

This message may not be that interesting to you unless you want to be used by God. This message is going to be a source of encouragement to the Christian whose constant prayer is “Lord use me.” You see many of us have as our regular prayer, “Lord give me.”

But this message is for the Christian who knows and believes that God has called him or her for a purpose. God has sent you on a mission. God has given to you talents, gifts and abilities in order for you to be used by Him—to spend yourself in doing His will.

- “Lord I want you to use me like you did Paul when he went around teaching about Christ.”
- “Lord I want you to use me like you did Peter, who preached and thousands gave their lives to Jesus.”
- “I want to be used like Aquila and Priscilla, who sat down with Apollos and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”
- “I want you to use me like you did Lydia, a businesswoman, who opened her home to start a brand new church.”
- “I want to be used like Timothy, a young man who grew up without a Christian father but still was used by God to pastor a church.”
- “Lord I want you to use me like you did Phoebe, a woman that Paul used as his personal assistant to the church at Rome.”

Whether your prayer has been “Lord use me” or not, it is my prayer that this message will begin to open up to you God’s method for empowering the Christian for service.

Review

By the time we get to Ephesians chapter three, Paul has nailed down the truth that God has made the two groups, Jew and Gentile, into one body in Christ.

We have seen Paul begin his letter blessing God who has blessed us. He praises God for blessing the Christian with “*all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ.*”

Paul goes on to delineate what those spiritual blessings are (1:3-14):

- Believers are chosen in Him
- The Christian is predestined to adoption as sons
- The grace of God is freely bestowed on the Christian in Jesus
- The follower of Christ has redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins
- The riches of God’s grace is lavished on the believer
- The mystery of God’s will is made known to the Christian (namely, that all things summed up in Christ and Jews and Gentiles become one body in Christ)
- The believer has obtained an inheritance
- The Christian is sealed in Christ by the Holy Spirit of promise—guarantees salvation

After Paul lists and somewhat elaborates on the Christian’s spiritual blessings he launches into a prayer.

Why does he pray? He prays that his readers might come to know and come to understand the magnitude of this calling on their lives, the riches of their inheritance and the surpassing power of God toward them that believe (1:15-23).

One way that Paul tries to get his readers to understand the great thing that God did for them is to contrast what they were now that they were in Christ with what they were like before Christ saved them.

So in chapter two Paul begins with the words, “*And you were dead in your trespasses and sins...*”

Many of you grew up in a home where your parents or grandparents tried to get you to appreciate your blessings and they may have gone back to the days when they grew up in Jim Crow where they:

- Had to use different water fountains and restrooms and different entrances into public establishments.
- Didn't have but a couple of dresses or one pair of shoes at a time

Your grandparent may have said something like, “*You kids have it so good now—I can remember when times weren't that good.*”

I believe that Paul is trying to get his readers to appreciate the grace of God in lavishing them with all these spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

After he lists all that the Christian is blessed with, he says in chapter two, “*And you were dead in trespasses and sins and walked the way the world walked and whatever the devil moved you to do you did and whatever your flesh longed for you pursued.*”

Notice the choice of some of Paul's words in Ephesians 2:11-12: “separate,” “excluded,” “strangers,” “without hope,” “without God.” Then Paul goes on to tell them that God was not without mercy—He didn't leave them in that state!

Eph 2:4-7- “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

In sharing with his readers the wonderful news of God drawing them near, Paul also unveils another aspect of the mystery that we discussed last time—that He took them, the Gentiles, and another groups of people, the Jews, and formed a brand new *race*—the Church, the Body of Christ.

This was good news! In the past the Gentiles were cut off and excluded and strangers to the covenants of promise but now they have been brought near by the blood of Christ!

Now Paul so desperately wants the Gentiles to know and understand the extent of God's love in doing what He did for them. So in Ephesians 3:1, Paul begins to launch into a prayer, asking God to help the Gentiles to know, understand and appreciate His goodness.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles--

Paul launches into a prayer then he abruptly stops his prayer before he really gets started (He restarts this prayer at verse 14). Now the question is, “Why does he do this? “

While I don’t know why he does this, I can certainly speculate. I believe that in chapter one, verse 9 where Paul mentions “*the mystery of His will,*” he never really finishes explaining what the mystery is (Chapter 3, verse 4 says he “wrote briefly” about it.)

In the first two chapters Paul seems to get carried away with what the mystery is and then at the beginning of chapter three launches into a prayer for his readers to get a hold of this truth. And then it seems that at this moment it occurs to him that he hasn’t been specific enough about what the mystery is.

Paul was about to pray for the application of what he just taught them but he wasn’t convinced they had enough information for the application.

So in chapter three, verses 2 through 13 Paul elaborates some more on what the mystery was all about and in verse 14 he picks up where he left off in verse 1. Let’s begin our examination of this prayer.

Eph 3:14-15 - 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...

As Paul begins his prayer for the believers, he mentions that he “*bows his knees.*” Now Paul is not prescribing to his readers his preferred method of praying—he is not telling his readers that this is the only truly “spiritual” way of accessing the throne of God.

Scripture lets us know that there are many ways to posture ourselves before the Lord in prayer:

- As he interceded for Sodom and Gomorrah, “Abraham was still *standing* before the Lord” (Gen. 18:22). When David prayed about the building of the Temple, he “went in and *sat* before the Lord” (1 Chron. 17:16).
- As Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal, He “*fell on His face and prayed*” (Matt. 26:39).

But in Scripture, bowing the knees signifies several things that may have prompted Paul to mention that position here.

First, it represents an attitude of submission, of recognition that one is in the presence of someone who is of much higher rank, dignity, and authority.

After proclaiming the Lord as “*the rock of our salvation,...a great God, and a great King above all gods,*” and as the Creator of all the earth, the psalmist says, “*Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker*” (Ps. 95:1–6).

Second, we find examples in Scripture where one bowed their knee before God in times of intense passion and emotion. Horrified and in heaviness of heart over the intermarriage of the Israelites with their pagan neighbors, Ezra fell on his knees and stretched out his hands in confession to the Lord on behalf of his people (Ezra 9:5–6).

As Paul met for the last time with the elders from Ephesus, “*he knelt down and prayed with them all*” on the seashore at Miletus (Acts 20:36).

Back in our text, as Paul prayed for his readers while writing this letter to them, he felt led to bow his knees before the Father on their behalf, not because that position or any other is especially sacred, but because this reflected the earnestness of the passion that was in his heart for his fellow believers as he approached the throne of God in prayer.

Eph 3:14-15 - 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...

Some try to say that Paul's words teach "the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man." This is clearly not what Paul is teaching—especially when one researches his other writings.

Scripture clearly teaches that there are two spiritual fatherhoods—God's and Satan's. God is the heavenly Father of those who trust in Him and Satan is the spiritual father of those who do not.

In John chapter 8, we find the two fatherhoods distinguished very clearly. To the unbelieving Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah but claimed that Abraham was their forefather, Jesus said, "*If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth... You are doing the deeds of your father.... If God were your Father, you would love Me;... You are of your father the devil*" (vv. 39-42, 44).

In his first epistle, John declares, "*By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother*" (3:10).

The "whole family" Paul is referring to is "the Church, the Body of Christ." Paul is referring to those who have followed the Lord by faith—the saints of God of every age—those now in heaven and those remaining on the earth.

Eph 3:16-17 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

If you are a member of the Body of Christ, God wants you as a believer in Christ to grow in your faith. This flies in the face of many of our popular preachers and TV-Evangelists who say we are put on this planet to "have a better life now."

Many of the sermons and teachings coming out of the church are encouraging their followers to get more and more from God—more wealth—better health and a greater prosperity. But is the concern of God for his children? Is this to be the Christian's preoccupation?

Is the goal of the Christian life centered on the questions, "How to have your better life now?" or "How to have a better marriage or family?" or "How to be a better person?" Self-help books are among the fastest growing genre of books published by the Christian community.

If you read through the letters of Paul, you will find that he wasn't concerned with helping believers learn how to be better. He was concerned with helping Christians to know Christ more and to become more like Christ.

Paul prayed that the Philippians' love would “*abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that [they would] be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ*” (Phil. 1:9–10).

He did not cease to pray for the Colossian believers to “*be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that [they might] walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power [lit., being empowered with all power], according to His glorious might*” (Col. 1:9–11; cf. Phil. 1:4; 1 Thess. 1:2).

Did you know that even the very trials and tribulations that we go through, some of us on almost a daily basis, is for this reason—that we might grow more and more like Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28-29 – “*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. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son....*”

It is also not God’s primary concern for us to be healthy and wealthy and prosperous—if that is so, He is dropping the ball on this when you consider many of His children who live in third world countries—who seem to be a lot more faithful than many believers in the land in which we live.

But in our text of Ephesians chapter three, it is Paul’s prayer for us to know Christ and be thoroughly acquainted with the riches and the power that are in Christ.

Eph 3:16-17 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

“*...that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory...*”

The word “grant” is a verb that is in the mood of the Greek, (the subjunctive mood) that indicates there is potential. In other words, whether a Christian receives the benefit of the "grant" depends on personal volition—the Holy Spirit is telling us that we need to have the “want to” or “will” or “the desire.”

This is telling us that God will grant the Christian, according to the riches of His glory if he or she wants it. So Paul is praying here that Christians will want it bad enough to take advantage of that which God has provided.

As we continue we find that whatever God is willing to grant, He does so “according to” the riches of His glory. To explain what this means, John MacArthur uses the illustration of a wealthy person who gives *according to*, rather than simply *out of*, his riches.

For a millionaire to give fifty or a hundred dollars would be simply to give *out of* his wealth, but to give twenty-five thousand dollars would be to give *according to* his wealth. The greater a person's wealth, the greater his gift must be to qualify for giving according to his wealth.

MacArthur says, “For God to give *according to the riches of His glory* is absolutely staggering, because His riches are limitless, completely without bounds! Yet that is exactly the measure by which Paul implores God to empower the Ephesians.”

Also notice that God is not granting to believers the riches of His glory; He granting to believers, *according to* the riches of His glory that they already possess.

Now what is it that Paul is praying for God to grant according to the riches of His glory for the believer? Four things:

- 1.) For the Holy Spirit to empower us
- 2.) For Christ to indwell us
- 3.) For the love of Christ to master us
- 4.) For God to fill us with His own fullness

Let’s briefly look at each of these and then we will be finished for today.

1. For the Holy Spirit to empower us

“... to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man...” (Eph. 3:16b)

God wants you to be strengthened in your inner person. The word “might” is *dunamis*, doo'-nam-is, from which we get our English word, dynamite.

This is an inner strengthening—an inner ruling power that is provided by the Holy Spirit. In John 14:16-17, Jesus says, “*And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.*”

The Holy Spirit is the “Helper” who comes to live in the person the moment he or she turns away from their sins to follow Christ.

The Holy Spirit indwells the believer and begins to do an inner transformation. You see, we are so concerned about the outer person but God is concerned with the inner person. The “inner man” or the “inner person” is what Christians are to be concerning with.

All you need to do is spend 10 or 15 minutes or less watching TV and you will find a plethora of commercials that deal with the outer man. There are billions of dollars spent each year on the outer man but the Bible teaches us that the outer man will one day perish—these bodies we live in will one day go back to the dust. “*Therefore we do not lose heart,*” Paul could say, “*but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day*” (2 Cor. 4:16)

At GraceWay Church God wants us to be concerned with the inner man—this is why He has called us to the ministry of “Pointing the Way to Transformation in Jesus Christ.” We want to see people transformed from the inside out.

Yes, we have ministries that deal with the outer man, like *AromaHouse* and the *LightHouse* Food Pantry. But in these ministries we are meeting the needs of the outer person in order to have the opportunity to minister the Word of God to the inner person.

The Holy Spirit helps us in the process of strengthening the inner man. Paul prayed that Christians would “... *be strengthened with might through God’s Spirit in the inner man...*”

This is a reference to the Holy Spirit. In John 14:17, he is called the “*Spirit of truth.*” In John 16 Jesus tells us that “*when the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth...*” In John 14:26 Jesus says, “*He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.*”

The reason Paul wanted his readers to be strengthened with might through God’s Spirit in the inner man is because he wanted “*Christ to dwell in their hearts through faith.*”

2. *For Christ to indwell us*

“...*that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...*” (Eph 3:17)

Paul’s prayer for his readers of our text is that Christ would “*dwell in their hearts.*”

The word dwell comes from the Greek word that means to “occupy a house.” So what Paul was praying is that Christ would be at home in their hearts. This was another way that Paul was praying for the growth of the Christian.

The word “heart” is from the Greek word *kardia* which is always used in the Bible to refer to the inner life, the life of the soul.

In the Gospel of John chapter one, verse one we are told that Christ is the Word of God (John 1)—“*In the beginning was the Logos...*”—the Word of God. Jesus Christ is the living Word of God.

Since “heart” is the inner life, the life of the soul, then “Christ dwelling in the heart” is the same as having “the Word in the Christian’s life.”

Paul says it this way in Colossians 3:16, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”

Why was this important to Paul? The heart is the inner life of the soul. The soul is the seat of one’s *mind, will and emotions.*

- You do your thinking in your soul
- You do your decision-making in your soul
- You respond to things emotionally—good or bad; positively or negatively, in your soul.
- Your ability to sin or to live righteously is found in your soul.

The most important weapon in combating sin and in having victory over personal sin is the Word of God locked (rooted) *in the soul.*

Hebrews 4:12 tells us that “*the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”

In this part of his prayer, Paul was praying that the recipients of his letter would grow—that they would be involved in the process of learning and applying the Word of God so that a system of divine standards is built up in their soul.

The key to successful Christian living isn't trying to better your life and better your finances and better your marriage and family situation—it is building up a system of divine standards in your soul by learning and applying the Word of God!

The sad thing today in the Christian community is that when people seek counseling they go to those who will make them feel better about themselves and their situation. But Paul prayed in Ephesians 3:16-17, *“that (God) would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith...”*

But he went on to pray...

3. *For the love of Christ to master us*

“...being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God...” (Eph 3:17b – 19)

A lot is going on here and we will more than likely deal with it in more detail in our LIFE Group Bible Study. Because of time constraints, I will only deal with one part of this verse.

Paul prays in verse 17 that we, *“...being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints...”* the love of Christ.

This word “comprehend” leads us to believe that Paul is praying for us to understand the love of Christ but it means so much more.

The words "to comprehend" is in the tense of the Greek (aorist middle infinitive of *katalambano*, kat-al-am-ban'-o;) and means, "to seize; to lay a hold of."

The middle voice is reflexive, showing that the benefit to be gained from "seizing" truth accrues to the subject ("you"). Thus it means "to seize for yourself!"

This is a *volitional* word. It carries far more meaning than mere "comprehension." There is a "seizing", a grasping and possessing of something. It is used in Mark 9:18, where the demonic and mute spirit "seizes" the son with an unrelenting grip and "throws him," "convulses him," "tears at him."

Paul is praying that we get an unrelenting grip on the truth of God's Word; he is praying that we seize it for ourselves—go after it—reach out for it—get a hold of it.

- This is the attitude you should have when it comes to your desire for the Word of God.
- This is the attitude you should have when it comes to coming out to hear the Word at church.
- This is the kind of focus of intensity the Christian should have with it comes to the preaching of the Word and the teaching of the Word.

Is this your desire? Do you have the desire to seize it for yourselves—go after it—reach out for it—get a hold of it?

Paul prays that the Christian “...*being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height; to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge...*”

Paul is saying that love goes in every direction and to the greatest distance. It goes wherever it is needed for as long as it is needed.

The early church Father Jerome said that “*the love of Christ reaches up to the holy angels and down to those in hell. Its length covers the men on the upward way and its breadth reaches those drifting away on evil paths.*”

Ryrie says, “*The love of Christ includes all, extends from eternity to eternity, seats us in the heavenlies, and reaches down to our alienated position.*”

When Paul speaks of *the width and length and depth and height*, he is not teaching us the four specific types or categories of love, he is simply trying to communicate to us the vastness and completeness of love.

In Romans 8:38-39, Paul was “*persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

The love that Paul is referring to is “agape” love; it is a sacrificial love. Paul writes in Romans 5:5 that “*the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” This is the same Spirit that Paul writes about here in our text of Ephesians 3, verse 16.

This is the same love that Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 that makes us patient and kind and helps us not to envy and keeps us humble.

- It is the same love that keeps us from being rude and self-seeking.
- It is the same love that helps us not to be easily angered; it helps us to be forgiving.
- It is the love that motivates us not to delight in evil but to rejoice with the truth.
- This love is the same love that always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres—this love doesn’t fail.

If we are rooted and grounded in this love; if we reach out and seize this love; if we come to know this love, we will be filled with all the fullness of God and this would be the answer to the last part of Paul’s prayer in the section.

4. *For God to fill us with His own fullness*

Paul prays that Christians might be “filled with the fullness of God” because there is obviously something lacking.

Remember, Christians were once dead in trespasses and sins. Christians were once void of the Spirit of God. But now that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, Paul is praying that God would occupy every “nook and cranny” of the believer’s life.

- God is not just to be your “Lord” on Sundays—He is Lord of each and every day of your week.
- Christ is not just to be your Master in the church; He is to be your Master at home and in the work place.
- Jesus is not just to be important to you when you need a bill paid, but when you pay your tithes. His ways are to be honored when you write your budget and do your taxes.
- Christ is to be Lord when you are on a date and looking for a mate.
- You are to be filled with all the fullness of God when you love your wife or respect your husband.
- You are to be filled with all the fullness of God when you raise your children and discipline them.

In Verse 16-19 of our text, Paul is letting us know that when the Holy Spirit has empowered us, Christ has indwelt us, love has mastered us, and God has filled us with His own fullness, then He (verse 20 tells us) *“is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us.”*

Until those conditions are met, God's working in us is limited. When they are met, His working in us is unlimited. In John 15:7-8 Jesus said, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”*

Christian, let the Holy Spirit empower you; acknowledge the indwelling of Christ; seek to let love master you and ask God to fill you with His own fullness—

- This is the only way you will have victory in your own life—
- This is the only way you will have victory in your marriage and home—
- This is the only way you will experience victory in your occupation.
- This is the only way you will be empowered for service.
- This is the only way that God can really use you to accomplish His purpose.

There is no situation in which the Lord cannot use us, provided we are submitted to Him.