. Bruce.

37 Arnold, C. E. (1993, p. 239). Ephesians, Letter to The. In G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin, & D. G. Reid (Eds.).

38 Adeyemo, T. (2006, p. 1454).

- ❖ John Stott writes: “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.**”<sup>39</sup>

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39 Stott, J. R. W. (1979, p. 137).