

## **Ephesians 3**

A Translation with Interpretation by James Garriss

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## The Mystery of Christ

### Ephesians 3:1-7

#### Limits of the Text

In 3:1 Paul began another prayer for the Ephesians and then promptly interrupted himself; he didn't pick up his original thought again until 3:14. Thus 3:2-13 is essentially a giant digression, which makes 3:1-13 its own section of text. The first part of this section, 3:2-7, is one sentence in Greek, and it is about the mystery of Christ and Paul's management of it.

#### Translation

1 For this purpose, **I**, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

2 Surely you have heard of the management of God's grace, which was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me **by revelation**, just as I briefly wrote before. 4 When you read that, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other times as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. 6 *The mystery is this*: the Gentiles are joint heirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, 7 of which I was made a servant according to the gift of God's grace, which was given to me according to the working of his power.<sup>1</sup>

#### Interpretation

In 3:1, Paul began a prayer for the Ephesians, but he interrupted himself mid-sentence in order to explain the mystery of Christ. In 3:14, he started his prayer again; note the repeated phrase "for this purpose." 3:1-13 has many parallels with Co 1:24-28.

1 Τούτου χάριν ἐγὼ Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν<sup>2</sup>

1 For this purpose, **I**, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—

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<sup>1</sup> Words in *italics* are implied; words in **bold** are emphasized.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek text is the NA27.

There is no verb in this sentence; it's an anacoluthon, a broken sentence. The ISV supplies a missing verb of being in order to make a complete sentence,<sup>3</sup> which is frequently appropriate to do in Greek, but in this case it's probably better to leave the sentence unfinished and capture the sense that Paul paused mid-sentence and didn't continue his train of thought, a prayer for the Ephesians, until 3:14.

“For this purpose” (Χάριτι) is used as a marker of purpose, pointing to the goal of an event;<sup>4</sup> a combined Jewish-Gentile church was the goal for which Paul was currently a prisoner in Rome.<sup>5</sup> “This purpose” looks back to the second half of chapter two (2:11-22), where Paul had described how the power of the God in salvation made Jews and Gentiles into one new body, the church. The Jews were already part of the church, becoming the founding members when the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. Paul had been working for the Gentiles, adding them to the church, and an unintended consequence was his imprisonment, under house arrest and chained to a Roman soldier (Ac 28:16, 30). Although the Romans had imprisoned Paul, he didn't consider himself to be a Roman prisoner; he was the prisoner of Jesus. His obedience in preaching the gospel of Jesus to the Gentiles was the overriding reason why he was incarcerated. Paul again picked up this theme of being a prisoner in 3:13 when he mentioned his tribulations.

Before Paul bowed on his knees before the Father in prayer (3:14), he once again went over “this purpose,” reviewing what he has already written in chapter two about the Gentiles' place in the church, and explained how it was connected to his current situation as a prisoner of Christ Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

2 - εἴ γε ἠκούσατε τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς,

[2 Surely you have heard of the management of God's grace, which was given to me for you,](#)

This verse starts a new sentence, one that runs through 3:7. Most translations, including mine, break it into multiple sentences for readability.

When εἴ γε is followed by an indicative verb, which ἠκούσατε (“you have heard”) is, it has the sense of something that is taken for granted.<sup>7</sup> A literal translation could be “if

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<sup>3</sup> For this reason I, Paul, am the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles.

<sup>4</sup> Louw, 1:784.

<sup>5</sup> This letter was probably written around 61 A.D.

<sup>6</sup> O'Brien, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Zodhiates, G1064.

indeed,” but the sense here should be more certain and confident. The HCSB translates this clause as “You have heard, haven’t you...?” and, even better, the ISV and NIV as “Surely you have heard...” So to give it a sense of certainty, I have followed the ISV and NIV and used “surely.”

Paul was certain they had heard of the management of God’s grace. Management (οἰκονομίαν) is the same word used in 1:10 and 3:9, and it has the idea of the administration or stewardship of a responsibility. Paul had a God-given responsibility to manage God’s grace, particularly God’s grace as it related to the mystery of Christ (1:4-5). Grace (χάριτος) is an attribute of God that Paul mentioned often in this letter; in 2:7, for example, he noted that God has an incomparable abundance of grace. Grace is “a favor done without expectation of return; the absolutely free expression of the loving kindness of God to men finding its only motive in the bounty and benevolence of the Giver; unearned and unmerited favor.”<sup>8</sup>

This management of God’s grace was given to Paul for the Ephesians (εἰς ὑμᾶς) in particular and all Gentiles in general (3:1). The preposition functions like a dative of advantage, which means that this management was given with the Gentiles in mind; if Paul did his job well, then many Gentiles would receive God’s grace.

3 [ὅτι] κατὰ<sup>9</sup> ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον, καθὼς προέγραψα ἐν ὀλίγῳ,

**3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, just as I briefly wrote before.**

“That is” (ὅτι) is a marker of explanation;<sup>10</sup> the clause that follows explains the previous clause. In this verse “mystery” further explains the “management of God’s grace” from the previous verse. Paul used the word mystery a half-dozen times in this letter, including the phrase “the mystery of his will” in 1:9. A mystery has the idea of something that is a secret; in the New Testament, a mystery of God is one that is “naturally unknown to human reason and is only known by the revelation of God.”<sup>11</sup> A revelation (ἀποκάλυψιν) is a disclosure, a making something known.<sup>12</sup> If the management of God’s grace is a mystery, a secret that must be revealed by God, then

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<sup>8</sup> Zodhiates, G5484.

<sup>9</sup> I do not understand how Paul used the preposition κατὰ (by) in this verse. The sense of the prepositional phrase is that a revelation was the means by which the mystery was made known to Paul, but according to the Greek lexicons and grammar books I have, κατὰ was not used that way.

<sup>10</sup> Swanson, DBLG 4022.

<sup>11</sup> Zodhiates, G3466.

<sup>12</sup> Arndt, 112.

logically it required a revelation of God to make it known to Paul. Paul's revelation was probably a reference to his Damascus road experience (Ac 9:2-6; Ga 1:15-16).

Having mentioned this revealing of the mystery, Paul interjected a comment about his previous actions. It appears that Paul had already written once to the Ephesians about this revelation, though he had only written briefly (ἐν ὀλίγῳ).<sup>13</sup> At this point it's worth remembering that Paul was probably writing to second or third generation Christians, both in the churches he founded and in the new churches the Ephesians had founded; that's why he said things like "surely you have heard" (3:2) and "I wrote briefly before," phrases that sound more impersonal than personal.

4 πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

4 When you read that, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ,

Paul encouraged them to go back and read his previous letter, from which they could gain the ability to understand his insight into the mystery of Christ. "You will be able" (δύνασθε) is the futuristic present, because their reading (ἀναγινώσκοντες) of his letter must precede their understanding of Paul's insight. Insight (σύνεσίν) and understanding (νοῆσαι) are synonymous concepts, having the idea of comprehending something; this infinitive could be translated "to understand my understanding" or "to gain insight into my insight." Paul was not hoarding his understanding; he was sharing it broadly. His "main purpose is to assist the Ephesians in their insight into that which has already been revealed to him."<sup>14</sup>

Why does Paul call this the mystery of Christ? "Of Christ" (τοῦ Χριστοῦ) is probably objective genitive, meaning this is a mystery about Christ or a mystery concerning Christ. In other words, creating the church and pulling all believers into one new group is all about Christ. He made it possible, he leads the church, he supplies power to the church, and so on. This is the mystery of Christ.

5 ὃ ἑτέραις γενεαῖς οὐκ ἐγνώρισθη τοῖς υἱοῖς τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη τοῖς ἀγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις ἐν πνεύματι,

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<sup>13</sup> Hoehner concludes Paul was actually referring back to what he wrote in chapter 2 (427-428).

<sup>14</sup> Hoehner, 436.

5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other times as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets.

This verse uses a comparison to provide additional information about the mystery that was made known to Paul back in 1:3. This mystery was not made known to the sons of men (i.e., people) in other times. This doesn't mean that God had never revealed anything about himself or the Messiah, but it does mean people living before Christ, even key figures like Abraham, Moses, and David, knew nothing about this mystery, God's plan for bringing Jews and Gentiles together into a new body. Co 1:26 says that the mystery had been hidden from past ages and generations. By comparison—ὡς is a marker of comparison—it had been revealed in Paul's day to the apostles and prophets; the comparison is thus acting as a contrast. It had not been made known (οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη) in other times, but it has been revealed (ἀπεκαλύφθη) now. These are (not accidentally) the same two words Paul used of himself in 3:3, where he said the mystery was made known to him by revelation.

Although the mystery had been made known to Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus (1:1), it had also been revealed to other New Testament apostles and prophets (ἀποστόλοις...καὶ προφήταις). You can see my commentary on 2:20 for a more detailed discussion of these groups, but in short the apostles authoritatively proclaimed Jesus' message and the prophets proclaimed God's revelation; together they established the early church and kept it from heresy. Although Paul did not give any details of which other apostles and prophets received this revelation, the point is that God's message was not given to him exclusively; others within the church could confirm the truthfulness of Paul's words. This mystery was revealed by the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι), God's instrument for revealing truth to the church (1 Co 2:10).

6 εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου,

*6 The mystery is this: the Gentiles are joint heirs, members of the same body, and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,*

In 1:6 Paul finally revealed what this mystery is. The infinitive that starts the verse (εἶναι τὰ) has the sense of "that is" or "namely," and is appositional to the mystery of Christ back in 1:4. Although this verse is still part of one super-long sentence (3:2-7), I started a new sentence here for clarity and pulled in the word "mystery" that is inferred from 1:4.

So what is this mystery? It is the new status of Gentiles who believe in Jesus and receive the grace of God (3:2), a status that is absolutely equal to the status of the Jews. No longer did any race or ethnic group have any advantages over any other (see 2:12-13). Paul used three compound nouns that begin with the preposition σύν, which has the idea of “with” or “together,” to “emphasize the unity of the Gentile converts with the rest of the Christian community.”<sup>15</sup> The commonality of these nouns could be emphasized by translating them with a common word or prefix, such as “fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers”<sup>16</sup> or “co-inheritors, co-body, and co-partakers.”<sup>17</sup> In my translation I chose to emphasize a clearer meaning of the words over emphasizing their commonality.

In the first description of their new status, Paul said the Gentiles were now joint heirs (συγκληρονόμα). A joint heir is one who inherits the same possessions or blessings as someone else. Ro 8:17 says that the children of God are joint heirs with Christ; 1 Pt 3:7 says believing husbands and wives are joint heirs of the grace of life. With whom are the Gentiles joint heirs? Paul doesn’t say explicitly, but given the latter half of chapter 2 the answer is obvious: The Gentiles are joint heirs with the Jews. What will the Gentiles inherit? If the Gentiles are now in the family of God (2:19), then they will inherit everything due a family member, which includes final redemption (1:14) and eternity with Christ.

In the second description of their new status, Paul said the Gentiles were members of the same body (σύσσωμα). The main part of this compound noun is the word “body;” although literally used to describe the physical body, New Testament writers frequently used this word in a figurative sense to refer to the church. Thus this word has the idea of many people united together in one group. Louw defines this word as “a person who is a member of a group, with emphasis upon his coordinate relation to other members of the group.”<sup>18</sup> The Gentiles were part of the church body, just as the believing Jews were. Although Paul apparently coined a new word here, it is identical in meaning to what he has already written in 2:16.

In the third description of their new status, Paul said the Gentiles were now partners (συμμέτοχα) of the promise in Christ Jesus through the good news. A partner is one who shares “with another in some possession or relationship.”<sup>19</sup> The Ephesians were partners of the promise in Christ Jesus. Paul has already used the word “promise”

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<sup>15</sup> O’Brien, 234.

<sup>16</sup> This is the NASB95 translation.

<sup>17</sup> This is the literal translation from the NA27 interlinear.

<sup>18</sup> Louw, 1:121.

<sup>19</sup> Arndt, 958.



twice in his letter. In 2:12 he referred to Gentiles as former foreigners to the covenants of the promise, where the promise looked ahead to the Messiah; promise has the same idea in 3:6, a promise of the Messiah. Gentiles were now partners with the Jews concerning the promised Messiah.

All three elements of the mystery are in Christ Jesus (ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ). This is the same phrase that Paul used in 1:1, referring to those who have a relationship with Christ. Gentiles become fellow heirs, fellow members, and fellow partakers when they come to know Jesus. And being in Christ Jesus happens through the gospel (διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). The gospel, “God’s good news to humans,”<sup>20</sup> is the means by which God saves people (1:13). Believing in the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus is how people become “in Christ Jesus.”

7 οὗ ἐγενήθην διάκονος κατὰ τὴν δωρεὰν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.

*7 of which I was made a servant according to the gift of God’s grace, which was given to me according to the working of his power.*

This verse serves as a transition from the previous verses about his stewardship of the mystery to the following verses about his preaching the riches of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

The “which” refers back to the gospel in the previous verse. Paul called himself a servant (διάκονος), which in this verse has the idea of one who is a courier or intermediary of something.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, Paul was a servant of the gospel; he couried the gospel by spreading it to those he met.

Paul was made (ἐγενήθην) a servant. He didn’t make himself a servant; the passive voice of this verb indicates that God made him a servant. When Jesus appeared to Paul on the Damascus road, he said, “For this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness” (Ac 26:16, NASB95). He was made a servant according to (κατὰ) the gift of God’s grace. How does God take someone who persecuted the church and turn him into someone who serves the gospel? That can only be measured by God’s grace. Grace (χάριτος) is by definition something given freely, and Paul repeated that idea by saying God’s grace was a gift (δωρεάν) to him. Paul emphasized that he did not deserve to be a servant of the gospel, but God freely made him so.

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<sup>20</sup> Arndt, 402.

<sup>21</sup> O’Brien, 237.

<sup>22</sup> Arndt, 230.

God's grace was given to Paul according to (κατὰ) the working of God's power. This last clause sounds very similar to 1:19, where Paul wrote about the "incomparable greatness of his power to us who are believing according to the working of the might of his strength." The idea of working (ἐνέργειαν) is actively doing something or getting something done, and the idea of power (δυνάμειος), which is nearly synonymous, is the ability or the capability to do something. Paul emphasized that he was not able to become a servant of the gospel on his own, but God used his power to make him so.

## Abridged Structural Diagram

(2:11-22)  
|  
For this purpose  
|  
I, Paul (pray)...

you have heard  
of the management of God's grace  
which was given to me for you  
that is  
the mystery made known to me  
just as I briefly wrote before.

When you read that  
you will be able  
to understand my insight  
into the mystery of Christ  
which was not made known to the sons of men  
as  
it has now been revealed

*The mystery is this:*  
the Gentiles are joint heirs  
members of the same body  
and  
partners of the promise  
in Christ Jesus  
thru the gospel  
of which  
I was made a  
servant...

## Tracing the Argument

**External** – Before Paul prayed for his readers, he wanted to make sure they understood the mystery of Christ, so he paused to explain it, thus further elaborating what he had written in 2:11-22.

**Internal** – God desired to extend his grace to the Gentiles, so he chose Paul to do it. Paul had written about this subject before, and he desired that the Ephesians re-read his previous letter, so they would understand what God was doing. Because this concept had never been revealed before, Paul referred to it as a mystery. When Gentiles embraced God's grace, they were put on the same level as the Jews.

## Textual Outline

1. God gave the management of the mystery of Christ to Paul (2-3).

2. God revealed the mystery of Christ to Paul (4-5).
3. God explained the mystery of Christ to Paul (6-7).

### **Central Truth of the Text**

Paul wrote Ephesians 3:1-7 in order to encourage Ephesians believers with the mystery of Christ.

### **Teaching Outline**

God gave the mystery of Christ to us. Today I want you to be encouraged by the mystery of Christ. From this first section in Ephesians 3, we are going to see 3 aspects of the mystery of Christ.

1. Be encouraged that the mystery of Christ is God's grace to us (2-3).
2. Be encouraged that the mystery of Christ is God's revelation to us (4-5).
3. Be encouraged that the mystery of Christ is God's changing of us (6-7).

## Ephesians 3:8-13

### Limits of the Text

3:2-13 is a digression about the mystery of Christ. The first part of this digression, 3:2-7, is about Paul's management of the mystery and an explanation of the mystery itself. The second part, 3:8-13, is about Paul's responsibility to proclaim Christ and explain the management of the mystery, thus making God's wisdom known.

### Translation

8 This grace was given **to me, the least *worthy* of all the holy ones**, to proclaim the message of the unfathomable abundance of Christ **to the Gentiles** 9 and to enlighten everyone about the management of the mystery that had been hidden for ages in God who created everything, 10 so that God's very diversified wisdom might now be made known **through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places**. 11 *This was* according to the eternal plan, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and the right to approach *God* with confidence through faith in him. 13 Therefore I myself am asking you to not be discouraged by my afflictions on your behalf, which is your glory.

### Interpretation

Verses 8-12 comprise another long sentence in Greek; I broke it after 10 for readability.

8 Ἐμοὶ τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ πάντων ἁγίων ἐδόθη ἡ χάρις αὕτη, τοῖς ἔθνεσιν εὐαγγελίσασθαι τὸ ἀνεξιχνίαστον πλοῦτος τοῦ Χριστοῦ

8 This grace was given **to me, the least *worthy* of all the holy ones**, to proclaim the message of the unfathomable abundance of Christ **to the Gentiles**

"This grace" refers back to the gift of grace that God gave Paul (3:7), the gift of being a servant of the gospel, which referred back to his administering God's grace for the Gentiles (3:2). This grace, this management, was given to Paul for two reasons, but before Paul gave the reasons, he inserted a statement about himself, one that was both parenthetical and emphatic.

Paul called himself the least worthy of all the holy ones. "Least worthy" comes from a comparative term (τῷ ἐλαχιστοτέρῳ) and has the literal idea of being lesser than the

least or the very least.<sup>23</sup> Holy ones (ἁγίων), a title Paul first used in 1:1, is a reference to God's people, who are to be dedicated, consecrated, and set apart to God from the rest of the world to serve him. Why did Paul refer to himself as the very least? In what way was he less than all other believers? Paul was probably thinking about his past, where he had persecuted the church and tried to wipe it out, even to the point of murder (Ac 9:1; 1 Co 15:9; Ga 1:13). He would later write, "I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all" (1 Ti 1:13, 15, NASB95). That kind of person was not worthy of salvation and was especially not worthy of the privilege of being God's chosen instrument to spread the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was the least *worthy* of all the believers, which is why I have added the interpretative word *worthy* to help clarify this sentence.<sup>24</sup> Hoehner believes this statement to be parenthetical in nature,<sup>25</sup> and some translations set it apart with a dash: "This grace was given to me—the least of all the saints!—to proclaim to the Gentiles the incalculable riches of the Messiah."<sup>26</sup>

Paul gave two reasons why God gave him this grace, and both reasons are expressed with an infinitive of purpose. The first reason God gave Paul grace was to proclaim a message (εὐαγγελίσασθαι). This compound verb literally means to tell good news. This word is also used in 2:17, where Jesus proclaimed the message of peace to Gentiles and Jews. Paul was to proclaim the message of the unfathomable abundance of Christ. The word abundance (πλοῦτος) is often translated as riches and can refer to physical wealth, but in this letter Paul used it figuratively to refer to an exceeding amount of something. God has an abundance of grace (1:7, 2:7); believers have an abundance of glory that we inherit in Christ (1:18). The abundance of Christ refers to who Christ is, what he has done, and what he gives to those, including Gentiles, who believe in him. The eulogy (1:3-14) explains part of the abundance of Christ, as does God giving authority to Christ (1:20), believers being created in Christ for good works (2:10), and Christ's destruction of the dividing wall and preaching peace (2:14, 17). All of these things (and more) are abundant, plentiful, and boundless, so much so that they are unfathomable (ἀνεξιχνίαστον). The abundance of Christ is untraceable, like a giant maze that cannot be figured out; it is incomprehensible, impossible to completely understand, no matter how diligently we examine or investigate him. Though we spend eternity studying Jesus—and we will—we will never understand everything there is to know about him and his work for us. And yet this was exactly the message Paul was to proclaim to the Gentiles. The phrase "to the Gentiles" is emphatic in this sentence, highlighting to whom Paul was proclaiming his message.

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<sup>23</sup> Zodhiates, G1646.

<sup>24</sup> It's not as if he were the least important of the holy ones, the least smart, etc.

<sup>25</sup> Hoehner, 452.

<sup>26</sup> HCSB.

Although he was unworthy, Paul was to proclaim Christ to the Gentiles.

9 καὶ φωτίσαι [πάντας] τίς ἢ οἰκονομία τοῦ μυστηρίου τοῦ ἀποκεκρυμμένου ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων ἐν τῷ θεῷ τῷ τὰ πάντα κτίσαντι,

9 and to enlighten everyone about the management of the mystery that had been hidden for ages in God who created everything,

The second reason God gave Paul grace was to enlighten everyone about the management of the mystery. As he wrote earlier (3:2-3), God gave the responsibility for managing his grace concerning the mystery of Christ to Paul; in this verse, Paul expanded upon his responsibility, stating that he was to enlighten everyone about God's plan. To enlighten (φωτίσαι) can literally mean to shine a light, but here it has the idea of helping people to understand. So Paul's responsibility was to help people understand God's plan for giving out his grace, particularly to the Gentiles. The second reason is not totally distinct from the first; that is, as Paul proclaims the abundance of Christ, he is helping people understand the management of the mystery of Christ. The target audience of proclaiming the Christ was the Gentiles; the target of enlightening about the management was everyone.

And though Paul has already written quite a bit about the mystery of Christ (3:3-7), he added two additional descriptions about it here. First, the mystery of Christ had been hidden for ages. The reason that the mystery of Christ was a mystery is because God hid it, and once he did, man couldn't know it unless God made it known. The prepositional phrase "for ages" (ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων) is more literally "from the ages," meaning from the beginning of the ages, or "since the ages," meaning since the ages began.<sup>27</sup> "For ages" conveys the idea of all periods of time from the beginning of time until Paul's time. Second, the mystery of Christ had been hidden in God (ἐν τῷ θεῷ). The dative use of the preposition "in" might be dative of agency, meaning it was God who did the hiding, but more likely it is dative of sphere, meaning the mystery was hidden within God himself, somewhere where people had no ability to discover it. The mystery was hidden in God, who created everything. Why did Paul note that God was the Creator God? It's consistent with the timeline; the Creator God hid the mystery of Christ when he created time (i.e., the ages). This was part of his eternal plan (3:11).

Although he was unworthy, Paul was to help everyone understand God's plan for giving his grace to everyone.

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<sup>27</sup> Hoehner, 457.

10 ἵνα γνωρισθῆ νῦν ταῖς ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἢ πολυποίκιλος σοφία τοῦ θεοῦ,

**10 so that God's very diversified wisdom might now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.**

God gave to the management of his grace to Paul (3:2); the giving of this management was in itself an act of grace (3:7-8). God gave this grace so that Paul would proclaim the abundance of Christ (3:8) and enlighten everyone (3:9). When all of this happened, the end result, the ultimate purpose, was that the wisdom of God might be made known; once again it is seen that God's actions always bring glory to himself.

Paul used a unique expression here: God's very diversified wisdom. Wisdom (σοφία) is "the capacity to understand and function accordingly."<sup>28</sup> God has wisdom, and Paul characterized his wisdom as very diversified (πολυποίκιλος). This compound adjective, which does not appear anywhere else in the New Testament, is made from the words "much" and "various" (or "diverse"). When used outside of the New Testament, "it refers to intricate embroidery or flowers of many colors."<sup>29</sup> It's a difficult word to translate into English; translations vary: manifold (NASB95), multifaceted (NET), and all its variety (ISV). The idea is that God's wisdom is neither simple nor one-dimensional; it has a rich diversity and abounds in variety.<sup>30</sup>

Paul proclaimed and enlightened so that God's wisdom might now be made known. "Might be made known" (γνωρισθῆ) means to "cause information to be known by someone"<sup>31</sup> and is synonymous with reveal. When rulers and authorities observed the church, Jews and Gentiles in one new group (2:15), they understood more about God's wisdom in all its diversity, "his richly diverse ways of working."<sup>32</sup> The adverb "now" (νῦν) draws a line in history. "In ages past" (3:9), this aspect of God's wisdom was not known, but with the formation of the church, it became known.

When Paul proclaimed and enlightened, the wisdom of God was made known to the rulers (ταῖς ἀρχαῖς) and authorities (ταῖς ἐξουσίαις). These are two of the four words Paul used in 1:21 to refer to a heavenly org chart of angelic beings; in some contexts these words refers to angels and in others demons. These rulers and authorities are in

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<sup>28</sup> Arndt, 934.

<sup>29</sup> Hoehner, 461.

<sup>30</sup> Zodhiates, G4181.

<sup>31</sup> Swanson, DBLG 1192.

<sup>32</sup> O'Brien, 245.



the heavenly places (ἐν τοῖς ἐπουρανίοις), which might refer to heaven, as it did in 1:3 and 2:20, or more generally to the spiritual realm where angels and demons reside, as it does in 6:12. In this context, Paul did not distinguish between good or bad, so he was probably referring to both. When Paul proclaimed and enlightened, angels and demons understood God's wisdom. Why might it be important that angels, especially demons, understand this?

“Through the church, the angelic leaders, both good and evil, gain knowledge of the manifold wisdom of God. It is a defeat for evil angels who would like to continue to engender animosity between Jews and Gentiles in order to frustrate the plan of God. The formation of the church is tangible evidence that the evil angelic leaders' power has been broken, demonstrating that even the most diverse elements of creation are subject to Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

Furthermore, the uniting of Jews and Gentiles looks forward to a time when all hostile elements in creation will be united in Christ.<sup>34</sup> At the end of time, God will bring everything in his creation together in harmony centered on Christ (1:10). As the demons watch God reversing the effects of the Fall, they undeniably see God's wisdom working in his creation.

God's wisdom was made known through the church (διὰ τῆς ἐκκλησίας).<sup>35</sup> When God made Jews and Gentiles into one new man (2:15) and made them equal (3:6), his wisdom was made known. Angels and demons are able to see God's wisdom when they look at the church; “the very existence of this new multiracial community in which Jews and Gentiles have been brought together in unity in the one body is the manifestation of God's richly diverse wisdom.”<sup>36</sup>

Christ's work through Paul on behalf of the church is a means for God to display his wisdom to angelic beings.

11 κατὰ πρόθεσιν τῶν αἰώνων ἦν ἐποίησεν ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν,

11 *This was* according to the eternal plan, which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord,

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<sup>33</sup> Hoehner, 462.

<sup>34</sup> O'Brien, 248.

<sup>35</sup> Genitive of agency.

<sup>36</sup> O'Brien, 246.

Although the Greek continues the sentence, I've started a new one to make it easier to read; the basic thought is this: Making his wisdom known was done according to God's own eternal plan. A plan (πρόθεσιν) is something that is purposed or resolved in advance.<sup>37</sup> Eternal (τῶν αἰώνων) denotes when the plan was purposed: before time began. The revealing of his wisdom through the formation of the church wasn't an accident or backup plan; God had always intended to do this.

This plan was accomplished (ἐποίησεν) in Jesus, as Paul previously described in 2:14-18. The death of Jesus enabled God's plan of creating the church and making thus making his wisdom known.

12 ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ προσαγωγὴν ἐν πεποιθήσει διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ.

[12 in whom we have boldness and the right to approach God with confidence through faith in him.](#)

This verse details one of the benefits of God's plan accomplished in Christ; it's not the primary benefit (which was the making known of God's wisdom) but rather a secondary one.

The "in whom" refers back to Jesus in 3:11; those who are in Christ, who are a relationship with him, have two things. First, they have boldness (παρρησίαν). "The basic idea is freedom to speak without restraints,"<sup>38</sup> and in this context it means courage, confidence, or even fearlessness. Second, they have the right to approach (προσαγωγὴν). This noun was also used in 2:18: "so that through him both groups have the right to approach the Father in one Spirit." It has the idea of being able to address someone of higher status. Whom we have the right to approach is not stated explicitly in this verse, but God the Father is implied. Both of these nouns are governed by one article, thus they form a hendiadys;<sup>39</sup> it could be translated as "the boldness to approach God." The hendiadys is modified by the phrase "with confidence" (πεποιθήσει); confidence is a synonym for boldness, which implies a "freedom or frankness in speaking."<sup>40</sup> To bring it all together: In Christ we have the boldness to approach God confidently. "Paul has gone out of his way to make this declaration of assurance as

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<sup>37</sup> Arndt, 869.

<sup>38</sup> Hoehner, 465.

<sup>39</sup> Two words linked by a conjunction to emphatically express a single complex idea. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hendiadys>

<sup>40</sup> Zodhiates, G3954.

strong as possible for his readers.”<sup>41</sup> Speaking with God should be an intimidating event, but for those who are in Christ it is an opportunity to speak openly and freely.

The main verb, “have” (ἔχομεν), is in the present tense; this means that the believer’s boldness and right to approach God is continual and ongoing. Unlike the Old Testament high priest who could only enter the most holy place once a year (Le 16), there are no limits to when or how often we can speak with our heavenly Father.

Boldness and the right to approach God were accomplished through faith in him (διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ). There are two possible ways to translate this prepositional phrase. One, it could be translated as subjective genitive: through his faithfulness.<sup>42</sup> The idea is that we have boldness and the right to approach God because Jesus was faithful. Two, it could be translated as objective genitive: through faith in him.<sup>43</sup> The idea here is that we have boldness and the right to approach God through our faith in Jesus. It’s difficult to choose between these options, and both make sense in this context. I have chosen the more traditional translation.

13 διὸ αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἐγκακεῖν ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ἥτις ἐστὶν δόξα ὑμῶν.

13 Therefore I myself am asking you to not be discouraged by my afflictions on your behalf, which is your glory.

This is the conclusion of Paul’s digression that began in 3:2.<sup>44</sup> Therefore (διὸ) is “a relatively emphatic marker of a result, usually denoting that the inference is self-evident.”<sup>45</sup> So what is it that was so self-evident? If the Ephesians understood everything that Paul had written in 3:2-12, then they should be agreeable to his request.<sup>46</sup> If they understood God’s eternal plan to give grace, their newfound ability to share equally in it, and Paul’s role to manage it, then they should not be discouraged (μὴ ἐγκακεῖν); they should not to lose their motivation and enthusiasm.<sup>47</sup> “In view of so momentous a task given to him in his calling, they are entreated not to become disheartened at his sufferings.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> O’Brien, 250.

<sup>42</sup> ISV: in whom we have boldness and confident access through his faithfulness.

<sup>43</sup> ESV: in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

<sup>44</sup> This entire section is one big if/then statement. If indeed if you have heard of the management of God’s grace (3:2)...then I am asking you to not be discouraged (3:13).

<sup>45</sup> Swanson, DBLG 1475.

<sup>46</sup> Hoehner, 467.

<sup>47</sup> Arndt, 272.

<sup>48</sup> O’Brien, 250-251.

Paul's afflictions (θλίψεσίν) refer to his current imprisonment (3:1), thus bookending this section in his letter. He was first imprisoned in Caesarea (Ac 23:23), and when he appealed to Caesar, he was transferred to Rome (Ac 28:16). At the time of this letter, he was awaiting trial, chained to a guard. Despite this, Paul was keenly of what God was doing, and he didn't want them to be discouraged.

Paul's affliction was their glory (δόξα). Paul used this word several times in his letter; it typically refers to God's glory but can refer to man's glory (1:18). Glory refers to the idea of a reputation, a summation of attributes. In 1:18, those attributes looked back to the eulogy of chapter 1; in the current context, those attributes refer to the same idea, though more broadly. His readers were in Christ (1:1, 3:12); everything they had because of this (everything from the eulogy to boldness and access to the Father) was their glory. It was for this glory that Paul was afflicted; in other words, "his imprisonment is tangible evidence that he preached the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Hoehner, 470.

## Abridged Structural Diagram

(The grace that made Paul a servant of the gospel in 3:7)  
|  
This grace was given **to me**  
| to proclaim the message **to the Gentiles**  
| of the unfathomable abundance  
| of Christ  
and  
to enlighten everyone  
| about the management  
| of the mystery  
| that had been hidden  
| for ages  
| in God  
| who created everything  
so that  
God's wisdom might be made known **to the rulers and auth's**  
**through the church.**

*This was acc. to the eternal plan,*  
which  
he accomplished  
in Christ Jesus  
in whom  
we have boldness  
and  
the right to approach *God*  
with confidence  
through faith in him.

Therefore  
I am asking you to not be discouraged by my afflictions on your behalf  
which is your glory.

## Tracing the Argument

**External** – Before Paul prayed for his readers, he wanted to make sure they understood the mystery of Christ, so he paused to explain it, thus further elaborating what he had written in 2:11-22.

**Internal** – Paul has two responsibilities: proclaim the abundance of Christ and explain the management of the mystery. When he did that, there were two results: God's wisdom was made known to angelic beings and the church could come to God in prayer. All of this was God's plan from eternity, and since Paul had helped bring about God's plan, he didn't want the Ephesians to be discouraged over his imprisonment.

## **Textual Outline**

This outline of the text continues the previous section:

1. God gave the management of the mystery of Christ to Paul (3:2-3).
2. God revealed the mystery of Christ to Paul (3:4-5).
3. God explained the mystery of Christ to Paul (3:6-7).
4. God tasked Paul to explain the mystery of Christ (3:8-9).
5. God revealed the purpose of the mystery of Christ to Paul (3:10-13).

## **Central Truth of the Text**

Paul wrote Ephesians 3:8-13 in order to encourage Ephesians believers with God's plan for the mystery of Christ.

## **Teaching Outline**

God planned the mystery of Christ, and I want you to be encouraged by understanding his plan. From this text in Ephesians, we are going to see two results of God's plan concerning the mystery of Christ.

1. Be encouraged that God planned (through the mystery of Christ) to make his wisdom known (8-10).
2. Be encouraged that God planned (through the mystery of Christ) to give us the right to approach him (11-13).

## Paul's Second Prayer for the Ephesians

### Ephesians 3:14-21

#### Limits of the Text

Paul's prayer begins in 3:14 and runs through 3:21. The first part of the prayer, his petitions (3:14-19), is a single sentence in the original Greek. The second part of the prayer is a doxology, an offering of praise to the God who can answer his petition.

#### Translation

14 For this purpose I bow on my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives a name, 16 so that he might cause you to be strengthened with power in the inner man through his Spirit according to the abundance of his glory, 17 to have Christ reside in your hearts through faith. *I bow* so that you, having been firmly rooted and well-founded **in love**, 18 might be fully able to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the width, length, height, and depth, 19 and so to know the love of Christ, which goes far beyond knowledge. *I bow* so that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to him who is able, according to the power working in us, to do infinitely more than all that **we ask or imagine**, 21 to him *be* glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

#### Interpretation

In 3:1 Paul began a prayer for the Ephesians, but he interrupted himself and further explained the uniting of Jew and Gentile into the church and his role in revealing this mystery to the Gentiles. Now, in 3:14, Paul began his prayer again. This is Paul's second prayer for the Ephesians in this letter. In his first prayer (1:17-23) he prayed that they would *know* the hope of God's calling, the abundance of the glory of his inheritance, and greatness of his power; he wanted them to know God better and experience his power. In his second prayer, Paul prayed that the Spirit would strengthen them and they would understand the love of Christ; he wanted them to *use* God's power to live like one new man (2:15), the church, by loving each other.

14 Τούτου χάριν κάμπτω τὰ γόνατά μου πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, 15 ἐξ οὗ πᾶσα πατριὰ ἐν οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς ὀνομάζεται,

14 For this purpose I bow on my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives a name,

“For this purpose” (Τούτου χάριν) marks the beginning of his prayer, the same words he used in 3:1 before he digressed to the mystery of Christ in 3:2-13. As mentioned previously<sup>50</sup> “this purpose” looks back to 2:11-22, where Paul described how God made Jews and Gentiles into one new man, the church. For the purpose of living as a unified church, Paul bowed down on his knees before the Father. Wanting his readers to live in this manner, he went to the one person who could make this possible, God.

Bowing (κάμπτω) or bending the knee was a Semitic idiom<sup>51</sup> that was frequently used “as a gesture of respect or devotion.”<sup>52</sup> Php 2:10 says, “So that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (NASB95). Ro 11:4 says, “But what was God’s reply to him? I have left 7,000 men for Myself who have not bowed down to Baal” (HCSB). From passages like these<sup>53</sup> it is seen that bowing down on the knees “conveys worship or submission to a supernatural power.”<sup>54</sup> The NIV’s “I kneel before the Father” translates this idea well into English.

The reasons Paul bowed his knees are found in verses 16, 18, and 19, where he desired his readers to be strengthened with power, able to comprehend, and filled with fullness; Paul was interceding in prayer. Paul referred to God as Father (πατέρα) in this verse; this title, which is common in this book, emphasized Paul’s spiritual adoption, which enabled him to come to God in prayer. Paul was doing the very thing he asserted the Ephesians could do when he wrote in 2:18, “Through him both *groups* have the right to approach the Father in one Spirit” (JPG). God listens to his children and answers their prayers.

In 3:15, Paul qualified the Father to whom he prayed as the one who is giving names to families (πατριὰ). There is a play on words here; the word father (*pater*) is similar in sound and related in meaning to the word family (*patria*). The idea of *patria* is a group of people who are related to (or descended from) one common father; the group might be as small a single-family unit or as large as a nation. Whether Paul used this word to mean smaller groups of people, larger groups of people, or something in between (e.g., clans or tribes), every family on earth (ἐπὶ γῆς) refers to the sum total of all humanity; Paul’s meaning is that all humanity is descended from God, thus one might understand

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<sup>50</sup> In the notes for 3:1.

<sup>51</sup> Louw, 1:540.

<sup>52</sup> Arndt, 507.

<sup>53</sup> See also Ro 14:11.

<sup>54</sup> Hoehner, 473.



the play on words as “the Father who is the father of every father.”<sup>55</sup> In what sense is God the Father of all families? Was Paul teaching universalism?<sup>56</sup> I believe Paul shifted categories. In 3:14, God is Father in a spiritual sense, which allows Paul to pray to him, but in 3:15 God is Father in a physical sense, one who is the originator and ruler of his family or clan; as a physical father is the originator of his physical family, so God is the originator of all families. To be succinct: God is the Creator. Having puzzled through how God is the Father of every family on earth, it is now a bit easier to understand how God is the Father of every family in heaven (ἐν οὐρανοῖς). Some take this to mean those human families who believed in Jesus, have died, and are already in heaven,<sup>57</sup> but as Paul was referring to God as Creator, it is more likely that he was referring to the angelic beings, both good and bad. God is the Creator of all people and all angels.

Every family receives a name (ὀνομάζεται) from the Father. This verb means to give a name or title to someone; as it’s in the present tense, it’s an activity that God is still doing. In what sense is God naming families? It’s not obvious from the text or the context. One reasonable guess is to note a similarity to Old Testament themes. In Ge 2:19 God brought the animals to Adam to see what he would name them; in his capacity as a namer, Adam was active in the garden, exercising authority over the animals. In Ps 147:4 and Is 40:26, God is the one who names the stars, thus signifying his power and the breath of his authority. In a similar manner, perhaps Paul was saying that God is active in the world and continues to exercise authority in it. If so, this is a rather convoluted (or perhaps poetic) way to express God’s sovereignty and imminence.

So what’s Paul’s point in verse 15? When praying for the Ephesians, Paul prayed to the Creator God who is still active and exercising authority in the world today. Such a God can give power, comprehension, and his fullness.

16 ἵνα δῶ ὑμῖν κατὰ τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ δυνάμει κραταιωθῆναι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον,

16 so that he might cause you to be strengthened with power in the inner man through his Spirit according to the abundance of his glory,

Paul prayed with intentionality. He had a purpose for his prayers; in fact, in verses 16-19 he had three purposes that are expressed in three clauses that begin with *hina* (ἵνα), a subordinating conjunction that “indicates the goal or aim of an action.”<sup>58</sup> The first

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<sup>55</sup> Adapted from Chuck Wade’s 13 Mar 2009 email.

<sup>56</sup> There are two spiritual fathers, not one; see Jn 8:39-59 and 1 Jn 3:7-10.

<sup>57</sup> So MacArthur, 102.

<sup>58</sup> Wallace, 676.

purpose for which Paul prayed to God was that the Holy Spirit would strengthen the Ephesians. The actor in this verse is “he,” referring back to the Father in 3:14; Paul prayed that God might cause (δῶ) the Ephesians to be strengthened. The verb translated as “might cause” is often translated as give or grant, but it can have the idea of making or causing something to happen. Paul desired the Ephesians to be strengthened, and so he prayed that God would make that happen.

Paul prayed that God could cause them to be strengthened with power. To be strengthened (κραταιωθῆναι) is an infinitive that can mean to receive physical strength and health; Philo used this word to mean getting stronger by exercise.<sup>59</sup> But as Paul used it here, it means to receive spiritual strength or power.<sup>60</sup> This verb is consistently used in the passive voice in the New Testament, which implies that spiritual power cannot come from within, but only from God. Paul specifically wanted them to be strengthened with God’s power (δυνάμει). In 1:19 he prayed that they would know God’s power; in Ac 1:8, Jesus promised his followers that they would receive power. Power is the ability or the capability to do something; in this case, it’s the power to live the way those who are the church should live. It’s the power to sin less and to obey God more. Paul repeated these two elements in 6:10, where he wrote, “Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by His vast strength” (HCSB). He also prayed for the same thing in the parallel passage, Co 1:11. So in summary, Paul prayed that the Ephesians would be strengthened with God’s ability to live victoriously.

Paul used three phrases to further describe this strengthening with power. In the first phrase, Paul described where he wanted them to be strengthened: in the inner man. In Paul’s mind there was clearly a distinction between the outer, physical part of a person and the inner, spiritual part; in 2 Co 4:16 he wrote, “Therefore we do not despair, but even if our physical body is wearing away, our inner person is being renewed day by day” (NET). The inner man is referred to in Scripture with words like heart, mind, and spirit. This phrase is what clarifies that Paul was praying for spiritual power, not physical power. The inner man is flawed by sin, so the inner man is where the Holy Spirit changes his people.

In the second phrase, Paul described who is going to do the strengthening: the Spirit. In Ac 1:8 Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” (NASB). The Holy Spirit is God’s agent for imparting power (and every other spiritual resource) to believers.

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<sup>59</sup> Hoehner, 478.

<sup>60</sup> Louw, 1:680.

In the third phrase,<sup>61</sup> Paul described the standard by which this strengthening is to be measured: according to the abundance of his glory. The preposition “according to” (κατὰ) is used here to give the means to measure God’s participation in strengthening his children with power; God strengthening is measured by the abundance of his glory. So how much glory (δόξης) does God have? The more glory God has, the more strength he is giving. This is already the seventh time Paul has used this word in his letter to the Ephesian churches. It has the idea of the summation of God’s attributes, the essence of who he is. God has an abundance (πλοῦτος) of glory. Abundance is another word that Paul used frequently in this letter; for example, in 1:7 Paul wrote that God has an abundance of grace. This word literally means riches, but it is used figuratively to mean an exceeding amount of something. God is abundantly, exceedingly who he is; he is never fake, and he never changes. So when Paul asked for strength according to the abundance of his glory, it was a way of telling the Ephesians that God has a limitless ability to answer this request. It’s very similar to what he wrote in Php 4:19, “And my God will supply your every need according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (NET).

17 κατοικῆσαι τὸν Χριστὸν διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἐν ἀγάπῃ ἑρριζωμένοι καὶ τεθεμελιωμένοι,

17 to have Christ reside in your hearts through faith. *I bow* so that you, having been firmly rooted and well-founded **in love**,

The first clause in 3:17 begins with an infinitive, which is parallel to the one back in 3:16; the basic structure is this: I bow my knees before the Father, so that he might cause you to be strengthened, to have Christ live in your heart. An interpretive difficulty in this clause is determining how these infinitives relate to each other. One possibility is that the second infinitive is a result of the first; that is, those who are strengthened will have Christ live in their heart.<sup>62</sup> Another possibility is that the second further explains the first; that is, those who are strengthened are those who are having Christ live in their heart.<sup>63</sup> Although both are syntactically possible, I think the second expresses the parallel nature of the syntax more accurately.

So what did Paul mean when he prayed that the Father might cause Christ to reside in the hearts of the Ephesians? To reside (κατοικῆσαι) is an intensified form of a verb that means to live or to dwell; it means to live somewhere for a long period of time. It’s the

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<sup>61</sup> This phrase actually comes before the verbs in the Greek; I have moved it for clarity.

<sup>62</sup> So Hoehner, 481.

<sup>63</sup> So O’Brien, 258.

difference between spending a week at a hotel or living in your own house. Paul obviously used this verb in a metaphorical manner, as he prayed that Christ would reside in their hearts. At first, Paul's request seems odd, because we know that Christ already lives in the heart of believers; in Ro 8:9-10, Paul states that those who belong to Christ have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them and have Christ in them. But when we consider that this verb has the idea of becoming established and settling down,<sup>64</sup> we see that it has to more to do with *how* Christ lives than *where*. "Paul's teaching here does not relate so much the *fact* of Jesus' presence in the hearts of the believers but to the *quality* of His presence."<sup>65</sup> The more a believer is strengthened with power, the more he lives like those in the church should live. The more that Christ resides in a life, the more he is in the center of the life, the more he is exercising his rule in every aspect of that life.<sup>66</sup>

Paul elaborated upon Christ's residence two ways. The first elaboration was where Christ resides: in the heart (ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις). Heart in 3:17 is parallel to inner man in 3:16; these terms are functionally synonymous. Paul wanted Christ to be at the center of who his readers were. The second elaboration was the means by which Christ resides: through faith (διὰ τῆς πίστεως). The more a believer trusts God, the more he obeys, thus the better Christ resides.

Verse 17 ends with two participles, having been firmly rooted (ἐρριζωμένοι) and well-founded (τεθεμελιωμένοι). Syntactically, it is somewhat challenging to determine what they modify. They are in the nominative case and the perfect tense, thus probably modify a subject and speak of something that already exists in the lives of the readers. Although there are several theories,<sup>67</sup> most likely they look ahead to 3:18, modifying the pronoun "you," which is the subject, and functioning as a prerequisite to the verb "able to comprehend." To translate this smoothly into English, the conjunction "so that" (ὅτι) and the pronoun "you" must be moved out of 3:18 and into 3:17.<sup>68</sup> Two translations capture this sense well. The NET says, "so that, because you have been rooted and grounded in love...;" the ISV says, "then, having been rooted and grounded in love..." Additionally, I chose to start a new sentence here, bringing in the subject and verb ("I bow") from 3:14.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Louw, 1:730.

<sup>65</sup> MacArthur, 106.

<sup>66</sup> O'Brien 259.

<sup>67</sup> See Hoehner 483-484.

<sup>68</sup> The verse numbers were added much later.

<sup>69</sup> As do the NIV, ISV, and HCSB.

These two participles have the same meaning. The first, having been firmly rooted, means to be firmly fixed.<sup>70</sup> It was used of the roots of a plant, but it was also used of buildings and bridges that were on a firm foundation.<sup>71</sup> The second, having been well-founded, means to have a base for a structure.<sup>72</sup> It was used in Greek literature to refer to the foundation of houses, towers, and cities.<sup>73</sup> Both participles are used metaphorically in this verse and have the idea of being grounded and established. In Co 2:7, Paul wrote that Colossian believers were rooted and founded in Christ. In this verse, Paul wrote that the Ephesian believers were rooted and founded in love. The phrase “in love” is emphatic in the clause, thus what they were rooted and founded upon was very important. Love here refers to God’s love, which has been expressed in everything that God has done for the Ephesians mentioned so far in the letter: he chose them (1:4), he predestined them for adoption (1:5), he redeemed them (1:7), he assigned them to be his inheritance (1:11), he sealed them (1:13), he made them alive with Christ (2:5), he raised them with Christ (2:6), he seated them with Christ (2:6), and he made them one new man (2:15). This is the foundation of love that the Ephesian believers were established upon, and it is basis upon which Paul prayed for his second purpose.

18 ἵνα ἐξισχύσητε καταλαβέσθαι σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις τί τὸ πλάτος καὶ μῆκος καὶ ὕψος καὶ βάθος,

18 might be fully able to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the width, length, height, and depth,

This clause, like the one in 3:16, begins with the conjunction *hina* (ἵνα); it not only follows the first purpose, but it builds upon it. The second purpose for which Paul prayed to God was that the Ephesians would comprehend and know the love of Christ. Paul prayed that they might be fully able (ἐξισχύσητε) or completely capable; Zodhiates writes that this “is the strongest word available to indicate strength or ability.”<sup>74</sup> Specifically, Paul wanted them to be fully able to comprehend (καταλαβέσθαι). This verb literally means to catch up with, apprehend, or grasp something,<sup>75</sup> but Paul used it figuratively in the middle voice to mean to understand or realize. Taken together, they have the idea of the ability to keep on trying to

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<sup>70</sup> Arndt, 906.

<sup>71</sup> Kittel, 6:990.

<sup>72</sup> Arndt, 449.

<sup>73</sup> Kittel, 3:62.

<sup>74</sup> Zodhiates, G1840.

<sup>75</sup> Zodhiates, G2638.

understand until they have understood.<sup>76</sup> Where did the Ephesians get this ability from? The unstated actor is God; to be able to understand requires divine enabling.<sup>77</sup>

But what is it that Paul wanted them to comprehend? Paul described it with four dimensional nouns, width, length, height, and depth, but didn't explicitly state the object of these dimensions. These nouns are governed by a single article, and thus refer to a single object. Commentators have suggested many possible interpretations, but most agree that the most likely interpretation comes from the immediate context: Paul wanted the Ephesians to comprehend the width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ. "On this view, the object of the dimensions is made explicit in the following parallel clause, thereby providing a climatic effect."<sup>78</sup> This is syntactically possible because, unlike the parallel clauses of 3:16 and 3:17, the clauses of 3:18 and 3:19 are linked with a coordinating conjunction (τε). This view fits well with the verbs Paul used, as the Ephesians would need a lot of ability from God to comprehend this love. The idea here is that the love of Christ is vast, and its magnitude is huge; idiomatically we might say that it's difficult to get our arms around the love of Christ. Some sense of the vastness of Christ's love can be grasped by reading Php 2:3-8, where we get a glimpse of what Jesus gave up and what he chose to do.

19 γνῶναί τε τὴν ὑπερβάλλουσαν τῆς γνώσεως ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα πληρωθῆτε εἰς πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ θεοῦ.

19 and so to know the love of Christ, which goes far beyond knowledge. *I bow so that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.*

To know (γνῶναί) is synonymous with to comprehend; if there's a distinction, the verb for knowing, *ginosko*, has the nuance of acquiring knowledge. Paul prayed that God would help them understand how immense Christ's love is and understand personally and individually what Christ's love has done in their lives. "The apostle...assumes that they do not adequately appreciate Christ's love...He prays for power to enable them to understand how immense it is...Their grasping this cannot be simply a mental exercise...It is personal knowledge...It cannot be reduced simply to intellectual reflection. Paul wants them to be empowered so as to grasp the dimensions of that love in their own experience."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Hoehner, 485.

<sup>77</sup> O'Brien, 261.

<sup>78</sup> O'Brien, 263.

<sup>79</sup> Hoehner, 264.

The love of Christ goes far beyond knowledge. Paul did not mean that knowledge is of little value. In this prayer he prayed that his readers would comprehend and know the love of Christ; he simply complemented what he said in 3:18. The love of Christ is so immense, so wide, long, tall, and deep, that it is beyond the ability of any human to comprehend fully; it goes far beyond (ὑπερβάλλουσιν) knowledge. This is the third time Paul has used this comparative term in this letter. God's power is incomparably great (1:19); it goes far beyond all other power. God has an incomparable abundance of grace (2:7); he has far more grace than anyone else. The love of Christ is incomparable to knowledge; he has and has demonstrated far more love than we can comprehend.

Why did Paul pray that they would comprehend Christ's love? There are several reasons. One, it is immense; Christ has loved us far more than we realize. We need God's help to understand what it meant for Christ to become a man and die for sinners. Two, it changes the spiritual condition of those who believe. We need God's help to understand the implications of once being spiritually dead but now being spiritually alive; being in Christ is far more life-changing than we know. Three, it brings about change. When we begin to appreciate what Christ has done and who we are in Christ, we live differently. We accept Christ's love, we are thankful and grateful for it, and we turn around and show the same type of love to others, both believers and non-believers.

Paul's prayer for love is the climax of the doctrinal section of his letter. God took two distinct and antagonistic types of people, Jews and Gentiles, and formed them into one new group of people, the church. He wanted his readers to live out the love of Christ in the context of this corporate body. "Unity of Jewish and Gentile believers is evidence of God's power."<sup>80</sup>

The final clause in 3:19, like the ones in 3:16 and 3:18, begins with the conjunction *hina* (ἵνα); this clause summarizes the first and second purposes. The third purpose for which Paul prayed to God was that the Ephesians would be filled with the fullness of God. Filled (πληρωθήτε) and fullness (πλήρωμα) are cognates; they have the idea of being filled up or full of something. The preposition *eis* (εἰς) might indicate moving toward a goal—Paul wanted them to move towards the goal of being filled—or it might indicate what is doing the filling—the fullness of God is what filled them up; both convey about the same idea. The verb filled is in the passive voice, indicating once again the activity of God; God fills his children. As in 3:17, I chose to start a new sentence here, bringing in the subject and verb ("I bow") from 3:14, to help this verse read smoothly.

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<sup>80</sup> Hoehner, 491.

What is the fullness of God? The fullness of God is an attempt to describe who God is; that is, it attempts to capture the completeness or the totality of God's character. God possesses power, moral excellence, life, perfection, and so on.

What does it mean to be filled with all of God's fullness? To be filled with all of God's fullness is to completely have God's character; in other words, it's to be spiritually mature. "This means being perfect as he is perfect, being holy as he is holy," etc.<sup>81</sup> In the immediate context, Paul was particularly concerned that his readers have God's power (3:16) and Christ's love (3:19).

**Rabbit Trail:** Co 2:9-10 indicates that believers have already been filled with the fullness of Christ: "For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority" (ESV). On the other hand, Ep 4:13 indicates that believers have not reached the point of having the fullness of Christ: "Until we all 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" (ESV). So have we been filled or not? This is an example of what Bible scholars refer to as the "already but not yet" eschatological tension; that is, on the one hand believers have *already* been filled *positionally* in Christ, but on the other hand believers have *not yet* been filled *practically* in Christ. Paul's readers needed to become what they already were.<sup>82</sup>

This prayer comes near the end of the doctrine section of Paul's letter, paving the way for the application section. When Paul's readers are strengthened with power, comprehend Christ's love, and are filled with God's fullness, then they will be able to walk in a manner worthy of their calling (4:1).

20 Τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ ὧν αἰτούμεθα ἢ νοοῦμεν κατὰ τὴν δύναμιν τὴν ἐνεργουμένην ἐν ἡμῖν,

20 Now to him who is able, according to the power working in us, to do infinitely more than all that **we ask or imagine,**

In this verse Paul described God, the one who is worthy to be glorified, as the one who is able. Able (δυναμένῳ) has the idea of being capable; it's a cognate to the word translated as power both in verse 16 and in this verse. God, using his power, has the capability to accomplish something. From the immediate context, Paul was saying that

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<sup>81</sup> O'Brien, 266.

<sup>82</sup> O'Brien, 265.



God can answer prayer. Paul described God's ability to answer prayer three ways in this verse.

First, God can answer any prayer that we can ask or imagine. If Paul had simply written, "God can do what we ask," that would have been a monumental statement on its own. After all, Paul had just asked that God would take two very different groups of people, Jews and Gentiles, and enable them to live and work together in this new entity called the church. That was an incredibly difficult request to fulfill, but Paul asserted that God has the ability to answer a prayer like that. He can do not only whatever we ask, he can also do whatever we imagine; anything we can think to ask God is within his ability.

Second, God can not only do what we ask or imagine, he can do infinitely more (ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ) than what we can ask or imagine. This adverb, infinitely more, has been described with superlatives such as the "highest form of comparison imaginable"<sup>83</sup> and "an extraordinary degree, involving a considerable excess over what would be expected."<sup>84</sup> In short, God's ability to answer prayer is so limitless<sup>85</sup> that we can't even begin to comprehend it.

Third, Paul said that God answers prayer according to the power working in us. As just discussed, power (τὴν δύναμιν) refers to the ability or capability to get something done. This power is working (τὴν ἐνεργουμένην), a term which is synonymous with power, though it has the nuance of getting things done. Paul said the Ephesians had a capability within them that was currently, actively—the participle is in the present tense—getting things done. These are the same two words that Paul ascribed to God in 1:19-20; God has the power that worked to raise Christ from the dead and seat him at the right hand in heavenly places. The power working in us is a reference to the Holy Spirit, and this is not a theoretical or a past-tense kind of power, it's an alive and actively working in believers now power.

**Rabbit Trail:** So if God's ability to answer prayer is so amazing, can I get whatever I want if I just pray for it? First, this doxology is a statement about God's ability; because he *can* answer any and every prayer (and a whole lot more) doesn't imply that he *does* answer any and every prayer. Second, this is only one of many passages dealing with answered prayer in the Bible; the others should also be studied before putting together a complete theology of prayer.

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<sup>83</sup> Ardent, 1033.

<sup>84</sup> Louw, 1:688.

<sup>85</sup> O'Brien, 267.

Hoehner summarized this verse like this, “No human or angel...could ever imagine that Jews and Gentiles could function together in one body. However, with God’s infinite and matchless power of love in the life of each believer, Paul expresses confidence that this is entirely possible.”<sup>86</sup>

21 αὐτῷ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ εἰς πάσας τὰς γενεὰς τοῦ αἰῶνος τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.

21 to him *be* glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

The “him” in this verse is the same “him” of the previous verse, the one who is able to do. There is no verb in this clause, though that is not uncommon in Greek; it’s probably a linking verb in the optative mood, expressing a wish or desire.<sup>87</sup> It was Paul’s desire that God would be glorified.

This is the eighth and final time that Paul used the word glory in this letter. Glory (δόξα) comes from the idea of reputation, and God’s reputation is the summation of all his attributes. God created the church in order to have his reputation praised and magnified, and as he didn’t focus on a single attribute, Paul desired the totality of God’s character be glorified. “To give God glory...is an active acknowledgement or extolling of who he is or what he has already done.”<sup>88</sup>

Paul prayed that God would be glorified in the church and in Christ Jesus. In this verse, the preposition “in” (ἐν) does not have the meaning “inside;” Paul was not suggesting that his readers go inside of a church building to give glory. Rather it’s dative of reference, which means God is to be glorified with reference to the church and with reference to Jesus; in other words, praise God for forming the church through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Paul specified when he desired God to be glorified: throughout all generations, forever and ever. The preposition “throughout” (εἰς) is temporal accusative, meaning it has a sense of time; God is to be glorified one generation of people after another so long as there are generations, so long as time exists. And God is to be glorified after time ceases, forever and ever. In short, God should always be praised. Thus Paul ended the first half of his letter the same way he started it, by praising God.

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<sup>86</sup> Hoehner, 494.

<sup>87</sup> Hoehner, 494.

<sup>88</sup> O’Brien, 268.

Paul closed the doctrinal section of his letter with an amen, which is “the transliteration of a Hebrew word signifying that something is certain, valid, truthful, or faithful; it is often used at the end of biblical songs, hymns, and prayers.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> HCSB, Ep 3:21.

## Structural Diagram

The structural diagram clarifies that Paul prayed for three things, each of which is begins with a “so that” (*hina*) clause.

(2:11-22 - the making of one new man)  
|  
For this purpose  
I bow on my knees before the Father  
| from whom every family receives a name  
| in heaven  
| and  
| on earth  
so that  
he might cause you to be strengthened with power  
| in the inner man  
| through his Spirit  
| according to the abundance of his glory  
| to have Christ reside in your hearts  
| through faith,  
so that  
|  
| having been firmly rooted  
| | and  
| | well-founded **in love**  
| |  
you might be fully able to comprehend with all the holy ones  
| | what is the width  
| | length  
| | height  
| | and  
| | depth  
| | and so  
| | to know the love of Christ  
| | which goes far beyond knowledge  
so that  
you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now  
to him  
| who is able to do infinitely more than all  
| according to the power that we ask  
| working in us or  
| imagine  
to him be glory  
in the church  
and  
in Christ Jesus  
throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

## Tracing the Argument

**External** – Having explained the formation of a Jew and Gentile church twice (2:11-22 and 3:2-13), Paul then prayed that his readers would be filled with God’s power and understand God’s love so that they would be able to live in a manner consistent with this new church, particularly by loving each other. This prayer thus functions as the conclusion to Paul’s doctrinal section and a lead-in to his exhortational section.

**Internal** – Paul prays to the Creator God who is still active in his world for three things. He prayed for God’s power; this is the ability to live like the church should live. He prayed for comprehension of the love of Christ; this is the motivation to live like the church should live. He prayed for the fullness of God; this is a result, a summary of having power and understanding Christ’s love. It means to have and display God’s character. The doxology is a logical conclusion to Paul’s prayer. If God did what Paul asked—he wanted God to enable the Ephesians to live as members of a unified church—then God should be glorified.

## Textual Outline

1. Paul prayed that God would strengthen the Ephesians with power (14-17a).
2. Paul prayed that God would enable the Ephesians to understand Christ’s love (17b-19a).
3. Paul prayed that God would fill the Ephesians with his fullness (19b).
4. Paul prayed that God would be glorified by the Ephesians (20-21)

## Central Truth of the Text

Paul wrote Ephesians 3:14-19 in order to teach Ephesian believers how to pray for power for each other.

## Teaching Outline

God’s people pray for each other so that we will all live like the church should live, and today I want you to begin praying this for other people in our church. Based upon Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 3, we are going to see 3 requests that we ask of God for each.

1. Pray that God strengthens us with power so we can live like the church (14-17a).
2. Pray that God enables us to understand Christ’s love so we can live like the church (17b-19a).

3. Pray that God fills us with his fullness so we can live like the church (19b).
4. Pray that God is glorified when we live like the church (20-21).

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